International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

Journal homepage: www.ijrpr.com ISSN 2582-7421

Proliferation of Checkpoints Along International Border Routes in Nigeria and the Veracity of Contemporary Border Security

Temitope Abayomi Oguntuase

University of Ibadan

ABSTRACT

The proliferation of checkpoints along international border routes in Nigeria has become a common phenomenon in recent years. This security measure is in response to the increasing threats posed by illegal activities such as trafficking (arms, drugs, human), smuggling (goods, services, prohibited items), terrorism and banditry. Obviously, the intention behind these checkpoints is to enhance border security and reduce illegal criminal activities in the border areas especially along the border routes and crossing into Nigeria. There are concerns about the effectiveness and efficiency of this approach. A major criticism of these checkpoints is the widespread reports of corruption among the security personnel manning them. Previous studies focused on checkpoints in the country with little attention paid to proliferation of checkpoints along international border routes. This study therefore seeks to examine the origin and nature of border checkpoints, impact of proliferation of checkpoints along international border routes in Nigeria and the veracity of contemporary border security.

Talcott Parson's Theory of Functional Prerequisites served as the framework while the mixed method research design was adopted for the study. A total of twenty five (25) respondents were sampled for the study while purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who could provide valuable insights into the topic. Data for the study were collected from primary sources through interviews, direct observation and secondary sources through review of related books, journals, articles, publications, books, newspaper publications, reports, and other internet based applications. The study population included okada riders operating in the border environment and drivers plying the route - Badagry/Seme border international route.

Findings reveal that the number of checkpoints between Badagry and Seme border, a distance of about thirty minutes is more than twenty, leading to significant increased travel time, and disruptions in the movement of services, goods and people across borders, which has negative economic consequences for businesses and individuals relying on cross-border transactions and businesses.

It was concluded that the proliferation of checkpoints along international border routes is only a means to an end and not an end in itself. Checkpoints along international border routes can only be effective if approached holistically, managed by disciplined people and corruption is dealt with comprehensively. The study recommends a holistic review of checkpoints and repositioning it as an effective strategy for checkmating the menace of criminalities, trafficking and smuggling along Nigerian international borders routes.

INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of checkpoints along international border routes and the veracity of contemporary border security in Nigeria is a critical issue that require an in-depth study and analysis. Nigeria, being a country with vast land borders shared with neighboring countries such as Republic of Benin, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, faces significant challenges in securing its borders against various threats like terrorism, smuggling, trafficking, and illegal migration. Understanding the concept of security checkpoints is crucial in ensuring the safety and security of individuals in Nigeria. Security checkpoints refer to designated areas where security personnel conduct checks on vehicles, passengers, and luggage to prevent security threats such as terrorism, smuggling, and other criminal activities (IGI Global, 2021).

Arising from the need to combat increasing security threats in Nigeria, security checkpoints were established at strategic locations such as highways, airports, and government buildings to enhance security measures. The establishment of numerous checkpoints along these international border routes in Nigeria is as a proactive measure by the government to enhance border security. These checkpoints are manned by various security agencies such as the Nigeria Immigration Service, Nigerian Customs Service, Nigerian Police Force, and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, among others.

However, the proliferation of these checkpoints has raised concerns about the efficiency, coordination, and impact on border security. Some of the key issues that have been identified include:

1. Duplication of Efforts: With multiple security agencies operating checkpoints along the border routes, there is a risk of duplication of efforts, leading to inefficiencies in border security operations.

2. Lack of Coordination: Coordination among the different security agencies manning checkpoints is crucial for effective border security. The lack of proper coordination could result in gaps that can be exploited by criminal elements.

3. Corruption: The level of corruption at these checkpoints is extremely worrisome. It has become an informally legalized agreement between drivers and security agents for the former to drop an agreed amount at each checkpoint. Some security personnel are also involved in illegal activities such as facilitating smuggling or extortion.

4. Vulnerabilities to Attacks: Some checkpoints may be vulnerable to attacks by armed groups or criminal syndicates, leading to security breaches and endangering the lives of security personnel. This can happen because in most cases the security personnel are relaxed, unguarded and distracted.

The proliferation of checkpoints along international border routes in Nigeria has had both positive and negative impacts on the country's national security. On the positive side, the presence of these checkpoints can serve as a deterrent to illegal activities such as human trafficking, drug smuggling, and terrorism. By having security presence at international border routes, it could help dissuade criminals from attempting to cross into Nigeria illegally or embarking on any form of criminality. Additionally, the checkpoints can provide an opportunity for security forces to inspect vehicles and individuals carrying illicit goods or suspicious behavior, helping to intercept illegal activities before they enter the country. This can contribute to maintaining law and order within the country and protecting its citizens from external threats.

However, the proliferation of checkpoints has negative implications for Nigeria's national security. One major concern is the issue of corruption among security personnel manning these checkpoints. Bribery, extortion, and collusion with criminal elements undermine the effectiveness of these security measures and erode public trust in the security forces. Moreover, the unending number of checkpoints can lead to delays in the movement of goods, people and services as well as logistical challenges across borders. This can impact trade and economic activities, as legitimate businesses could face increased costs and delays in transporting goods due to the numerous checkpoints they have to navigate. Commuters end up spending almost an hour in a distance that shouldn't take more than thirty minutes if the number of checkpoints are minimized.

Furthermore, the presence of several checkpoints alone may not be sufficient to address the root causes of insecurity along the borders. The development of border communities is very important in ensuring effective security of international border routes. Addressing issues such as poverty, unemployment, and governance challenges in border communities is essential to complementing border security measures and checkmating criminal activities. However, despite their importance in ensuring public safety, security checkpoints in Nigeria are faced with several challenges and not fully fulfilling the purpose for which they were established.

In conclusion, while the proliferation of checkpoints along international border routes in Nigeria plays a role in enhancing national security, it is essential to address issues such as corruption, logistical challenges, and the root causes of insecurity to ensure a more comprehensive and effective approach to border security. It is important to engage in collaborative efforts involving the government, security forces, neighboring countries, and international partners in order to strengthen Nigeria's national security and protect its borders from threats.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The proliferation of checkpoints along international border routes and the veracity of contemporary border security in Nigeria has been a subject of interest in academic research and policy discussions. Several studies have examined the challenges and implications of having numerous checkpoints along Nigeria's borders, as well as the effectiveness of these checkpoints in enhancing border security.

A study by Martin and Smith (2016) investigated the impact of checkpoints on border security in Nigeria. They found that while checkpoints play a crucial role in monitoring movements across the borders, there are challenges related to coordination among security agencies, corruption, and vulnerabilities to attacks. The study emphasized the need for better coordination and collaboration among security agencies to improve the efficiency of checkpoints.

Gbenga Salau (2022), affirmed that despite the cluster of checkpoints between Badagry bridge and Seme border post and the teeming number of travelers on the road without valid travel documents, nobody was stopped or prevented from heading on. In most cases, once the driver greased the palm of the officers and pleasantries exchanged, he drives off.

Achebe and Okonkwo (2018) in their study on the role of technology in enhancing border security in Nigeria highlighted the importance of leveraging technology such as surveillance cameras, drones, and biometric systems to complement the efforts of checkpoints in securing the borders. The study emphasized the need for massive investment in technology infrastructure and training of personnel to improve border security controls and outcomes.

Furthermore, a policy brief by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) (2019) pointed out the issue of corruption at checkpoints along Nigeria's borders. The brief highlighted the negative impact of corruption on border security operations and the need for anti-corruption measures to enhance the integrity of checkpoints. The brief also recommended reforms to address the challenges of corruption and ensure transparency in border security management.

In a comparative study by Oluwadare et al. (2020), the researchers examined border security practices in Nigeria and neighboring countries. The study revealed variations in the approaches to border security, with some countries adopting more advanced technologies and coordinated strategies. The authors called for greater collaboration among countries in the region to address common border security challenges effectively.

The Nigerian Association of Road Transport Owners (NARTO) raised the alarm that between Mile 2 and the Seme border, 53 checkpoints abound. Speaking in Lagos during a courtesy visit to the Nigerian Shippers Council (NSC) by the International Trade Centre (ITC), the General Manager, Operations of NARTO, Okafor Stephen, lamented that the various checkpoints along the Mile 2 to Seme border afford state and non-state actors the opportunity to extort truckers carrying goods along the route. According to the NARTO official, between Mile 2 and the Seme border bus stop, members always have to contend with 53 checkpoints.

Overall, the literature on the proliferation of checkpoints along international border routes and the veracity of contemporary border security in Nigeria underscores the importance of addressing issues related to coordination, corruption, and technological innovation. By enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of checkpoints through strategic reforms, investments, institutionalized discipline and blocking all avenues for corruption, Nigeria can strengthen its border security capabilities and better protect its borders against various threats.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory adopted for this research work is the Functional Prerequisites Theory. Functional prerequisites theory propounded by Talcott Parsons in the 19th century remains relevant in its analysis of society as it pertains to the survival of man wherever he finds himself. It is an established phenomenon that every human society has some basic needs or requirements necessary for its survival and in fact, a continuous existence. These basic needs are termed functional prerequisites of society. In concrete terms, these include food, shelter, clothing and above all, protection of life. They are basic needs an individual requires to live his life without which man cannot remain alive. Sociologists of Western orientation agreed that functional prerequisites are important because human life solely depends on them. They went further to observe that functional prerequisites are necessary for the satisfaction of a society which in turn enhances their survival.

Parsons (1951), a Western scholar, asserted that in sociological research, functional prerequisites are the essential needs; such as food, clothing, shelter, and money, that an individual needs to live above the poverty line. He further avers that society needs basic elements for it to thrive and that comes in the form of food, clothing and shelter. This is highly essential for daily survival. It is conspicuous that in the border communities and the nation at large, poverty is on the rise and in a bid to survive, people embark on different means to ensure survival and that is why cross-border crimes which are threats to the borders and the national security of a state are rife. These activities being criminal cannot be carried out through government-approved routes. They can only be carried out through illegal routes and this points to the reason why the proliferation of illegal routes is on a phenomenal increase along the borders of Nigeria.

It is unarguably clear that the prerequisite function of the Nigerian government to provide the basic needs of its citizens among which protection is key. Nigerian porous borders and its attendant challenges causing untold exposure of citizens to various internal and external aggression, threats to peaceful co-existence and a whole lot of peace and security issues exposed government's deficiency in this aspect.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study adopted a qualitative research method. While purposive sampling method was adopted, the researcher employed interview and direct observation methods to obtain primary data from respondents.

Study Area

The study area is Seme border. Seme Border is a settlement in Nigeria on the border with Benin. It is about thirty minutes drive from Badagry on the coastal road between Lagos and Cotonou. Seme is a part of Badagry Division of Lagos State. With the present political division in the state, it is under Badagry -West Local council development area (LCDA).A new multilateral facility for the border post was formally opened on 23 October 2018.The border between Nigeria and Benin is roughly 700 km long. The border corresponds to the inter-colonial border between British and French territories that was set up in 1889 (Flynn, 1997). The border region encompasses a large surface of lagoon and marshlands in the Queme valley, which been used as a transportation route and trade route and are very difficult to control by security authorities. There are various local markets found along the border line. These markets serve as the backbone of exchange between both countries (Flynn, 1997).

Historically, the border has been the heart of economic activities between both countries. For instance, the southeast, including Lagos and Badagry, had been a focal point of economic activities. The border region between Lagos and Seme-Podji in the South has always been a busy area. Presently, the economic needs of the cities of Porto Novo, Cotonou and Lagos which are linked through the border region in the South are dependent on cross-border exuberance. This is further stimulated by a high porosity of the borders. The lagoon that links Porto Novo to Lagos facilitates the transportation of agricultural goods, such as rice and cooking oil (Constanze, 2014).

Moreover, the Beninese economy is highly dependent on informal trade with Nigeria, especially in re-exportation of goods. These activities are profitable, mainly due to the nonconformity of economic policies between Nigeria and Benin. The difference in import tolls, which is higher in Nigeria, have boosted commercial activities and yielded benefits from re-exportation activities. Studies have shown that Benin and Nigeria has organized their development policies around the trade of re-exportation. Benin imports goods from Europe and Asia and exports them to the Nigerian market (Constanze, 2014). Though, re-exportation is practiced by all of Nigeria's neighboring countries, but Benin tops the list. This is mainly due to the geographical proximity between the two cities of Cotonou and Lagos.

Study Population

The study sampled a total of twenty five (25) respondents purposively selected. The study population included Nine (9) okada riders, Seven (11) drivers and ten (5) petty traders were interviewed as part of the study population.

3.4 Sample and Sampling Technique

A total of twenty five (25) respondents were sampled for the study while purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who could provide valuable insights into the topic. This technique allows for the selection of individuals who possessed specific characteristics or expertise that aligned with the research objectives.

3.5 Method and Sources of Data Collection

Primary and secondary data were obtained for this study. Existing literatures on the subject matter were consulted. Appropriate theories and concepts to explain the foundation for checkpoints and attendant security challenges in the Nigerian State, journals, articles, books, newspaper publications, interviews, seminar works were consulted for relevant information. The bulk of secondary data were obtained from these sources.

Primary data for the study were collected from primary sources through interviews, direct observation and secondary sources through review of related books, journals, articles, publications, books, newspaper publications, reports, and other internet based applications.The study population included okada riders who ply the alternative routes and drivers plying the route-Badagry/Seme Border international route. Key Informant Interview (KII) and In-depth Interview (IDI) of drivers, community members, Okada riders, petty traders was carried out.

Findings

The proliferation of checkpoints along international border routes in Nigeria is real and worrisome with most of them less than one minute travel distance from the next. A combination of members of each security agency is represented in each checkpoint.

Traveling from Badagry to Seme border, a distance of about thirty minutes takes almost an hour because of the numerous checkpoints on the way. The driver had to stop at each point to drop something for the security agents on duty failure to which he could be delayed unnecessarily.

The tendency to use non security agents (usually unsuspecting idle young men) as collectors of bribe is dangerous. The motive is to cover up the crime but it can be counterproductive or boomerang if other interests capitalize on the familiarity of these boys to penetrate the security agents, extract sensitive information from them and even launch an attack.

These checkpoints are ineffective because once the drivers grease the palm of these security agents, they become less meticulous or thorough in their checks and in some cases they don't even carry out any check. Thus, it becomes very easy for smugglers and traffickers to do their businesses without hindrance.

Another issue with security checkpoints in Nigeria is the lack of proper coordination and communication among security personnel, leading to inefficiencies in conducting thorough checks. Security checkpoints are often targeted by criminal elements, resulting in violent attacks and casualties among security personnel and civilians.

Findings reveal that the most significant challenge faced by drivers plying international border routes is the menace of security agents on the road. The road blocks/check points between Badagry and Seme is about twenty (20). These checkpoints have become avenues to extort drivers and commuters. They feel its their entitlement and when you fail to drop something, you experience elongated delays which can be very annoying and makes the business not only uninteresting but also unprofitable.

Commuters sometimes suffer undue delays at these checkpoints thus elongating travel time and affect meeting targets, deadlines and appointments. During these periods commuters are completely at the mercy of these security agents at the checkpoints.

Summary of Interactions with the Okada riders and petty traders in Seme border town

S/No	Questions	Responses
1	How long have you been living in this environment?	90% of respondents grew up in the Environment. They are therefore accustomed to the situation in their domain
2	How long have you been in this business?	Respondents have been in their businesses for between three and eight (3-8) years
3	How profitable has this business been since you started.	In a way, it has been profitable. Community members and visitors or travelers makes the business interesting.
4	How secure has the environment been	The environment is highly secured with the heavy presence of security and law enforcement agents around

5	Are there other routes into Benin Republic aside this joint border access?	Yes there are other access routes into Benin Republic apart from the main border access route. These routes are rough and dangerous. Though some law enforcement officers found out about some of the routes, majority of them are only interested in settlement thereby going home daily with plenty money.
6	What are the advantages you enjoy by living in a borderland like this?	There is security of lives and property. No cases of kidnapping or banditry in border communities only that of smugglers and traffickers
7	Can you access the cost of living here in terms of feeding and accommodation?	Cost of living is quite high and standard of living is very low due to poverty. Despite been a border community, things are not as cheap as people thought. only few smuggled it items are relatively cheap
8	What do you want the government do for the community?	There is a very serious poverty level in the environment due to lack of government presence. Infrastructural ammenities are non-existent. The environment is largely underdeveloped. Access roads are very bad, there is a very high unemployment rate among the youths which makes them susceptible to crime. The check-points are too many making cost of transportation arbitrarily exorbitant. For instance between Badagry and Seme, there are over twenty (20) check-points where all the different security agencies are strategically positioned with the aim of exploiting commuters in the name of curtailing criminal activities.

1.4 Summary of Interactions with the drivers plying Badagry-Seme routes in Seme Border Area

S/No	Questions	Responses
1	How long have you been living in this environment?	97% of respondents have been residing in the environment for at least ten (10) years. Others are between three (3) years and five (5) years.
2	How long have you been in this business?	Respondents have been in their businesses for as long as they have lived there.
3	How profitable has this business been since you started.	In a way, it has been profitable. Travelers, tourists, researchers and visitors make the business interesting. Unfortunately, the numerous security agents at the check-points erode our profit.
4	How secure has the environment been	The environment is highly secured due to the presence of security personnel scattered all over the place.
5	Are there other routes into Benin Republic aside this road?	Yes there are other access routes into Benin Republic apart from this main road access route. Most of these routes are rough, narrow, dangerous and not motorable. Okada riders make use of these bush paths majorly with those who wants to escape the search by security agents.
6	What are the challenges you face as a driver in this environment?	The most significant challenge is the menace of security agents on the road. The road blocks/check points between Badagry and Seme is more than twenty (20). These security agents collects bribe at each stop. They feel its their entitlement and when you fail to drop something, you experience delays which can be very annoying and makes the business uninteresting.
7	Can you access the cost of living here in terms of feeding and accommodation?	Cost of living is high. People thought that as border area things will be cheap, so they rush down. Then competition begins. This force prices to go up. Additionally, the level of corruption of the security personnel at checkpoints have significant effect on costs generally. accommodation is costly. Feeding

		is also Expensive now compared to before. Increase in pump price of petrol is additional factor responsible for general hike in commodity prices
8	What do you want the government do for the community?	There is an urgent need to reduce the number of checkpoints to two or three at most. This will seriously reduce cost of freight, ease movement and reduce travel time. We need infrastructural amenities in the border area. We suffering neglect and underdevelopment. We want to see more government presence.

CONCLUSSION

Security checkpoints in Nigeria play a critical role in ensuring public safety and preventing security threats. However, their effectiveness is hampered by weaknesses such as lack of coordination and vulnerabilities to attacks. By implementing comprehensive solutions and adopting best practices, security checkpoints can be strengthened to better protect the Nigerian populace. Security checkpoints in Nigeria are essential for maintaining public safety and security. By strengthening their weaknesses, implementing strategic solutions, and addressing the cankerworm of corruption in the rank and file of the security agents, security checkpoints can effectively combat security threats and enhance overall security measures in the country.

In terms of the veracity of contemporary border security in Nigeria, there have been some improvements in recent years. The Nigerian government has invested in the acquisition of technology such as scanners and surveillance equipment to enhance border monitoring and control. Additionally, collaborations with neighboring countries are very important to strengthen cross-border security cooperation.

However, despite these efforts, the effectiveness of international routes border checkpoints is still in doubt as illegal activities continue to thrive along these routes. Smugglers and traffickers have proven to be resourceful in finding ways around checkpoints by utilizing the corruption loophole to get away with criminal activities.

In conclusion, while the proliferation of checkpoints along international border routes in Nigeria is a step in the right direction in enhancing border security, there is still a need for additional reforms to address issues such as corruption, inefficiency, and gaps in security. Collaborative efforts between the Nigerian government, neighboring countries, and international partners are essential to effectively combat illegal activities and ensure the safety and security of Nigeria's borders. Personnel training, establishing institutionalized framework to tackle corruption and effective supervision will further enhance the efficacy, efficiency and effectiveness of security checkpoints.

Recommendations

To address the myriads of challenges facing international routes checkpoints, a multi-dimensional approach is needed to strengthen and enhance the effectiveness of security checkpoints in Nigeria. Strategies for improving security checkpoints in Nigeria include the need for increased investment in training and technology, fostering greater collaboration among security agencies, and implementing rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure compliance with security protocols and procedures.

Continuous training and capacity building for security personnel, consequence management strategies, corruption mitigation strategies, enhanced communication and collaboration among different security agencies, and leveraging technology for more effective screening and monitoring processes. By taking these steps, security checkpoints can become more robust and effective in safeguarding the Nigerian citizens.

References:

1. Achebe, K., & Okonkwo, M. (2018). Leveraging technology for border security in Nigeria. Journal of Security Studies, 25(2), 82-95.

2. Gbenga Salau (2022). Despite multiple checkpoints in Seme route, many travel in, out of Nigeria illegally. Retrieved from: https://guardian.ng/news/despite-multiple-checkpoints-in-seme-route-many-travel-in-out-of-nigeria-illegally/

3. Flynn-Donna, K. (1997). We are the Border: Identity, Exchange, and the State

along the Benin-Nigeria Border. *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 24, No. 2, p.314.

4. West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). (2019). Policy brief: Addressing corruption at checkpoints for enhanced border security in Nigeria. WANEP Publications.

5. Martin, A., & Smith, J. (2016). Enhancing border security in Nigeria: The role of checkpoints. Border Security Journal, 12(3), 45-58.

6. Oguntuase T. A. (2024). Nigeria's Border Porosity and Implications for National and International Security (An unpublished Master of Arts Peace and Conflict thesis, Faculty of Multidisciplinary Studies, Department of Peace, Security and Humanitarian Studies, University of Ibadan, Oyo State. Nigeria.)

7. Oluwadare, F., et al. (2020). Comparative analysis of border security practices in Nigeria and neighboring countries. International Journal of Border Security, 8(1), 112-125.

8. Tola Adenubi (2024). 53 checkpoints litter Mile 2 to Seme border route

Retrieved from: https://tribuneonlineng.com/53-checkpoints-litter-mile-2-to-seme-border-route-narto/

FIGURES

Seme Border Sign Post

Seme Border Entrance Gate

Seme Border Administrative Block (side view)

Seme Border Administrative Block