

# **TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME AND REGIONAL STABILITY: NIGER-NIGERIA IN PERSPECTIVES**

**John Danfulani**

Department of International Relations,  
Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT),  
Kaduna, Kaduna State, Nigeria  
[johndanfulani@gmail.com](mailto:johndanfulani@gmail.com)

And

**Kabiru Zubairu**

Department of International Relations,  
Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT),  
Kaduna, Kaduna State, Nigeria  
[zubairukabiru@rocketmail.com](mailto:zubairukabiru@rocketmail.com)

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**Abstract:** Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) constitutes a major impediment to regional stability in West Africa, with the Niger-Nigeria corridor serving as a critical case study. The paper adopts the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) as its theoretical framework to interrogate how porous borders, weak governance, and socio-economic vulnerabilities enable illicit networks to thrive. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative approach, relying on documentary analysis of policy reports, academic literature, and regional security communiqués, complemented by comparative case insights from Niger Republic and Nigeria. The findings reveal among others that trafficking in arms, narcotics, and human beings not only undermines state authority but also fuels insurgency, banditry and other armed groups activity, distorts local economies, and erodes public trust in institutions. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that the absence of effective intelligence-sharing and coordinated border

management between Niger and Nigeria exacerbates insecurity and complicates bilateral relations. In response, the paper recommends strengthening border governance through joint patrols and surveillance technologies, enhancing intelligence cooperation, implementing socio-economic interventions to reduce reliance on illicit economies, and leveraging regional integration mechanisms such as ECOWAS and the African Union for harmonized anti-crime strategies. Anti-corruption reforms within law enforcement agencies are also emphasized as indispensable for sustainable peace and development.

**Keywords:** Border, Security, Regional Stability, Governance, Insurgency

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## **Introduction**

Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) has become one of the most significant threats to peace, security, and development in the twenty-first century. Its impact transcends borders, undermining governance, destabilizing economies, and eroding social cohesion. In West Africa, the Nigeria–Niger corridor has emerged as a critical hotspot for Transnational Organized Crime due to porous borders, weak institutional frameworks, socio-economic vulnerabilities, and geopolitical complexities. These conditions have enabled illicit activities such as arms trafficking, drug smuggling, human trafficking, and terrorism financing, all of which compromise national sovereignty and regional stability (UNODC, 2023). Nigeria functions simultaneously as a base, transit, and destination country for organized crime, facilitated by its strategic location along global shipping routes and extensive land borders. Transnational Organized Crime is considered one of the core drivers of insecurity in Nigeria, negatively impacting democratic governance and the rule of law (UNODC, 2023).

Similarly, Niger’s position as a landlocked state with limited border control capacity makes it highly vulnerable to transnational criminal networks. The Nigeria–Niger border exemplifies the challenges of managing transnational security threats in a region where state institutions are overstretched, and criminal groups exploit

cultural, trade, and migration linkages to expand their operations (Idrees, Ogaji, & Zakariya'u, 2023). The consequences of Transnational Organized Crime in this corridor are profound. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons has intensified insecurity, fueling insurgencies, exacerbating communal conflicts, and undermining legitimate economic activities. These dynamics not only destabilize Nigeria and Niger but also reverberate across the wider Sahel region, where fragile states struggle to contain cycles of violence (Wagner, 2014).

This paper therefore, situates transnational organized crime within the broader discourse of regional stability, focusing specifically on the Nigeria–Niger perspective. It interrogates the structural drivers of organized crime, weaknesses in border governance, and implications for peace and security in West Africa. By adopting a multidisciplinary lens, the study seeks to illuminate how criminal enterprises intersect with political, economic, and social realities, thereby shaping the trajectory of regional stability. Ultimately, the paper argues that addressing Transnational Organized Crime requires robust border management strategies, enhanced regional cooperation, institutional reforms, and community-based resilience mechanisms.

### **Conceptual Discourse**

#### **The concept of banditry**

Banditry has been theorized across history, sociology, criminology, and political science with shifting meanings that reflect the economic and political contexts in which it appears. Eric Hobsbawm's "social banditry" thesis, introduced in *Primitive Rebels* (1959) and developed in "The Bandits" (1969), framed bandits as peasant outlaws who resist exploitative structures and are celebrated by local communities as defenders rather than mere criminals (Hobsbawm, 1969). His typology distinguished social bandits from "primitive rebels" and "noble robbers," emphasizing moral economies and communal legitimacy. Anton Blok's *Mafia of a Sicilian Village, 1860–1960* (1972) challenged this romanticization, showing how alleged social bandits could be violent entrepreneurs aligned with local elites, thereby destabilizing the rebel/criminal binary (Blok, 1972). Charles Tilly later recast banditry within a broader repertoire of collective violence and state formation,

arguing that coercion, extortion, and protection rackets are structurally linked to the emergence of modern states (Tilly, 2003). This moved the debate from moral narratives to institutional dynamics, seeing banditry as part of contention, coercion, and the uneven monopolization of violence.

This is why some American Scholars argued that Bandits, Police, and Mexican Development (1981) situated banditry within Mexico's modernization, showing how policing and developmental projects coevolved with rural outlawry. In the Mediterranean, Blok's work remains central, but so too do studies of Corsican and Sardinian vendetta traditions, which blur lines between kinship violence, local justice, and bandit enterprise. However, African scholarship expands the lens from rural rebellion to criminal economies, frontier governance, and postcolonial state capacity. Paul Nugent's work on West African borderlands (1995) considers how smuggling and informal economies intersect with bandit practices under weak state regulation. John and Jean Comaroff's in their work entitled "Law and Disorder" on the Postcolony (2006) argues that neoliberal transformations, unemployment, and privatized security catalyze new forms of criminal entrepreneurship commonly labeled "banditry," destabilizing moral economies and eroding communal protections. Also, Morten Bøos and colleagues (2015) analyze the Sahel's violent entrepreneurs, showing how protection markets, arms inflows, and mobility across porous borders scaffold bandit networks that are adaptive rather than ideologically anchored. These perspectives shift the concept from local resistance to marketized violence embedded in regional and transnational circuits (Boas & Torheim, 2013).

### **The concept of insurgency**

The concept of insurgency has been widely debated in academic discourse, with scholars offering diverse interpretations that reflect historical, strategic, moral, and socio-political dimensions. Yurtbay (2018) situates insurgency within a long historical trajectory, arguing that it is a phenomenon rooted in the problematic relationship between state and society. He emphasizes that insurgencies, while sharing common features across time, also possess unique characteristics shaped by context. Importantly, Yurtbay highlights the role of weak governance and exclusionary politics in creating fertile ground for rebellion, noting that Maoist

insurgency marked a turning point in the evolution of insurgent tactics. Grice (2018) advances a strategic perspective, framing insurgency as a persistent form of asymmetric conflict. He challenges the popular belief that Mao Zedong invented a fundamentally new form of insurgency, instead contending that insurgency has always been a political struggle for legitimacy and control. Grice underscores that insurgent movements are not merely violent uprisings but calculated efforts to erode state stability, extract concessions, or achieve autonomy. His work situates insurgency within broader debates on fourth-generation warfare and hybrid conflict, thereby expanding its conceptual scope. Betz (2010) offers a moral and political interpretation, describing insurgency as a contest over legitimacy rather than simply a military confrontation. Drawing on T.E. Lawrence's insights, Betz argues that insurgent movements require a compelling cause or ideology to sustain themselves. He distinguishes between pre-Maoist, Maoist, and post-Maoist insurgencies, showing how strategies and objectives have shifted over time. For Betz, insurgency is fundamentally about mobilizing populations around a moral vision that challenges the authority of the state.

Nnatu (2022), defines insurgency as a violent attempt to disrupt or transform political and social order through sustained violence, rebellion, and disruption. Her analysis highlights Boko Haram as a paradigmatic case of insurgency driven by religious extremism and socio-economic grievances. Nnatu underlines the destabilizing effects of insurgency on governance, development, and regional stability, framing it as both a security and socio-political challenge. Her work demonstrates how insurgency in Nigeria exemplifies the broader dynamics of insurgent movements in fragile states. Taken together, these perspectives illustrate insurgency as a multidimensional phenomenon: historically embedded (Yurtbay), strategically calculated (Grice), morally contested (Betz), and socio-politically disruptive (Nnatu, 2022). This synthesis underscores the complexity of insurgency and its destabilizing impact on fragile states such as Niger and Nigeria.

### **The concept of transnational**

Transnational centres on threats, actors, and governance arrangements that operate across or irrespective of national borders, challenging state-centric paradigms that

assume territorial control and sovereignty as sufficient foundations for security. The concept emerged from early work on transnational relations that foregrounded non-state actors, interdependence, and issue networks as consequential forces in world politics (Keohane & Nye, 1972). Over time, scholarship expanded to show how global networks and flows financial, logistical, informational enable crime, insurgency, cyber operations, and illicit economies to traverse jurisdictions, rendering unilateral enforcement both inefficient and prone to displacement effects. Contemporary analyses thus emphasize multi-level, networked governance that combines state agencies, international organizations, private sectors, and civil society to close jurisdictional gaps and align capacities across borders (Singha, 1998). Sassen's framework shifts the analytic emphasis of transnational from border crossing alone to institutional redesign. He further argued that transnational impliestransparency of beneficial ownership, cross-border legal interoperability, and the governance of platforms and networks become core security tasks within transnational spaces where state authority is partial and co-produced (Sassen, 2006). Peter Andreas (2000) offered yet another perspective of transnationalism by focusing on borders as sites of transnational contestation. In his analysis of U.S./Mexico border policing, Andreas argued that borders have not disappeared under globalization but have instead been reconfigured as selective filters. They allow legitimate flows of goods and people while attempting to block illicit activities such as smuggling and trafficking. His work underscores the paradox of transnationalism, while globalization increases cross-border flows, states respond by intensifying border controls, creating a dynamic interplay between openness and restriction. For security, this highlights the importance of adaptive border management strategies that recognize both the permeability and the resilience of borders in the face of transnational organized crime (Boas & Torheim, 2013).

### **Transnational organized crime**

Transnational organized crime (TOC) is commonly understood as the structured, profit-driven commission of serious offenses whose planning, execution, or impact traverse national borders. Yet scholars differ in how they parse organization, transnationality, and market logics, producing complementary definitions that emphasize networks, governance, embeddedness, and the co-evolution of illicit and

licit infrastructures. Phil Williams (2009) conceptualizes Transnational Organized Crime as networked enterprises that mobilize flexible, resilient structures rather than rigid hierarchies to coordinate cross-border illicit markets. He views TOC in terms of “criminal organizations and networks” that exploit globalization’s flows (finance, logistics, communications) to engage in serious offenses across jurisdictions, with organizational form ranging from hierarchical formations to decentralized webs of brokers and facilitators (Williams, 2001). In his view, transnationality is not merely geographic scope but the operational interdependence of nodes situated in different legal environments. His definition foregrounds adaptive capacity, redundancy, and the importance of middlemen and service providers, arguing that effective countermeasures must target facilitators, infrastructures, and the financial architecture that connects dispersed actors rather than focusing exclusively on leadership decapitation (Williams, 2009).

Shelley (2014) defines Transnational Organized Crime as the intersection of global market integration and criminal entrepreneurship, emphasizing how illicit actors embed within legitimate institutions, supply chains, and technologies to scale cross-border offenses. For Shelley, Transnational Organized Crime is “organized crime conducted across national borders” whose value chains integrate production, transit, and distribution sites internationally, often leveraging corruption, trade systems, and digital platforms. Her formulation stresses the sectoral diversification of Transnational Organized Crime human trafficking, environmental crime, cyber-enabled fraud, counterfeit trade and the civilizational costs (public health, governance erosion, ecological damage and climate change). The definition’s analytic hallmark is its systems orientation. Transnational Organized Crime is inseparable from the global political economy and must be analyzed through the same lenses applied to complex transnational industries (Shelley, 2014).

### **The concept of regional security**

Regional security has emerged as a central theme in international relations, particularly since the end of the Cold War, when scholars began to recognize that most security dynamics are clustered regionally rather than globally. Buzan and Wæver (2003) advanced this argument through their Regional Security Complex

Theory (RSCT), which conceptualizes regions as “security complexes” defined by patterns of amity and enmity among neighboring states. They argue that security interdependence is more intense within regions than across them, making regional structures the primary arenas for conflict formation and resolution. RSCT also highlights how military, political, societal, and economic sectors interact differently across regions, producing distinct security logics that cannot be reduced to global polarity alone (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

Complementing this structural approach, Lake and Morgan (1997) examined regional orders as frameworks for managing security. They contend that regional security is shaped by the distribution of power and the presence of “security managers,” often dominant or pivotal states that stabilize their regions through deterrence, reassurance, and institutional design. Their work underscores the importance of leadership and institutional arrangements in preventing regional conflicts from escalating, while also showing how external powers can reinforce or destabilize regional orders depending on their level of involvement. Acharya (2009) offers a normative and constructivist perspective by extending Karl Deutsch’s concept of security communities to the Global South. He demonstrates how ASEAN evolved into a “pluralistic security community” where war among members became unthinkable, not through military integration but through shared norms, consultation practices, and identity-building. Acharya’s work illustrates that regional security can be sustained by socialization and normative consensus, even in the absence of strong collective defense mechanisms. This approach broadens the understanding of security beyond material capabilities to include ideational and institutional factors. Hettne (2008) situates regional security within the broader context of globalization and regionalism. He argues that regions are political projects that evolve through stages of “regionness,” progressing from loose spatial formations to institutionalized communities capable of managing security collectively. For Hettne, regional security is not only about preventing interstate war but also about addressing transnational threats such as organized crime, terrorism, and environmental degradation. His perspective highlights the increasing importance of regional institutions and governance structures in managing complex, multi-level security challenges. Katzenstein (2005) adds another dimension by emphasizing the embeddedness of regions in global and local structures. He

describes regions as “regional worlds” shaped by overlapping hierarchies, networks, and identities. Katzenstein argues that regional security cannot be understood in isolation, since external great powers, global markets, and local cultural identities all interact to produce unique security outcomes. His analysis explains why similar institutional designs yield different results across regions, stressing the importance of historical and social context in shaping regional security dynamics. Finally, more recent conceptual work by Laifaoui, Soula, and Hallab (2024) emphasizes the definitional complexity of regional security. They argue that the concept overlaps with both security and regional studies, making it inherently multidimensional. Regional security, in their view, must be analyzed across sectors military, political, societal, economic, and environmental while also accounting for governance arrangements and spatial features such as boundaries and corridors. This perspective cautions against reifying regions as fixed entities, instead urging scholars to examine how internal dynamics and external linkages co-constitute regional security architecture (Lake, & Morgan, 1997).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) emerged from the work of Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, particularly in “*Regions and Powers*”. The Structure of International Security (2003), as a refinement of earlier security studies that were either overly state-centric or excessively global in scope. Regional Security Complex Theory posits that security is most coherently understood at the regional level, where clusters of states form “complexes” characterized by dense patterns of security interdependence. The central claim is that threats and vulnerabilities travel more easily over short distances, making proximity the decisive factor in shaping security dynamics. Thus, while global powers may intervene, the primary arena of security politics remains regional. Regional Security Complex Theory is viewed as a set of states whose national securities are so interlinked that they cannot be analyzed in isolation. These complexes are structured by patterns of friendship and hostility, distributions of power, and the intensity of securitization across multiple sectors military, political, economic, societal, and environmental. Regional Security Complex Theory integrates the Copenhagen School’s securitization theory, which emphasizes how issues become framed as existential threats requiring extraordinary

measures, with a spatial framework that maps how these securitizations cluster regionally. In this way, Regional Security Complex Theory bridges constructivist insights about discourse with structuralist concerns about geography and power. The typology of complexes includes **standard** Regional Security Complexes, where multiple states interact without a single hegemon, **centered**, Regional Security Complexes dominated by one pivotal state; **overlays**, where external great powers suppress local dynamics; and **super complexes**, where overlapping regions blur boundaries (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

These categories provide analytical tools for distinguishing between different regional configurations. Importantly, Regional Security Complex Theory insists that security is not only military. Societal identity conflicts, economic interdependence, and environmental stress are equally constitutive of regional complexes. Applications of Regional Security Complex Theory have been particularly fruitful in Africa and Asia. In West Africa, Nigeria's security challenges ranging from Boko Haram insurgency, banditry to Gulf of Guinea piracy cannot be understood apart from its neighbors. Nigeria functions as a pivotal state whose internal crises radiate outward, while its stabilizing initiatives through ECOWAS are constrained by the structural interdependence of the region (Singha, 1998). Similarly, in East Africa, Regional Security Complex Theory has been used to analyze Uganda's regional interventions, showing how regime strategies and personalized rule interact with structural patterns of threat and alliance. These cases demonstrate Regional Security Complex Theory utility in mapping how local insecurities diffuse across borders, creating regionalized threat environments. Critiques of Regional Security Complex Theory however, focus on its state-centric bias and its tendency to treat regions as relatively fixed (Umate, & Idris, 2023).

African scholars like Austen and Agbe (2024) argue that porous borders, transnational insurgencies, and political marketplaces challenge Regional Security Complex Theory's neat boundaries, requiring greater attention to non-state actors and informal economies. Others note that globalization and transregional jihadist networks erode the distinctiveness of complexes, suggesting the need for expanded concepts such as "supercomplexes" or multilayered complexes (Varese, 2017). Nonetheless, Regional Security Complex Theory remains valuable for highlighting

the structural constraints that persist despite leadership changes, and for emphasizing that security cannot be reduced to national or global levels alone. Regional Security Complex Theory provides a powerful framework for analyzing security as a regional phenomenon, structured by geography, history, and patterns of securitization. While refinements are necessary to account for non-state actors and transregional flows, its core insight that security is clustered regionally continues to shape both academic debates and policy approaches. For scholars of African and West African security, Regional Security Complex Theory offers a lens through which Nigeria's role, Niger's vulnerabilities, and ECOWAS's interventions can be understood as parts of a wider, interdependent complex rather than isolated national phenomena (Lampe, 2016).

### **Research Methodology**

The study adopts a qualitative approach, relying on documentary analysis of policy reports, academic literature, and regional security communiqués, complemented by comparative case insights from Niger Republic and Nigeria.

### **Niger- Nigerian's Historical Context**

The historical trajectory of Niger–Nigeria relations is best understood through the prism of shared cultural heritage, colonial disruption, and postcolonial diplomacy. Prior to European intervention, the Hausa, Fulani, and Kanuri peoples inhabited contiguous territories across what is now northern Nigeria and southern Niger. These communities were bound together by trade, kinship, and religion, particularly under the expansive influence of the Sokoto Caliphate in the nineteenth century, which provided a unifying Islamic framework across the region (Umate & Idris, 2023). The Caliphate's authority extended beyond present-day Nigeria into Niger, embedding a transnational identity those colonial boundaries later attempted to sever. The Berlin Conference of 1884–85 imposed artificial borders that divided these historically integrated societies. France assumed control over Niger, while Britain colonized Nigeria, thereby institutionalizing a frontier that disrupted pre-existing socio-political networks. Despite colonial demarcations, Hausa and Fulani communities continued to sustain cross-border relations through commerce,

migration, and cultural exchange. This persistence of interaction highlights the inadequacy of colonial boundaries in erasing deeply rooted social ties (Umate & Idris, 2023).

Post-independence in 1960, both Niger and Nigeria inherited these colonial borders but sought to reassert their historical connections through diplomatic and cultural initiatives. Nigeria's size and economic strength positioned it as a regional power, while Niger's geographic proximity and shared ethnic composition made bilateral relations inevitable. Cultural diplomacy has been particularly significant in reinforcing these ties, with shared traditions in music, literature, and festivals serving as instruments of soft power and mutual recognition (Shehu & Muhammad, 2024). Such cultural exchanges underscore the resilience of pre-colonial bonds in shaping modern diplomacy. Security concerns have further deepened cooperation. The emergence of Boko Haram (insurgency) and other terrorists groups operating across the porous frontier has necessitated joint military operations and intelligence sharing between the both countries. These collaborations reflect not only pragmatic security needs but also the historical reality of a borderland that has always been more porous than rigid (Ogunsola & Adefabi, 2021). At the same time, informal trade across the 1,500 km border continues to sustain livelihoods, particularly in northern Nigeria and southern Niger, reinforcing economic interdependence rooted in centuries of exchange. Consequently, Niger-Nigeria relations exemplify the tension between colonial legacies and indigenous continuities. While European powers imposed boundaries that sought to fragment shared identities, the lived realities of ethnic, cultural, and economic integration have persisted. Contemporary diplomacy, whether through ECOWAS frameworks or bilateral cultural initiatives, reflects an ongoing negotiation between these historical forces. The inseparability of Niger and Nigeria's destinies is not merely a political slogan but a historical fact grounded in centuries of shared experience (Lampe, 2016).

***Socio-economic ties between Niger Republic and Nigeria:*** Niger-Nigeria socio-economic ties are historically embedded, multidimensional, and resilient sustained by cross-border ethnic cohesion, market interdependence, and layered governance from local associations to regional institutions. Long-standing Hausa-Fulani and Kanuri networks underpin trade, mobility, and cultural exchange across the frontier,

while state-level collaboration cyclically alternates between facilitation and control in response to security shocks, food system stresses, and macroeconomic policy shifts. The result is a border economy characterized by dense informal flows, adaptive logistics, and hybrid institutions that together smooth consumption and income across households in both countries despite volatility in formal frameworks (Shehu & Muhammad, 2024).

*Historical foundations and socio-cultural embeddedness:* The social fabric of Niger-Nigeria relations is rooted in precolonial Hausa and Kanuri polities and the trans-Saharan trade ecology that linked northern Nigerian cities (Kano, Katsina, Sokoto) with southern Niger (Maradi, Zinder), creating continuous marketplaces and kinship-based contracting systems. This embeddedness persists in contemporary border towns Mai'adua (Katsina State) and Mai'mujia (Maradi Region) are often cited where trade associations, rotating market days, and shared language reduce search costs, enforce norms, and enable credit without collateral. Such socio-cultural continuity explains why border closures or tariff shifts rarely eliminate commerce; instead, flows reconfigure along alternative corridors through trust-based networks and micro-scale logistics (Laifaoui, Soula & Hallab, 2024).

*Trade, price integration, and the informal economy:* Commodity trade is the backbone of bilateral ties, spanning cereals (millet, sorghum, maize), livestock (cattle, sheep, goats), textiles, and consumer goods. Empirical studies of border markets describe synchronized price movements driven by arbitrage, seasonal migration, and common information channels, which align supply and demand across the frontier and dampen local scarcity. Informal small consignments dominate, moving by motorcycles, light trucks, and pedestrian portage, with micro-warehousing and night trading practices that minimize checkpoint delays and inventory risk. When formal trade is restricted, these flows often intensify, substituting for official channels and sustaining food availability and retail employment. Livestock is especially salient: Nigerien pastoralists and traders supply Nigerian slaughterhouses and urban markets, while Nigerian feed and veterinary inputs circulate back across Niger. These cross-border value chains are organized by brokers who coordinate animal assembly, grading, and payments using reputational capital rather than formal contracts, illustrating how social embeddedness

substitutes for weak formal enforcement (Laifaoui, Soula & Hallab, 2024). For staples, small-scale grain movements stabilize household consumption, with women's groups prominent in petty trade and processing, and youth in transport services critical gendered and generational dimensions sometimes overlooked in macro-level narratives (Boas & Torheim, 2013).

***Labor mobility, remittances, and household risk management:*** Seasonal and circular migration binds the two labor markets. Nigerien workers commonly move to Nigerian agricultural belts and urban centers during peak seasons, while Nigerian traders and artisans operate in Nigerien towns, aided by shared language and social acceptance. These movements diversify income sources, spread risk, and transmit remittances that finance consumption smoothing, education, and small capital formation. Households deploy flexible strategies shifting members between trading, farm work, and transport to respond to shocks such as droughts, price spikes, or border operations. Migration costs are lowered by kin-based accommodation and job matching, and by the portability of occupational skills tied to border market norms. Remittance circuits are predominantly informal, leveraging trader-led cash transfers and rotating savings groups. While difficult to measure, studies indicate they are countercyclical at the local level, increasing when formal opportunities shrink, and thereby hedging household welfare. The gendered composition of mobility matters: women's cross-border petty trade supports liquidity in food and textile markets, and their networks often provide crucial information on safety and price trends, reinforcing resilience (Laifaoui, Soula, & Hallab, 2024).

***Energy, infrastructure, and formal coordination:*** Beyond grassroots practices, formal cooperation seeks to align infrastructure and energy linkages to support commerce. Bilateral committees and regional platforms have periodically targeted road rehabilitation, one-stop border posts, and customs simplification to reduce transit times and improve predictability for legitimate traders. Energy coordination electricity interconnections and refined product supply arrangements reflects Nigeria's scale and Niger's proximity, though execution is uneven and frequently disrupted by fiscal constraints or security events. Where physical connectivity modestly improves upgraded feeder roads, market sanitation, and small cold storage the immediate impacts are visible: lower spoilage, greater turnover for

perishable goods, and increased participation by women traders constrained by time and safety concerns. Formal arrangements often lag behind the pace of informal adaptation, underscoring the need to co-design interventions with local trade associations and transport unions. Evidence from border case studies shows that customs modernization paired with community monitoring (e.g., trader ID recognition, market-day protection) has higher compliance and efficacy than purely punitive approaches (N-ue, 2023).

*Security shocks, policy volatility, and adaptive market responses:* Insurgency, banditry, and episodic border closures increase transaction costs, deter investment, and elevate risk premiums. Yet fieldwork highlights a suite of adaptive practices: traders temporize shipments, reroute through lower-risk crossings, shift toward higher-value, lower-bulk goods, and rely on nocturnal movement to avoid congestion and extortion (Laifaoui, Soula, & Hallab, 2024). Kinship-based credit expands when formal finance recedes, buffering liquidity shortfalls; dispute resolution through elders and associations maintains baseline trust and reduces violence in marketplaces. Policy volatility tariff changes, currency restrictions, and temporary prohibitions on commodities generates substitution effects. Rather than halting flows, traders substitute sources or commodities, or engage in parallel pricing to reflect risk and enforcement intensity. Studies assessing periods of tightened border controls find short-term welfare losses, particularly for low-capital traders and transport workers, but rapid rebound once passages normalize, indicating high elasticity of informal supply chains. These dynamics affirm that socio-economic ties are not marginal but constitutive of local development in the frontier (Shehu & Muhammad, 2024).

*Governance, institutions, and policy design:* Hybrid governance where state, customary authorities and trade associations share rule-making best explains durable outcomes. Trader unions set rotating market schedules, fees, and sanctions for default; transport associations stipulate rates and safety standards; customary leaders adjudicate disputes and enforce reputational penalties. When public authorities coordinate with these institutions recognizing trader IDs, harmonizing levies, and clarifying rules the result is lower rent-seeking and higher compliance (Onuche & Martins, 2024). Conversely, unilateral enforcement without community

buy-in often diverts trade to riskier routes and undermines tax collection. Policy recommendations emerging from scholarship emphasize facilitation over suppression: simplified customs for low-value consignments; mutual recognition of small-trader status; standardized, predictable levies; and targeted infrastructure (market storage, water, sanitation, and lighting) to improve productivity and safety for women and youth traders. Cross-border skills certification and portable social protection pilots can formalize mobility benefits while reducing exploitation, and joint border market charters can codify local norms in ways compatible with national regulations (Shehu & Muhammad, 2024).

***Development and regional integration pathways:*** Niger–Nigeria interdependence is a lever for inclusive growth if policy aligns with lived practice. Strengthening feeder roads that connect hinterland production to border markets reduces price dispersion and farmer losses; small-scale energy solutions (solar cold rooms) enhance value addition for perishables; and digital tools for trader registration and dispute documentation can modernize governance without eroding trust-based systems. At the regional scale, harmonized standards and coordinated enforcement through ECOWAS-brokered mechanisms are more effective when embedded in borderland institutions that actually mediate transactions. Ultimately, the border is an economic ecosystem a distributed network of households, associations, and micro-enterprises whose resilience has repeatedly compensated for state capacity gaps. Effective policy recognizes this, works with it, and formalizes it lightly, transforming resilience into sustained productivity and welfare gains (Onuche & Martins, 2024).

### **Drivers of Niger–Nigeria Border Insecurity**

Border insecurity between Niger and Nigeria is the product of multiple interrelated factors that have evolved historically and continue to shape contemporary relations.

***The Porous Nature (border):*** The first major trigger is the porous nature of the frontier itself. Stretching over 1,500 kilometers, the boundary was drawn during the colonial era without regard to ethnic, cultural, or economic realities. Today, it remains inadequately policed, allowing uncontrolled movement of people, goods,

and arms. This porousness undermines state sovereignty and provides fertile ground for insecurity (Ogunsola & Adefabi, 2021).

*Presence of Terrorist and Insurgent Groups:* A second trigger is the presence of terrorist and insurgent groups, most notably Boko Haram, Bandit Groups and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). These organizations exploit the border's openness to establish safe havens, move fighters, and launch attacks across both countries. The Lake Chad Basin and Niger's Diffa region have become epicenters of violence, with cross-border raids destabilizing communities and eroding trust in state institutions (Ogunsola & Adefabi, 2021).

*Smuggling and Organized Crime:* Third, smuggling and organized crime exacerbate insecurity. The frontier is a hub for illicit trade in fuel, arms, drugs, and contraband goods. Criminal networks thrive in the absence of effective customs enforcement, often overlapping with insurgent groups who rely on smuggling routes for financing. This shadows economy weakens legitimate trade and deprives both states of revenue, while simultaneously empowering actors who challenge state authority (Nugent, 1995).

*Political instability in Niger:* Political instability in Niger constitutes a fourth trigger. Recurrent coups and fragile governance structures have limited Niger's ability to manage its borders effectively. Nigeria, as a regional power, often bears the burden of spillover effects when Niger's institutions falter. The 2023 coup that brought about Gen. Chiani as head of State in Niger, for instance, strained bilateral cooperation and complicated joint security initiatives, highlighting how domestic instability in one state reverberates across the frontier (Madu & Kaniye-Ebeku, 2025).

*Resource Competition and Environmental Stress:* Also, resource competition and environmental stress intensify border insecurity. Desertification, shrinking water resources, and the migration of pastoralist communities in search of grazing land have fueled conflicts between farmers and herders across the border. These disputes, often rooted in ecological pressures, escalate into violence and contribute to broader instability. Climate change thus acts as a multiplier, aggravating existing tensions

and undermining efforts at sustainable border management (Madu & Kaniye-Ebeku, 2025).

**Foreign Involvement/Military Base:** Foreign involvement has also introduced new layers of insecurity. External military operations sometimes generate local resentment, with communities perceiving them as infringements on sovereignty or as exacerbating violence rather than resolving it. The reliance on foreign aid and security assistance can weaken domestic institutions, creating dependency and undermining long-term capacity-building. Moreover, geopolitical rivalries such as competition between Western powers and emerging actors like Russia, China and US have complicated the security landscape, particularly in Niger following the 2023 coup, when debates over foreign military bases and alliances intensified from the countries. These tensions spill over into Nigeria, which must balance its own regional leadership role with the realities of external influence on its northern neighbor (Nugent, 1995).

**Weak Governance:** Weak governance in both Niger and Nigeria created **ungoverned spaces** that armed groups exploit, undermining regional security cooperation. Without stronger institutions, accountability, and cross-border coordination, insecurity will persist and deepen.

**Socio-economic vulnerabilities:** Socio-economic vulnerabilities act as driver of **insecurity** between Niger and Nigeria. Without addressing poverty, unemployment, and inequality, military responses alone cannot stabilize the region. Long-term security depends on **inclusive development, stronger institutions, and regional cooperation** (Boas, 2015).

### ***Illicit Networks***

Illicit networks are the **connective tissue of insecurity** between Niger and Nigeria. They thrive on weak governance and socio-economic fragility, making them harder to dismantle than isolated insurgent groups. Tackling them requires regional intelligence sharing, stronger border management, and anti-corruption reforms.

## **Joint Military Operations between Niger and Nigeria**

The history of joint military operations between Niger and Nigeria is closely tied to the evolution of insurgency and organized crime in the Lake Chad Basin. Early cooperation was relatively limited, consisting of ad hoc border patrols and intelligence exchanges aimed at curbing smuggling and small-scale banditry. However, the rise of Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria during the late 2000s and its subsequent expansion into Niger's Diffa region transformed the security landscape. By 2012, Boko Haram's cross-border attacks had compelled both governments to intensify collaboration, recognizing that unilateral responses were insufficient to contain a transnational threat (Adeniji, 2023).

A major turning point came in 2015 with the reactivation of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which brought together Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin under the auspices of the African Union. The MNJTF provided a formal institutional framework for joint operations, with headquarters established in N'Djamena, Chad. Within this framework, Nigerien and Nigerian forces coordinated large-scale offensives against Boko Haram, combining cross-border troop deployments with intelligence sharing. These operations succeeded in reducing Boko Haram's territorial control, though the group retained the capacity for asymmetric warfare (Usman, 2025).

Between 2016 and 2019, joint operations expanded beyond counter-insurgency to include efforts against trafficking and banditry. The Niger-Nigeria frontier became a focal point for combating arms smuggling and human trafficking, both of which sustained insurgent groups and distorted local economies. Nigerien forces often provided rear-guard support and secured refugee flows, while Nigerian forces led direct assaults on insurgent strongholds. Despite these efforts, the persistence of illicit networks and socio-economic vulnerabilities limited the long-term effectiveness of military campaigns (Ikechukwu, 2025).

The period from 2020 to 2023 saw joint operations increasingly challenged by political developments. Niger's July 2023 coup disrupted governance structures and strained regional cooperation. By January 2024, Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso

announced their withdrawal from ECOWAS, weakening collective security frameworks and reducing trust in multinational coordination. Although Niger and Nigeria reaffirmed bilateral security ties, the broader regional framework for joint military action was significantly undermined. This political rupture highlighted the fragility of regional security cooperation, where military collaboration is deeply dependent on stable governance and diplomatic alignment. The history of Niger–Nigeria joint military operations reflects a trajectory from limited border patrols to institutionalized multinational campaigns under the MNJTF, followed by a period of strain due to political instability. While these operations have achieved tactical successes, structural challenges such as porous borders, illicit trafficking, and governance fragility continue to undermine their strategic effectiveness (Vanderwood, 1981).

### **Combating Regional Insecurity**

The challenges of combating regional security between Niger and Nigeria are multifaceted and deeply entrenched in structural weaknesses. One of the most pressing issues is the porous nature of their shared border. Stretching across vast, sparsely populated terrain, the frontier is difficult to monitor, allowing insurgents, smugglers, and traffickers to move freely. This has enabled Boko Haram and ISWAP to sustain cross-border operations, undermining state authority and fueling instability. The Global Terrorism Index 2025 reported that Nigeria recorded 565 deaths from terror attacks in 2024, with many concentrated in northern border regions, that Niger and Nigeria particularly, Sokoto, Katsina and Jigawa State highlighting the difficulty of securing these areas.

Governance fragility compounds the problem. In Nigeria, corruption and fragmented policing reduce the effectiveness of security forces, while in Niger, fragile institutions and political instability especially following the July 2023 coup have disrupted regional cooperation and weakened state legitimacy. By January 2024, Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso announced their withdrawal from ECOWAS, straining collective security frameworks and reducing trust in joint operations with Nigeria. These governance gaps create ungoverned spaces where armed groups thrive and erode public trust in state institutions (Lake & Morgan, 1997).

Socio-economic vulnerabilities also play a central role. Widespread poverty, youth unemployment, and food insecurity make populations susceptible to recruitment by extremist groups or involvement in criminal networks. Nigeria was ranked sixth globally for terrorism in the GTI 2025 Report, which emphasized how socio-economic fragility sustains violence. Niger, one of the world's poorest countries, faces similar vulnerabilities, worsened by climate change and resource scarcity. These pressures create a cycle in which insecurity deepens poverty, and poverty in turn sustains insecurity (Akanji, 2025).

Illicit networks further complicate the picture such as arms trafficking, drug smuggling, and human trafficking flow through the Niger-Nigeria corridor, strengthening insurgent groups and criminal gangs. Conflict trackers in 2025 noted that arms proliferation and criminal activities were primary drivers of violence in West Africa, creating hybrid threats that blur the line between terrorism and organized crime. These networks are resilient because they are tied to corruption and weak enforcement, making them difficult to dismantle. However, regional cooperation faces significant obstacles. Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso's withdrawal from ECOWAS has weakened collective security frameworks, undermining intelligence sharing and joint operations with Nigeria. Without strong diplomatic and institutional collaboration, gaps remain that armed groups exploit (Lake & Morgan, 1997).

### **Results and Discussions**

This paper reveals, among others, that trafficking in arms, narcotics, and human beings not only undermines state authority but also fuels insurgency, banditry, and other armed group activity, distorts local economies, and erodes public trust in institutions. This dynamic is well documented in recent scholarship on West African security. Arms trafficking across porous borders have been identified as a critical enabler of Boko Haram and ISWAP operations, providing insurgents with sustained access to weapons and ammunition (Acharya, 2009). Similarly, narcotics trafficking networks in Nigeria have been linked to organized crime and corruption, weakening state institutions and diverting resources away from legitimate governance (Usman, 2025). Human trafficking further exacerbates insecurity by creating transnational

criminal economies that exploit vulnerable populations. Studies show that trafficking routes through Niger and Nigeria are often intertwined with extremist networks, providing both financial resources and logistical support to armed groups. These illicit economies distort local markets by undermining legitimate trade, inflating prices, and diverting labor into criminal enterprises. As a result, communities lose confidence in state institutions, perceiving them as either complicit or incapable of protecting citizens from exploitation (Ikechukwu, 2025).

The erosion of public trust is particularly damaging in fragile states. When citizens view institutions as corrupt or ineffective, they are less likely to cooperate with security forces, thereby weakening counterinsurgency efforts. This creates a vicious cycle: illicit trafficking strengthens armed groups, which in turn destabilize governance, further enabling criminal networks to flourish (Akanji, 2025).

### **Conclusion**

The Niger-Nigeria security nexus demonstrates how transnational organized crime (TOC) undermines regional stability by eroding state authority, sustaining insurgency, and distorting local economies. Trafficking in arms, narcotics, and human beings has created hybrid threats that blur the boundaries between terrorism and organized crime. These illicit networks exploit porous borders and weak governance, enabling insurgent groups such as Boko Haram and ISWAP to maintain operational capacity across both states (Ikechukwu, 2025). The July 2023 coup in Niger and its subsequent withdrawal from ECOWAS in January 2024 further complicated cooperative frameworks, weakening intelligence sharing and joint military operations (Usman, 2025). This political rupture illustrates how fragile governance amplifies the impact of TOC, leaving communities vulnerable to violence and exploitation. Moreover, socio-economic vulnerabilities poverty, unemployment, and climate-induced resource scarcity provide fertile ground for recruitment into criminal and extremist networks, perpetuating a cycle of fragility (Usman, 2025). In essence, transnational organized crime is not merely a criminal phenomenon but a structural driver of insecurity between Niger-Nigeria and West African Region in general. Its persistence highlights the inadequacy of military only

responses and underscores the need for integrated strategies that combine diplomacy, security, governance, and development.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the above, the paper recommends the following measures to address the menace:

- 1. Strengthen Border Governance:** Invest in advanced surveillance technologies, biometric systems, and coordinated patrols to disrupt trafficking routes along the Niger-Nigeria frontier.
- 2. Institutionalize Bilateral Security Mechanisms:** with Niger's withdrawal from ECOWAS, bilateral agreements should be reinforced to ensure continuity of joint operations, while leveraging African Union frameworks for legitimacy.
- 3. Disrupt Illicit Economies:** Target arms, narcotics, and human trafficking through coordinated crackdowns, anti-corruption reforms, and collaboration with international partners to dismantle transnational networks.
- 4. Address Socio-Economic Drivers:** Implement development programs focused on youth employment, agricultural resilience, and climate adaptation to reduce vulnerability to recruitment by criminal and extremist groups.
- 5. Enhance Community Trust in Institutions:** Promote transparency, accountability, and civil-military engagement to rebuild public confidence in state institutions and strengthen cooperation against TOC.
- 6. Reinvigorate Regional Diplomacy:** Nigeria should lead efforts to re-engage Niger diplomatically, encouraging reintegration into regional security frameworks and supporting governance reforms that stabilize its institutions.

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