



NIGERIA-BENIN SOCIO-ECONOMIC TIES: KIDNAPPING AND BANDITRY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *This study examines Nigeria-Benin socio-economic ties vis-à-vis the prevailing kidnapping, banditry in Nigeria, in order to ascertain whether Nigeria-Benin socio-economic ties account for the deteriorating nature of national security in Nigeria, leading to incessant kidnapping and banditry in the country. The study is guided by a research question: Does Nigeria-Benin socio-economic ties account for kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria, 2015-2021. The study adopted Neo-functionalism theory of integration as its blue-print of understanding. We raised a hypothesis that: Nigeria-Benin socio-economic ties accounted for kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria, 2015-2021. The study adopted content analysis for the purpose of analysing the documented materials generated through secondary source of data collection. Therefore, we recommended, amongst other things the establishment of joint border task-force or patrol team for proper monitoring of the borders in order to curb the high incidence of trans-border crimes which thrives on the proliferation of SALW in Nigeria. The establishment of border communities policing outfits (border community vigilantes), whose monitoring responsibility shall complement the security agents at both the borders and within the bordering communities.*

KEYWORDS: Banditry, Borders, Firearms, Proliferation, Kidnappings, Porous, Socio-economic.



INTRODUCTION

It is a widely recognised truism that relations amongst nations cannot be overemphasised on the premise that “no country is an island unto itself politically, economically, technologically, and otherwise” (Yamin, 2012, p. 122) for the purpose of achieving national development and sustainable goals in the society. It is on the basis of the aforementioned needs that nations engage with one another sub-regionally, regionally as well as internationally due to the essential nature of such goals. Clearly, nations also engage with one another against hostilities and barriers to ensure and maintain peace and security, which are regarded as *sine qua non*, or necessary conditions for the achievement of national development.

Akin to the above, Nigeria’s diplomatic relations have often been predicated on the consciousness and recognition that both countries—Nigeria and Benin are the same socio-culturally, particularly before the balkanisation of Africa in late 19th century by the colonial powers (Isyaku, 2017). More precisely, this has been reflected in the Nigeria’s series of foreign policies, particularly after her political independence in 1960. For instance, according to Mohammed, Karaure and Rao (2019), Nigeria in its foreign policies maintained cordial relations with her African neighbours, particularly the Republic of Benin as a central point of reference to its peaceful existence. As a result, its official relations with Benin are given most priority vis-à-vis other non-direct neighbouring States of Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ghana amongst others in the West African States. This is because of the belief that both countries share many things in common, particularly in the areas of political ideology, socio-cultural heritage, amongst others, but were only delineated by artificial boundaries for colonial rule. Again, this is because Nigeria’s prosperity and security is intrinsically linked to its peaceful co-existence with her immediate neighbours on the other hand (Mohammed, Karaure & Rao, 2019).

Etymologically, a number of Nigerians had socio-economic relations with Beninese prior to the colonial era based on the good understanding of their socio-cultural similarity. For instance, “there was an appreciable contact between the Yoruba of South-western Nigeria and the Fon of the Republic of Benin; and consequently, there was the spread of Yoruba and Fon languages across the two communities” (Babatunde, 2014) (in Mohammed, Karaure & Rao, 2019, p. 121). They further observed that prior to the creation of Nigeria-Benin colonial borders; the Yoruba and the Fon interrelated with one another and moved freely for their daily economic activities and transactions across the two territories without restrictions (Yusuf 2016).

However, the politics of colonial border creation continued into the post-colonial era with a strong emphasis on the impact of guarding territorial borders as a critical security issue; thus tended to affect the pre-colonial Nigerian-Beninese relationships (Babatunde 2014). In spite of these artificial borders that, for instance separated the Yoruba people of Nigeria from the Fon people of Benin as well as the recognition of borders as a determinant of security, there has been the persistence of socio-cultural and economic affinities amongst the peoples (Yusuf 2016). For instance, most of the Yoruba and Fon peoples in the two countries have similarities in sociological and anthropological characteristics. More clearly, both the Yoruba and Fon peoples speak each other’s language, a number of them practice the same religion and other cultural traits irrespective of some areas of differences, particularly in terms of national citizenship as posed by colonial powers (Babatunde 2014). As a result, the two countries’ foreign policies with regard to each other were flexible and friendly in terms of



their political boundaries as posed by colonial rule. This is coupled with the goal of ensuring free movement of persons and goods, peaceful co-existence, and the integration of African nations in general and West African nations in particular. Therefore, this made it easier for Nigerians and Beninese to cross the two countries' borders with little or no check, thus, posing a serious security threat to Nigeria (Yusuf 2016).

Furthermore, the socio-cultural affinity between the two countries resulted in improper management of the borders linking the two countries. For instance, Mohammed, Karaure, and Rao (2019) observed that border surveillance and monitoring are seriously challenged due to socio-cultural similarities between the two countries in terms of religion, dressing, and other daily socio-economic activities between the two countries, amongst others. The aforementioned more often is a point of reference by which the border management and security agencies of both countries are not discharging their official duties effectively at the borders. Without thoroughly checking who goes-in and out of the countries through the borders on one hand and, what comes-in or goes-out of the countries on the other hand. Thus, trafficking and smuggling of all kinds become the order of the day and thriving socio-economic activities in the border regions of both countries, leading to the experienced security menace in the country. As people, including illegal aliens from other parts of the region in disguise to traffic and smuggle small arms and light weapons (SALW) in and out of the country.

Thus, in an attempt to address this pressing issue, Nigeria went into several bilateral agreements with the Republic of Benin as possible preventive measures to avert its overwhelming dangers to national security of Nigeria. Therefore, this resulted in a number of unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral actions by both countries' governments in order to curtail the incessant security threats across Nigeria (Mohammed, Karaure & Rao, 2019). Such include the Nigeria-Benin Joint effort of 2003 to reform informal border trade, which was signed on the 9th of August, 2003, as a cooperative measure to curtail the incessant security threats across Nigeria-Benin borders (Adetula 2014). Furthermore, Nigeria-Benin bilateral cooperation continued as both countries signed "Death Kneel" on piracy (Mohammed, Karaure & Rao, 2019), as a pathway to minimise if not to stamp out, the activities of armed robbers who are giving traders large boat of sleepless nights and ruining the country's economies. The agreement was endorsed by Presidents Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of Nigeria and BoniYayi of Benin Republic in 2011 (Oditia 2011) (in Mohammed, Karaure & Rao, 2019, p. 124). While smuggling of weapons has continued to exacerbate insecurity in Nigeria on one hand; also smuggling of goods has denied the Nigerian Government of the essential revenue generation through import and export duties on the other hand. Therefore, the Republic of Benin, in commiserating with the ugly situation joined, the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in 2019, a regional security outfit set up to confront the madness of terrorism in the West African sub-region, with particular reference to Nigeria (Rotimi, 2021).

However, despite the series of joint efforts of the two sister States, smuggling of illegitimate items continues across the borders, and the level of insecurity intensified in Nigeria (Alake 2019). This thus compelled Nigeria to make a unilateral decision to close its borders in August, 2019 following the reason to control influx of goods like rice and tomatoes and other food items that believed to have expired into Nigeria. Consequently, the porosity of Nigeria-Benin borders, as a result of ethnic relations between Nigeria and Benin Republic therefore led to inflow of illegal goods that recently constituted serious threats to Nigerian food



security on one hand (Folarin et al. 2014). And trafficking and smuggling of small arms and light weapons (SALW), including sophisticated firearms of AK-47 rifle that threatens Nigeria's National Security, on the other hand. Because many of these weapons are scattered in the hands of unprofessional individuals, thereby exacerbating terrorism, banditry, and the overall challenge of security in the country since 2009, being the very beginning of Boko Haram's insurgency in the country. In the same vein, the uncontrollable influx of food items such as rice, tomatoes, frozen foods, amongst others, as a result of the inability to mount strict checks at the borders due to the long-existed-ethnic relations between the two countries also mutilated the national development of Nigeria. Therefore, the above narratives are currently leading Nigeria into suddenly becoming a disposal field or waste bin for Western artifacts in the sub-region, following the ECOWAS protocol on free movement of persons and goods within the West African sub-region. Again, this also undermines economic growth of the country as the process of smuggling of goods depletes government's source of revenue generation. In view of the above, the study seeks to interrogate how Nigeria-Benin ethnic relations undermine national security in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Incessant killings of innocent citizens, kidnapping for ransom and, raping predominantly in the contemporary Nigerian society, remained dominant features of the State's failure to properly guard her borders on account of what goes-in and out of the country from its neighbouring countries (Obi, Chinweze & Onyejebu, 2018; Abanyam, Aver & Gwambeka, 2020). Akin to the above, Mohammed, Karaure, and Rao (2019) argued that Nigeria-Benin ethnic relations are vital recognition of the long-existed-relationship between the two countries before the western political balkanisation of kith and kin in Africa. Which thus constituted a challenge or threat to national security in Nigeria, leading to high rate of border crimes such as smuggling of SALW, illegal goods, trafficking of persons, especially women and children, and migration of illegal aliens who were exacerbating banditry, and terrorism as means of economic engagement in the country.

In agreement with the above, fundamental questions seeking to be addressed are, why socio-cultural affinity between Nigeria and Benin, which ought to be a blessing to both sister countries, a bane and threat to Nigeria's national security? And why has the security agencies and border management, whose official responsibility is to guard and protect Nigeria's interest at the border regions unable to properly mount surveillance on what comes-in and out of the country through the borders? Therefore, the above questions thus aroused scholarly and intellectual debate amongst security experts, scholars, and researchers. In response to the above questions, many factors were brought into visibility as the possible genetic cause of this prevailing menace (Nigeria-Benin border porosity) leading to an increase in border crimes such as trafficking, smuggling of illicit goods, and firearms, amongst others. For instance, according to Mohammed, Karaure, and Rao (2019), there are a number of underlying factors that appear to be responsible for the obvious systemic porous nature of Nigeria-Benin borders. These, according to them include, amongst other things, the historical and nature of Nigeria-Benin relations and socio-economic and security relations. Furthermore, they laid much blames on the disparities of administrative orientation between the two countries as being problematic, thus giving rise to smuggling of illicit drugs, and SALW through the borders, causing insecurity in the society.



In agreement with the above, Obarisiagbon and Akintola (2019) further argued that leadership failure which often results in economic-unemployment, poverty, weak leadership system, weak legislative system and ineffectiveness of the security agencies are the possible factors resulted in the increased border crimes, trafficking, and smuggling, amongst others into Nigeria. According to them, the aforementioned leadership failure most often render security agents handicapped and ineffective in discharging their duties by turning blind eyes on these illegal activities of smugglers, because they (security agents) also depend on them for their economic survival. This according to Adeyinka (2014); and Folarin et al. (2014) gave rise to uncontrollable increase of crimes within the border region, thus leading to inflow of illegitimate goods that over the years constituted threats to the national development of the country. In the same vein, Adeola and Fayomi (2012) (in Mohammed, Karaure and Rao, 2019, p. 123) argued that the artificial border line between the two countries, and lack of purposeful leadership-will within both countries continued to facilitate the inflow of illegitimate goods to Nigeria. Furthermore, Adeyinka (2014) maintained that the low income earnings along Beninese borders communities made many of them resorted in illegal smuggling to boost the country's revenue generation, as against Nigeria's national security.

Therefore, the adverse implications of Nigeria-Benin ethnic relations cannot be overemphasised within the context of social reality, as this is the prime factor upon which the borders linking both countries are considered porous and unguarded. Thus, allowing all kinds of unhealthy transactions, such as smuggling, trafficking, and all sorts of border crimes, uninterrupted by the security agents at the borders. Aside from trafficking of SALWs, there exists illegal trade across the borders that includes arms smugglings, drugs, and human trafficking and other criminal activities like armed robbery within the border region, thereby making the borders unsafe for legitimate and legal border users (Mohammed, Karaure, and Rao, 2019). Meanwhile, persistency in the forgoing criminal activities across the Nigeria-Benin borders continued to constitute serious threats to the Nigeria's economy and the society at large, especially between 2009 till date. As its consequences originated from Boko Haram insurgency to the activities of Niger-Delta militancy, herdsmen terrorism, banditry, and unknown-gunmen, and agitations for self-determine/sovereign states such as the Indigenous People of Biafra insurgency (IPOB), amongst others in the country cannot be overemphasised (Udeh, Edeh, Obiagu, Madu & Agwu, 2023).

Although scholars have extensively explored the root causes of security situation in the country, however, none have critically explained the implications of Nigeria-Benin ethnic relations on national security of Nigeria on one hand and how it is paralysing national development of the country on the other hand. Therefore, the explanation of this problem may be found within the ambit of socio-cultural affinity between Nigeria (Yoruba) and Benin Republic (Fon) and the ECOWAS protocol on Free Movement of persons and goods, upon which movements are made easier across the frontiers with little or no security check. As a result, illegal aliens and other nationals of both counties seize the opportunity to traffic and smuggle illicit goods and other kinds of sophisticated weapons in disguise. Hence, we pose a research question:

- Do Nigeria-Benin socio-economic ties account for the incessant kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria?

H1: Nigeria-Benin socio-economic ties accounted for the incessant kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria.



METHODOLOGY

According to Udeh, Eyikorogha, Ekoyo and Obiagu (2021), data collection is the science and art of extracting information about the selected properties of units. For the purpose of validity and convenience, we adopted a documentary method of data collection. Documentary method provides us with relevant documented and written materials already in existence even though they were not produced precisely for the direct use of the investigators (Obasi, 1999). To this end, we source data from documented materials such as books, book chapters, journal articles, official documents, newspapers, magazines, internet materials, and unpublished works.

Similarly, in correlation with the above-adopted method of data collection with regards to the complex nature of the study, the study also adopted content analysis for the purpose of analysing the documented materials generated through secondary source of data collection. Accordingly, Udeh, Eyikorogha, Ekoyo, and Obiagu (2021) noted that content analysis is a structured technique for valid analysis of documents in which the researcher first constructs a set of mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories that can be used to analyse documents, and then records the frequency with which each of these categories is observed in the documents studied. Furthermore, content analysis is a research technique for objectivity, systematic, and quantitative description of manifest content of communication (Oguwuike & Udeh, 2024, p. 171).

Theoretical Trapping

In order to properly explain how Nigeria-Benin socio-economic ties account for the prevailing kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria. This study adopted Neo-functionalism theory of integration as its blue-print of understanding. Neo-functionalism theory is a part of regional integration theory propounded by Ernst Haas in 1958 in his book titled, *Uniting of Europe, 1958*, (Udeh, Ezirim, Obi & Eme, 2024).

The Neo-functionalism theory was developed in an attempt to integrate the European communities and their economic institutions, such as the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), which was the first regional integration stage, later to European Atomic Energy (EAE) (Onuoha, 2008). The European Economic Community (EEC) was later introduced when the ECSC recorded an inundated success, particularly as regards to the economic concern of the entire European community after the World War II in 1945 (Bache, 2001). Neo-functionalism was propounded when the Functionalism theory failed to address the whole issue of regional integration in Europe. Similarly, Neo-functionalism theory holds similar view to that of the Functionalism theory of regional integration, which was propounded by David Mitrany in 1946 in his book titled, *Working Peace System* (Udeh, Ezirim, Obi & Eme, 2024).

Thus, both theories held that every society is composed of various groups of interests, and an integration process would better satisfy them (Rosamond, 2011). Furthermore, Neo-functionalism sees a State as a complex society composed of various needs, values, aspirations, interests, amongst others, and held that States with such similar needs, values, aspirations, and experiences can transfer or voluntarily cede their sovereign will by functioning in realisation of set out certain goals and objectives with the expectation that in future the integrating States would shift from working together in certain technical areas of



interest to create a political union in order to stimulate cooperation, peace and unity amongst the integrated Nation-states.

Ernst Haas, the founding father of neo-functionalism, based his initial thesis on the idea of the transfer of loyalty to a supranational authority that will facilitate cooperation amongst the integrated States. In the same vein, Haas theorised three major assumptions of the theory as follow:

- Positive spillover effect. The positive spillover effect holds that integration in one sector (e.g., economic) would deepen or create strong incentive for integration in further sector (e.g., political) which would result in integrated union States.
- Transfer of domestic allegiances. The theory holds that the process of integration gathers interest groups and associations who is ready to will their allegiances to the supranational institution that will oversee their cooperation
- Technocratic automaticity. Neo-functionalism theory maintains that integration process proceeds to the establishment of supranational institutions set up to oversee that integration leads to the sponsoring of further integration of the member States and becomes more powerful and autonomous. (Rosamond, 2001).

In the same vein, the thrust of Neo-functionalism theory with respect to boundaries or differences advocates for the interference of sovereignty from the Nation-state to a supranational body through organisational capacity to resolve disputes and build international legal authority.

The application of theory

Neo-functionalism theory, being a sub-unit of regional integration theory, perceives State as a complex society composed of various needs, aspirations, interest etc. It also suggested that States with same visions, needs, values, aspirations, interests, and differences, amongst others should agree to work together through an integrating authority in order to achieve a common goal and objective by voluntarily transferring their sovereign will by function to an established supranational authority that would oversee their cooperation and unity. It is also the process whereby States submit their loyalty to an integrated political unit.

Thus, at the dawn of African independence, it was obvious that Africa's development lies in the unity of her people or neighbours. For instance, the establishment of African Union (AU) as a continental supranational authority was strategic for the quest for unity and development through African integration. Again, West African sub-regional integration—ECOWAS with its primary objective of promoting economic viability of its member states through its protocol on free movement of persons, goods, and services across the sub-regional frontiers. The treaty also targeted the promotion of trade by providing for cooperation in trade, customs, taxation, statistics, money, and payments. It requires ECOWAS Member States to liberalise trade, as part of the trade liberalisation scheme, by removing tariff and non-tariff barriers in order to establish a free trade in West Africa sub-region Furthermore, the establishment of African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) for Africa economic relations amongst the member states, with the aim to create a single continental market for goods and services and expand intra-African trade across the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Africa in general. Also, the objectives include the promotion of



intra-African trade, elimination of border barriers, and the creation of the world's largest free trade area.

The aforementioned supranational authorities were established on the common belief that *no State is an island unto itself, and can effectively achieve development of any sort unto itself without the assistance of the others*. Thus, Nigeria and the Republic of Benin are not exceptions in this regard and can as well pursue an integration or cooperation in one sphere of their ties, which may have a spillover effect on other aspects, particularly border harmonisation. Again, they may pursue integration or cooperation in a particular aspect of their pursuits, which would overlook their colonial differences by building a strong integrating unit that would stimulate more cooperation and unity between the two countries and engender national development of both countries through economic comparative advantage. For instance, Nigeria up to date remains one of the highest oil and gas producing nations in Africa upon which most African economies depend, particularly that of the Republic of Benin. In the same vein, the Republic of Benin has one of the highest automobile industries in the West African sub-region, which Nigeria also depends on. Thus, Nigeria and the Republic of Benin could be integrated through these two industries with consensus agreements to have a defined bilateral deal to curtail smuggling of illegal products on both sides, which for a long while have denied both countries source of revenue generation due to the high rate of smugglings on one hand, and also have undermined the national security of both countries on the other hand. This cooperation or integration is capable of curtailing the prevailing culture of smuggling of all kinds of fire arms upon which proliferation of SALWs prevails in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nigeria-Benin socio-economic engagement, kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria

Historically, Nigerians and Beninese have established and been engaged in serious trade relationships since pre-colonial era, when some empires in what is today “Benin Republic”, that is, Nigeria ruled some parts of modern-day Benin Republic (Enamhe & Maxwell-Borjor, 2021). Similarly, after the colonial rule, the Yoruba and Hausa people of Nigeria also had serious economic and cultural ties with the people of Benin (Dahomeyan) on the fate of having same ancestral origin (Ubi, 2020). The fate of same ancestral origin and socio-cultural background, coupled with the belief of sharing some cultural heritage (language and culture) in common, which invariably identified them as one, ensured their economic ties. Akin to the above, Umar, Sule and Rao (2019) argued that there was an appreciable contact between the Yoruba of South-western Nigeria and the Fon of the Republic of Benin; and this encouraged economic engagement between the sister countries. Again, prior to the creation of Nigeria-Benin colonial borders, the Yoruba and the Fon interrelated with one another and moved freely for economic activities and transactions across the two territories with little or no restrictions (Yusuf 2016). This continued in spite of the artificial borders that separated the Yoruba people of Nigeria from the Fon people of Benin as well as the recognition of borders as a determinant of security; their socio-cultural and socio-economic ties were not battered (Yusuf 2016). Because most of the Yoruba and Fon peoples in the two countries have common identical similarities, particularly in the areas of sociological and anthropological characteristics. For instance, they speak each other’s language and have same religious and

cultural practices irrespective of differences in national citizenship and ethnicity (Babatunde 2014). Again, the two countries' foreign policies with regard to each other were quite flexible in terms of their political boundaries.

The above, coupled with the ECOWAS protocol on free movement of persons, goods and services across the sub-region and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) gave a boost to the economic relations between the sister countries (Nigeria and Benin) in particular and the region in general. According to Omodele (2021), the main objective of the economic agreement of ECOWAS and AfCFTA is to create a single continental market for goods and services and expand intra-African trade across the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Africa in general. He further contends that the AU agreement's provisions in particular are geared towards the promotion of intra-African trade, the elimination of border barriers, and the creation of the world's largest free trade area; however, not at the expense of the interests of the State Parties.

Thus, this made it permissible for the nationals of both countries (Nigerians and Beninese) to cross the frontiers of the two countries with ease; therefore, this accessibility had been a serious threat to the national security of Nigeria, as the borders became more porous than ever (Yusuf 2016). Thereby, allowing for all sorts of illegitimate activities such as trafficking, smuggling of people and SALW, and other kinds of contraband goods into Nigeria through the border corridors of Benin Republic (Golub, Mbaye & Diop, 2019). For instance, below are pictorial evidence of the smuggled SALWs into Nigeria through the Nigeria-Benin borders.

Fig. 1 The intercepted smuggled SALWs along old Lagos-Abeokuta road



Source: Kone (2022); *Business Day* (2023).

Thus, this therefore poses serious security challenge to Nigeria in spite efforts by the security agencies who are officially responsible for curbing illegal trade and other activities on the border (Nigeria Customs Service, 2019). Again, despite all efforts of the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), smuggling activities have always remained much pronounced on the international borders between Nigeria and Benin Republic. For instance, according to World Bank estimation, in 2006 alone goods worth over US\$2.4 billion were smuggled into Nigeria from Benin Republic (Raballand & Mjekiqi, 2010). Similarly, Abegunde and Fabiyi (2020) also contend that the porous nature of the Nigeria-Benin borders as a result of the obvious socio-cultural and socio-economic ties made smugglings of SALW and other crimes of weapons theft very common along the two countries' frontiers. This is so because the culprits (weapons thieves) easily escape through the borders into the Republic of Benin after such dirty transactions and vice versa (Abegunde & Fabiyi, 2020).



Consequently, smuggling activities as a result of socio-economic ties between Nigeria and Benin have negatively affected Nigerian society in several ways. For instance, smuggling of SALWs into Nigeria has been discovered to have resulted in the death of an estimated 1,000 Nigerians per year since 1999 through armed robbery (Okeke & Oji, 2014). This consequence appears more severe in Northern Nigeria due to their commendable trade across the frontiers of Nigeria and Benin Republic in particular and other West African States in general. Akin to the above, Rosenje and Adeniyi (2022); Udeh, Eyikorogha, Ekoyo and Obiagu (2021) observed that banditry activities cannot be over emphasised in Nigeria, particularly in the northern region of the country with reference to Niger, Kaduna, Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto, and other states in the North. For instance, below is the table with details of attacks, dates, killings by bandits as a result of the escalations of SALWs in the society.

Table 1: Recent attacks and killings by bandits in Nigeria, particularly in the northern region, 2018-2020

S/N	Date	Place	No. killed	No. kidnapped
1.	31 st March, 2018	Bawan Daji village, Anka LGA, Zamfara State	30	Nil
2.	1 st March, 2019	Kawaye village in Bagega community, Anka LGA, Zamfara State	21	40
3.	9 th June, 2019	Klahu, Tsage and Geeri villages, Rabah LGA, Sokoto State	25	Nil
4.	4 th July, 2019	Kankara and Danmusa LGAs, Kastina State	11	Nil
5.	19 th August, 2019	Tsayu community, Jibiya LGA, Kastina State	4	Nil
6.	17 th January, 2020	Babban Rafi Community, Gummi LGA and Makosa Community Zurmi LGA, Zamfara State	31	Nil
7.	2 nd March, 2020	Igabi and Giwa LGA, Kaduna State	50	24 injured
8.	20 th April, 2020	Kurechin Atai, Kurechin Giye Duste, Makauwachi and Daule villages, Dutsinma LGA, Kastina State	47	Nil
9.	24 th April, 2020	Akwunakwo, Kabirasha and Damba Communities, Cikun LGA, Kaduna State	7	1
10.	6 th May, 2020	Fasksri and Sabuwa LGA, Kastina State	5	1
11.	20 th May, 2020	Three communities in Tsafe LGA, Zamfara State	12	Nil
12.	5 th June, 2020	Maru, Talata-Mafara LGA, Zamfara State	21	Nil



13.	25 th June, 2020	Sunko, Gavya and Marafa communities, Manta District, Shiroro LGA, Niger State	4	Nil
14.	21 st July, 2020	Magani and Tungan-Bajo communities, Rafi LGA, Niger State	Nil	16
15.	26 th July, 2020	Three communities in Jema'a and Kaura LGAs, Kaduna State	10	Nil
16.	9 th August, 2020	Zamfara community, Batsari LGA, Kastina State	10	Nil
17.	4 th September, 2020	Dukku and Kagara towns, Niger State	22	Nil
18.	13 th September, 2020	Udawa farming community, Kaduna State	Nil	16
19.	18 th September, 2020	Police Station in Tangaza LGA, Sokoto State	2	2
20.	12 th October, 2020	Rowan Godiya Community, Faskari LGA, Kastina State, and Kagara town, Rafi LGA, Niger State	16	1
21.	17 th November, 2020	Kaduna-Abuja road, Gidan Zaki, Zangon Kataf LGA, Kaduna State	Nil	8
22.	20 th November, 2020	Mariya LGA, Niger State	1	14
23.	23 rd November, 2020	Mosque in Kanoma District, Maru LGA, Zamfara State	Nil	18
24.	1 st December, 2020	Tashar Bama, Dogun Muaze and Unguwar Maigayya communities, Sabuwa LGA, Kastina State	7	30
25.	5 th December, 2020	Kasuwan Magani town, Kajuru LGA, Kaduna State	1	Nil
26.	10 th December, 2020	Pmahbe Layout, Ushafa, Abuja	Nil	3
27.	12 th December, 2020	Tse-Angbande, Makurdi LGA, Benue State	4	7 injured
28.	12 th December, 2020	Government Science Secondary School (GSSS), Kankara LGA, Kastina State	Nil	333
29.	13 th December, 2020	ECWA Gospel, Kuta, Chukuba community, Shiroro LGA, Niger State	1	20

Source: *Daily Post* (2020), *Rosenje & Adeniyi* (2022).

Furthermore, below is the picture of mass killings of innocent passengers in Sokoto State by bandits, which is a seeming consequence of the escalation and uncontrollable proliferation of arms in Nigeria.

Fig. 2: The images/corpses of 23 passengers burnt to death in a bus in bandit attacks in Sokoto State



Source: Akewushola (2021).

Similarly, it is also observed that the proliferation of weapons is responsible for the obvious alarming insecurity situation in Nigeria, with particular reference to Boko Haram terrorism, herdsmen terrorism, banditry and kidnappings in the country's northeast and northwest regions (Awodola & Ayuba, 2015). Increased oil bunkering, oil pipeline vandalism, environmental degradation, and kidnapping for ransom in the country's Niger-Delta region (Badmus, 2010) worsened violent activities of the urban youth gangs and increased cultism and rival cult clashes amongst the youths in academic institutions and urban centres (Abegunde & Fabiyi, 2020). Increased herdsmen attacks on the on the armless farmers (Omitola, 2014); and emboldened secessionist agitations in the southeastern region of the country (Adeniyi, 2017). The incessant ethno-religious violent, intra and inter party violent conflicts across the country are not left out (Ubi, 2020). It is against this backdrop that Aluko (2012) posited that the proliferation of arms into African sub-region remained a strong tool used to actualise socio-political objectives, which on several occasions used to invite troubles to security settings of many countries. With evidence records of social unrest incidents and destruction of properties loss of lives as a result of socio-economic and political violence due to rampant circulation of SALWs.

In the same vein, security experts and scholars such as Gaye (2018), Olaniyan and Yahaya (2016), Suleiman (2017), and Mustapha (2019) have therefore attributed the founding factors of the prevailing menace of kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria to the "fragility of Nigerian State, weak State institutions, especially the security agencies, availability of grossly ungoverned spaces, porosity of Nigeria's borders with its neighbouring countries and arms proliferation, weak leadership, corruption, unemployment, and mass poverty".

The activities of smuggling of arms and light weapons (SALWs) across Nigeria-Benin frontiers

Pitiably, smuggling of any kind is highly condemnable, as its escalation is on the rise, particularly across Nigeria-Benin frontiers. This following the 19th August, 2010, daily newspaper reports across the nation on the series of cross-border trading and crimes



constituting a security threat in the country (Nigeria), leading to the arrest of one suspected killers of 2007 notable Lagos State governorship candidate--Funsun Williams (Aluko, 2012). According to the police report, “efforts in conjunction with foreign collaboration led to the arrest of one Ben Faton Djideonou Aguemon alias *Matthew Asumo*, a Beninoise who is a prime suspect of the killing” (Aluko, 2012, p. 26). He also specialised in snatching of vehicles along Owode-Idiroko road with arms for self-protection and confessed his involvement in various cars-snatching deals, especially jeeps, through the bush path into Benin Republic, with foreign and local collaborators. Furthermore, the Police also arrested other suspects connected with a series of car snatchings along the Owode, Sango-Ota, and Idiroko axis.

Accordingly, the suspect confessed that “what I do is to clear Tokunbo (secondhand cars) from Cotonou to the Nigeria side, and I have cleared many cars, I have been in this business for seven years, to clear small cars, we collect C400,000” (Ubi, 2010 p. 5). The above defines the extent at which smuggling activities thrive in Nigeria-Benin borders with its effect on national security of Nigeria. Sometimes, the smugglers kill security operatives in the course of crossing the borders. For instance, with the confession of one of the suspects (Afisu Adekunle) a citizen of Benin Republic who maintained that “It’s a do-or-die operation with security agents at night” (Aluko, 2012, p. 27). He also engaged in Toyota Camry car snatching which was recovered by the police thereafter. According to Aluko (2012), the Police recovered vehicles that were snatched during an armed robbery attack at Mangoro Bus Stop along Abeokuta-Agege Motor Road by four heavily armed hoodlums from Benin Republic. The gang also admitted to having been terrorising Idiroko borders and its environs, disposing of motorists of their GSM phones and other valuables in the process. Furthermore, the suspect, (Adekunle), agreed that he was a car smuggler, locally known as ‘fiaya wo’, and was contracted by the gang to ferry the stolen car out of the country.

The porosity of Nigeria-Benin borders cannot be over-emphasised as its adverse implications in both countries, particularly in Nigeria abound. It is also noted with dismay that the obvious socio-cultural affinities are the indisputable factors upon the thriving of smuggling businesses, proliferation of SALWs amongst others in the country. For instance, Ubi (2020, p. 27) observed with dismay that “the unfortunate thing about the smugglers is that some of them have names similar to Nigerians, and until they declare their nationalities, no one can really say they are not Nigerians”. He further noted that, in the process of smuggling cars, the smugglers also carry arms for other nefarious activities, which may include armed robbery, killings, and disseminating of weapons of all kinds in the society. For instance, according to Aluko (2012, p. 29), the State Security Services (SSS) intercepted 52 Kalashnikov rifles and tens of thousands of ammunitions heading for an area that has been the scene of religious violence”. He further maintained that:

Five men, including two students of the University of Maiduguri, Nigeria were arrested for trying to bring the weapons from neighbouring borders...the men hid the rifles, ammunition and about \$32,000 underneath vegetables and dried fish in two cars. The trafficked weapons concealed in car doors, packaged stock fish and other bagged foodstuff in a V-booth Mercedes Benz and a Peugeot 504 wagon taxi include over 50 different sets of AK-47 rifles, rocket launchers, assorted ammunitions, grenades, computer ware and N4, 823,500 cash. The weapons were heading for Jos, the epicenter of religious violence in Nigeria’s middle belt



where dozens of ethnic groups and hundreds of Christians and Muslims have died fighting this year alone.

Furthermore, there were also two other robbery suspects that were arrested in Lagos who maintained that “we go for any Honda and Toyota products; we also snatch Nissan Pathfinders because there are ready markets for the cars” (sic). However, the intercepted Honda Bulldog car was found being used as a mobile armoury deals. Again, at the interception, guns were cleverly found hidden in the back door pad, with some other items such as vehicle parts, a military assault rifle, two-cut-to size double-barrel guns, 22 live rounds of 6m bullets and five live cartridges were also discovered; and another bus abandoned by the road side contained a lot of guns in the engine compartment, which was also discovered in the process (Ubi, 2020).

Consequently, the daily prevailing and incessant situation of trafficking SALWs across the frontiers of Nigeria-Benin, thus, has not only ensued in the daily growing incidents of armed robberies, kidnapping, and rising waves of ethnic militias and its resultant attendant in violent conflicts but has also, increasingly resulted in the incessant killings of innocent citizens through escalation of ethno-religious clashes in the country in general. For instance, according to Eliagwu (2003) (in Aluko, 2012, p. 30), since July 2010, “there have been no less than fifty violent conflicts in Nigeria leaving thousands dead, injured, and homeless”. He further maintained that “with, the increase in cross-border banditry and smuggling of arms, there were grave consequences for both national and regional security, as clearly evidenced with the attack of the daughter of Nigeria former President, Olusegun Obasanjo. The attack which also claimed the lives of two kids, Akinolu and Adeife Akindeko, and also a police officer was killed”. The incident, which was traced to Hamani Tijani, a 41 year-old Niger Republic national whom security reports had identified along with members of his gang as being responsible for the snatching of over two thousands exotic cars and the killing of over one thousand people between 2010 and 2013 (Ubi, 2020). In a similar vein, he also observed that in early 2013, there was another similar report on Republic of Benin television upon which cargos of sophisticated weapons were intercepted by men of Republic of Benin customs service. The cargos, according to him, were allegedly moved into the country (Benin Republic) by Hamani Tijani and his notorious gang.

Furthermore, the adverse effect of smuggling of SALWs has largely continued to aid the formation of ethnic armies, especially in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, and has remained a source of worry to national security, security experts and Nigerian citizenry who believed that its supply is through illegal means (Aluko, 2012). Affirmatively, in buttressing the danger posed by smuggling and proliferation SALWs, a former director in Nigeria foreign affairs ministry-Olusegun Akindeko during the 58th session of the United Nations Conference on Disarmament and International security in New York contends that the proliferation of SALWs in Nigeria not only constituted an impediment to security of lives and properties in the society, but also a severe challenge to national development on the other hand (Aluko, 2012). He further expressed that, “these arms continue to have devastating effect on the African continent considering their capacity to fuel and prolong conflicts rising in the formation of ethnic militia and ethnic related violence in the continent”.



Porosity of Nigeria-Benin borders and its smuggling implications to national security of Nigeria

Imperatively, a number of studies have critically examined the vastness, extent as well as the porosity of Nigerian borderlands with her neighbours. Conventionally, the country shares boundaries with five countries of which Benin is one of them. These boundaries differed in both size and length, as Nigeria-Chad remained the smallest in size, while Nigeria-Cameroon borders being the largest border, but also contrasted in both geographical features and historical epoch (Bonchuk, 2014). Etymologically, Nigerians and Beninese had both socio-economic and socio-cultural ties since pre-colonial era when some empires in what is today, as being ruled by Nigeria some parts of modern-day Benin Republic (Enamhe & Maxwell-Borjor, 2021). These relations are very obvious in the Yoruba and Hausa people of Nigeria who had both economic and cultural relations with the people of Benin Republic (Ubi, 2020). This coupled with the ancestral belief of sharing socio-cultural heritage—language and cultural ties in common, invariably identified them as having same cultural background (Ubi, 2020). Though, these affinities were somehow mutilated by colonial artificial borders; however they remained resilience in their cultural practices and rites irrespective of colonial differences. Therefore, this remained all the more reason why the problem of porosity and insecurity across countries' borders very difficult to be controlled, thus allowing the proliferation and smuggling of arms into both countries in particular and other countries in West African sub-region in general. Thus, resulting in several occasions of socio-political, ethno-religious unrest, destruction of properties; loss of lives as a result of rampant circulation and proliferation of SALWs in the country (Enamhe & Maxwell-Borjor, 2021).

Consequently, with regards to the implications of land borders for Nigerian national security, it is observed that Nigeria uses her power and resources to push for her interests in order to guarantee regional peace and security (Ushie & Odey 2018). This therefore subjected its national security to be determined by the happenings by Benin Republic because of the two countries' socio-cultural and socio-economic ties (Adetula, 2014). This is the obvious reason for the intensity of cross-border crimes such as smuggling and illicit small arms trade across the two countries frontiers. Nigeria as a result of remedying the underlying security situations in the country obviously emanated from the porosity of Nigeria-Benin borders has engaged into a number of policies with Benin on how to proffer lasting solution against security challenges coming from the two countries borders. However, the very fact that the two countries' borders are the major economic strategic avenue and easier to cross to other countries in the regions remained a point of reference for frequent flouting the various policies and agreements between the countries. This coupled with the socio-cultural and geographical landscape of the two countries' borders made clear of the border porosity and the panic of criminal activities between the two sisters borders (Ubi, 2020). He further contends that the cultural conditions and affinities of the border region gave credence for all sorts of illegal businesses transactions across the borders. Thus, attracting so many illegal happenings, particularly the smuggling of SALWs and border conflicts because criminals found the place suitable for the execution of their inhuman activity to achieve desired goals without trial (Enamhe & Maxwell-Borjor, 2021). Similarly, they maintained that the major problem found with Nigeria-Benin borders is the glare deadly operation of Boko Haram in the northern part of the country who often used the frontier as its easiest operational transit route into Benin Republic after their deadly attacks.



The socio-cultural affinity and socio-economic engagement between Nigerians and Beninese stimulated frequent and free movements of individuals and exchange of goods ensued transnational economic happenings between the two countries. Upon which smuggling of SALWs and other illicit goods across the borders of Nigeria and the Republic of Benin has increased and intensified beyond control (Ubi, 2020). Thus, ushering in vary degree of ethno-religious conflicts, banditry, and kidnappings amongst others in the country. In consonance with the above, it is observed that proliferation of SALWs has led Nigeria into unfortunate fifty violent conflicts resulting in the deaths of thousands of innocent citizens, also leaving quite a number of people upset and dispossessed (Odey & Ushie 2018). Similarly, through the escalation of arms smuggling and their influx into the Nigerian societies has added much more burden to the national security of the country, with example of having the attack of daughter of former president, Obasanjo fallen victim of such criminal activities leading to the death of two innocent children and a security personnel in the process (Enamhe & Maxwell-Borjor, 2021). Furthermore, it was gathered and reported by the Nigerian security agencies that a Niger Republic national in person of Hamani Tijjani along with his boys were caught guilty of smuggling of over 100 AK47 rifles to Nigeria in collaboration with one Alhaji Usman Musa who strategically was waiting for reception at Idiroko Ogun State (Ubi, 2020). According to report, the said person and his gang were also guilty of snatching more than 2,000 expensive vehicles and led to the death of nearly 1,500 innocent people between 2000 and 2013 in Nigeria (Enamhe & Maxwell-Borjor, 2021). Again, Benin Republic Television revealed the interception of cargos loaded with SALWs purportedly transited into the country by Hamani Tijani (Enamhe & Maxwell-Borjor, 2021). Socio-economic and socio-cultural relations between Nigeria and Benin Republic cannot be underscored as it is an obvious founding pillar upon which the frontiers of the two sister countries are made porous and permissible of all sorts of socio-economic activities and the prevailing smuggling of arms into the country (Odey & Ushie 2018).

Consequently, the porosity of Nigeria-Benin borders has craved the opportunity for nationals, mainly from countries in the Sahel and Western Sahara trade across the Nigeria-Benin frontiers with ease, thus, causing ethno-religious uprising in Nigeria. The porosity of the borders no doubt resulted in the importation of religious extremism into Nigeria, which has added to a degree of insecurity in the country. In agreement with the above, Fagge, Danguguwa and Muhammed (2021) argued that the importation of religious values and orientations through the dominant presence of foreign alien in some parts of the country have at different times challenged the secular status of the Nigerian state. They further contend that in Nigeria, the notion that immigrants contribute to the incessant religious conflicts has gained ground especially in official circles. Because, the immigrants most often receive significant public attention in the country causing religious uproar, with particular reference to the incidents of Maitatsine religious disturbance in Kano, Maiduguri and Kaduna since 1980s to date (Ering, 2011; Alli, 2012; Sunday & Okechukwu, 2014). Similarly, it is observed that the findings of the various tribunals set up by the government to investigate the remote causes of such obvious ethno-religious uprisings in Nigeria indicated that there were traces of external influence and the involvement of immigrants from the neighbouring countries in such crises in the country (Fagge, Danguguwa & Muhammed, 2021). Again, it was recently reported in the media that some members of Boko Haram sect and other jihadist groups in Nigeria received both Islamic and military training from Mauritania immigrants in Nigeria, including how to make bombs and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) (Ogege, 2013; Wakili, 2014; and Adetula, 2015). Therefore, the activities of the Boko Haram



popularly known as *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad* (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad) have continued to attract global concern and responses due to its consequences against humanity in the society.

Furthermore, its devastating effect in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general has resulted in serious concerns and reactions from the Nigerian government and other government across West and Central Africa sub-regions that have also felt threatened by the strikes and dangers posed by the sect. Upon which led to the deaths of more than 13,000 innocent citizens in the continent between 2010 and 2019 (Adetula, 2015). Such activities of the sect constituted not only serious threat to human security, national security, but also undermined economic and national development of the country on one hand, and the obvious political stability in Nigeria on the other hand (Fagge, Danguguwa & Muhammed, 2021). Also, it is worthy to note that the impact of the insurgency is being felt in all spheres of Nigeria's existence, including its defence, security and sustainable development. To buttress the above argument, Adetelu (2015, p. 2) aptly contends that "Boko Haram insurgency has grown from a local affair into a complex transnational terrorist group whose destabilising operations have spread beyond Nigeria to some countries in the West and Central Africa sub-regions". Accordingly, Hamidu and Nuhu (2015) maintained that, the risks posed by these militant groups and other ethno-religious militias are amplified primarily through the prevalence of porous border in the West African Sub-region in general, and Nigeria-Benin borders in particular. They further contend that countries such as Niger, Chad and Cameroun Republics are currently experiencing terrorist activities largely because they share common borders with Nigeria. Again, the group's activities in the neighbouring countries such as training, recruits, planning and execution of planned strategies are escalating due to porosity of the borders, as they use the neighbouring States as safe havens.

CONCLUSION

Affirmatively, Nigeria-Benin socio-economic ties are one of the most security challenges confronting Nigeria's national security in the recent time. This is so because the socio-economic ties, coupled with ECOWAS protocol on free movement of persons, goods and services across the sub-region; Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA); and the AU agreements towards the promotion of intra-African trade, elimination of border barriers and the creation of the world's largest free trade area in Africa continent. This made it permissible for the nationals of both countries (Nigerians and Beninese) and other countries of the continent to move across the frontiers of their countries with ease. Thus, making the borders so porous and allowing all sort of illegitimate activities such as trafficking, smuggling of SALWs, and other kinds of contraband goods into Nigeria through the Republic of Benin borders. These however pose security threat to Nigeria, causing unethical culture of kidnapping, banditry in the country.

Therefore, the study evidently validated our hypothesis that:

- Nigeria-Benin socio-economic tie accounted for kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the study recommended amongst other that things that:



- The establishment of joint border task-force or patrol team for proper monitoring of the borders in order to curb the high incidences of trans-border crimes which thrives the proliferation of SALWs in Nigeria is eminently vital.
- The establishment of border communities policing outfits (border community vigilante) whose monitoring responsibility complement the security agents at both the borders and within the bordering communities.

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