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GOVERNANCE, SECURITY AND CROSS-BORDER MIGRATION IN NIGERIA UNDER PRESIDENT MUHAMMADU BUHARI (2015-2023)

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Abstract

This paper examined the nexus between governance, security, and cross-border migration in Nigeria during President Muhammadu Buhari's administration (2015–2023). Utilizing Everett Lee's Push and Pull Theory, the paper analyzed the factors driving migration within and beyond Nigeria's borders. The paper highlighted how insecurity, economic instability, and governance challenges have acted as push factors, compelling individuals to seek better opportunities elsewhere. Conversely, the pull factors, including perceived stability and economic prospects in neighbouring countries, have influenced migration patterns. The study also explored the implications of Nigeria's security policies, border management strategies, and regional cooperation efforts on migration flows. Findings indicated that despite the administration's commitment to strengthening border security, issues such as terrorism, banditry, and economic hardship continued to fuel irregular migration. The paper concluded that addressing the root causes of migration requires a holistic governance approach that integrates security reforms, economic development, and regional partnerships.

Keywords: Governance, Security, Cross-border Migration, Migration dynamics, Border Management

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Introduction

Nigeria has faced escalating security challenges, primarily due to insurgent groups like Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa (ISWAP). These groups have carried out numerous attacks on both civilians and security forces, resulting in thousands of deaths and widespread displacement (Zenn, 2020). The persistent threat of terrorism, coupled with rising banditry and violent conflicts between herders and farmers, has exacerbated insecurity across the country. These conflicts are often driven by resource competition, climate change, and population pressures, leading to further casualties and displacement (International Crisis Group, 2019). Reports indicate that over two thousand, five hundred (2,500) individuals were killed in various attacks between 2017 and 2020 alone (Bazan, 2020). Additionally, kidnapping for ransom, which initially emerged in the Niger Delta, has spread across Nigeria, raising concerns about the government's ability to ensure citizens' safety (Dara et al., 2018).

The widespread insecurity has significantly influenced migration patterns, forcing many Nigerians to seek refuge within and outside the country. Insecurity often compels individuals to relocate to safer environments, contributing to both internal displacement and cross-border migration (De Haas, 2010). By 2019, over two million people had been displaced within Nigeria due to violence, with many seeking safety in neighbouring countries such as Niger, Chad, and Cameroon (Ojo & Abimbola, 2019). However, Nigeria’s porous borders complicate this situation, enabling the movement of migrants, as well as criminal elements and illicit arms, further worsening security challenges (Belgore, 2020). The government has acknowledged the urgent need for improved border management to curb irregular migration and transnational crimes.

During his administration, President Muhammadu Buhari prioritized military action in addressing insecurity, launching campaigns against Boko Haram and other militant groups while promoting community policing initiatives (Agbiboa, 2020). Despite these efforts, critics argue that the response has been largely reactive, failing to address the root causes of insecurity (Kanu et al., 2020). Although security spending increased under Buhari’s administration, concerns about corruption and inefficiency within security agencies have persisted, with mismanagement preventing meaningful improvements in safety (Chatham House, 2019). The ongoing insecurity continues to drive cross-border migration as individuals flee violence and instability in search of safety.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's escalating insecurity, driven primarily by insurgent groups like Boko Haram and ISWAP, has resulted in widespread violence and displacement. Since 2009, over two million individuals have been internally displaced due to persistent attacks on civilians (Zenn, 2020). Banditry and communal conflicts, particularly in northern Nigeria, have further exacerbated the crisis, forcing many Nigerians to migrate across borders in search of safety. The porous nature of Nigeria’s borders has facilitated unchecked migration, smuggling, and arms trafficking, posing significant security threats.

Economic instability has further compounded the situation. With high unemployment rates and limited opportunities, many young Nigerians see migration as an escape from both economic hardship and insecurity. Reports indicate that nearly one in four households in certain states have had a family member attempt migration due to safety concerns (Ojo & Abimbola, 2019). Inadequate access to food, healthcare, and education for internally displaced persons (IDPs) has led to a severe humanitarian crisis, increasing migration pressures both within and beyond Nigeria’s borders. The influx of refugees into neighbouring

countries such as Chad, Niger, and Cameroon has strained local resources, sometimes resulting in tensions between migrants and host communities (International Crisis Group, 2019).

While Buhari's administration undertook various initiatives to address insecurity and migration challenges, critics argue that the government's response has been largely reactive and military-focused, failing to tackle the root socio-economic drivers of migration. Additionally, corruption within security agencies has hindered effective border control, undermining national security efforts (Chatham House, 2019).

Literature Review

The literature on security and insecurity presents varying conceptualizations and perspectives, reflecting the evolving nature of the discourse. Security, as the opposite of insecurity, has traditionally been understood in a state-centric manner, focusing on military threats and national defense mechanisms (Stan, 2004). However, since the end of the Cold War, scholars have broadened the definition of security to include human security, encompassing economic stability, human rights, and national development. This shift highlights the need to protect not just the state but also individuals and communities from threats posed by economic instability, political turmoil, and social inequalities.

Two dominant theoretical strands emerge in the literature on security. The neo-realist approach views security as the primary responsibility of the state, while the postmodernist or pluralist approach argues that security should be handled by both state and non-state actors. Proponents of the latter emphasize that economic security should take precedence over military concerns, as economic hardship is often the root cause of insecurity. Some scholars define security as the absence of threats to national cohesion, political stability, and socio-economic progress. In contrast, the intelligence community sees security not merely as the absence of threats but as the existence of effective mechanisms to respond proactively to challenges.

Insecurity, on the other hand, is characterized by fear, danger, and lack of protection (Bazan, 2020). Ali (2013) defined insecurity as both exposure to danger and vulnerability to threats, which can manifest as historical, religious, economic, and political crises leading to conflicts. The literature suggests that insecurity in Nigeria is largely a product of structural weaknesses in governance, economic imbalances, and unresolved ethnic and religious tensions. The conceptualization of development has similarly evolved, shifting from an economic-growth-centered perspective to a human-centered approach that considers well-being, equity, and empowerment as key indicators of progress.

The security-development nexus is a significant theme in the literature, emphasizing that sustainable development cannot be achieved in an environment plagued by conflict and insecurity. The consensus among scholars is that insecurity hampers economic growth, discourages investment, and undermines national stability.

The literature, further identified several causes of insecurity in Nigeria, which can be categorized into historical, political, economic, and social factors. Historical factors date back to Nigeria's colonial and post-independence periods, where ethnic tensions, military interventions, and political instability created deep divisions (Ali, 2013). The imposition of an imbalanced federal structure by colonial rulers and subsequent military regimes contributed to recurring conflicts over resource allocation and governance. These issues have

created an atmosphere of instability, threatening national unity and socio-economic development.

Ethno-religious conflicts are a major driver of insecurity. Distrust among ethnic groups and religious factions has fueled violent confrontations, especially between Christians and Muslims. Ethno-Religious Conflict Communal and societal conflicts in Nigeria have been fueled by ethno-religious identities (Ibrahim and Igbuzor, 2002). These conflicts have occurred in states such as Ogun, Lagos, Abia, Kano, Bauchi, and Jos, among others. Factors like land disputes, chieftaincy rights, local government control, the Osu caste system, and the implementation of sharia law have led to large-scale violence. The classification of groups as "settler" vs. "indigene,""Christian" vs. "Muslim," and "osu" (slave) vs. "Nwadiala" (freeborn) has exacerbated social divisions and insecurity. These conflicts are exacerbated by perceptions of marginalization and political exclusion, as seen in violent clashes in states such as Kaduna, Jos, and Taraba.

Political violence in Nigeria is characterized by competition for power among elites, leading to inter and intra-party conflicts. Politicians employ large resources, change rules, distort laws, and resort to violence and assassination to maintain power. Political gatherings have become violent, with small arms openly used to intimidate opponents and rig elections. Notable assassinations include Chief Bola Ige, Funsho Williams, Dikibo, and Ogbonna Uche. Politicians favour selection over elections, eroding democracy and deepening political insecurity.

Political violence has long been a feature of Nigeria’s democratic landscape, with elections often marred by thuggery, assassinations, and violent power struggles. Desperation among political elites to retain power has led to the use of armed groups and militias, worsening insecurity. Corruption and governance failure are also significant contributors to insecurity. Systemic corruption weakens institutions, diverts public resources, and erodes trust in government. This has created an environment where criminal activities, such as banditry and kidnapping, thrive due to the inefficiency of security agencies (Iyare, 2008).

Economic factors, particularly poverty and unemployment and particularly resource control have fueled violence and crime, and have also played a significant role in conflicts (Eme, 2011). The high rate of youth unemployment has led many young people to join militant groups, armed gangs, or engage in violent protests. Resource control conflicts, particularly in the Niger Delta, have also triggered violent agitations, with militants demanding greater economic benefits from oil wealth.The struggle over oil revenues in the Niger Delta has led to clashes between communities and the state. Other resource-related conflicts involve land use for grazing and farming. Poverty-induced violence is another concern, where the lack of basic services leads to heightened frustrations. The state’s failure to address economic needs has resulted in conflicts driven by relative deprivation.Different forms of organized violent groups have emerged, including ethnic militias, vigilantes, secret cults, and political thugs. The rise of these groups is attributed to the culture of militarism from past military regimes, economic disenfranchisement, and the failure of state institutions (Ibrahim and Igbuzor, 2002). These groups exacerbate insecurity through targeted violence and criminal activities

Weak security systems are another key challenge. Nigeria’s security agencies suffer from underfunding, inadequate training, and poor coordination, limiting their ability to effectively combat crime and terrorism (Achumba et al., 2013). The police-population ratio in Nigeria falls below the UN standard, contributing to law enforcement inefficiencies. Porous

borders have facilitated the proliferation of small arms and the unchecked movement of criminal elements into Nigeria. It is estimated that Nigeria hosts over seventy percent (70%) of the illegal weapons in West Africa, worsening security challenges (Edeko, 2011). Weak border controls have also enabled the influx of undocumented migrants, some of whom are involved in criminal activities (Adeola&Oluyemi, 2012).

Terrorism remains Nigeria's most pressing security threat, particularly with the rise of Boko Haram and ISWAP in the north. These extremist groups have been responsible for thousands of deaths and large-scale displacement since 2009 (Achumba et al., 2013). Terrorism in Nigeria is linked to religious radicalism, economic inequality, poor governance, and corruption (Oluwarotimi, 2012).

Insecurity has led to widespread displacement, social tensions, and increased hostility between ethnic and religious groups (Eme, 2011). Other consequences include disruption of family life, deepened poverty, and political instability. Additionally, corruption and inefficiency within security agencies have further aggravated governance deficits (Ibrahim and Igbuzor, 2002).

Furthermore, traditional rulers, politicians, and vigilante groups have contributed to insecurity. For instance, the Anambra Vigilante Service (AVG) was implicated in extrajudicial killings. Politicians fuel violence by arming youths for electoral gains and abandoning them afterward (Albert, 2021). Urbanization also poses a security challenge, as rising unemployment leads to criminal activities. Policing remains ineffective due to corruption and poor response strategies.

Nigeria's security challenges stem from a combination of ethno-religious conflicts, political violence, economic deprivation, and weak governance structures. Addressing these issues requires a holistic approach, including job creation, electoral reforms, improved policing, and social security programs to mitigate the root causes of insecurity.

On the other hand, migration has been a fundamental aspect of human history, encompassing the movement of people across geographical regions for various reasons. It can be classified into internal migration, which occurs within a country, and international migration, which involves movement across borders. The International Organization for Migration (IMO) (2009) defines migration as any population movement, regardless of its cause or duration, including economic migration, displacement due to conflict and family reunification.

Economic disparities between regions often drive migration, with individuals seeking better job opportunities, improved living conditions, and political stability. The push-pull theory, introduced by Everett Revenstein and later modified by Lee (1969), explains migration as a response to adverse conditions in origin regions (push factors) and attractive conditions in destination regions (pull factors). Push factors include unemployment, political instability, and environmental disasters, while pull factors include better economic prospects, security, and social services.

Nigeria plays a crucial role in African migration patterns. As Africa's most populous country, it serves as both a source and destination for migrants. Economic migration within West Africa follows historical patterns, with movement primarily driven by trade, employment, and economic opportunities. Nigeria's porous borders have facilitated cross-

border migration, including both legal and irregular migration, which can be associated with economic ventures and security concerns such as human trafficking and smuggling.

Globalization has further influenced migration patterns by reducing barriers to movement and enhancing transnational networks. Improved transportation and communication technologies have facilitated both legal and illegal migration, leading to increased concerns over security, economic stability and diplomatic relations. The concept of transnationalism highlights how migrants maintain strong ties with their countries of origin, contributing to economic development through remittances and business activities.

Cross-border migration, particularly within Africa, has historical roots dating back to the pre-colonial and colonial eras. The transatlantic slave trade, colonization, and industrialization all contributed to migration patterns that continue to shape modern African societies. In contemporary times, migration remains a topic of debate, as it influences national policies on trade, security, and international relations. While migration can foster innovation, entrepreneurship, and cultural exchange, it also poses challenges such as increased pressure on social infrastructure and national security concerns.

International migration, which includes both voluntary and forced migration, has also significantly impacted Nigeria. During the post-colonial era, migration policies facilitated the movement of Nigerians abroad for education and economic advancement. The role of migration in shaping international relations is evident in diplomatic efforts to regulate migration, address human rights issues, and promote economic integration among nations. International migration is a dynamic phenomenon that evolves over time due to shifting socio-economic and geopolitical conditions. Researchers continue to identify new categories of migration, highlighting its ever-changing nature. International migration can be classified into several types:

i. Labour International Migration – This occurs when individuals move across borders in search of job opportunities, skill exchange, or better working conditions. It may be influenced by bilateral agreements between states or individual decisions. Migrants can be skilled, semi-skilled, or unskilled workers, contributing to economic growth in both the sending and receiving countries.
ii. Return International Migration – This refers to migrants returning to their home country after an extended stay abroad. Reasons for return migration include retirement, accumulated wealth, completion of education, or the desire to establish businesses in their home country.
iii. Chain International Migration – Also known as reunification migration, this occurs when individuals migrate to join family members or friends who have already settled in a foreign country. This process is often facilitated through invitations and sponsorships by existing migrants.
iv. Asylum International Migration – This type of migration involves individuals seeking refuge in another country due to persecution, conflicts, or human rights violations in their home nation. It is classified as forced migration and typically involves refugees and internally displaced persons.

Additionally, international migration can be categorized into broader types:

i. Environmental International Migration – Driven by environmental factors such as desertification, rising sea levels, droughts, and natural disasters. Migrants seek refuge in regions with better living conditions and opportunities.

ii. Political International Migration – Triggered by political instability, including civil wars, corruption, discrimination, and tribal conflicts, prompting individuals to seek stability and security in other nations.

These classifications reflect the diverse reasons behind international migration, demonstrating how economic, social, political, and environmental factors shape human mobility across borders. While there was insufficient existing literature, there are works extensively examining the impact of insecurity on internal displacement and conflict dynamics within Nigeria, there remains a gap in understanding the specific mechanisms through which insecurity influences cross-border migration patterns and dynamics, particularly under the administration of Muhammadu Buhari. While studies explored the socio-economic, political, and environmental factors that drive cross-border migration from Nigeria, there is limited research that directly addresses the role of insecurity as a determinant of migration decisions and the implications for regional stability and governance. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the relationship between insecurity and cross-border migration, explore the experiences and motivations of migrants, and assesses the effectiveness of government policies in addressing these interconnected challenges.

Methodology

This paper primarily relied on secondary sources for data collection, chosen for their inherent value in providing insights into cross-border migration and insecurity. These sources include government publications, official documents, textbooks, and online materials. Content analysis is used as the method of interpretation, allowing for meaningful conclusions from collected data. By employing content analysis, the paper ensured a structured approach to interpreting data, making it easier to draw reliable and verifiable conclusions.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted Everett Lee's Push and Pull Theory to analyze migration dynamics. Lee's theory, first introduced in 1965, categorized migration influences into four factors: (1) conditions in the area of origin, (2) conditions in the destination area, (3) intervening obstacles, and (4) personal factors. Push factors drive people away from their home regions due to challenges like political instability, economic hardship, or environmental disasters. Pull factors attract migrants to new destinations with better opportunities, security, and economic prospects. Ravenstein (1889) emphasized that pull factors often play a more significant role in migration decisions. Other scholars, such as Zelinsky (1971) and Massey (1990), expanded on this framework by linking migration to socio-political and economic factors.

The application of this theory is evident in Nigeria, where insecurity, economic struggles, and violence force people to migrate. The Boko Haram insurgency, inter-communal clashes, and criminal activities have created instability, pushing many Nigerians to seek safety and better opportunities in neighbouring countries. Economic factors, such as unemployment and inflation, further exacerbate migration trends. Neighbouring countries, offering relative stability and economic opportunities, serve as key destinations for Nigerian migrants. Social networks and informal economies in these regions also act as pull factors, encouraging cross-border migration in search of security and economic stability.

Analysis/Discussion

Nigeria's colonial-era borders disregarded ethnic and cultural divisions, leading to fluid cross-border migration patterns. The Hausas, Fulanis, and Kanuris, for example, reside

in both Nigeria and neighbouring countries, maintaining migration for trade, family connections, and cultural events (Adagba, 2012). Colonial labour migration also contributed to movement patterns that persist today, with many migrants still crossing borders for employment. Nigeria, as West Africa's largest economy, attracts economic migrants from countries such as Benin, Niger, and Ghana, particularly in agriculture and informal labour (Fiki & Lee, 2005). However, seasonal migration patterns are influenced by climate, with agricultural workers from Niger and Chad returning home after the farming season.

Nigeria has faced persistent insecurity, including terrorism, banditry, ethnic clashes, and political violence, leading to internal displacement and cross-border migration. The Boko Haram insurgency, particularly in northeastern Nigeria, has driven thousands of people into neighbouring countries such as Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, creating a severe refugee crisis (Onuoha, 2020). The Lake Chad Basin, with its porous borders, allows both displaced persons and terrorist networks to move freely, intensifying regional instability (Albert, 2020). The influx of refugees into neighbouring countries strains resources and fosters competition over services and jobs, which can further fuel conflicts. Additionally, some refugee camps serve as recruitment grounds for insurgents and criminal networks, worsening the security situation.

Environmental migration is also increasing due to desertification, drought, and the drying up of Lake Chad, which has forced many farmers and herders to seek more fertile land. These environmental shifts have led to conflicts between migrating herders and settled farmers, both within Nigeria and across borders (IOM, 2019).

Nigeria's porous borders remain a significant challenge to national security, economic stability, and territorial integrity. The country shares approximately four thousand, four hundred and seventy-seven (4,477) kilometers of land borders with Benin, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, which are inadequately monitored (International Crisis Group, 2019). Limited fencing, sparse security personnel, and insufficient surveillance technology have made Nigeria's borders vulnerable to unauthorized migration, smuggling, and infiltration by criminal and insurgent groups. Between 2015 and 2022, the Muhammadu Buhari administration struggled to address these issues, particularly their security implications.

The unregulated movement of individuals, goods, and illicit materials exacerbates security concerns. Nigeria's northern borders, particularly the expansive desert regions shared with Niger and Chad, are difficult to monitor. Corruption among border officials, underfunding of security operations, and political instability in neighbouring countries further compound the issue. Boko Haram, for instance, has exploited these vulnerabilities to sustain its insurgency, recruiting fighters and smuggling arms into Nigeria through unguarded border crossings. A report by the International Crisis Group (2019) highlighted that seventy-five percent of Boko Haram recruits intercepted in northeastern Nigeria entered through borders with Chad and Niger.

Additionally, bandit groups operating in northwestern Nigeria, particularly in Zamfara, Sokoto, and Katsina states, have utilized porous borders to evade security forces and smuggle arms. The December 2020 abduction of over three hundred schoolboys from Kankara, Katsina State, exemplifies this issue, as the assailants fled to Niger after the attack. The porous borders also facilitate human trafficking and the smuggling of goods such as subsidized fuel, agricultural products, and arms. The Nigeria Customs Service (2020) estimated that over $2 billion worth of fuel was smuggled into neighboring countries annually between 2016 and 2021. The migration of armed herders from Chad and Niger into

Nigeria has further escalated the herders-farmers conflict, exemplified by the January 2018 attack in Benue State, which left over 70 people dead (Global Terrorism Database, 2018).The economic consequences are severe, with reduced agricultural output threatening food security. ManyNigerians fleeing these threats find that conditions in neighbouring countries are equally insecure, creating a continuous cycle of displacement. Addressing these challenges requires regional cooperation, yet efforts are often hindered by national interests, lack of political will, and limited resources.

Economic conditions also influence migration patterns. Historically, Nigeria has attracted migrants from ECOWAS countries due to its relatively strong economy and free movement policies. However, insecurity has disrupted trade, agriculture, and other economic activities, pushing people to migrate for safety rather than economic gain. Refugee influxes into neighbouring countries, which already have weak economies, exacerbate poverty and provide recruitment opportunities for terrorist and criminal groups. The migration of young, able-bodied individuals also leads to human capital loss, further weakening Nigeria's economy and fueling resentment that insurgent groups exploit (Akinyemi& Adebayo, 2021). Criminal networks play a crucial role in the intersection of migration and insecurity. Human trafficking, arms smuggling, and drug trafficking flourish in unstable regions, with traffickers exploiting migrants fleeing violence. Many migrants fall victim to forced labour or sexual exploitation, while profits from trafficking fund insurgent and criminal groups (Akinyemi& Adebayo, 2021). Similarly, arms smuggling sustains conflicts by ensuring a steady flow of weapons to terrorist and bandit groups (Onuoha, 2020).

Irregular migration, including human trafficking and smuggling, is another major issue. Many Nigerians attempt to migrate to North Africa and Europe, often falling prey to trafficking networks, especially along the Benin-Nigeria-Togo route (Adagba, 2012). Weak border control also facilitates the movement of smugglers, insurgents, and illicit goods, worsening insecurity in Nigeria and the region.

Furthermore, porous borders have been instrumental in sustaining terrorism in Nigeria, particularly in the northeastern region. Boko Haram and its splinter group, the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), exploit unregulated routes to smuggle weapons and recruit fighters. The November 2018 attack on a military base in Metele, Borno State, which resulted in over a hundred deaths, was facilitated by unmonitored border crossings from Chad (International Crisis Group, 2019). As of 2022, Boko Haram's activities had resulted in over thirty-five thousand deaths and displaced more than 2.1 million people (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2022).

The uncontrolled smuggling of firearms fuels violence by insurgents, bandits, and armed herders. The Small Arms Survey (2020) estimated that seventy percent of the six million illegal firearms in Nigeria were smuggled through its northern borders. For instance, in April 2017, over four hundred pump-action rifles were intercepted in Lagos, having been smuggled through the northern border. Economic disparities between Nigeria and neighboring countries significantly drive cross-border migration. Nigeria's oil wealth is concentrated in a few regions, while the northern and northeastern areas remain underdeveloped, increasing migration pressure. Unemployment, which reached thirty-three percent in 2020, further exacerbates the issue. Many Nigerians migrate to neighboring countries, where living costs are lower and economic opportunities, particularly in agriculture, are more accessible.

The decline in agriculture and rural livelihoods due to poor infrastructure and insecurity has forced many rural dwellers to migrate. In 2016, over a hundred thousand Nigerians fled the Middle Belt region due to the herders-farmers conflict (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2019). Additionally, declining public services, volatile currency exchange rates, and inflation have driven Nigerians to seek better living conditions abroad. The UNHCR (2022) reported that around three hundred thousand Nigerians sought asylum in neighbouring countries due to economic hardships.

In the same vein, poverty and unemployment are key drivers of insecurity in Nigeria. The northern states, particularly Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe, have the highest poverty rates, making them vulnerable to insurgent recruitment. Boko Haram has capitalized on economic despair to recruit disenfranchised youth, contributing to over 2.1 million displacements (UNHCR, 2020).

Youth unemployment, which reached forty-two percent in 2020, has fueled criminal activities such as banditry and kidnapping. The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC, 2019) reported increased criminal activities in Zamfara, Katsina, and Sokoto states due to economic alienation. The competition for scarce resources has also intensified violent conflicts, particularly between herders and farmers, resulting in over five thousand deaths between 2015 and 2020 (International Crisis Group, 2019).

Cross-border migration has contributed to regional instability, as Nigerian migrants in Niger and Chad have been linked to arms and drug trafficking (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2021). Porous borders and weak enforcement mechanisms allow these criminal activities to thrive, exacerbating insecurity within Nigeria and across the Lake Chad Basin region.

Nigeria's political instability, characterized by weak governance and corruption, has significantly contributed to cross-border migration. Despite anti-corruption efforts, governance failures persisted under President Muhammadu Buhari, especially in addressing widespread insecurity. Poor governance hindered service delivery, forcing many to migrate. In 2018, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in Akinyemi & Adebayo (2021) reported that over one million Nigerians fled to neighbouring countries due to insecurity.

Clashes between Fulani herders and farmers in the Middle Belt escalated between 2015 and 2022, leading to large-scale displacement (International Crisis Group, 2019). In 2018, over two hundred thousand people fled to Cameroon and Niger due to violence fueled by ethnic divisions (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2022).

Also, electoral violence has fueled cross-border migration. The 2019 general elections were marked by violent clashes, leading to the displacement of over a hundred thousand people (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2019). Many fled to Benin, Cameroon, and Niger, seeking safety from politically motivated violence.

Furthermore, Nigeria's governance failures, marked by corruption and inefficiency, have weakened security institutions. Between 2015 and 2022, Nigeria ranked among the most corrupt nations, leaving security forces ill-equipped to handle threats (Transparency International, 2020). Banditry, kidnapping, and insurgency flourished as a result.

Displacement caused by insecurity has worsened regional instability. Over three hundred Nigerians sought refuge in Cameroon and Chad between 2015 and 2022, straining

resources in host communities (UNHCR, 2022). This migration has exacerbated tensions, with some refugees being recruited into armed groups. Nigeria's 4,477-kilometer land borders with Benin, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon are inadequately monitored (International Crisis Group, 2019). Corruption and insufficient surveillance have allowed criminal groups and insurgents to infiltrate, fueling insecurity. Between 2015 and 2022, Boko Haram exploited border weaknesses for arms smuggling and recruitment. Northwestern states, particularly Zamfara and Katsina, have witnessed a rise in banditry, exacerbated by unregulated borders. The Kankara schoolboys' abduction in December 2020 demonstrated how criminals evade security forces by escaping across borders. The unregulated migration of herders from Chad, Niger, and Cameroon has intensified conflicts with local farmers. The January 2018 Benue attack, which resulted in over 70 deaths, exemplifies how cross-border migration fuels communal tensions (Global Terrorism Database, 2018). Also, economic inequalities between Nigeria and neighboring countries contribute to migration. Unemployment, which reached thirty-three percent in 2020, has driven Nigerians to seek opportunities abroad. Poor infrastructure and insecurity in rural areas have forced many to migrate, with over three hundred thousand Nigerians seeking asylum due to economic hardships (UNHCR, 2020). The high unemployment rates have driven youths into insurgency and criminal activities, exacerbating displacement.

Hence, political instability in Nigeria has significantly driven cross-border migration, exacerbating regional insecurity. Also, weak governance, ethnic conflicts, insurgency, electoral violence, and economic hardships have fueled displacement, straining resources in neighbouring countries. Without effective governance and security reforms, cross-border migration and instability will continue to threaten Nigeria and the wider West African region.

Influence of Political Instability on Cross-Border Migration in Nigeria

It is now clearer than ever, that political instability in Nigeria remains a primary driver of cross-border migration, with profound implications for regional security. Weak governance, ethnic conflicts, insurgency, electoral violence, and economic hardships have fueled forced displacement, straining resources in neighbouring countries. Without effective governance and security reforms, cross-border migration and instability will continue to threaten Nigeria and the broader West African region.

Nigeria's political instability, characterized by weak governance, corruption, and systemic inefficiencies, has significantly contributed to cross-border migration. Despite various anti-corruption initiatives, governance failures persisted under President Muhammadu Buhari, particularly in addressing widespread insecurity and economic instability. Poor governance has hindered effective service delivery, forcing many Nigerians to seek safety and economic stability elsewhere. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in (Onuoha, 2020), over one million Nigerians fled to neighbouring countries due to insecurity and deteriorating economic conditions in 2018.

Political instability in Nigeria has created a ripple effect, contributing to regional insecurity. Porous borders facilitate the movement of insurgents, arms, and displaced persons, increasing tensions in neighbouring countries. The Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) reported that over 10,000 Nigerians migrate annually to Cameroon, Niger, and Chad due to insecurity, heightening the risk of extremism in these regions (LCBC, 2020). This has placed additional pressure on regional security mechanisms, requiring multilateral cooperation to address shared security threats.

Nigeria's governance failures, characterized by corruption, inefficiency, and weak institutional capacity, have exacerbated insecurity. Between 2015 and 2022, Nigeria consistently ranked among the most corrupt nations, leaving security forces underfunded and ill-equipped to handle emerging threats (Transparency International, 2020). This environment has allowed banditry, kidnapping, and insurgency to flourish, further driving migration.Weak governance has provided fertile ground for the expansion of criminal networks. Banditry has surged in northwestern states such as Zamfara and Katsina, displacing thousands of people. The December 2020 Kankara schoolboys' abduction underscored the state's inability to curb cross-border criminal activities. Criminal networks exploit Nigeria's porous borders to engage in arms smuggling, human trafficking, and drug trade, further destabilizing the region.

Also, ethnic and religious conflicts, often politicized, have escalated violence in Nigeria. The competition for resources between Fulani herders and farmers has resulted in significant casualties and displacements. In 2018 alone, over one thousand, three hundred (1,300) deaths were recorded due to these clashes (International Crisis Group, 2019). The government's inability to implement sustainable land-use policies and conflict resolution strategies has exacerbated the crisis. More so, the activities of the Boko Haram sect have further exposed governance gaps, particularly in border management. Between 2015 and 2022, over two million people were internally displaced, with many fleeing to neighbouring countries, destabilizing the Lake Chad Basin region (UNHCR, 2022). The inability of security agencies to effectively monitor and control border areas has facilitated the free movement of insurgents and illegal arms.

Furthermore, Nigeria has one of the highest concentrations of illicit small arms in Africa. The Small Arms Survey (2020) estimated that over six million illegal firearms were in circulation, fueling violence and insecurity. In 2020, arms trafficking networks along Nigeria's borders with Niger and Chad were uncovered, highlighting the role of cross-border arms smuggling in sustaining conflicts (Small Arms Survey, 2020).

Economic disparities between Nigeria and its neighbours contribute significantly to migration. Unemployment, which reached thirty-three percent in 2020, has driven many Nigerians to seek economic opportunities abroad. Poor infrastructure, insecurity, and a lack of social services in rural areas have forced many to migrate, with three hundred thousand Nigerians seeking asylum due to economic hardships (UNHCR, 2020). Additionally, regional economic imbalances have led to the movement of unskilled labour across borders, further complicating migration patterns.

Poverty and unemployment have fueled insecurity, particularly in northern states. High unemployment rates have driven youths into insurgency and criminal activities, exacerbating displacement. Boko Haram and other militant groups exploit economic despair to recruit fighters, contributing to over 2.1 million displacements (UNHCR, 2020). This cycle of poverty, violence, and migration continues to pose significant challenges to regional stability.

Political instability in Nigeria is a major driver of cross-border migration, with severe regional security implications. Weak governance, ethnic conflicts, insurgency, electoral violence, and economic hardships contribute to forced displacement, straining neighbouring countries. Without significant governance and security reforms, migration and instability will persist, threatening Nigeria and the broader West African region.

Nigeria's porous borders and weak governance have facilitated unchecked cross-border migration, exacerbating security challenges. The influx of migrants, arms, and illicit goods has strengthened insurgent groups like Boko Haram, fueling violence and displacement. Economic disparities and political unrest in neighbouring countries have further driven migration, leading to resource conflicts and increasing criminal activities. Corruption and mismanagement within Nigeria's security sector have hindered efforts to curb insecurity, allowing armed groups to thrive. Despite government initiatives to strengthen border control, ineffective policy implementation has perpetuated the crisis, with millions of Nigerians fleeing due to violence, poverty, and instability.

Implications of Nigeria's Security Policies, Border Management Strategies, and Regional Cooperation Efforts on Migration Flows during President Muhammadu Buhari's Administration

Nigeria's security policies, border management strategies, and regional cooperation efforts under President Muhammadu Buhari's administration (2015–2023) had significant implications on migration flows. The administration faced challenges such as terrorism, banditry, and economic instability, which influenced migration patterns both within and outside Nigeria. This paper also examined the effectiveness of these policies and their impact on migration.

a. *Security Policies and Migration Flows*

The Buhari administration prioritized national security through counterterrorism operations, particularly against Boko Haram and other insurgent groups. Policies such as Operation Lafiya Dole and the Super Camp Strategy aimed to degrade insurgents and restore stability in the northeast (Akinyemi & Olaniyan, 2021). However, despite these efforts, persistent insecurity, including farmer-herder conflicts and banditry in the Northwest, led to increased internal displacement and cross-border migration, particularly to Niger, Chad, and Cameroon (Olayemi, 2022). The militarization of security responses also resulted in human rights violations, prompting asylum-seeking migration (Amnesty International, 2021).

b. *Border Management Strategies and Migration*

Nigeria's border management under Buhari was marked by the closure of land borders between 2019 and 2020 to curb smuggling and enhance security (Eze, 2020). While this policy aimed to promote local economic growth and reduce illicit trade, it disrupted informal cross-border migration and trade, leading to economic hardship for border communities. The Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) also implemented stricter border controls and biometric data collection to monitor migration flows (Adebayo, 2021). However, inadequate surveillance technology and corruption among border officials undermined the effectiveness of these strategies, allowing irregular migration and trafficking to persist (Okonkwo & Yusuf, 2022).

c. Regional Cooperation and Migration Trends

Nigeria engaged in regional security and migration cooperation through organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). ECOWAS' Free Movement Protocol facilitated legal migration within West Africa, but Nigeria's security concerns often led to restrictive measures that contradicted regional commitments (Adeyemi, 2021). Joint military operations with neighbouring countries helped combat cross-border terrorism but also displaced populations, increasing forced migration to safer regions (UNHCR, 2022).

The Buhari administration's security policies, border management strategies, and regional cooperation efforts had mixed implications on migration. While efforts to combat terrorism and enhance border security were intensified, persistent insecurity, economic policies, and inconsistent regional migration measures contributed to increased displacement and irregular migration. A balanced approach that integrates security with economic and human rights considerations is essential for sustainable migration management in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Political instability in Nigeria, particularly under Muhammadu Buhari's administration, significantly influenced cross-border migration and regional security. Insurgencies, ethnic conflicts, and electoral violence forced millions of Nigerians to seek refuge in neighbouring countries, straining regional resources and stability. Weak border management facilitated arms smuggling, human trafficking, and criminal activities, worsening Nigeria's security crisis. Despite efforts to address these challenges, systemic corruption and governance failures undermined meaningful progress. Addressing migration-related insecurity requires a comprehensive approach that integrates border security, socio-economic development, and regional cooperation.

Recommendations

By implementing the following strategies, Nigeria can mitigate the security and socio-economic challenges of cross-border migration, fostering stability within the country and across the region.

1. *Strengthening Border Security and Regional Coordination:* Nigeria should enhance surveillance, deploy modern technology, and increase security personnel along its borders. Regional cooperation through ECOWAS and the AU should focus on intelligence sharing, joint patrols, and humanitarian corridors to manage displaced populations safely.
2. *Investing in Socio-Economic Development and Reintegration:* Addressing the root causes of forced migration requires investment in education, healthcare, and infrastructure in conflict-affected regions. Reintegration programs for displaced populations should provide vocational training, job opportunities, and psychological support to reduce dependence on migration and humanitarian aid.
3. *Reforming Security and Migration Management Policies:* Nigeria must improve coordination between security agencies, reduce corruption, and allocate resources efficiently. A national migration policy should address internal and cross-border migration challenges, ensuring the protection of displaced persons and promoting safe, legal migration pathways.
4. *Enhancing Accountability and Transparency:* Strengthening oversight mechanisms in security and migration sectors is crucial. Anti-corruption measures, public accountability, and civil society involvement in monitoring security initiatives can help restore trust and improve governance.

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