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Border management strategies on Cross Border Crimes in Cross River State, Nigeria		
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Keywords	Abstract	
Border management strategies, globalization, transnational criminal activities, drug trafficking, immigration control, inter-agency cooperation,	This study examines border management strategies and their implications for cross-border crimes in Cross River State, Nigeria, within the broader context of globalization and increasing transnational criminal activities. The movement of people, goods, and services across borders has intensified due to global interconnectedness; however, it has also facilitated the expansion of criminal networks engaged in activities such as human trafficking, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and illicit trade. The study explores how existing border management strategies—including immigration control, customs enforcement, surveillance systems, and inter-agency cooperation—affect both legitimate cross-border activities and the prevalence of cross-border crimes. Findings from the review reveal that while border management strategies have recorded some successes in intercepting illegal activities, their effectiveness is constrained by porous borders, inadequate infrastructure, corruption, and weak institutional coordination. These challenges not only undermine national security but also disrupt legitimate trade and socio-economic activities in border	
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	communities. The study also highlights that cross-border crimes are driven by a combination of weak enforcement mechanisms and socio-economic factors such as poverty and unemployment, which increase vulnerability to criminal recruitment. The study concludes that effective border management requires a holistic and integrated approach that combines technological innovation, institutional reform, regional cooperation, and community engagement. Strengthening these dimensions is essential for improving border security, reducing cross-border crimes, and promoting sustainable socio-economic development in Cross River State and Nigeria at large.
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Introduction

The movement of people across national borders is not a new phenomenon, but it has become more extensive and complex, given fillip by globalization. Beyond the migration of individuals, globalization has facilitated the increased movement of goods and services, technology, information, capital and, unfortunately, criminal elements across international boundaries (Chamie,2020). This growing interconnectedness among nations has transformed the world into a global system where geographical distances and national boundaries have become less restrictive. As a result, countries, institutions and individuals can interact more freely, promoting economic growth, cultural exchange and international cooperation. According to Nein et al. (2022), globalization has significantly reduced barriers between nations, allowing for greater cross-border interactions and integration. In Africa, the challenge of border security is particularly complex, and as alluded by Herzog, (2014), many borders are highly porous, making it difficult for security agencies to effectively monitor and control movements across them. The situation is further complicated by weak institutional configurations, inadequate border infrastructure, limited technological resources and corruption within some border management systems. These weaknesses create opportunities for transnational criminal networks to operate with relative ease across national boundaries.

As noted by Isoke (2015), the combination of permeable borders, insufficient government capacity and organized criminal activities continues to hinder border security efforts across the continent, hence, strengthening border management systems remains essential for combating cross-border crimes and enhancing national and regional security in Africa. While the movement of people, goods and services across borders contributes significantly to economic growth, regional cooperation and cultural exchange, it has also created opportunities for criminal networks to engage in various forms of illegal activities. Consequently, governments across the world have adopted diverse border management strategies aimed at regulating cross-border movements and preventing criminal activities that threaten national and regional security. Więckowski (2024), opined borders represent the territorial limits of a state and serve as critical points for regulating migration, trade, customs operations and security activities. Effective border management involves the implementation of policies, technologies, institutional frameworks and collaborative mechanisms designed to monitor and control the movement of persons and goods across national boundaries. Traditionally, border management focused primarily on customs administration and immigration control. However, the changing nature of security threats has expanded the scope of border management to include intelligence gathering, surveillance, law enforcement cooperation, risk assessment, and the use of advanced technologies to detect and prevent criminal activities (Allen & Lastra,2020).

Accordingly, cross-border crimes conjure criminal activities that occur across national boundaries and involve offenders, victims vis-a-vis criminal networks operating in more than one country. Common forms of cross-border crimes include human trafficking, migrant smuggling, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, terrorism, money laundering, cybercrime, vehicle theft, wildlife trafficking and the illegal trade in natural resources (Wahl,2025). The rise of cross-border crimes has become a major concern for governments, international organizations and security agencies because of its far-reaching social, economic and political consequences. Human trafficking and migrant smuggling expose vulnerable populations to exploitation, abuse, and human rights violations (Itang, 2022; Tamfu et al 2025). Drug trafficking contributes to increased substance abuse, violence and public health challenges. Arms smuggling fuels conflicts, insurgencies and criminal violence, while terrorism poses direct threats to national security and public safety (Ilić,2025). Additionally, money laundering subverts financial systems, reduces government revenues and facilitates the financing of other criminal activities. These consequences highlight the need for effective border management strategies capable of addressing the evolving nature of transnational crime.

Nigeria presents a particularly important case in the study of border management and cross-border crimes due to its strategic location, extensive land and maritime borders, and significant role in regional trade and migration. The country shares borders with several neighboring countries, including Benin, Niger, Chad and Cameroon. These borders facilitate legitimate economic activities and regional integration within the framework of the Economic Community of West African State, but they have also become channels for various forms of criminal activities (Kanu & Olua,2025; Mobolaji, 2017; Nosiri & Ohazurike, 2016). The Nigerian government has implemented several border management strategies to address these challenges. These strategies include the deployment of immigration and customs personnel, establishment of border patrol units, use of surveillance technologies, construction of border.

Despite these efforts, cross-border crimes continue to pose significant challenges to national security and socio-economic development in Nigeria, as Criminal groups continuously exploit unmanned routes to evade security checks and transport contraband goods. Consequently, there is a growing need to assess the effectiveness of existing border management strategies and identify areas for improvement. Against this background, this study seeks to examine the impact of border management strategies on cross-border crimes and expectedly to offer valuable insights for policymakers, security practitioners, researchers, and other stakeholders involved in designing and implementing effective border management systems capable of addressing the growing threat of cross-border crimes.

Statement of the problem

Globalization has enabled criminals to roam freely across borders and even to conduct illicit business with impunity, threatening socioeconomic progress and the security of people and property. Nigeria is not immune to this rising phenomenon, which necessitates an increased requirement for security and protection at our borders (Omolara, 2013). Security agencies such as the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), and others have been deployed to national borders yet, Nigeria's borders have been described as porous, allowing all manner of cross-border criminal activities such as human trafficking, smuggling, drug trafficking, arm robbery, money laundering, and illicit arms trafficking, resulting in the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. For example, it is estimated that 100 million of the 640 million small guns circulating globally are discovered in Africa, with 30 million in Sub-Saharan Africa and 8 million in West Africa alone (Abdulkareem, 2012; Adetula, 2015). Cross River State, Nigeria shares a border with Cameroun, experiencing significant cross border movement of people,

goods and service. Current border management strategies including security measures, customs procedures and immigration policies appear to have a complex impact. These strategies may unintentionally hinder legitimate trades, social integration and economic opportunities while aiming to control illicit activities like smuggling and human trafficking. Therefore, the problem is to understand the multifaceted effects of these border management strategies on cross border activities in Cross River State, identifying both negative and positive consequences for local communities, economic development and regional security.

Objectives of the study.

The main objective is examine the effectiveness of border management strategies in controlling and preventing cross-border crimes in cross river state, Nigeria.

- 1 To examine the existing border management strategies employed by security agencies in cross river state.
- 2 To identify the major forms of cross-border crimes prevalent in cross river state
- 3 To investigate the challenges facing border security agencies in the management of cross -border crimes in cross river state

Literature

Border Management and Security Strategies

Border management and security strategies refer to the policies, measures, and mechanisms adopted by governments to regulate the movement of people, goods, and services across national borders while safeguarding national security and territorial integrity. In an era characterized by globalization, increased migration, and transnational criminal activities, effective border management has become a critical component of national and regional security frameworks (Minnaar,2022). It seeks to strike a balance between facilitating legitimate trade and travel and preventing threats such as terrorism, human trafficking, arms smuggling, drug trafficking, and other forms of cross-border crime. Similarly, POLGÁR (2026), argued that effective border management involves the coordination of multiple agencies, including immigration services, customs authorities, border patrol units, intelligence agencies, and law enforcement institutions. These agencies work together to monitor border activities, enforce immigration laws, detect illicit movements, and ensure compliance with national regulations. The adoption of integrated border management systems has become increasingly important in enhancing cooperation among these agencies and improving overall border security outcomes.

One of the major security strategies employed in border management is surveillance and monitoring. Governments utilize modern technologies such as biometric identification systems, closed-circuit television (CCTV), drones, satellite imagery, and electronic border monitoring systems to detect and respond to suspicious activities. These technological innovations enhance the ability of security agencies to monitor vast and often difficult terrains, particularly in countries with extensive and porous borders. Another important strategy is intelligence gathering and information sharing. Effective border security depends heavily on timely and accurate intelligence regarding potential threats. Security agencies often collaborate with neighboring countries, regional organizations, and international partners to exchange information on criminal networks, terrorist groups, and illicit trafficking routes. Such cooperation strengthens the capacity of states to identify and disrupt transnational criminal activities before they pose

significant security risks. Capacity building and personnel training also play a crucial role in border management. Border officials require adequate training in document verification, risk assessment, intelligence analysis, and the use of modern surveillance technologies. Continuous professional development enhances their ability to respond effectively to emerging security challenges.

In Nigeria, border management strategies have become increasingly important due to the country's extensive land and maritime borders with Benin, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. Efforts such as joint border patrols, enhanced surveillance, inter-agency collaboration, and regional cooperation through ECOWAS have been adopted to address security challenges. However, challenges such as porous borders, inadequate infrastructure, corruption, and limited resources continue to affect the effectiveness of border security operations. Strengthening border management remains essential for promoting national security, economic stability, and regional peace.

Borders, in a general sense, establish the geographical limits of political bodies or legal jurisdictions, such as governments, sovereign states, federated states, and other subnational entities (Edward 2012). Cross border refers to activities that occur across state borders, including those that take place within the boundaries of a state but include subnational borders. Cross border crimes refer to the movement of individuals, goods, and services across national borders in a way that disregards accepted norms and standards (Ngboawaji, 2011). Cross-border crimes refer to criminal activities that either cross national borders or have the potential to do so. They also include intra-state crimes that violate the fundamental principles of the international community (Moliki & Ajetunmobi, 2024). Cross-border crimes are common among countries with porous borders and a country has the right to prevent individuals from crossing its borders and impose appropriate penalties when these laws are violated. Instances of cross border criminal activities encompass people trafficking, the illicit transportation of items (such as weaponry, drugs, and contraband animal and plant products), as well as other environmentally forbidden commodities (Malechi & Matthias, 2021). Abia (2013) observed that cross-border crimes include a number of illegal and notorious activities carried out by individuals and groups across national and international borders, either for financial or economic benefits and also socio-political or religious considerations. It is a set of criminal acts whose perpetrators and repercussions go beyond territorial borders. These would include human trafficking, money laundering, drug trafficking, arms smuggling or trafficking of weapons, cross-border terrorism, illegal oil bunkering, illicit trafficking in diamonds, corruption, business fraud, to mention but a few.

Cross River State is among the border states engulfed with cross border criminalities. Its border areas such as Bakassi and Ikom Local Government Area are known for its porous border routes characterized by different forms of border criminalities and its associated consequences on national security Kati, Ukor & Michael (2025). Illegal migration through the numerous border entry points in the Cross River State-Cameroon border has given room for the influx of small arms and light weapons terrorists, bandits, smugglers, human traffickers, drug peddlers, etc, into Nigeria. This is facilitated by too many entry points without a commensurate manpower to man them ((Moliki & Ajetunmobi, 2024). According to Opanike, (2015), the area along Nigeria's South-eastern border with Cameroon has been identified over the years as one favored by child traffickers. Studies conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) indicate that coastal and border towns in the southeastern states of Cross River, Akwa Ibom and Rivers are frequently used as staging points by child-trafficking rings for moving children, mostly by sea, to destinations including Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, and Cameroon. "There are many cases of children and young women taken from Togo, Benin and other West African countries, who are brought into Nigeria and

moved to the southeast areas," Chinwe Okonji, a researcher who has investigated child trafficking, told IRIN. "Through coastal and border towns such as Eastern Obolo, Eket, Ibeno, Ikom and Oron, they are transported mostly by sea to the recipient countries".

Border Management Strategies in Nigeria

Border, identity, territory and human security remain the foundational pillars upon which the concept of national security is constructed. A nation's borders do not merely represent geographical boundaries; they symbolize sovereignty, authority, and the state's capacity to regulate movement and protect its citizens. In this regard, Ullah and Kumpoh (2018) observe that borders significantly shape the geopolitical configuration of any state, influencing both internal governance and external relations. Borders, therefore, are not static lines on a map but dynamic spaces where political, economic, and security interests intersect. Border management refers to the entire system of policies, institutions, processes and operational procedures that guide how a country regulates the movement of people, goods, and services across its boundaries. It involves ensuring that legitimate cross-border activities are facilitated while illegal movements are detected and prevented. Osimen et al. (2017) further explain that border management also includes the maintenance of boundary beacons and physical markers that define a country's territorial limits. In essence, effective border governance is a collaborative effort between a state and its neighbouring countries, requiring coordination, trust, and shared responsibility.

When borders function poorly or become porous, they create opportunities for criminal networks to thrive. In such situations, different forms of transnational crimes emerge, undermining national stability and regional peace. Border agencies are therefore tasked with processing individuals and goods at official entry and exit points, while also intercepting illegal crossings and contraband. In Nigeria, key border management institutions include the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), and the Armed Forces, all of which play complementary roles in safeguarding territorial integrity and controlling cross-border movements. Despite these institutional arrangements, Nigeria's border security system faces significant challenges. Security agencies often deploy roadblocks and checkpoints along strategic border corridors such as Akpabuyo–Calabar road, Ekipiricon–Itu–Uyo road, and Itigidi–Abomege–Abakaliki routes in an attempt to intercept irregular migrants and criminal elements. However, overlapping mandates, poor coordination, and bureaucratic inefficiencies frequently undermine operational effectiveness (Okolie, 2019). As Njoku and Kelechi (2025) argue, clearer role definitions, stronger inter-agency collaboration, and continuous training are essential for improving border governance.

Technological innovation also plays a critical role in modern border management. The adoption of surveillance drones, biometric identification systems, satellite monitoring, electronic databases, and advanced scanning technologies can significantly enhance Nigeria's capacity to monitor its borders (Chidozie, 2019). Modern security realities demand that border agencies evolve alongside technological advancements. Tools such as CCTV networks, robotic surveillance systems, vehicle scanners, and trained detection dogs can help improve efficiency and reduce human error. Establishing centralized databases and hidden surveillance systems would further strengthen intelligence gathering and response mechanisms (Ukwayi & Anam, 2019). Beyond technology, legal and institutional reforms are equally important. Nigeria's legal frameworks must be updated to address emerging threats such as cybercrime, terrorism, human trafficking, and drug trafficking. A strong legal environment empowers enforcement agencies to act

decisively while ensuring accountability and respect for human rights. Furthermore, Adewumi (2020), maintained that community policing, trust-building initiatives, and cross-border dialogue can help bridge the gap between security agencies and local populations, thereby improving intelligence sharing and reducing hostility.

Regional and international cooperation is another essential strategy. Joint border patrols and intelligence sharing between Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, and Niger have proven effective in countering Boko Haram insurgency, although such efforts need to be institutionalized for long-term impact (Onuoha, 2013). Similarly, collaboration within ECOWAS and partnerships with organizations such as the African Union and UNODC provide technical assistance and funding for strengthening border security systems (Njoku & Kelechi, 2025). However, corruption remains a major obstacle to effective border management. It facilitates the smuggling of arms, drugs, and human beings, thereby weakening institutional responses (Eze, 2021). Strengthening accountability mechanisms, improving personnel welfare, and ensuring transparent recruitment processes are necessary steps toward reducing corruption. Finally, cross-border crimes such as drug trafficking, arms proliferation, human trafficking, and prostitution continue to threaten Nigeria's security, particularly in border states like Cross River. Illicit drug trafficking, in particular, has expanded significantly, fueling other crimes such as cultism, kidnapping, and armed robbery. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that combines technology, legal reform, community engagement, and regional cooperation.

Effect of border management strategies on cross border criminal activities

Border management strategies in Nigeria, particularly in Cross River State, encompass security measures, customs procedures, and immigration policies designed to regulate the movement of people and goods across international boundaries. While these measures aim to curb illicit activities such as smuggling, trafficking, and terrorism, they also produce complex outcomes that affect legitimate trade, social interaction, and local economic opportunities. This creates a policy dilemma that requires balancing security concerns with the facilitation of lawful cross-border activities. Key border agencies, including the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), and the Armed Forces, play central roles in managing Nigeria's porous borders. These agencies coordinate surveillance and enforcement activities, often through roadblocks and checkpoints along strategic corridors such as the Akpabuyo–Calabar road and the Ekpiron–Itu–Uyo axis (pulse.ng, 2022). These interventions have yielded notable operational successes. For instance, in June 2022, military personnel intercepted a vehicle in Cross River State carrying explosives, ammunition, and military kits, highlighting the persistent security threats along border routes.

Despite such efforts, research shows that certain policy approaches, such as border closure, have not produced the desired outcomes. Studies by Idoniboye-Obu (2022) and Ola and Fabiyi (2020) reveal that border restrictions have neither significantly reduced smuggling nor improved national development. Instead, they have contributed to inflation, unemployment, and strained relations with neighbouring states that depend heavily on cross-border trade with Nigeria. The Cross River–Cameroon border remains particularly vulnerable due to its porous nature. Criminal activities, including arms trafficking and insurgent movements, continue to exploit these weaknesses. Security agencies have recorded some successes, such as the interception of suspected arms dealers at Mfum, involving both Nigerian and Cameroonian suspects linked to separatist groups (Businessday, 2022).

However, border governance is significantly undermined by corruption and weak institutional coordination. Reports indicate that some officials of immigration and customs agencies collude with smugglers, facilitating illicit trade in exchange for bribes (Adewumi, 2020). The Seme–Krake border case, where officers were arrested for aiding rice and fuel smuggling, further illustrates systemic weaknesses in enforcement. Similarly, trafficking routes through the Calabar maritime axis have been used for human exploitation, particularly involving young women moved to other West African and Central African states (Njoku & Kelechi, 2025). Smuggling of petroleum products, rice, and textiles continues to undermine Nigeria’s economy by encouraging tax evasion and weakening local industries. At the same time, border communities remain vulnerable due to poverty and limited state presence, making them susceptible to criminal recruitment and participation in illegal trade.

Theoretical Framework

Broken Windows Theory

The Broken Windows Theory was first developed by social scientists James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling in 1982. The theory emerged from urban criminology and was initially used to explain how visible signs of disorder in communities, such as broken windows, vandalism, littering, and neglect, can encourage more serious crimes if left unaddressed. The central idea is that crime is not only influenced by individual motivation but also by the environment in which individuals operate. When disorder is visible and tolerated, it sends a signal that rules are weak, authority is absent, and deviant behaviour is unlikely to be punished. Over time, this perception can escalate minor disorder into more serious criminal activities. The core assumption of the Broken Windows Theory is that physical and social disorder create an environment that encourages further lawlessness. In other words, crime becomes self-reinforcing when early signs of disorder are ignored. Another assumption is that effective law enforcement and prompt correction of minor infractions can prevent the escalation of more serious crimes. The theory also assumes that visible authority presence and consistent rule enforcement serve as deterrents to potential offenders. In the context of border management, these assumptions are particularly relevant because borders represent high-risk zones where weak governance, poor surveillance and institutional neglect can easily create opportunities for cross-border criminal activities.

Applied to border management strategies on cross-border crimes, the Broken Windows Theory helps explain how porous borders, weak checkpoints, and inconsistent enforcement practices contribute to escalating insecurity. In many border communities, especially in regions like Cross River State, the presence of abandoned routes, unmonitored entry points, and poorly maintained security infrastructure creates an impression of state absence. This “environmental disorder” encourages smugglers, traffickers, and armed groups to exploit such gaps. For example, when illegal crossings are routinely ignored or lightly punished, it signals to criminal networks that border control is weak, thereby increasing the frequency and scale of illicit activities such as arms trafficking, human smuggling, and drug trade. Furthermore, visible corruption and irregular practices among border officials can also be interpreted through this theory. When security operatives openly engage in bribery, extortion, or selective enforcement, they contribute to a breakdown of order similar to broken windows in urban settings. This erodes public trust and further weakens compliance with border regulations. In such situations, criminal actors perceive the system as compromised and are more likely to operate freely across borders.

However, the Broken Windows Theory has faced several criticisms. One major criticism is that it overemphasizes physical disorder while neglecting deeper structural causes of crime such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, and weak governance. Critics argue that crime at borders cannot be fully explained by visible disorder alone, as many cross-border crimes are driven by organized networks and global demand for illicit goods. Another criticism is that strict enforcement of minor infractions, as suggested by the theory, may lead to excessive policing, human rights violations, and strained relations between border communities and security agencies. In some cases, aggressive enforcement strategies may criminalize vulnerable populations rather than addressing the root causes of border insecurity. Additionally, the theory has been criticized for assuming a direct causal relationship between disorder and serious crime without sufficient empirical evidence in complex environments like international borders. Cross-border crime is often transnational, highly organized, and technologically sophisticated, which may go beyond the explanatory scope of environmental disorder alone. Despite these limitations, the Broken Windows Theory remains useful in understanding border management strategies in Nigeria. It highlights the importance of maintaining order, strengthening visible enforcement, reducing corruption, and improving surveillance systems in border areas. When applied alongside broader socio-economic and institutional approaches, the theory helps explain how early signs of neglect in border governance can escalate into serious cross-border criminal threats if not properly addressed.

Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusion

This study examined border management strategies and their implications for cross-border crimes, with particular attention to the Nigerian context and border communities such as Cross River State. The discussion revealed that border management is a critical component of national security, encompassing immigration control, customs enforcement, surveillance systems, and inter-agency coordination. These mechanisms are designed to regulate the movement of people and goods while preventing illicit activities such as smuggling, human trafficking, arms proliferation, drug trafficking, and other forms of transnational organized crime.

Findings from the review indicate that while border management strategies have recorded some level of success—such as interceptions of arms, explosives, and criminal networks—they remain constrained by several structural and operational challenges. These include porous borders, inadequate infrastructure, corruption among security personnel, overlapping institutional mandates, and weak inter-agency collaboration. In many cases, these challenges reduce the effectiveness of enforcement efforts and create opportunities for criminal networks to thrive across borders.

The study also highlights that certain policy measures, such as border closures and heavy militarization, have produced mixed outcomes. While they may temporarily reduce the flow of illegal goods, they often disrupt legitimate trade, increase unemployment in border communities, and strain diplomatic relations with neighbouring countries. This demonstrates that border management strategies have both intended and unintended consequences that must be carefully balanced.

Furthermore, the study establishes that cross-border crimes are not only driven by weak enforcement but also by socio-economic conditions such as poverty, unemployment, and marginalization

of border communities. These conditions make local populations vulnerable to recruitment by criminal networks, thereby complicating enforcement efforts. Overall, the study concludes that effective border management requires a holistic approach that integrates security, development, governance, and regional cooperation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made to improve border management and reduce cross-border crimes:

1. **Strengthening Inter-Agency Collaboration:** There is a need for improved coordination among the Nigeria Immigration Service, Nigeria Customs Service, military, and other security agencies. Clear delineation of roles and integrated operations will reduce duplication of efforts and enhance efficiency.
2. **Adoption of Modern Technology:** The government should invest in advanced border surveillance systems such as drones, biometric identification, electronic tracking systems, CCTV networks, and automated scanners to improve monitoring and detection of illegal activities.
3. **Anti-Corruption Measures:** Strict accountability mechanisms must be enforced to curb corruption among border officials. Improved remuneration, regular monitoring, and disciplinary actions will help reduce bribery and collusion with criminals.
4. **Community Engagement:** Border communities should be actively involved in security governance through community policing and intelligence-sharing frameworks. This will enhance trust and improve information flow between locals and security agencies.
5. **Regional Cooperation:** Nigeria should strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation with neighbouring countries such as Cameroon, Benin, and Niger through joint patrols, intelligence sharing, and harmonized border policies under ECOWAS frameworks.
6. **Socio-Economic Development:** Government should invest in border communities through job creation, infrastructure development, and social services to reduce vulnerability to criminal recruitment.

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