

Cross-Border Crime and Trade in Sub-Sahara Africa: Mitigating the Outcome in the Ekok Nfum Nigeria and Cameroon Transnational Trade

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Article History

Received: 30 / 04 / 2026

Accepted: 01 / 06 / 2026

Published: 15 / 06 / 2026

Abstract:

Background: Cross-border crime poses significant threats to national security and economic development in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Ekok-Nfum border between Cameroon and Nigeria represents a critical case study, where porous borders facilitate illicit trade, human trafficking, and arms smuggling despite existing security protocols. This study examines the mechanisms through which cross-border crime can be mitigated to permit legitimate transnational trade.

Methods: A descriptive survey design was employed using stratified and cluster sampling techniques. Data were collected from 300 respondents, including border officials, traders, and security personnel, through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The study utilised the theories of Transnationalism, Regulation, and Ecological Systems as analytical frameworks. Data analysis employed descriptive statistics and chi-square hypothesis testing.

Results: Findings indicate that cross-border crime significantly threatens transnational security ($\chi^2 = 157.255$, $p < 0.001$), with 69% of respondents confirming the severity of threats, including arms trafficking, drug smuggling, and human trafficking. Customs officials play a significant role in mitigating insecurity ($\chi^2 = 60.017$, $p < 0.001$), though their effectiveness is constrained by inadequate resources, corruption, and conflicting local and national taxation interests. Trans-governmental enforcement networks are essential for cross-border collaboration ($\chi^2 = 50.354$, $p < 0.001$), with informal cooperation mechanisms proving more effective than formal treaty-based approaches.

Conclusion: The study recommends enhanced customs autonomy, community-based border development, and informal trans-governmental enforcement networks to mitigate crime while facilitating legitimate trade. Economic development in border regions remains crucial for reducing criminal incentives.

Keywords: Cross-border crime, transnational trade, border security, Cameroon-Nigeria, customs enforcement, trans-governmental networks, Ekok-Nfum, illicit international political economy.

How to Cite in APA format: Etta, M. R. & Arrey, A. J. (2026). Cross-Border Crime and Trade in Sub-Sahara Africa: Mitigating the Outcome in the Ekok Nfum Nigeria and Cameroon Transnational Trade. *IRASS Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(6), 51-66.

Introduction

The phenomenon of cross-border crime represents one of the most pressing security challenges confronting Sub-Saharan Africa in the contemporary era. Governments across the region have consistently prioritised national security, yet the porous nature of international boundaries continues to facilitate criminal activities that undermine governance, economic development, and human security (Adeola & Fayomi, 2012; Osimen et al., 2017). The Cameroon-Nigeria border, particularly the Ekok-Nfum transnational trade corridor, exemplifies these challenges, situated within two distinct regional economic communities, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS/CEMAC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), each with divergent protocols on the free movement of persons and goods.

The historical context of cross-border crime in West Africa dates to the 1970s, initially manifesting as small-scale smuggling. This is an open access article under the [CC BY-NC](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) license

by individual traders and businesspersons (de Andrés, 2008). However, these activities have evolved dramatically, assuming alarming proportions with the advent of human trafficking, narcotics peddling, and arms smuggling by transnational criminal syndicates (Boister, 2003; Ering, 2011). The outbreak of intra-state conflicts, beginning with Liberia in 1989, introduced additional dimensions, including mercenary activities, small arms trafficking, and the recruitment of child soldiers (de Andrés, 2008). The contemporary landscape is further complicated by the Cameroon Anglophone separatist conflict and the Biafran separatist movement, which have transformed the Ekok-Nfum corridor into a conduit for illicit arms and ammunition trafficking (Joseph & Basse, 2019).

The theoretical significance of this study lies in its application of three complementary frameworks: Transnationalism (Bourne, 2016), Regulation Theory (Newbery, 1999), and



Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These frameworks collectively illuminate how cross-border criminal networks operate across national boundaries, how regulatory mechanisms can be optimised, and how environmental factors influence criminal behaviour at border communities. The Ecological Systems Theory is particularly relevant, as the porous nature of the Ekok-Nfum border determines the behavioural patterns of businesspersons who depend on trans-border trade as a cultural inheritance from their forefathers.

Despite the implementation of various security measures, including customs outposts, integrated border enforcement teams, and the Cameroon Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR), cross-border crime continues to escalate geometrically. Smuggling of small arms, luxury vehicles, illicit fuel, rice, and agricultural products persists unabated, raising fundamental questions about the efficacy of existing security architectures. This study, therefore, investigates the extent to which cross-border crime can be mitigated to permit legitimate transnational trade between Cameroon and Nigeria, contributing to both national integration and external relations within their respective sub-regions.

The research addresses three specific objectives: (1) examining the extent to which cross-border crime threatens transnational security in border management; (2) assessing the role of customs officials in mitigating cross-border insecurity; and (3) evaluating the trans-governmental enforcement networks needed to secure cross-border collaboration. These objectives are operationalised through corresponding hypotheses tested using chi-square analysis, with findings indicating significant relationships between all three variables and border security outcomes.

The significance of this study extends beyond academic contribution to practical policy implications. For policymakers charged with regional integration, the research sounds a cautionary note that free movement protocols must be accompanied by robust security frameworks to protect national security and external relations. For customs services, the work seeks to enhance operational effectiveness while educating officers on adaptive practices in conflict situations. For scholars of regional integration, the study demonstrates that national integration, while necessary for sub-regional unity, remains insufficient without parallel security guarantees for individual states.

Geographically, the study focuses on the land border between Cameroon and Nigeria, the "giants" of their respective sub-regional blocs, specifically the Ekok-Nfum corridor in Manyu Division, Southwest Region of Cameroon, and Ikom Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. The temporal scope spans 2018–2025, capturing the period from the escalation of the Anglophone conflict through the study's conclusion. This timeframe is particularly relevant as 2018 marked the intensification of armed conflict between Anglophone separatists and the Government of Cameroon, with Nigeria serving as the primary route for arms and ammunition trafficking.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Conceptualising Cross-Border Crime

The nature of cross-border crime has undergone a rapid transformation due to technological advances, network expansion, and the loosening of travel restrictions (Boister, 2003). Transnational crimes are defined as offences with actual or potential effects across national borders, or intra-state crimes that offend fundamental values of the international community (Boister,

2003). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2005) characterises transnational crime as involving individuals in multiple countries maintaining effective systems of operation and communication to perform criminal transactions repeatedly.

The definitional complexity of "trans-border crime" stems from its multifaceted nature, encompassing illegal activities carried out across national and international borders by individuals and groups for financial, commercial, socio-political, or religious purposes (Asiwaju, 1992; Ering, 2011). These activities include human trafficking, money laundering, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, cross-border terrorism, illegal oil bunkering, illicit diamond trafficking, corruption, and commercial fraud. The criminal networks involved demonstrate remarkable flexibility, adapting their forms and modes of operation to exploit jurisdictional gaps and enforcement weaknesses (UN, 2005).

In the West African context, criminal enterprises employ techniques similar to legitimate traders, particularly within lineage-based societies where successful entrepreneurs recruit junior relatives into illegal dealings (de Andrés, 2008). This organisational structure has facilitated the expansion from localised smuggling to sophisticated transnational operations involving narcotics, human trafficking, and cybercrime. The 2004 UN Secretary-General's Report identified major cross-border problems, including security sector weakening, roadblock proliferation, youth unemployment, environmental degradation, and mass refugee movements, factors that remain relevant in the Cameroon-Nigeria context today.

Border Management and Security Architecture

Border management constitutes a critical dimension of national security architecture, defining territorial boundaries that must be secured for internal stability and sovereignty (Willie & Samuel, 2020). Effective border management determines a nation's capacity to prevent prohibited persons and harmful substances from entering while facilitating legitimate trade and movement. However, the post-Cold War globalisation era has introduced new vulnerabilities, as technological advancements enable criminal businesses and terrorist operations to traverse national borders with unprecedented ease (Straw & Glennie, 2012).

The Cameroon-Nigeria border exemplifies these challenges. Despite the presence of multiple security agencies, including the Police Force, Customs Service, Immigration Service, and the BIR, the border remains porous, allowing cross-border criminal activities to flourish (Osimen et al., 2017). The artificial boundaries created by colonial partition cut across ethnic groups with shared ancestry, intermarriage patterns, and cultural practices, complicating enforcement efforts. The northeastern border regions are particularly vulnerable due to difficult terrain, lower literacy rates, higher poverty, and elevated unemployment, conditions that explain the highest frequency of border-related crimes, including Boko Haram insurgency and separatist conflicts (Joseph & Bassey, 2019).

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) represents a particularly acute threat. An estimated 100 million of the 640 million small guns circulating globally are found in Africa, with 30 million in Sub-Saharan Africa and 8 million in West Africa alone (Abdulkareem, 2012; Adetula, 2015). The Nigerian Customs Service reported intercepting small arms and ammunition worth over 4.3 billion naira (US\$34.1 million) in the first six months of 2002, with significant quantities entering through borders with Benin, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon (de Andrés,

2008). These weapons not only fuel conflicts but also hinder development efforts and exacerbate socio-economic inequalities.

The Role of Customs in Insecure Borderlands

The relationship between customs administration and cross-border trade in insecure areas has been analysed through three main approaches: general customs reform contexts, sociological end-user experiences, and direct examination of civil servant practices (Golub, 2015; Cantens et al., 2015; Chalfin, 2004, 2008, 2010). The weakness of border enforcement is identified as a primary cause of informal cross-border trade, which accounts for up to half of economic activity in developing countries (La Porta & Shleifer, 2014). In the Cameroon-Nigeria context, informal cross-border trade serves as the most important income-generating activity, with major impacts on poverty reduction despite significant revenue losses to national treasuries (Amin & Hoppe, 2013; Ayadi et al., 2014; Brenton et al., 2014; Bensassi et al., 2016).

Anthropological and geographical approaches highlight the network effects of informal trade and the hybrid governance models that emerge (Walther, 2009, 2015; Titeca & Flynn, 2014). Informal trade is often tolerated by authorities to ensure local income generation, representing a local response to distrusted national institutions. Taxation levels are frequently negotiated locally rather than uniformly applied, creating pragmatic arrangements that balance state authority with economic survival (Roitman, 2007; Reyntjens, 2014).

In fragile borderlands, customs officers adopt distinctive roles beyond revenue collection. They serve as interface-negotiators and peacemakers between traders and authorities, granting legitimacy to the state following conflict outbreaks (Cantens, 2012, 2013, 2015). Customs outposts function as service providers and intelligence-gathering agencies, sometimes providing local populations with telephone and electricity services to attract cooperation. Officers frequently benefit from informal agreements with headquarters granting flexibility in tax burden assessment, meeting regularly with importers to negotiate acceptable rates and avoid smuggling or corruption.

However, this autonomy creates tensions between local and national taxation interests. Customs, as a national administration, must balance central authority with local pragmatism. Political authorities at municipal and governorate levels may levy additional taxes, creating overlapping claims on traders. Research indicates that traders often trust customs more than local authorities because customs procedures are more consistent and cooperative, though local authorities may be described as more "resourceful" in tax extraction (Cantens & Raballand, 2016).

Trans-Governmental Enforcement Networks

The emergence of trans-governmental enforcement networks (TGENs) represents an innovative response to the limitations of traditional border enforcement. These networks involve informal, horizontal associations of government officials working across borders to manage shared security challenges, extending beyond the trans-governmental networks (TGNs) identified by Keohane and Nye (1974) to include operational enforcement capabilities (Slaughter, 1997, 2009; Andreas & Nadelmann, 2008).

The US-Canada border provides instructive examples through the Integrated Border Enforcement Teams (IBETs) and the Shiprider program. IBETs originated in 1996 as locally driven

initiatives between the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), US Coast Guard, and border officers, expanding to 23 teams across 15 locations following the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Public Safety, 2015b; Watson, 2009). The Shiprider program, initiated in 2005, achieved the innovative cross-designation of officers, RCMP officers as US Customs officers and US Coast Guard as RCMP supernumerary constables, enabling seamless enforcement across jurisdictional boundaries (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2015).

Operation MYGALE (2016) demonstrated the potential of large-scale transnational operations, involving 700 police officers from multiple Canadian and American agencies. The operation seized \$13.5 million worth of tobacco, \$3 million in US cash, \$1.5 million in Canadian cash, and over 800 kg of cocaine, arresting 60 individuals with organised crime connections (Feith, 2016; Thibault, 2016). These cases illustrate how illicit economies stimulate new enforcement arrangements that transform sovereignty through additive rather than diminishing approaches, mutually empowering governmental agencies through collaborative philosophy rather than ceding authority.

The Cameroon-Nigeria context presents distinct challenges for such networks. The countries belong to different regional economic communities (CEMAC and ECOWAS) with divergent protocols on free movement. The Anglophone conflict and Biafran separatist movements create additional security complications. However, the fundamental logic of TGENs, informal operational flexibility, cross-designation of officers, and intelligence-sharing remain applicable. The study finds that creating cross-border networks must adhere to domestic legal strictures if prosecutions are to succeed, while empowering foreign officials to conduct operations in partner jurisdictions (Legrand, 2015, 2019; Aydinli & Yön, 2011).

Illicit International Political Economy (IIPE)

The theoretical framework of Illicit International Political Economy (IIPE) provides crucial insights into how criminal enterprises exploit structural asymmetries across borders. Andreas (2004, 2015) defines the illicit global economy as clandestine cross-border flows of people, goods, money, and information unauthorised by sending or receiving countries. Passas (1999) argues that these enterprises flourish due to "criminogenic asymmetries", structural discrepancies, mismatches, and inequalities in economic, legal, political, and cultural realms that generate demand for illicit commodities and reduce law enforcement capacity.

The estimated global value of illicit trade and transnational criminal activities was approximately \$650 billion in 2011, rising to \$2.2 trillion annually by 2019, when including money laundering (World Economic Forum, 2015, 2019). These dimensions are particularly relevant for the Cameroon-Nigeria corridor, where differences in taxation rates, regulatory frameworks, and enforcement capacities create systematic opportunities for smuggling. The informal cross-border trade in consumer goods, textiles, flour, vegetable oil, fuel, and cigarettes represents the most heavily taxed and therefore most smuggled commodities, though high-value goods including gold and weapons also transit through these routes.

The persistence of illicit cross-border activities paradoxically creates incentives for more interventionist state responses rather than retreat. As Andreas (2017) argues, suggestions of state decline are "overly alarmist and misleading"; instead, illicit economies pressure states to innovate new

transnational processes, capacities, and policies. This dynamic is evident in the Cameroon-Nigeria context, where the geometric increase in cross-border crime despite existing security measures demands fundamentally reimagined collaborative approaches.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs three complementary theoretical frameworks to analyse cross-border crime and trade at the Ekok-Nfum border.

Transnationalism Theory (Bourne, 2016): Randolph Bourne's concept of transnationalism, originally developed in the early twentieth century, addresses the diminishing relevance of nation-state boundaries amid increasing interconnection. The theory emphasises how immigrants and cross-border actors build multi-stranded social links connecting communities of origin and host countries, challenging traditional citizenship and national identity concepts (Rosemberg et al., 2016). Applied to border security, transnationalism explains how criminal organisations exploit weak governance and porous borders to operate across jurisdictions, while also suggesting that legitimate cross-border networks can be mobilised for security cooperation. The theory is particularly relevant for understanding how ethnic and cultural ties across the Cameroon-Nigeria border facilitate both criminal activities and potential collaborative solutions.

Regulation Theory (Newbery, 1999): This theory examines why regulation emerges, which actors contribute to its development, and typical patterns of interaction between regulatory actors. It assumes that regulatory authority actions are motivated by public interest, though public choice theorists critique this assumption, arguing that regulatory capture often occurs without altering formal regulations by weakening enforcement (Newbery, 1999). In the border context, regulation theory illuminates how customs and security agencies can optimise trade management through adaptive taxation and enforcement, while acknowledging the risks of corruption and capture by local interests. The theory suggests that improved regulation of goods and services movement can enhance transnational trade compared to unregulated border exchange.

Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979): Bronfenbrenner's framework posits that individual development is influenced by interconnected environmental systems ranging from immediate surroundings (microsystem) to broad societal structures (macrosystem). The five systems, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, represent different levels of environmental influence on behaviour. For this study, the macrosystem is most relevant: government policies and cultural contexts determine behavioural patterns at border communities. The porous nature of the Ekok-Nfum border and the long-standing trading culture inherited from ancestors create an environment where cross-border trade is normative, and where the physical and social ecology shapes both legitimate and criminal economic activities. The theory's limitation, difficulty in establishing direct causal relationships between systems and outcomes, must be acknowledged, as not all individuals in border communities engage in criminal behaviour despite shared environmental pressures.

Synthesis of Theoretical Frameworks

The integration of Transnationalism, Regulation, and Ecological Systems theories provides a comprehensive analytical lens for understanding cross-border crime dynamics at the Ekok-Nfum corridor. Transnationalism explains the social networks and

cultural continuities that facilitate both legitimate trade and criminal activities across the artificial colonial boundary. The theory's emphasis on multi-stranded social links connecting communities of origin and host countries illuminates how ethnic ties, intermarriage patterns, and shared cultural practices create social capital that criminal networks exploit (Rosemberg et al., 2016). Simultaneously, these same networks provide foundations for collaborative security arrangements that leverage community trust and local knowledge.

Regulation Theory addresses the institutional mechanisms through which border governance can be optimised. The theory's focus on why regulation emerges and how regulatory actors interact helps explain the tensions between formal customs procedures and informal adaptive practices observed at the Ekok-Nfum border. The finding that 67% of respondents agree local tax negotiation can improve efficiency, while 66% recognize corruption risks, reflects the central regulatory dilemma: balancing standardisation with flexibility, central authority with local autonomy. Newbery's (1999) framework suggests that effective regulation must account for information asymmetries between regulators and the regulated, which in the border context manifests as customs officers' superior knowledge of local conditions versus headquarters' access to broader policy frameworks.

Ecological Systems Theory provides the environmental context within which these transnational and regulatory dynamics unfold. The macrosystem level, encompassing government policies, cultural norms, and historical legacies, shapes the border environment where microsystem interactions (trader-customs officer encounters, community-security force relations) occur. The chronosystem dimension captures how the 2018 escalation of the Anglophone conflict transformed the border ecology, creating new stressors and adaptation requirements. The 69% agreement that lack of infrastructure and basic services aggravates insecurity reflects the exosystem influence of resource allocation decisions made far from the border itself, yet profoundly affecting local security outcomes.

The theoretical synthesis suggests that effective border security interventions must operate across all system levels simultaneously: strengthening microsystem trader-officer relationships through training and community engagement; improving mesosystem coordination between customs, police, and military; addressing exosystem resource deficiencies through infrastructure investment; and reforming macrosystem policies to align national regulations with local realities. This multi-level approach, informed by the three theoretical frameworks, underpins the study's recommendations for integrated border management reform.

Methodology

Research Design and Approach

This study employed a descriptive survey design, selected for its capacity to capture opinions and experiences from multiple key actors involved in cross-border trade and security. The design integrates quantitative questionnaire data with qualitative interview insights, enabling both statistical generalisation and contextual understanding of border dynamics. The mixed-methods approach is particularly appropriate for studying complex security phenomena where numerical patterns require qualitative interpretation to reveal underlying mechanisms (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

Study Area

The study focuses on the Ekok-Nfum land border between Cameroon and Nigeria, located in Manyu Division, Southwest Region of Cameroon, and Ikom Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria. This corridor was selected due to its strategic significance as a transnational trade route between two major sub-regional economic communities, CEMAC and ECOWAS, and its current vulnerability to armed conflict. The Anglophone separatist conflict in Cameroon, escalating since 2018, has transformed this border into a primary route for arms and ammunition trafficking, while the Biafran separatist movement in Nigeria adds additional security complications.

Geographically, the region encompasses the western Sudan-Sahel transition zone, with rainfall ranging from 250mm in northern reaches to 1,250mm in southern areas. The terrain includes semiarid plateau, scrub vegetation, and mixed savanna grasslands. Culturally, the area is dominated by Niger-Congo language groups with complex ethnic mosaics, where colonial boundaries artificially divided communities with shared ancestry and intermarriage patterns. This cultural continuity facilitates both legitimate trade and criminal movement across the border.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised financial administrators, finance service staff, human resource personnel, businesspersons, legal personnel, and other stakeholders in Manyu Division and Ikom Local Government Area. A sample of 300 respondents was selected using stratified random sampling combined with cluster sampling techniques to ensure representation across different stakeholder categories. Additionally, 10 respondents who provided open-ended questionnaire responses were selected through quota sampling for qualitative analysis.

The sample size of 300 was determined to be appropriate for detecting significant relationships in chi-square analysis, providing sufficient statistical power for hypothesis testing with multiple response categories. Stratification ensured proportional representation of administrators, legal services, human resources, business operators, and other professionals (20% each, n=60 per category), while clustering allowed efficient data collection across geographically dispersed border communities.

Data Collection Instruments

Data collection utilised structured questionnaires divided into four sections: Section A collected demographic information (gender, age, education, work experience, career orientation); Section B addressed cross-border crime as a threat to transnational security; Section C examined the role of customs officials in mitigating insecurity; and Section D evaluated trans-governmental enforcement networks. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree=5, Agree=4, Neutral=3, Disagree=2, Strongly Disagree=1) for standardised response measurement.

Semi-structured interview guides with open-ended questions supplemented the questionnaires, enabling deeper exploration of respondent experiences and perspectives. The interview protocol covered three thematic areas corresponding to the research objectives: cross-border crime threats, customs roles, and trans-governmental networks. Direct observation of border activities provided additional contextual data.

Validity and Reliability

Instrument validity was established through three mechanisms: face validity (peer review and supervisor appraisal),

content validity (supervisor verification of relevance to study objectives), and construct validity (alignment between Likert scale items and theoretical constructs). Reliability was assessed through pilot testing and Cronbach's alpha coefficient calculation, yielding excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.99$) across all four questionnaire sections. This coefficient substantially exceeds the conventional threshold of 0.70, indicating robust instrument reliability (Field, 2018).

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher obtained written authorisation from the University of Buea's Department of Public Law and Public Administration, followed by permissions from heads of relevant services. Questionnaires were administered using the Direct Delivery Technique (DDT) to ensure 100% return rates, with the researcher providing guidance on completion where necessary. Interviews were arranged in advance, with informed consent obtained and confidentiality assured. Data collection occurred across multiple border communities, requiring movement between camps and administrative centres.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) and inferential statistics (chi-square tests for hypothesis testing). The chi-square test was selected for its appropriateness with categorical Likert scale data and large sample sizes. The formula applied was:

$$\chi^2 = \sum [(O - E)^2 / E]$$

Where O = observed frequencies and E = expected frequencies. Degrees of freedom were calculated as $(r-1)(c-1)$, where r = number of rows and c = number of columns. With $\alpha = 0.005$ and $df = 24$ (3 response categories \times 13 items), the critical value was 45.559.

Qualitative data from interviews were analysed using thematic content analysis, with responses coded according to the three research themes and sub-themes emerging from the data. Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings followed a convergent parallel design, with both data sources contributing to a comprehensive interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation. Respondents were informed that data would be used for academic purposes only, with no individual identification in reports. Authorisation documents from the university department were presented to institutional gatekeepers. No deception was employed, and privacy was respected throughout data collection. All consulted materials were properly referenced to avoid plagiarism.

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework integrated quantitative and qualitative data through a convergent parallel design, enabling triangulation across methods and sources. Quantitative analysis employed descriptive statistics to characterise response distributions and chi-square goodness-of-fit tests to examine whether observed response patterns deviated significantly from expected equal distributions. The chi-square test was selected for its robustness with categorical data and appropriateness for large sample sizes, though the assumption of independent observations

was partially compromised by cluster sampling, acknowledged as a limitation.

Qualitative analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach, progressing through six phases: familiarisation with interview data, initial coding, theme searching, theme reviewing, theme defining, and report writing. Coding was conducted manually to ensure close engagement with the data, with themes developed inductively from respondent language rather than imposed from theoretical frameworks. However, the research objectives provided sensitising concepts that directed initial attention toward security threats, customs practices, and collaboration mechanisms.

Data integration occurred at the interpretation stage, with quantitative patterns informing qualitative theme development and qualitative insights explaining quantitative anomalies. For instance, the high neutral response rate on certain items (up to 4% in some cases, exceeding the 1% average) prompted qualitative exploration

of respondent hesitation, revealing concerns about reprisal or political sensitivity that structured silence as a strategic response.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The sample of 300 respondents demonstrated balanced gender distribution (51% male, 49% female) and age representation skewed toward younger adults: 17% below 20 years, 33% aged 21–30 years, 33% aged 31–40 years, 10% aged 41–50 years, and 7% above 50 years. Educational attainment was distributed as 10% certificate holders, 33% diploma holders, 33% undergraduates, 10% post-graduates, and 14% with other qualifications. Work experience was relatively evenly spread: 23% with less than 1 year, 23% with 1–3 years, 24% with 4–7 years, 20% with 8–11 years, and 10% with over 11 years. Career orientation was equally distributed across administrators, legal services, human resources, legal personnel, and other professionals (20% each).

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n=300)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	152	50.7
	Female	148	49.3
Age (years)	Below 20	50	16.7
	21–30	100	33.3
	31–40	100	33.3
	41–50	30	10.0
	Above 50	20	6.7
Education	Certificate	30	10.0
	Diploma	100	33.3
	Undergraduate	100	33.3
	Post-graduate	30	10.0
	Other	40	13.3
Work Experience	<1 year	70	23.3
	1–3 years	70	23.3
	4–7 years	70	23.3
	8–11 years	60	20.0
	>11 years	30	10.0
Career Orientation	Administrator	60	20.0
	Legal Service	60	20.0
	Human Resource	60	20.0
	Legal Personnel	60	20.0
	Other	60	20.0

Source: Field survey, 2025

Cross-Border Crime as a Threat to Transnational Security

Analysis of questionnaire responses reveals a strong consensus that cross-border crime poses significant threats to transnational security. The overall response rate showed 30% strongly agreeing and 39% agreeing with threat indicators, while 19% disagreed, 11% strongly disagreed, and 1% remained neutral, yielding a 69% affirmative response rate across all items.

Specific threat indicators achieved the following agreement rates: fragmentation of markets and colonial border legacies creating ethnic tensions (67%); porous borders allowing human trafficking, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and money laundering despite security agency efforts (68%); intensification of armed conflicts including Boko Haram, Anglophone separatist, and Biafran conflicts (69%); lack of infrastructure and basic services creating underdevelopment-insecurity cycles (69%); worsening economic crisis enabling trafficking, fraud, and internet scams

(68%); trans-border armed robbery and arms proliferation endangering national security (70%); smuggling of cocoa, timber, ivory, petroleum, diamonds, and gold through illegal routes (71%); lack of monitoring mechanisms undermining governance and rule of law (69%); organized criminal groups using technology to exploit legislative differences (67%); government non-proactivity and inadequate equipment/manpower (69%); criminal damage to financial institutions and economic distortion through corruption (69%); expansion into cybercrime and sophisticated operations

(67%); and contraband trafficking haunting local industries and creating informal exchange centers (68%).

Interview data corroborated these findings, with respondents identifying artificial borders cutting across ethnic groups, lack of infrastructure, economic crisis, and weak state capacity as primary factors enabling crime. The convergence of quantitative and qualitative data strengthens confidence in the finding that cross-border crime represents a substantial, multifaceted threat to Cameroon-Nigeria border security.

Table 2: Cross-Border Crime Threat Indicators, Response Distribution (n=300)

Threat Indicator	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	N (%)	Affirmative (%)
Market fragmentation & colonial border legacies	40.0	45.0	10.0	4.0	1.0	85.0
Porous borders enabling multiple criminal activities	28.7	40.7	21.0	9.0	0.7	69.3
Armed conflict intensification (Boko Haram, separatists)	25.7	38.3	23.0	12.0	1.0	64.0
Lack of infrastructure and basic services	29.7	39.0	18.0	12.3	1.0	68.7
Economic crisis enabling trafficking and fraud	25.7	37.7	21.3	12.3	3.0	63.3
Armed robbery and arms proliferation	26.0	38.7	21.7	11.3	2.3	64.7
Smuggling of high-value commodities	27.0	38.0	22.0	11.7	1.3	65.0
Lack of monitoring undermines governance	26.7	36.7	24.0	11.3	1.3	63.3
Organised crime	27.0	40.3	20.7	10.7	1.3	67.3

exploiting technology						
Government non-proactivity and inadequate capacity	31.3	36.3	20.7	10.7	1.3	67.7
Criminal damage to financial institutions	27.3	36.7	22.0	12.7	1.3	64.0
Expansion into cybercrime	26.7	37.3	20.7	13.7	1.7	64.0
Contraband haunting local industries	29.3	38.7	19.0	12.3	0.7	68.0
OVERALL	29.9	38.6	19.2	11.9	0.4	68.6

Note: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, N = Neutral. Affirmative = SA + A

Note: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, N = Neutral. Affirmative = SA + A

Source: Field survey, 2025

4.3 The Role of Customs Officials in Mitigating Insecurity

The second research objective examined customs officials' roles in mitigating cross-border insecurity, achieving a 65% overall affirmative response rate (28% strongly agree, 37% agree). Key findings indicate that customs officials operate within complex institutional environments where formal mandates intersect with informal adaptive practices.

The weakness of border enforcement was identified by 63% of respondents as a primary cause of informal cross-border trade, which simultaneously challenges state authority and provides crucial income generation for local populations (62%). Informal trade represents a local response to distrusted national authorities, serving as a means for negotiating taxation levels and enabling non-state institutional regulation of border activities (64%). Smugglers of heavily taxed consumer goods, textiles, flour, vegetable oil, fuel, cigarettes, constitute the majority of informal traders, though some also transport high-value goods, including weapons and drugs, using flexible transport means (65%).

Customs strategy focuses on locating at trade hubs where commodity flows converge, with insecurity and army patrols in "no-go zones" forcing traders to remain on frequented roads (64%). Some security solutions, such as border closures, are considered extreme, justified as protection against terrorist attacks, but potentially counterproductive (66%). Customs outposts between borders and cities, located near informal trade routes and military camps, play roles in state control policy, sometimes tolerating petty smuggling to avoid riots or political instability (67%).

An explicit policy of building customs posts providing services (telephone, electricity) has shifted the mission toward intelligence-gathering rather than pure revenue collection (64%). Customs officers serve as interface-negotiators and peacemakers between traders and authorities, granting state legitimacy post-conflict (66%). Informal agreements with headquarters allow flexibility in tax burden assessment, with regular meetings between customs and importers to establish acceptable rates and reduce corruption (66%).

Local tax negotiation, while potentially encouraging corruption, can improve efficiency in contexts with limited documentation and transparently uniform clearance processes (67%). However, conflicts arise between local and national taxation schemes, with customs operating pragmatically under central authority while local political authorities levy additional taxes (67%). Geographic proximity between taxpayers and spenders may encourage accountability, though elite connections can facilitate patronage and corruption (66%). Ultimately, customs plays a political role by tailoring tax burdens for stability, with procedures used as inputs for local tax assessments. Traders often trust customs more than local authorities due to consistent procedures (68%).

Interview respondents emphasised that customs outposts provide intelligence, tolerate petty smuggling to maintain stability, and negotiate tax burdens directly with local actors. The dual role of revenue collection and political stabilisation creates inherent tensions that require careful management.

Table 3: Customs Role Indicators, Response Distribution (n=300)

Customs Role Indicator	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	N (%)	Affirmative (%)
Weak enforcement is causing informal trade	29.0	33.7	20.3	16.7	0.3	62.7
Informal trade as a poverty reduction	20.3	42.0	19.0	16.7	2.0	62.3
Local response to distrusted authorities	27.0	36.7	23.3	11.7	1.3	63.7
Smuggling of heavily taxed consumer goods	27.3	36.7	22.3	12.0	1.7	64.0
Customs strategy at trade hubs	30.0	36.3	22.0	11.3	0.3	66.3
Border closures as extreme solutions	29.3	37.7	21.0	11.7	0.3	67.0
Outposts tolerating petty smuggling	29.3	36.0	21.0	11.0	4.0	65.3
Intelligence-gathering mission shift	28.0	38.3	21.7	11.7	0.3	66.3
Interface-negotiator and peacemaker role	31.0	35.7	22.0	10.3	1.0	66.7
Local tax negotiation reduces corruption	31.0	36.7	22.0	10.0	0.3	67.7
Local-national taxation conflicts	29.0	37.0	20.7	12.0	1.3	66.0
Proximity encouraging accountability	31.3	37.0	20.0	11.3	0.3	68.3
Customs	31.3	37.0	20.0	11.3	0.3	68.3

tailoring tax for stability						
OVERALL	28.6	36.9	21.4	12.2	0.9	65.5

Source: Field survey, 2025

Trans-Governmental Enforcement Networks

The third research objective evaluated trans-governmental enforcement networks needed for cross-border collaboration, achieving a 69% overall affirmative response rate. Findings indicate strong support for innovative, informal collaborative mechanisms beyond traditional treaty-based approaches.

Criminal enterprises exploit jurisdictional and resource constraints to generate vast profits in illicit markets worth an estimated \$2.2 trillion globally (67%). These "darker dimensions" of globalisation are difficult to track, with no single agency monitoring global illicit economies (68%). Structural discrepancies across economic, legal, political, and cultural realms drive international criminal enterprise by fueling demand and reducing enforcement capacity (69%). Modern technology and digital economies further catalyse illicit supply chains spanning continents (69%).

Against this backdrop, 68% of respondents agreed that governments must network their military and law enforcement establishments, with state agencies increasingly mobilising beyond borders. These networks share data and intelligence, pursue prosecutions, and establish cross-border collaborations (70%). Illicit markets drive states to innovate new transnational processes and policies, with enforcement networks comprising government and non-state actors concerned with border security policy (69%).

The persistence of illicit activities creates pressure for more interventionist, activist states that extend beyond territoriality to enforce laws (69%). Trans-governmental enforcement networks are increasingly expansive, with officials exchanging information and coordinating activity to combat global crime (67%). Informal operational flexibility, shunning off formal treaties, permits greater capacity to interdict illicit activities through rapid information exchange and coordination (69%).

The maturing of these networks indicates that illicit economies stimulate new enforcement arrangements, transforming sovereignty through additive approaches, mutually empowering agencies rather than diminishing states (69%). However, unlike policy collaborations, enforcement networks must adhere to domestic legal strictures for successful prosecutions, empowering foreign officials to conduct operations in partner jurisdictions (67%). Despite cooperation, members maintain national identities and cultural differences, with tasks defined by national agendas rather than transnational identities (68%).

Interview data reinforced these findings, with respondents emphasising the need for coordination of state efforts, community-based solutions, and networking of enforcement establishments. The informal genesis of successful networks, exemplified by US-Canada IBETs and Shiprider, suggests that Cameroon-Nigeria collaboration should begin with local operational partnerships rather than top-down treaty negotiations.

Table 4: Trans-Governmental Network Indicators, Response Distribution (n=300)

Network Indicator	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	N (%)	Affirmative (%)
Criminal enterprises exploiting jurisdictional gaps	28.7	38.0	21.3	10.7	1.3	66.7
Global illicit economy (\$2.2 trillion)	29.7	38.7	18.7	12.7	0.3	68.3
Criminogenic asymmetries driving crime	30.3	38.3	18.7	12.7	0.0	68.7
Technology catalysing illicit markets	31.3	37.3	18.7	12.3	0.3	68.7
Need for government networking	30.0	38.3	19.0	12.3	0.3	68.3
Networks sharing data and intelligence	30.7	40.0	18.0	11.3	0.0	70.7
Illicit markets driving state	30.7	40.0	18.0	11.3	0.0	70.7

innovation						
Pressure for interventionist states	30.0	38.7	19.0	11.3	0.0	68.7
Expansive trans-governmental networks	28.3	38.7	20.7	11.7	0.7	67.0
Informal operational flexibility	30.7	38.7	18.0	11.3	0.3	69.3
Additive sovereignty approach	31.0	38.3	19.3	11.0	0.3	69.3
Adherence to domestic legal strictures	28.3	38.3	19.7	13.3	0.3	66.7
Maintenance of national identities	29.3	38.7	19.0	12.3	0.3	68.0
OVERALL	30.0	38.8	19.1	11.7	0.4	68.8

Source: Field survey, 2025

4.5 Hypothesis Testing

Three hypotheses were tested using chi-square analysis at $\alpha = 0.005$:

Hypothesis 1: Cross-border crime poses a significant threat to transnational security.

- $H_0: \mu = 45.559$ (no significant threat)
- $H_1: \mu \neq 45.559$ (significant threat)
- Test value: $\chi^2 = 157.255$
- Critical value: 45.559
- Decision: Do not reject H_0 ($157.255 > 45.559$, test value exceeds critical value in the rejection region)
- Conclusion: There is sufficient evidence to support that cross-border crime poses a significant threat to transnational security.

Hypothesis 2: The role of customs officials is significant in mitigating cross-border insecurity.

- $H_0: \mu = 45.559$ (significant role)
- $H_2: \mu \neq 45.559$ (not significant role)
- Test value: $\chi^2 = 60.017$
- Critical value: 45.559

- Decision: Do not reject H_0 ($60.017 > 45.559$)
- Conclusion: There is sufficient evidence to support that customs officials play a significant role in mitigating cross-border insecurity.

Hypothesis 3: Trans-governmental enforcement networks would significantly mitigate crime and illicit international political economy.

- $H_0: \mu = 45.559$ (significant mitigation)
- $H_3: \mu \neq 45.559$ (not significant mitigation)
- Test value: $\chi^2 = 50.354$
- Critical value: 45.559
- Decision: Do not reject H_0 ($50.354 > 45.559$)
- Conclusion: There is sufficient evidence to support that trans-governmental enforcement networks significantly mitigate crime and illicit international political economy.

All three hypotheses are supported at the 0.005 significance level, indicating robust statistical evidence for the relationships between cross-border crime, customs roles, and trans-governmental networks in the Ekok-Nfum border context.

Table 5: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Research Question	Test Value (χ^2)	Critical Value	df	Decision	Conclusion
H ₁	Cross-border crime threatens transnational security	157.255	45.559	24	Do not reject H_0	Significant threat confirmed
H ₂	Customs role is significant in mitigating insecurity	60.017	45.559	24	Do not reject H_0	Significant role confirmed

H ₃	TGENs significantly mitigate crime and IIPE	50.354	45.559	24	Do not reject H ₀	Significant mitigation confirmed
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Note: $\alpha = 0.005$; all test values exceed critical values, indicating significant relationships.
 Source: Field survey, 2025

5. Discussion

5.1 Principal Findings

This study provides comprehensive evidence that cross-border crime at the Ekok-Nfum Cameroon-Nigeria border constitutes a significant threat to transnational security, that customs officials play meaningful but constrained roles in mitigation, and that trans-governmental enforcement networks offer promising avenues for enhanced collaboration. The 69% affirmative response rate across threat indicators, combined with highly significant chi-square values (all $p < 0.001$), establishes robust empirical foundations for these conclusions.

The findings align with broader regional patterns identified by Osimen et al. (2017), who demonstrated that colonial territorialization created structural conditions facilitating cross-border crime through market fragmentation and ethnic tensions. The 71% agreement rate regarding smuggling of high-value commodities through illegal routes corroborates de Andrés (2008) and Julins (2002), who documented how secret routes enable evasion of regulations and taxes where state capacity is weak. The persistence of these patterns despite security agency presence supports Abdulkareem (2012) and Adetula (2015), who estimated 8 million small arms in West Africa alone, with the Cameroon-Nigeria corridor serving as a significant transit route.

Comparison with Prior Literature

The study's findings regarding customs officials' roles both confirm and extend existing literature. Golub (2015) and Cantens et al. (2015) identified weak border enforcement as a primary cause of informal trade, which this study confirms with 63% agreement. However, the finding that informal trade is tolerated for poverty reduction (62%) and local income generation adds nuance to La Porta and Shleifer's (2014) observation that informal businesses comprise half of developing country economic activity. The Cameroon-Nigeria context demonstrates that this tolerance is not merely passive acceptance but active negotiation of governance arrangements.

The anthropological insights of Walther (2009, 2015) and Titeca and Flynn (2014) regarding hybrid governance are validated by the 64% agreement that informal trade represents local responses to distrusted authorities. The study's finding that customs officers serve as interface-negotiators and peacemakers (66%) extends Chalfin's (2004, 2008, 2010) analysis of customs governance at points of entry, demonstrating that these roles become more pronounced in conflict-affected borderlands. The 68% agreement that traders trust customs more than local authorities due to consistent procedures resonates with Cantens and Raballand's (2016) observations from Northern Mali, where corruption and violence generate population defiance against state services.

The trans-governmental network findings both confirm and challenge existing IIPE literature. Shelley (2018) and Passas (1999) correctly identified the structural conditions enabling illicit

markets, which this study validates with 69% agreement regarding criminogenic asymmetries. However, the finding that informal operational flexibility proves more effective than formal treaties (69%) extends Andreas and Nadelmann's (2008) observation that trans-governmental enforcement networks are "more expansive and intensive than ever before." The US-Canada IBET and Shiprider examples (Watson, 2009; Public Safety, 2015b; Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2015) demonstrate that successful networks often originate from informal local collaborations rather than top-down diplomatic initiatives, a pattern potentially applicable to the Cameroon-Nigeria context.

The additive approach to sovereignty, mutually empowering agencies rather than diminishing states, challenges realist IPE scholars who reprise Strange's (1996) claim of state decline (Andreas, 2017). The 69% agreement that networks respond by strengthening rather than ceding sovereignty supports Held's (2000) argument that illicit economies create pressure for more interventionist states. However, the finding that members maintain national identities despite cooperation (68%) confirms Varró's (2016) observation that cultural differences persist even in integrated networks, suggesting that Cameroon-Nigeria collaboration must accommodate rather than override national distinctions.

Mechanisms and Implications

The study reveals several mechanisms through which cross-border crime persists and can potentially be mitigated. First, the ethnic and cultural continuity across the artificial colonial border creates social networks that facilitate both legitimate trade and criminal movement. The 69% agreement that shared ancestry and intermarriage complicate enforcement suggests that security strategies must differentiate between culturally embedded trade practices and exploitative criminal activities. Indiscriminate border closures, as noted by respondents (66%), may inadvertently criminalise legitimate livelihoods while failing to deter sophisticated criminal networks.

Second, the economic crisis within sub-regions generates material incentives for criminal participation that cannot be addressed through enforcement alone. The 68% agreement that worsening economic conditions enable trafficking, fraud, and scams supports the argument that development interventions are essential complements to security measures. The 62% recognition that informal trade reduces poverty despite revenue losses indicates that effective border management must balance security with economic survival, a tension central to the customs officers' dilemma.

Third, the dual role of customs as revenue collectors and political stabilisers creates institutional complexity that requires careful calibration. The 67% agreement that local tax negotiation can reduce corruption through transparent uniform processes suggests that some autonomy may improve outcomes, yet the 66% concern about patronage and corruption risks indicates that accountability mechanisms must accompany decentralisation. The

finding that customs outposts increasingly serve intelligence-gathering rather than purely revenue functions (64%) points toward a potential reorientation of border management priorities.

The policy implications are substantial. For Cameroon and Nigeria, the findings suggest that enhanced customs capacity, through improved training, equipment, and personnel, must be accompanied by community-based economic development to reduce criminal incentives. The 68% agreement that traders trust customs more than local authorities suggests that strengthening customs legitimacy could improve compliance, but this requires addressing the 66% concern about corruption risks in local negotiations. The trans-governmental network findings indicate that informal operational collaborations, potentially beginning with joint patrols and intelligence-sharing at the local level, may prove more effective than formal treaty negotiations that risk bureaucratic delays and political complications.

Limitations

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design captures perceptions at a single point in time (2025) rather than tracking changes over the 2018–2025 study period. The Anglophone conflict's dynamic evolution means that some findings may not reflect current conditions. Second, the reliance on self-reported questionnaire responses introduces potential social desirability bias, particularly regarding sensitive topics like corruption and criminal activities. While the 100% return rate and direct delivery technique minimise non-response bias, respondents may have underreported involvement in or tolerance of illicit activities.

Third, the sampling frame, while stratified, may not fully capture the perspectives of marginalised groups, including women traders, refugee populations, or armed group members. The 49% female representation, while balanced, may not reflect the gendered dimensions of border trade, where women often dominate specific commodity sectors. Fourth, the chi-square analysis, while appropriate for categorical data, cannot establish causal relationships between variables. The significant associations between crime, customs roles, and network effectiveness do not demonstrate that improving customs capacity or establishing networks will necessarily reduce crime.

Fifth, the study's focus on the Ekok-Nfum corridor limits generalizability to other Cameroon-Nigeria border posts or broader regional contexts. The specific dynamics of the Anglophone conflict and Biafran separatism create unique conditions that may not apply to the more stable northern borders. Finally, the Cronbach's alpha of 0.99, while indicating excellent reliability, approaches the upper limit where redundancy rather than true consistency may be measured, suggesting some questionnaire items may be overly similar.

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to track border security evolution, incorporate more diverse qualitative methods, including ethnographic observation, and expand to multiple border posts for comparative analysis. Experimental or quasi-experimental approaches could test the effectiveness of specific interventions, such as customs autonomy reforms or pilot trans-governmental network arrangements.

Policy Recommendations and Implementation Pathways

Based on the empirical findings and theoretical analysis, several policy pathways emerge for enhancing border security while facilitating legitimate trade at the Ekok-Nfum corridor. First,

the development of border communities through targeted economic interventions, including infrastructure investment, agricultural support, and small business financing, can reduce the economic desperation that drives participation in criminal activities. The 68% agreement that economic crisis enables criminal activities, combined with the 62% recognition that informal trade reduces poverty, suggests that formalising and supporting legitimate cross-border trade may simultaneously address security and development objectives.

Second, customs capacity building must extend beyond traditional revenue collection training to encompass intelligence analysis, conflict-sensitive negotiation, and community engagement. The finding that customs officers increasingly serve intelligence-gathering functions (64%) while maintaining revenue roles indicates the need for dual-competency development. The 67% agreement that local tax negotiation can reduce corruption through transparent uniform processes suggests that decentralising certain customs functions, with appropriate accountability mechanisms, may improve both compliance and state legitimacy.

Third, the establishment of informal trans-governmental networks should precede formal treaty negotiations. The US-Canada experience demonstrates that locally-driven initiatives such as IBETs can eventually achieve institutionalisation and federal support, but their effectiveness depends on organic development rather than imposed structures. For Cameroon and Nigeria, this suggests beginning with joint patrols, shared intelligence protocols, and cross-training between customs and security personnel at the Ekok-Nfum corridor, potentially expanding to other border posts as relationships mature.

Fourth, the differentiation between culturally embedded cross-border trade and exploitative criminal activities requires nuanced policy approaches. The 69% agreement that shared ancestry complicates enforcement indicates that blanket border closures or indiscriminate enforcement may alienate communities whose cooperation is essential for intelligence and stability. Instead, community-based monitoring systems that leverage local knowledge while protecting traders from criminal exploitation could enhance security without disrupting legitimate livelihoods.

Finally, the integration of technology, including surveillance systems, biometric tracking, and digital customs documentation, must be accompanied by human capacity development and community trust-building. The 67% agreement that organised crime exploits technology suggests that technological solutions alone are insufficient; indeed, without corresponding governance improvements, technology may simply displace criminal activities to less monitored routes or enable more sophisticated evasion strategies.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that cross-border crime at the Ekok-Nfum Cameroon-Nigeria border poses significant threats to transnational security, with statistical evidence supporting all three research hypotheses. The findings reveal that customs officials play meaningful but constrained mitigation roles, operating within complex institutional environments where formal mandates intersect with informal adaptive practices. Trans-governmental enforcement networks emerge as essential mechanisms for cross-border collaboration, with informal operational flexibility proving more promising than formal treaty-based approaches.

The policy implications are clear: Cameroon and Nigeria must enhance customs capacity through improved training, equipment, and personnel while simultaneously developing border communities economically to reduce criminal incentives. Customs officers should be granted greater autonomy in taxation and assessment, with regular trader meetings to explain fiscal policy changes and establish transparent, uniform processes. Cross-border cooperation should begin with informal operational collaborations, joint patrols, intelligence-sharing, and cross-designated officers, rather than awaiting comprehensive treaty negotiations that may prove politically cumbersome.

The theoretical contribution lies in demonstrating how Transnationalism, Regulation, and Ecological Systems theories can be integrated to analyse border security phenomena. The Ecological Systems framework particularly illuminates how the porous border environment shapes behavioural patterns inherited across generations, suggesting that effective interventions must address both immediate security needs and underlying socioeconomic conditions. The study extends IIPE literature by providing empirical evidence from a conflict-affected African context, supporting the argument that illicit economies stimulate state innovation rather than decline.

Prospective multicenter studies across multiple Cameroon-Nigeria border posts are needed to validate these findings and test specific intervention effectiveness. Longitudinal research should track how customs autonomy reforms and trans-governmental network establishment affect both security outcomes and legitimate trade volumes. Comparative analysis with other conflict-affected borders, such as Mali-Algeria or Chad-Nigeria, could identify generalizable principles for border management in fragile contexts. Ultimately, securing the Ekok-Nfum corridor requires recognising that border communities are not merely security threats to be controlled but economic actors whose legitimate livelihoods must be protected and developed.

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