

SECURITY ACTORS, AGENCY POLITICS AND ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF MULTIPLE SECURITY CHECKPOINTS ALONG NIGERIA-BENIN BORDERS

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Abstract

Emanating from the borders between Nigeria and the Republic of Benin in the regional security complex of West Africa there are criminal activities that pose serious implications for the Nigerian state. The persistence of transnational organised crimes on this corridor despite the presence of the Nigeria Customs Service, Nigeria Immigration Service and other specialised security agencies established by Nigeria to completely eradicate or minimise cross-border crimes makes the study of agency politics of multiple checkpoints in the Nigeria-Benin border communities imperative. The study, utilising agency theory adopts

a qualitative research design with the aid of primary and secondary source of data to examine the multiplicity of security actors (and their checkpoints); and investigate the rationale for and impact of multiple checkpoints for border security. The study argues that the multiplicity of security actors and checkpoints intended to ensure effective border security have become spaces for bribery and corruption, negotiation, bargaining and compromise. The study concludes that the multiple checkpoints are laced and shaped by the politics of the different security agencies mounting checkpoints along the Nigeria-Benin border and while these checkpoints have played pivotal roles in intercepting trans-border criminals, they are

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also “cheque-points” of corrupt interactions between the security actors and transporters. It is on this note that the study recommends that the Nigerian government should provide a holistic security framework that would ensure that the purpose of multiple security checks along Nigeria-Benin borders are achieved with a minimal or total eradication of an unprofessional interface between security, criminal, and non-criminal actors.

Keywords: Borders; Benin-Nigeria; Security; State Security Actors; Non-state Security Actors

ACTORES DE SEGURIDAD, POLÍTICA DE AGENCIA E IMPLICACIONES ECONÓMICAS DE LOS MÚLTIPLES CONTROLES DE SEGURIDAD EN LAS FRONTERAS ENTRE NIGERIA Y BENÍN

Resumen

En las fronteras entre Nigeria y la República de Benín, en el complejo de seguridad regional de África Occidental, existen actividades delictivas que plantean graves implicaciones para el Estado nigeriano. La persistencia de la delincuencia organizada transnacional en este corredor, a pesar de la presencia del Servicio de Aduanas, el Servicio de Inmigración y otras agencias de seguridad especializadas establecidas por Nigeria para erradicar por completo o minimizar los delitos transfronterizos, hace imperativo el estudio de la política de agencia de los múltiples puestos de control en las comunidades fronterizas entre Nigeria y Benín. El estudio, que utiliza la teoría de la agencia, adopta la investigación cualitativa con la ayu-

da de fuentes de datos primarias y secundarias para examinar la multiplicidad de agentes de seguridad (y sus puestos de control) e investigar la justificación y el impacto de los múltiples puestos de control para la seguridad fronteriza. El estudio sostiene que la multiplicidad de agentes de seguridad y puestos de control destinados a garantizar una seguridad fronteriza eficaz se han convertido en espacios para el soborno y la corrupción, la negociación, el regateo y el compromiso. El estudio concluye que estos puestos de control están interrelacionados y moldeados por la política de los organismos de seguridad que montan puestos de control a lo largo de la frontera entre Nigeria y Benín y, aunque estos han desempeñado un papel fundamental en la interceptación de delincuentes transfronterizos, también son “puntos de control” de interacciones corruptas entre los agentes de seguridad y los transportistas. En este sentido, el estudio recomienda que el gobierno nigeriano proporcione un marco de seguridad holístico que garantice que el propósito de los controles de seguridad a lo largo de las fronteras entre Nigeria y Benín se logre con una erradicación mínima o total de una interfaz poco profesional entre los actores de seguridad, criminales y no criminales.

Palabras clave: Fronteras; Benín-Nigeria; seguridad; agentes de seguridad estatales; agentes de seguridad no estatales.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, global, national and human security institutions have been affected by the scourge and alarming rate of transna-

tional crimes. Scholars like Adeola & Oluyemi (2012), Mobolaji & Alabi (2017); and Mahmoud, Adeoye, & Johnson (2022) posit that the persistence of such crimes across the international boundaries have been made possible by the globalisation of trade relations. Advancements in science, technology and transportation are impetuous for the manifestation of smuggling, human and drug trafficking, the proliferation of small arms, and vehicle theft, to mention a few. These trans-border security threats affect the bilateral relations of nations across the world and often compel world leaders at the continental, regional and sub-regional level to converge and form a united front that seeks to effectively curb illicit cross border trade and transactions (Walther, 2015).

The formal and global convergence of world leaders against trans-border crimes at Naples, Italy, in 1994, under the aegis of the World Ministerial Conference on Organised Trans-border Crimes, is a reference point. The Resolution communiqué of the conference title Political Declaration and Global Action Plan against Organised Transnational Crimes outlines the cardinal principles and draws the specific plans and guidelines that member states can adopt at international and national level to curb trans-border crime. The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crimes also called Palermo Convention of 2000 was another attempt by world leaders to proffer a solution to the problem of trans-border crimes. The international political community acknowledged the global challenge of trans-border crimes and resolved to respond with a global governance structure that would be holistically efficient to proffer a solution to

the problem of crimes across national frontiers and borderlines. The slogan “If crime crosses borders, so must law enforcement” as chanted at the global level demonstrates the scope and extent of trans-border crimes and the imperative of law enforcement agents whose operations can either suppress, curb or allow the flow of trans-border crimes in the world. Yet, notwithstanding the global response, the peril of trans-border crimes continues to provide constraints and opportunities for interstate relations, especially for proximate neighbours regarding peace, security and development within national territories.

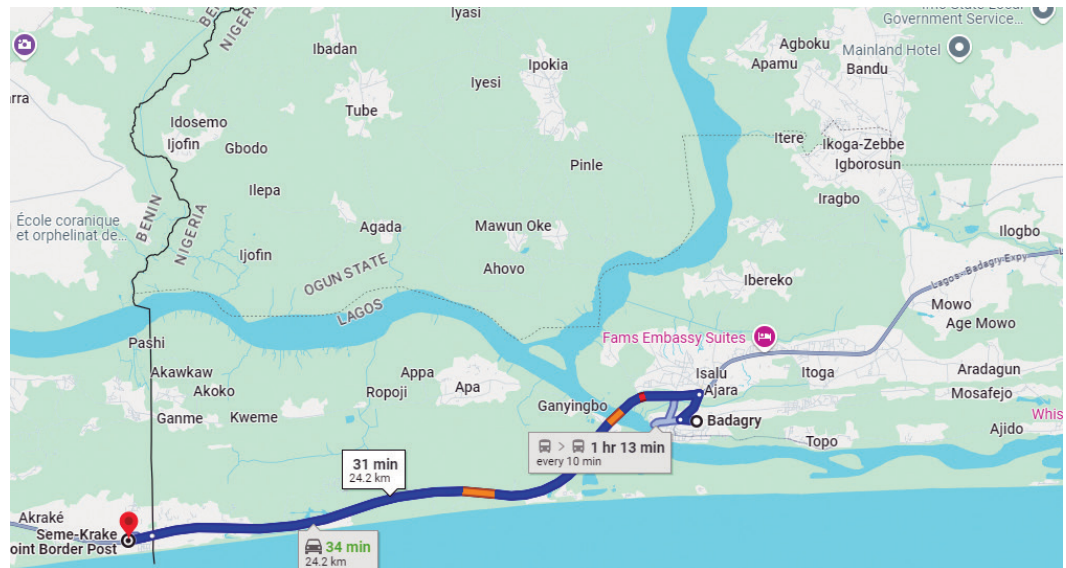
Another crisis that world leaders have to face is the emergence and the proliferation of criminal networks across international boundaries. This has made complex the phenomenon of criminal activities that security agencies within national and along international borders have to grapple with to provide safety for the national government and the people they swear to serve (Carik, 2009). However, the nature and pattern of the operations of security actors in tackling trans-border crimes vary from country to country. Mindful of this, the study investigates the strategic rationale for the multiplicity of security checkpoints as mounted by the formal security operatives of Nigeria along the borders. The study also examines the impact of multiple checkpoints in curbing illicit cross-border trafficking across the borders of Nigeria and the Republic of Benin. These are with the overarching view to determine the implication of multiple security actors for border security between Nigeria and the Republic of Benin, with a particular focus on the Seme and Idi Iroko border routes. Seme

on one side is on the coastline of the Lagos-Abidjan corridor as part of the shared 809km border with the Republic of Benin in West Africa (Central Intelligence Agency, 2024). This border area is selected for being one of the official and busiest land border routes for both commuting and commerce in West Africa (Eselebor, 2020; Daku, 1991). The Idi-Iroko border route, which is located in the Northeast of Yewa North LGA of Ogun State, is surrounded by communities including but not limited to: Ilara, Eti Iropo, Ajile etc. and these border areas share borderlines with the Benin Republic. The Idi Iroko border is also an official border road for commuters and trade (Ojo & Morakinyo, 2023). Both the Seme and Idi Iroko border areas are in full complement of multiple border security agencies,

including Immigration, Customs and Port Health Services, among others. While Seme is administratively under the Badagry-West Local Council Development Area (LCDA) of Lagos State, Idi Iroko is under the Ipokia Local government of Ogun State Nigeria (Eselebor, 2020; Ojo & Morakinyo, 2023).

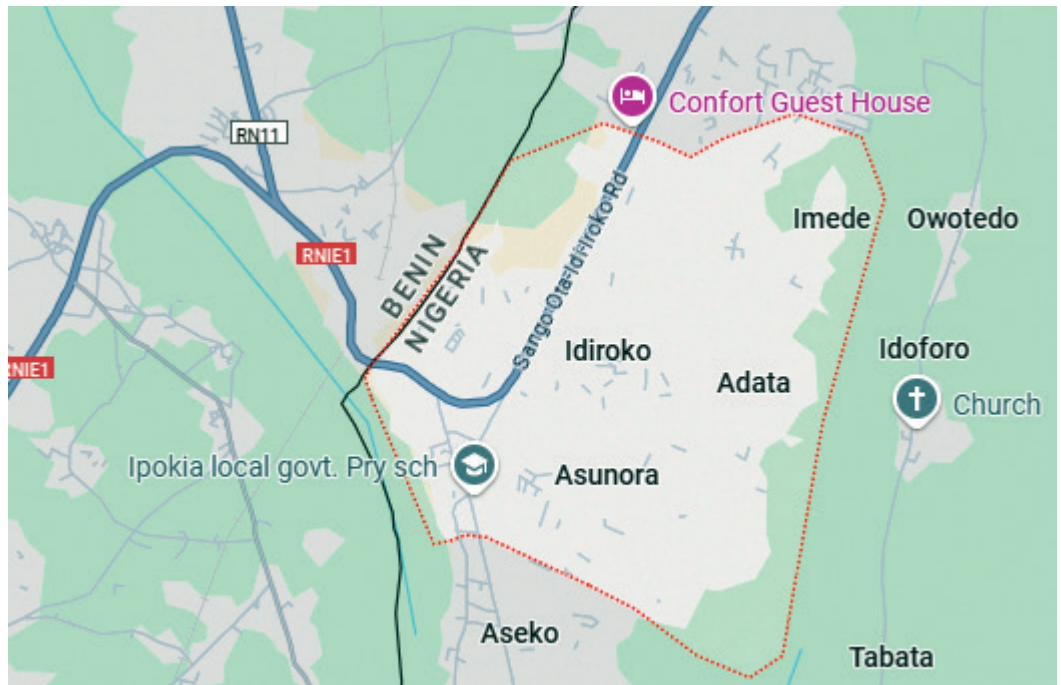
To unravel the agency politics of multiple checkpoints and economic cost implications in the Seme and Idi-Iroko border routes, following the introduction, the study attempted to clarify the concept of security actors in the context of Agency theory. Next to that is the methodology section demonstrating how the study was planned and implemented in terms of the methods of selecting samples, data gathering and analysis. The study later investigated the number of checkpoints and cost implica-

FIGURE 1. MAP SHOWING THE BADAGRY-SEME/KRAKE BORDER ROAD HOSTING MULTIPLE SECURITY CHECKPOINTS



Source: Google Map (2024).

FIGURE 2. MAP SHOWING THE SANGO OTA-IDI IROKO BORDER ROAD HOSTING MULTIPLE SECURITY CHECKPOINTS



Source: Google Map (2024).

tions of plying the route to both Seme/Krake and Idi Iroko/Igolo border posts between the year 2022 and 2023. This was followed by the section on the positive and negative implications of multiple checkpoints along the Seme and Idi Iroko border routes. In the final analysis, the study concludes that while the multiple checkpoints have on different occasions been pivotal to intercepting cross-border criminal networks, these checkpoints can also be figuratively termed “cheque-points” of corrupt intercourse between security operatives and transporters.

THE CONCEPT OF SECURITY ACTORS IN THE CONTEXT OF AGENCY THEORY

The concept of security actors has been interchangeably and synonymously used with other concepts like security agents, security operatives, security players, and law enforcement agents, among others, to depict institutional security providers, state and non-state alike, whose core mandate rests on ensuring the safety of lives and properties. Security actors, in the context that is used here, refers to institutions and security officers in the armed forces,

police, state security services, and paramilitary institutions such as the customs and immigration services and the civil defence corps. Adegoke (2014) opines that security actors are employed to detect and intercept crimes, the apprehension of offenders, the preservation of law and order, the protection of life and property and the due enforcement of laws, policies and regulations for which they are deployed. Aina (2014) postulates that their duties are statutory, and the security actors owe these duties to the citizens and non-citizens lawfully living within the nation-state. Security actors, according to Aina (2014), are answerable to the law in the course of performing their duties.

To Hänggi (2004), security actors belong to five groups: (i) organisations authorised to use force, (ii) civil management and oversight bodies, (iii) justice and law enforcement institutions, (iv) non-statutory security forces and (v) non-statutory civil society groups. These classifications depend on individual national character and the specific period of historical development of a given state. In a functional sense, Edmund (2001) posits that security actors are typically involved in the provision of security within political territories in an effective and efficient manner. They have changed and expanded according to the modern understanding of security as a concept which captures not only the classical state-centred view, but also human security. Robert (2012) views security actors as the conglomeration of security personnel whose primary task is constitutionally determined to protect the state from external threats and domestic insurrection while peace and order are maintained. It is enunciated that these security actors are

also instruments of peace in that they participate in peacekeeping missions in war zones. Security actors are coercive and non-coercive instruments of managing internal and external security (Idowu, 2014). The coercive actors include the Navy, Army, Air Force, Police, and State Security Services, Nigeria Customs and Immigration Services while the non-coercive agencies include the Ports Authority, Federal Road Safety Corps, Federal Fire Service, Nigeria Correctional Centre, National Intelligence Agency, Defence Intelligence Agency. To Nweke (1999), security actors are the personnel on active duty watching against threats to the internal and external peace and unity of a country. Security actors are created by the state to monitor the excesses of personnel and groups in society.

Situating the study within the agency theory provides a significant framework and insight to understand, describe, and explain the operation of security agencies and as well proffer solutions to the inadequacies that contribute to the persistence of criminal activities despite their presence in the borders of Nigeria and the Republic of Benin. The agency theory was developed by Feaver (2003) to provide insight into civil-military relations. Agency theory seeks to understand the civil-military interplay in the process of ensuring national security. Feaver (2003) defines civil-military relations as the strategic interface and interaction between the civil leadership of a state and the military. The agency theory argues that the civilian leader set the overarching objective to monitor the actions of the military saddled with the responsibility of ensuring state survival (Feaver, 2003). The agency theory in

the field of Political Science and Economics explains a situation where an agent is able to decide and or act on behalf of the principal. Feaver's construct of civil-military relations within a hierarchical setting is such that civilian leaders assume the role of 'principal' and the military is the 'agent' hired by the civilian leader for security. The theory maintains that the civilian leader (principal) maintains and controls the activities of the military to achieve the set of national and political objectives (Feaver, 2003). This model is used to explain the interactive process that ensues between the American government and American military on several security issues (Berman, 1990). The theory poses that it is uneasy to determine and interpret the preferences of civilians and the military because both actors have the same desire, goal, and objectives of ensuring national security. Civilians want to contain external threats and enemies for the public good while the military is responsible for ensuring the safety of the nation-state.

Viewing civil-military relations through the agency theory clarifies the interaction between the Nigerian government and security actors. The Government of Nigeria is the principal actor, while the security actors are the agents that carry out the bidding of the civilian government to ensure border security, a non-negotiable factor for national security. The theory also provides insight into the actions of the civilian leaders in their relations with the military, which is to monitor the performance of the security actors in upholding law and order. In the context of this study, the Nigerian government monitors the activities of the border security actors along Nigeria's border -with

the Republic of Benin, and provides support, equipment and training for effective border control and management (Ekhomu, 2013).

The shortcoming inherent in Feaver's agency theory is similar to the challenge (Lane, 2005) experienced in the application of the principal-agent theory to other government agencies. The theory finds it difficult to account for non-material factors in the interaction between civilians and the military while engendering national security. According to Lane (2005), the non-material factors are social ambition and trust. Accounting for non-material factors in civil-military relations such as duty, honour, and trust are beyond cost-benefit calculations (Lane, 2005). The military behaviour is influenced by norms, ideals, and beliefs as much as by the technical expertise possessed by the military rather than the civilian preferences. The theory of Agency, as espoused by Feaver, prevents an understanding of the effect of non-material factors such as ideals, norms and beliefs and how they affect military behaviours. It is on this basis that this study further attempts a theoretical proposition of agency politics of multiple checkpoints to determine the implications of the operations of multiple security actors for border security between Nigeria and the Republic of Benin.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilised descriptive survey design. This is due to the fact that the method provides an opportunity to obtain information on broad knowledge about the subject matter. The research explores a qualitative approach to

undertake a comprehensive study on security actors operating along the Nigerian border. Experts, analysts, academics and professionals in border security are engaged through in-depth interview on the nature and character of relations between the Nigerian Customs Service, Nigerian Immigration Service and vigilantes. Primary data were sourced through in-depth interviews with 40 purposively selected respondents from state security actors (customs, immigration, policemen and drug law enforcement officials) and non-state security actors (Kelebe, Social Orientation Safety Corps, Aja Customs) as well as academics and researchers in universities and research institutions who are experts on border-related security issues between Nigeria and the Republic of Benin. For state-owned security agencies, a senior and a junior cadre officer from each of the following areas: Customs Services, Immigration Services of Nigeria, the Republic of Benin, Nigeria Police, and Nigeria Drug Law Enforcement Agency along the Seme and Idi-Iroko Border Posts were identified and selected for interview; making a total of twenty-four (24) respondents. With respect to non-state security actors operating along the Seme and Idi Iroko border, eight (8) interviews were conducted with four (4) members from the local security guards (Kelebe group), and two (2) members each from the Social Orientation Safety Corps (So Safe Corps) and Aja Customs. The selection is based on their knowledge of, and direct involvement in curbing criminal activities and security threats along the Nigeria-Benin border.

Furthermore, eight (8) in-depth interviews were conducted with one (1) lecturer and researcher each from the Nigerian Insti-

tute of International Affairs (NIIA), Lagos; the African Regional Institute, Imeko Afon; the University of Lagos; and Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. The volume of outstanding and cutting-edge research works and the familiarities of these researchers with the operation of security actors at the border informed the selection of these senior researchers for the study. With respect to traders and indigenes of the border communities in Nigeria, one (1) of each was drawn from Seme and Idi Iroko border markets and communities based on their adequate knowledge of and involvement in the activities of state and non-state security actors along the Nigerian borders with the Republic of Benin. Also, secondary data were sourced from relevant books, journal articles, newspapers, magazines, official publications and internet sources. The data generated were analysed using the descriptive method.

Each of the selected respondents were interviewed according to their schedule and at their convenience. This method enabled the researcher to both easily access the respondents and have enough time for detailed conversations that generated reliable and qualitative evidence for this study. This method also allowed for well-thought-out explanations on the nexus between the dependent and independent variables. The independent variable for this study is security actors, while security threats emanating from trans-border illegal activities in the border communities form the dependent variable. This also implies that security actors, being the independent variable, are capable of affecting the security and stability of Nigeria and the Republic of Benin through their operations in the border regions.

SECURITY ACTORS AND MULTIPLE CHECKPOINTS ALONG THE BORDERS OF NIGERIA AND THE REPUBLIC OF BENIN

Studies on crimes in the borders of Nigeria have noted instances of uprising, defilement, and nonchalance of security officials along Nigeria's borders (Sowale & Ukeje, 2024). These cases were identified as being a portion of the crucial concerns that endanger the lives of the residents of border communities in Nigeria (Mobolaji and Alabi, 2017). Notwithstanding, in some security checkpoints where the unlawful travellers effectively dodge the examination of security checks, there are intimations that the illegal migrants probably evaded the typical public road for an alternate way or shortcuts within the border areas as arranged with the intrigue of some security agents (Rasaki, 1991). There are different cases where indigenes of the border communities have become effectively involved in the smuggling of unlawful goods into Nigeria by using their knowledge of local terrain and expanding their partnership with some security operatives of the Federal Republic of Nigeria deployed to the border zones. Likewise, the majority of the investigations on border violations have focused more on the smuggling of goods and persons, insurgency, and border porosity (Adeola and Oluyemi, 2012). The existing literature has not adequately examined the exercises of security operatives; and their behaviours (licit or unlawful) which should be significantly curbing border crimes. Previous studies have not likewise explored the development, number and impact of checkpoints mounted by the security agents along

the Nigeria-Benin Republic borders. Subsequently, this study is an endeavour to fill the gap in knowledge by presenting a qualitative and quantitative analysis which can be utilised as empirical evidence on the emergence, growth and proliferation of security actors; and the multiplicity of checkpoints along Nigeria's border with the Benin Republic, using NCS and NIS as selected specimen to examine the border management efforts of security actors along the Nigeria-Benin border.

The Seme and Idi Iroko border zones are historical towns of Nigeria and the borders are as old as the nation itself. Both border towns are settlements in Nigeria which are extremely near Cotonou. Nigeria shares 809km with the Benin Republic (Central Intelligence Agency, 2024) which stretches from the Atlantic coast in the South to the Sahel frontiers in the north of both countries. The border zone between Nigeria and Benin includes the Seme-Krake border post as against the notion that Seme is a Benin region. The Krake is likewise a waterfront town in Benin frequently defended by the customs agency, the police and immigration. At the Seme border zone are the Nigerian Customs Service, the Association of Nigeria Customs Licensed Agents (ANCLA), the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NAFDAC), the State Security Service (SSS), the Standard Organisation of Nigeria (SON), and the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) (CEDEAO ECOWAS, 2014). The Seme border territory has been viewed as a significant channel for better regional cooperation inside ECOWAS (Akhigbe,

2021). The region is prevalently occupied by the Aworis, Ijaw, and Eguns communities, and farming, and fishing are their means of livelihood. The security agencies, particularly NCS and NIS selected for this study have their approved check points along the Nigeria- Benin border. While the latter is deployed to be stationed at the borderline, the former has approved checkpoints across the country including routes that connect to the Benin Republic. The approved checkpoints are Lagos Agbara-Gbaji along Lagos Mile2–Badagry-Seme expressway; Ogun Ajilete-Ihumbo, Ayetoro and Atan; and Oyo Igbeti. The Nigeria Immigration Service by virtue of its function is stationed at the entry and exit points of Nigeria and the Benin Republic.

Rijke and Minca (2019) regard checkpoints as the geographical formation capable of implementing specific strategic control and limiting the mobility speed of people and goods. The checkpoint along the Nigeria-Benin border encompasses a securitised backbone that demands certain behaviours and has in place a mobility system designed to respect border delimitation and the history of relations. The post border checkpoints and the asymmetrically unbalanced security apparatus have gained little scholarly attention. A checkpoint, according to Tawil-Souri (2011), is a contested space, point and border area most often transcending the infrastructural and physical meaning outside the presence of security operatives. It is regarded as the unique anthropological space with diverse material formations, placement and functions. Authors have attempted a broad interpretation of the significance of checkpoints as dichotomised

space of contestation between the “powerful” and the “powerless”. A checkpoint is a pivotal temporary occupation that serves to govern the movement and even mould the identity of cross border users. The researcher observes that there are numerous security actors mounting their checkpoints along the borders of Nigeria and the Republic of Benin. It is important to note that despite the approved checkpoints, the cross-border travellers have witnessed multiple checkpoints. The table below shows different security actors and their checkpoints along the roads that lead to the Seme border:

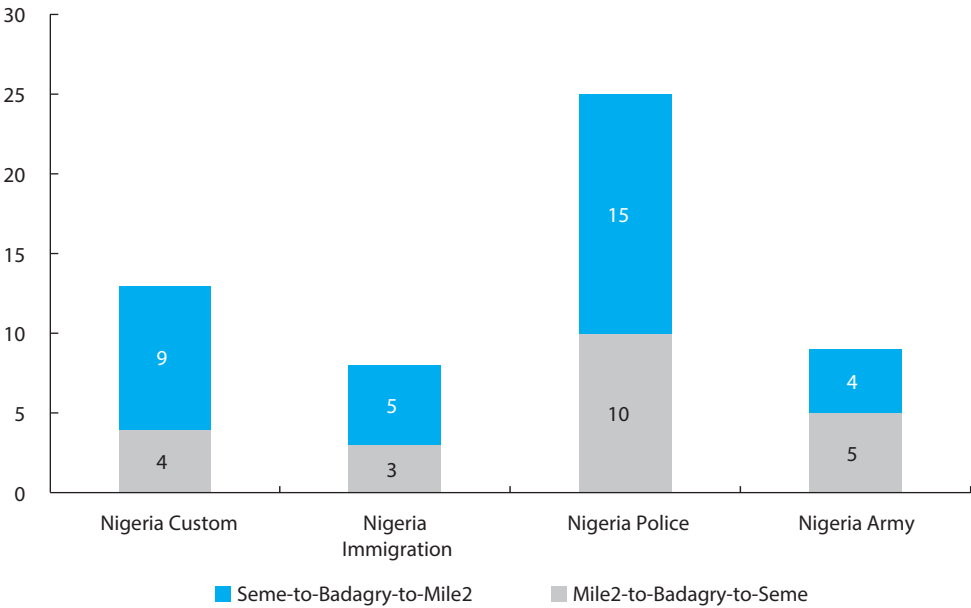
TABLE 1. MULTIPLE SECURITY ACTORS AND THEIR CHECKPOINTS TO AND FROM NIGERIA – BENIN (SEME/KRAKE) BORDERS

S/N	Security Actors	Mile2-to-Badagry-to-Seme	Seme-to-Badagry-Mile 2
1	Nigeria Custom Service	4	9
2	Nigeria Immigration Service	3	5
3	Police Force	6	9
4	Army	5	4

Source: Author's compilation (2022-2023).

Table 1 reveals the number of check points mounted by security actors along Mile 2 - Badagry - Seme expressway. The observation method utilised by the researcher reveals that the Nigeria Customs Service on the road from Mile 2 to the Seme border mounted multiple checkpoints of four (4), and from the border to Mile, there were two (2) all in Lagos State. The researcher encountered nine (9) checkpoints of the Nigeria Customs Service.

FIGURE 3. A HISTOGRAM OF MULTIPLE SECURITY ACTORS AND THEIR CHECKPOINTS TO AND FROM NIGERIA – BENIN (SEME/KRAKE) BORDERS



Source: Author's compilation (2022-2023).

The Nigeria Immigration Service along the border roads also mounted three (3) and five (5) checkpoints to and from Badagry-Seme border roads respectively.

Regarding the Nigeria Police Force, though not selected for this study, it is a para-military agency that is notorious for mounting six (6) and nine (9) checkpoints on the road to Seme and back from the Badagry-Seme expressway respectively. The Nigerian Army staged five (5) checkpoints on the way to Benin Republic, while it mounted four (4) checkpoints returning from Benin Republic to Lagos. The researcher and the commuters that completed the field survey encountered a total number of forty-five (45) checkpoints

along Mile 2 – Seme/Krake highway between Nigeria and Benin Republic at the time of the field research. This confirms the claim from the people that security actors mount unnecessary and illegal checkpoints along the Nigeria-Benin border. However, the security operatives along the Badagry-Seme Road explained the need to securitise the border route as part of the measure to forestall trans-border crime. It was not intended to delay border road users, but in cases where individuals or groups of individuals are suspected of being criminals, it is challenging to manage the traffic without affecting all vehicles. People travel to Benin Republic with contrabands in their loads and the security agencies have the responsibility to

ensure they detect and arrest the individuals involved. As argued by another respondent (Interview with Mr. B, Custom Official) multiple checkpoints exist for strategic reasons and are expected to be implemented as though no checkpoints exist at all. It has been discovered that multiple checkpoints are exploited for corruption purposes and managed in an unprofessional manner by some security operatives. What has been noticed is that through delays via the checkpoints, criminals have been detected and apprehended. The checkpoints, while they could have positive effects, may impede the movement of persons and goods along the borders (Interview with Mr. R. Immigration Officer). The differences in the opinions of the security operatives and the public on the essence of multiple checkpoints suggest that members of the public have a limited understanding of the underpinning reasons propelling and guiding the operations of security actors, especially on matters regarding national and human security. The histogram above shows that the Nigeria Customs Service has the second highest checkpoints while the Nigeria Immigration Service is ranked third among the security actors, mounting multiple checkpoints along Seme border roads. The findings show that contrary to the publicised two approved checkpoints situated at Agbara and Gbaji along the Badagry Seme road, different security operatives mounted multiple checkpoints with impunity on the border road linking Benin Republic.

Table 2 reveals the number of checkpoints mounted by security actors along the Sango to-Idi-Iroko border routes that lead to the Republic of Benin. Using the observation method,

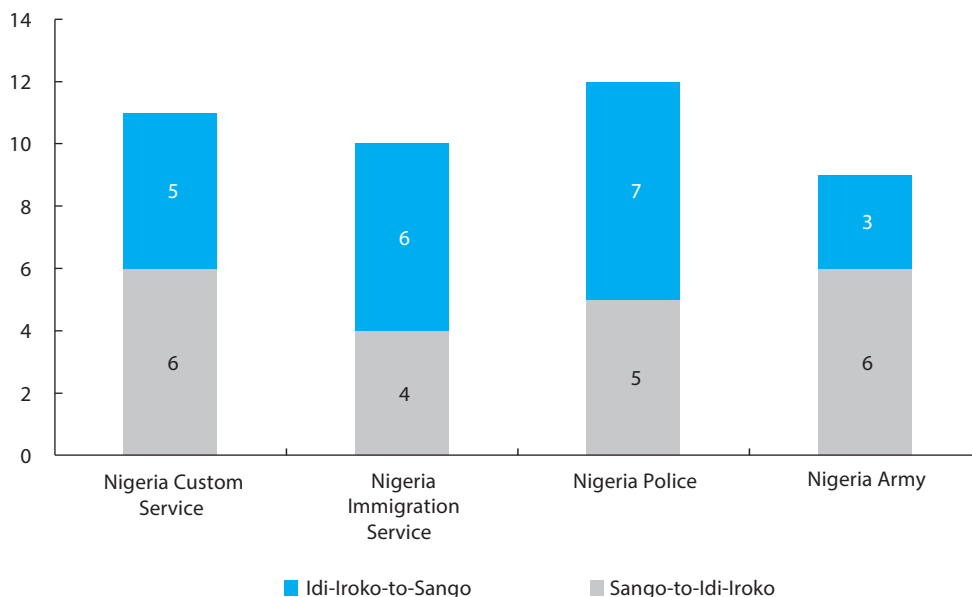
the researcher unveils that the Nigeria Customs Service along the Sango Ota to-Idi-Iroko border there are mounted multiple checkpoints of six (6) and on coming back from the border to Ogun State, the commuters including the researcher encountered five (5) checkpoints of the Nigeria Custom Service. The Nigeria Immigration Service whose business is to be at the entry point into Nigeria mounted four (4) and six (6) checkpoints to and from Sango Ota to-Idi-Iroko border roads. Regarding the Nigeria Police Force and the Army though not selected for this study, it is worth noting that police officers are infamous for mounting five (5) and seven (7) checkpoints on both ways of the Sango Ota to-Idi-Iroko routes. The Nigerian Army staged six (6) checkpoints on the way to Benin Republic while it mounted three (3) checkpoints on returning to Ogun State from Benin Republic. Through field observation by the researcher, it was discovered that forty-two (42) checkpoints were mounted by security players along Sango

TABLE 2. MULTIPLE SECURITY ACTORS AND THEIR CHECKPOINTS TO AND FROM NIGERIA – BENIN (IDI-IROKO/IGOLO) BORDERS

S/N	Security Actors	Sango Ota-to-Idi-Iroko Express	Idi-Iroko-to-Sango Ota Express
1	Nigeria Customs Service	6	5
2	Nigeria Immigration Service	4	6
3	Police Force	5	7
4	Army	6	3

Source: Authors compilation (2022-2023).

FIGURE 4. A HISTOGRAM OF MULTIPLE SECURITY ACTORS AND THEIR CHECKPOINTS TO AND FROM NIGERIA – BENIN (IDI-IROKO/IGOLO) BORDERS



Source: Author's compilation (2022-2023).

Ota to-Idi-Iroko border routes. The histogram above shows that the Nigeria Customs Service has the second highest checkpoints, while the Nigeria Immigration Service is ranked third among security actors mounting illegal checkpoints along the Sango Ota to-Idi-Iroko border area.

It was found that customs officials along the border inflict unjustifiable coercions on the border users. From the Seme border to Badagry in Lagos state and the Idi Iroko border to Sango Ota, Ogun State, the number of checkpoints is simply and excessively numerous. It is dispiriting to note that these checkpoints are mounted in trekkable distances to one another. It was additionally seen that the Customs, Police officials, and immigration of-

ficers in certain spots mounted their barriers near to one another and the traders, drivers and dealers are required to give a bribe at each point. Field observation shows that three (3) in every six (6) passengers cross the borders with different kinds of goods. This is quite interesting considering the high volume of trade across the Nigeria-Benin border. At all the borders sides visited by the researcher, from the Badagry-Seme and Idi-Iroko border road, similar and identical behaviour on the part of security actors was identified, as they extorted money, harassed travellers, and delayed movement. This becomes paradoxical as the same security actors that have the responsibility to encourage the smooth and hitch-free trade and movement of people have become hindrances

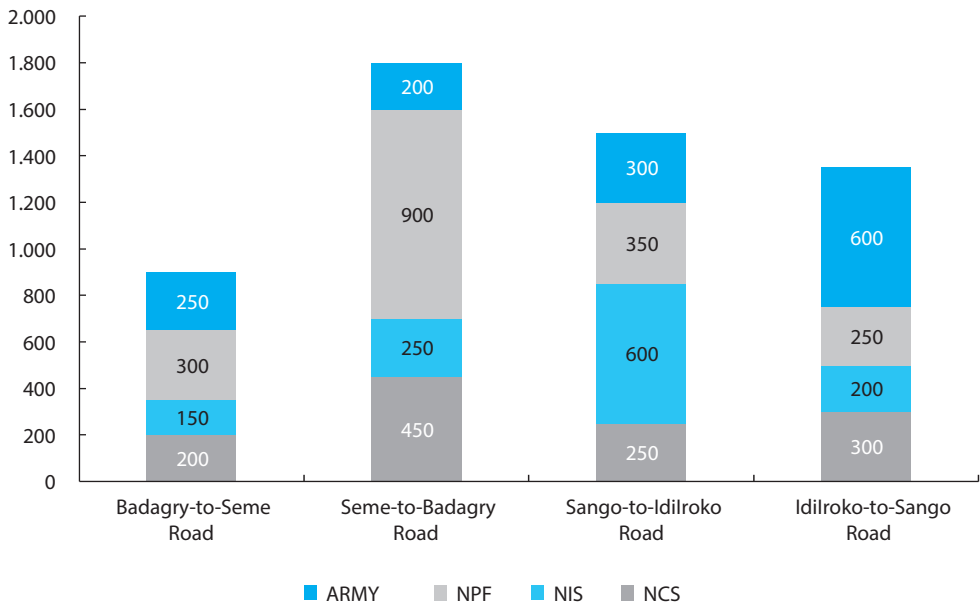
to the ECOWAS free movement of persons and goods protocol.

It was discovered that the average cost of crossing each border costs travellers the sum of NGN200 and FCFA 1,000 on the Benin side of the Nigeria-Benin border (2022-2023). At Seme, educated border users attest to the fact that the security actors do not provide lee-way for the implementation of the ECOWAS protocol on Free Movement. Information gathered shows that drivers/transporters can be delayed at the Seme and Idi-Iroko border for days even with all the necessary documents and in some cases may still not be allowed to cross.

People moving along the West African highways of Nigeria and Benin Republic can

anticipate a critical slowdown, increasing from 10 to 20 minutes for every 90 km travelled, which equates to 6 hours of delays for a trip of 2 hours. Those delays are mostly because of the long and numerous checkpoints by formal security actors (customs, and immigration) positioned along the roads that lead to border posts. The diagrams above provide an outline of the quantity of checkpoints, pay-offs, and delays along chosen Nigeria-Benin highways. Dealers, and transporters are gravely affected by the delays from the different checkpoints along the passageways of Nigeria and Benin Republic. The delays experienced by trucks, and buses conveying different items; the width of checkpoints along the passageways; and the

FIGURE 5. A HISTOGRAM OF THE AMOUNT OF BRIBES COLLECTED BY MULTIPLE SECURITY ACTORS AND THEIR CHECKPOINTS TO AND FROM NIGERIA – BENIN (SEME/ KRAKE AND IDI-IROKO/IGOLO) BORDERS (2022-2023)



Source: Author’s compilation (2022-2023).

exchange of hands with security actors, seriously caused a hike in the transportation cost of goods and movement of people between the two countries. For example, transporters on the Badagry-Seme and Sango-Idi Iroko passage of Nigeria and Benin Republic is expected to go through nearly 50 checkpoints on the road to border posts, and the driver can hope to offer incentives of more than one Thousand and Two Hundred Naira (NGN1200) at the end of the journey as to give an average of fifty naira (NGN 50) to one hundred naira (NGN 100) at every checkpoint.

The quantity of checkpoints and the degree of bribes and delays fluctuate on the expressway at different times. In such conditions, it is discovered that people adopt different methods for crossing the border. Most individuals prefer to hide their destination when asked by the immigration service. They claim to be going to an area in the communities close to the Idi-Iroko and Seme border. Upon arriving at the border region, they prefer crossing the border by walking or by motorcycle because they do not have the required documents to cross the international borders of Nigeria and the Republic of Benin.

MULTIPLE SECURITY CHECKPOINTS AND SECURITY BETWEEN NIGERIA AND BENIN BORDER CORRIDORS

The presence of security actors and multiple checkpoints represents a triangular dynamics of relations between diverse interest-actors. This comprises the state actors of Nigeria and Benin at the joint border patrol level, non-

state security actors and criminal networks, that draw a nexus between mounting multiple checkpoints and intelligence. Checkpoints are often the aftermath of intelligence sharing (Interview with Mr K. Custom Officer, 2022). On many occasions checkpoints are raised because reliable sources of information indicate that criminal networks are smuggling contrabands into the country through the Benin border. The information identifies the brand of vehicle, the products and the key areas that help to apprehend criminals. Information on the kind of vehicle is always disclosed. However, the product that criminals want to smuggle into the country are only mentioned. The duty of the security operatives is to remain in their checkpoints to ensure arrest of the criminal gangs (Interview with Mr M. Kelebe).

Checkpoints are mounted to control an area, create and allow a safe area, protect the polity from corrosive external influences, and maximise shared intelligence. Tactical considerations such as objectives, the environment, terrain, location and weather conditions, duration, personnel and material resources, and effect and importance are considered in mounting checkpoints along the road (Interview with Mr B., Customs Official). The instruction to mount checkpoints often comes unexpectedly from the service heads. Strict compliance is expected of the security operatives as specific instructions are laid for the apprehension of identified criminals across the borders. Checkpoints are also ordered countless times because of the activities of criminals that have escaped other checkpoints of Beninese security agents through illegal routes to Nigeria. The objective of security actors is to advance the positioning

of checkpoints as an inevitable necessity which cannot be regarded as ordinary disruptions of the movement of persons and goods across borders (Interview Mr A. Customs Official). This affirms the view of the United Nations Peacekeeping that the consideration of checkpoints is based on diverse factors that will affect the layouts and will have bearing on its suitability. The checkpoints are to create an interposition layout between two opponent groups (security actors and illegal border road users). Indeed, checkpoints foster limited binary and subtler relations between the various actors operating along the Nigeria-Benin border. The multiplicity of security checkpoints portends that the close interactions among security actors are affecting one another as they form a security complex that continues to impact on the safety and security of the neighbouring states sharing international borders.

The Nigerian and Beninese governments have made several efforts to respond to the threat of transborder crimes in the borderlands. This includes the setting up of joint border patrols and joint border tours to the border communities advising them to desist from the illicit enterprise and approval of checkpoints by security agencies (Nigeria Customs Service and Nigeria Immigration Service), and other border related issues. The emergence, growth, and proliferation of security actors with multiple checkpoints along the Nigeria-Benin border from the period of independence to-date was not documented. The point of convergence is that at the gaining of independence from Britain in 1960, only the Police Force was known to mount checkpoints on Nigerian roads including the ones

linking Benin Republic. Nigerian Customs did not factor in checkpoints as a measure to curb trans-border criminal activities (Ifeanyi-Aneke *et al.*, 2021). The mounting checkpoints along the Nigeria-Benin border was not strategically intended, as authorities take cognisance of the historical relations between different ethnic groups and clans separated by the artificial bifurcation of these African societies (Interview, 13 February 2023). The incessant and notorious acts of criminals taking advantage of the laissez faire style of border governance and the economic and security implications on Nigeria necessitated the checkpoints that security personnel mount along the road that link Nigeria and Benin Republic (Sowale, 2025). The checkpoint however, is not intended to cause any distress to Nigerians who are on legitimate movement and trading activities. The checkpoints are meant to be approximately 40 metres long. One of the respondents said that, “before now, plying the Nigeria-Benin border roads was easy. Although easy, it was also a den of robbers.... without the checkpoint, armed robbers mount their roadblocks to rob travellers or assassinate targets”.

Quite a range of motivations and responsibilities have led to the presence of multiple security actors along the Nigeria-Benin borders. Motivation and responsibilities are reflected in numerous organized forces and intelligence agencies claiming authority and representing the federal government to fight diverse criminal actors across borders. The checkpoints of security actors along the Nigeria-Benin border can be described as a situation of security pluralism where each of the deployed security operatives develop and implement their own

specific response mechanism and actions to confront security issues along the border. The policy of deploying several security actors along the border is described as the aftermath of the securitization process used to legitimise practices and underscore the authorities that security agents represent (Interview, 13 February 2023). The definition of security especially border related concerns is political in nature and the overarching objective that allows for the process of creating multiple security networks of state security actors leads to the emergence of practices and invented response mechanisms. This gives credence to the fact that the nature of security assignment underlines the reasons for different security actors: while some are buffers for internal security agents, NCS and NIS are there to forestall external threats from non-states criminal actors. At the Idi Iroko border post, an immigration member of staff that was contacted was of the opinion that the different duties of the security forces explain the many security officers present at the border. The different security agencies exist to create a synergy that would be pivotal for effective border security. He said,

Different security agencies have different functions to perform along the border while some perform internal security duties others are for external issues. In the case of synergy or the need to perform a function which is with the jurisdiction of another agency, it will be easier to contact the agencies. In case of fake drugs intercepted by NCS, the NDLEA will take matters further.

To ensure the concerted effort of security agencies to clamp down on illegal activities such as human and drug trafficking, and the

proliferation of small arms, the presence of multiple actors is *sine qua non* to deal with multifaceted security challenges. The unpredictable moves of criminal networks along and around the border are a precursor to the multiplicity of security actors along the Nigeria-Benin border. As pointed by an immigration officer, it has practically become impossible for a single security agency of government to face the myriads of security challenges (armed robbery, drug smuggling, human smuggling and trafficking, money laundering, and international terrorism) that emerged since the end of the Cold War and the wake of globalisation. A colleague of the aforementioned respondents, in agreement posited that “armed robbery and other criminal activities are prevalent along the border roads of Badagry to Seme and Sango to Idi Iroko the government needed to reinforce the area with security operatives that can handle the situation” (Interview, February 13, 2023).

Studying the merits and demerits of checkpoints is of particular benefit as border sites are characterised by intense levels of contestations; convergence for security apparatuses engaging constant interactions; negotiation ground for state and non-state security actors. It also offers benefits and constraints for the economic conditions of neighbouring countries (Asiwaju, 1984; Nugent, 2002; Das and Poole, 2004). Being a place where authority is exerted, respondents differ in their responses but are in agreement on the advantage and disadvantages of the activities and presence of a multiplicity of checkpoints along the border. Security agents regard the checkpoints as a measure to ensure order in

line with the security interests of the Nigerian state. A member of the informal security actors acknowledges the good side of the checkpoints but was of the opinion that despite signaling a tight security from Seme-to-Badagry, Idi-Iroko to Sango Ota, its advantages are outweighed by the delay, extortion and harassment of drivers and passengers by security operatives. The presence of multiple security checkpoints helps to ensure proper scrutiny of border road users.

The effect of multiple checkpoints is evidenced in the obvious slowdown of the movement of vehicles conveying different persons and goods. It also has other effects that are not obvious to the public. According to an interviewee, “travellers will definitely feel the pain in their body as a result of bad roads. Even as security agents I experience delay and before you know it I am feeling pains as a result of bad roads”. Multiple checkpoints imposed by law enforcement agents on West African border routes, which slows vehicular movement according to Walther *et al.* (2020), often reduces accessibility to border areas as it creates additional extra distance between border zones. Calculating the average speed for different kinds of roads Walther *et al.* (2020) posit that multiple checkpoints on roads in fair and poor condition which require slow speed add 20 to 40 minutes extra to a journey. In contrast, a border road in which travel time takes less than four hours such as the one between Accra in Ghana and Lagos in Nigeria, does not require extra travelling time. This is evident in an expressed view of a respondent who said that, mounting multiple checkpoints along the Nigeria-Benin border were the cause of traffic congestions coupled with bad roads

and created unnecessary delay and discouraged people from travelling. A two hour journey should be planned for a whole day.

Drawing from the tendencies of security agencies to take undue advantage of the multiple checkpoints, a respondent avers that the checkpoints have various effects. Foremost is corruption and extortion. Some corrupt officials have turned checkpoints to extortion where people are compelled to pay money. This kind of behaviour exhibited by security actors is not only characteristic of Nigeria-Benin border government officials, Barka (2012) in his study of challenges and solutions to intra-African trade identifies this exact kind of behaviour from security actors along the Ouagadougou-Tema border corridors of Burkina Faso and Ghana and the Ouagadougou-Lome border of Burkina Faso and Togo. According to Barka (2012) commuters experience a high number of customs controls, though the level of bribe collected by customs is significantly low compared to those given to the Police.

Corrupt practices described as “administrative harassment” requires unrecorded and undocumented payment made to government security officials on major border routes. While some security agents have fixed extortion rates, they collect from border users, small traders and migrants, others collect payment from drivers whose vehicles lack the required documentations and regulations. Raballand and Mjekigi (2010) posit that long-term relations are established between traders, transporters and security actors to provide leeway for the passage of prohibited goods, fuel, gas, and contrabands. Having had personal experience of the multiple checkpoints on his way to bor-

der post, a customs officer told the researcher that checkpoints inflict stress on travellers. It is a waste of time and causes vehicular congestion along the border. The checkpoints are easily used to cause one problem or the other for the movement of people. According to Barka (2012), the multiple checkpoints of the security operatives along the same border corridor doubles the procedural bureaucracy at the border zone that results in congestion and delays of containers, and trucks. The stiff-necked measures of customs also amount to an increase in the cost of consignment. This is a far cry from the desired situation of the border corridors in developed countries, as border checkpoints between Nigeria and the Republic of Benin are overwhelmed by limited infrastructure, and inadequate manpower, leading to delays. The major cause of delays is the outdated procedure of checking for illegal goods and wanted criminals, as the purpose of checkpoints is to detect, arrest and prosecute smugglers of goods, illegal traders, human traffickers and hosts of criminal networks.

A customs official of a non-state security actor along Sango Ota - Idi Iroko border corridors, with the nomenclature, "Aja Custom", was of the opinion that, delays in the movement of goods and people is the number one effect of multiple checkpoints on the border corridor. Passengers and traders can expect to be delayed. This thereby affects the daily trading activities of people whose business is carried out at the border zones. The nexus between the multiplicity of checkpoints along the Nigeria-Benin border corridors and Intra African trading and informal trading is established by the aforementioned opinion. The

survey conducted by Walther (2012) confirms that checkpoints are among the identified bottlenecks to travelling and transportation of goods and persons along the borders. In the research, the majority of farmers and traders complain that illegal and unregulated payments and bribes given to officials along the Benin-Nigeria borders are a major challenge to their economic and trading activities.

More to the effect of the multiple checkpoints is the distrust that Nigerians have on the efficiency of the Nigerian government to ensure that formulated policy is executed in such a manner that no stone is left unturned. A senior official in the immigration service expressly states that multiple checkpoints undermine the trust that citizens have on the government. It has been said that illegal checkpoints are being dismantled, yet citizens continually have to be subjected to heinous checkpoints of security agencies (Interview with Mr. F, Customs Official). This goes to show that the persistence of multiple security checkpoints, despite government efforts to align with the ECOWAS vision of seamless transnational movement, determines how the populace perceives the government. This also explains why the general populace at the initial stage of hearing about government policies usually express pessimism between the gap of formulation and implementation.

It is important to indicate that the multiplicity of checkpoints is not specific to Benin-Nigeria border routes. Scholars (Barka 2012; Walther 2015;) have identified a multiplicity of checkpoints and their effects in other West African countries. For instance, they have established the implications of multiple checkpoints

for the movement of agricultural products along the borders of Mali and Senegal. Barkar (2012), for example, contends that delays and inefficiency adversely affect the agricultural sector. For instance, paying close to USD437 to security officials in transporting millet/sorghum along the borders of the Koutiala-Darka corridor of Mali and Senegal is connected to an increase in the cost of agricultural produce. A justification for connecting this to the opinion of respondents hinges on the intensity of trades along the Nigeria-Benin border, especially one that relates to value-chain crops such as maize, onions/shallots, livestock/ meat, millet/sorghum, rice, and poultry. The high cost of these goods is linked to the bribes that transporters give the security officials as they are moved from one border post to the major cities and consumer markets of countries of their destination.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

National and human security dimensions have been affected by the menace of cross-border crimes. The intensity of the effect of crimes across international borders is a result of advancements in technology and science, especially in the area of transportation and the production of sophisticated weapons. Nigeria is severely implicated by the phenomenon of drug trafficking, arms trafficking, human trafficking, smuggling, armed banditry and insurgency. The implications of these crimes for the economic and security conditions of the country stimulate the establishment of a plethora of security agencies both within and

at the edge of Nigeria's borders. This denotes the emergence of diverse security agencies and multiple security checkpoints as a measure to inspect the movement of people and goods along the borders of Nigeria with the Republic of Benin. Despite the multiple checkpoints, criminal activities have remained unabated and complicated especially in the era of globalisation. The study therefore concludes that the multiple checkpoints are shaped by the politics of the different agencies on mounting checkpoints along the Nigeria-Benin border and that these checkpoints, though they play a significant role in intercepting crimes, are also "cheque-points" where money exchange hands between security actors and transporters. Therefore, the study recommends that the Nigerian government should provide a holistic security framework that would ensure that the purpose of multiple security checks along Nigeria-Benin borders are achieved with a minimal or total eradication of an unprofessional interface between security, criminal, and non-criminal actors.

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