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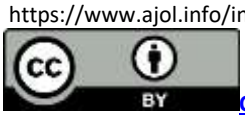
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Original Research

UNGOVERNED SPACES AND CROSS-BORDER SECURITY MANAGEMENT: FOCUS ON NIGERIA-NIGER BORDER RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper assessed the impact of ungoverned spaces on crossborder security management between Nigeria and Niger Republic. There has been a raging debate on the causes and enablers of insecurity alone the border belt regions in the southern Libya corridor. Most discussants in this debate have lavished interest on governments' reactions especially in the use of force, while few have highlighted the importance of proactiveness. Studies have found ungoverned spaces and fertile ground for criminal networks to operate. More so, the vast land spaces along the borderline that are mostly lacking in governance have come under severe scrutiny. This paper joined this debate by positing ungoverned spaces as proactive opportunity for the state in preventing insecurity. In this regard, it was within the focus of the paper to determine whether there is relationship between ungoverned border communities and crossborder security challenges; and examine the efforts of Nigeria and Niger through NNJCC in demarginalizing residents in their border communities. The study was anchored on the theories of ungoverned spaces and securitization while a combination of quantitative and qualitative research designs to gather and analyse data. The study found that there is a strong relationship between ungoverned spaces and security challenges along the communities in Nigeria-Niger borderlines, and that there is currently no bilateral agreement to address the issues of ungoverned spaces in these border communities. Hence, the study recommended among other things that the governments of Nigeria and Niger Republic should set aside their political differences and enter into an agreement that will condition both countries to make sizeable investment in border communities.

Keywords: Ungoverned Spaces, Banditry, Border Communities, Borderlines, Enabler, Securitization

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's national security is faced with challenges which vary in cause, effect and implications. While some of these security challenges are internally driven others are externally influenced; the immediate consequence of both, however, is the threat and damage to lives, property, national stability as well as the socio-economic development and potential of the nation, (Eselebor &

Okunade, 2020). National security goes beyond a nation's sovereign protection against external military attack, conflict or insurgency, to also include protection from specific challenges that impact the nation's energy, food, environmental and cyber securities, respectively, (Pham, 2007). Existing right within the physical limits of a state's territorial jurisdiction, border communities are perceived as communities situated on the edge of formal states. Globally, border communities have a long history of state marginalisation, (Lee & North, 2016). Poor management of border communities has exacerbated security risk at these regions - posing enormous danger to national and international peace. The escalating rise in the criminal activities of violent non-state actors such as terrorist groups; human, drug and arms/weapons smugglers, etc., can be tied to the vulnerability of these communities, (UNDP, 2016).

Border communities within the context of the Sahel and Lake Chad basin region countries, are mostly perceived as areas or spaces of limited state presence hence presenting easily accessible entry points through which external security challenges are facilitated by non-state actors. The vast stretch of this region, especially its bush parts, forest areas and large border expanse, highlights the peculiar risk facing the nation including vulnerability to external threat. Despite the added economic and cultural value of these communities and their strategic importance in ensuring national security, they have been left vulnerable overtime by successive governments who underestimate their strategic importance within the security and socio-economic value chain. The evident lack of adequate and formal state presence in these areas and the accompanying checks and control, impedes government regulation and enforcement at these spaces, resulting in a preponderance of border communities across the nation's international borders that are vulnerable to criminal manipulation, exploitation, subjugation and control. Central to the vulnerability of border communities is their political, physical and social distance away from the centre, (Raleigh & Dowd, 2013).

Though the appropriateness of 'ungoverned spaces' as a qualifying concept for describing vulnerable geographical areas devoid of state presence and control is still being contested, its use as a term still dominates regional and global security discussions, as well as border security strategy proposals and policy framework designs for several nations. Nigeria's National Security Strategy 2019, specifically recognises ungoverned spaces as areas around the nation's external boundaries, border communities, internal game reserves and forests which provide opportunities and a conducive environment for criminal networks to fester and actively promote crime including terrorism, (NSS, 2019). Ungoverned spaces, according to NSS 2019, "constitute critical fragility in Nigeria's national security and are antithetical to the nation’s security system". Rabasa (2007) and Menkhaus (2007), agree in defining an ungoverned space as an area of abdicated governance, where the government abandons its control and as a result leaves the area or space relatively lawless.

Nigeria, mostly bordered by the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin countries such as Chad, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, have over the years witnessed daring cross-border management challenges perpetrated by violent non-state actors such as criminal cattle herders, armed bandits, religious extremists and terrorists. These attacks frequently emanate from border areas or spaces without

formal state authority and presence, hence lacking in government reach, enforcement capabilities and control, (IOM, 2017). The lack of state authority and control in these spaces pose a significant security risk. Drug and human trafficking, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, money laundering, illegal crossborder migration and smuggling of illicit-contraband goods are criminal activities that also fester as a direct result, (Mitchell, 2010).

Accordingly, the gap in border community development, control and regulation is symbolised by increasing incidents of banditry, kidnapping, militancy and communal conflicts, the effects which are now experienced inwards far beyond the borders within urban and rural communities, (Taylor, 2016). Terrorism, today, has been adjudged the most fundamental cause of insecurity in Nigeria, so also in Chad, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, and this is so because the ungoverned spaces which demarcate these countries as borders and border communities exhibit vulnerability hence exploited by trans-border criminals and terrorists, (Bernard & Daful, 2021).

This paper, situates border communities as risk-prone ungoverned spaces through which armed and criminal non-state actors infiltrate and attempt to compromise the country's national security. Securing these border communities is an imperative if national security is to be effectively enforced in the face of the nation's growing security challenges. Averting or mitigating these challenges, falls under the purview of the security regime existing between neighbouring nations. In the case of Nigeria and Niger, the 1,608-kilometer long borderline has been over the years proven difficult to be managed thereby yielding series of wanton attacks on civilians across both divides. If the historical complexities in the security and management of border communities have resulted in national security challenges, then the recent diplomatic row between Nigeria and Niger since July 2023 has even exacerbated it. Therefore, the border communities remain largely ungoverned, insecurity continues unabated, and what has both nations done in this regard?

Beyond the regimes of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and African Union (AU), the Nigeria Niger Joint Commission for Cooperation (NNJCC) which was created in 1973 to, among other things, provide institutional anchorage and political support for regional initiatives between the two countries. According to Okechukwu (2018) the workings of the NNJCC goes beyond the framework of simple economic relations, its integrity remains concrete in the promotion of joint development of the two countries by implementing local projects, designing financing strategies and accompanying political decisions in order to facilitate their implementation. The NNJCC's achievements are closely linked to its mission of developing bilateral and cross border trade in the following vital sectors: transport, telecommunications network, trade, environment, management and promotion of livestock breeding, joint rural programmes, energy, industry, health, management of aquatic resources, combating cultural enemies, security and border management among others (Okechukwu, 2018). This paper also interrogates the place of NNJCC in the face of rising attacks on border communities especially those that are largely starved of governance.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Specifically, this paper was designed to

i. Determine whether there is relationship between ungoverned border communities and crossborder security challenges; and
ii. Examine the efforts of Nigeria and Niger through NNJCC in demarginalizing residents in their border communities.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Ungoverned Spaces

The concept of ungoverned spaces is defined as spaces that are ineffectively governed by the state. Taylor (2016) sees ungoverned spaces as the inability of the state to exert its power as the authoritative allocator of value, possessor of the monopoly of legitimate coercion and the provider of the collective good. Ungoverned spaces are seen as political, social, and economic territories functioning within the state where the legitimate authorities are unwilling or incapable to exert "effective sovereignty". The political economy of ungoverned spaces maintains that integrating such spaces is of little value and may be too expensive or difficult to govern. For instance, it has not been easy for the government of Nigeria in governing its forests. Though the forests have long existed, in recent times, some of them have been invaded and controlled by terrorist groups.

Some have argued that contrary to the widely acceptable generalisation on the absence of governance in these areas, political orders in these areas have not disappeared, rather it is exerted by non-state actors like warlords, religious or traditional leaders, rebel organisations, and community leaders (Lake, 2009; Keister, 2014). Ungoverned spaces, therefore, exist in areas where the legitimate government has willingly or unwillingly surrendered its organisations, and community leaders (Lake, 2009; Keister, 2014). Ungoverned spaces, therefore, exist in areas where the legitimate government has willingly or unwillingly surrendered its legitimate power, fully or partially to non-state actors whose actions may be harmful to the local or national peace. Sackflame and Omitola (2022) then argued that the national security apparatus in such places are not potent in securing the territory and fulling governance in such places. It is therefore right to conclude that governance in such spaces is highly contested which makes it weak (Keister, 2014; Taylor, 2016; Lenshie, Okengwu, Ogbonna and Ezeibe, 2021).

Some features of Ungoverened Spaces include No Governance, No Control/Authority, Tangible and Intangible. Vulnerability, Marignalized, mis-managed. Contested.

According to Clark and Mansour (2013), what is at stake in the discourse of the ungoverned spaces is the "spaces of contested governance and misgovernance". Relying on the data gathered in Syria, they argue that the rationality is unsound because areas termed ungoverned are either ceded from the state or became ungoverned due to the absence of governance. They further argued that these spaces are not ungoverned. Rather, it is either these spaces are willingly abandoned, which place them under the sphere of mismanagement or they are not willingly abandoned which place such spaces under contested governance. In the case of contested governance, the state performs its legitimate function where the non-state actors are not in control but struggles with the

non-state actors where they are in operation to perform its legitimate function. Igboin (2021) corroborates this argument that since the state does not voluntarily relinquish such spaces, the notion of misgovernance captures the reason for contested governance.

These contested ungoverned spaces harbor non-state actors. The non-state actors plan their operational activities in such spaces. They incite and mobilize forces for their expansion in such spaces (Djugumanov and Pankovski, 2013). From these spaces, they "establish themselves, consolidate, plan, organise, fundraise, recruit, train, and operate" (Clark and Mansour 2013). This enables the non-state actor to have a base of operation. Then, this is the point, whether ungoverned spaces are assessed from the angle of mismanagement or contested governance, a substantial portion of the forests in Nigeria are not only qualified to be called ungoverned spaces but also serve as a haven for the non-state actors, whose activities have been injurious to the existence of the Nigeria state.

The rainforests in the Niger-Delta host illegal oil bunkers, pipeline vandals, thieves, and other insurgent groups involved in the struggle for the control of oil resources. Forests in the Western and Eastern parts of the country have been havens to armed robbers, kidnappers, ritualists, smugglers, and robbers. In the North, the Sambisa Forest in the Northeast has been the house of the Bobo Haram extremist group for more than a decade. The Gundami forest in Zamfara, Kagoro-Nindam forest in Kaduna, and Kuyanbana forest, where Niger, Kaduna, and Kebbi states among others can be accessed have accommodated the cattle rustlers, kidnappers, cattle rustlers, and armed bandits (Olaniyan, 2018). The non-state actors like bandits and Boko Haram extremists among others make use of these spaces as havens. They mobilise forces from these spaces and launch out to the governed spaces to claim more spaces.

Banditry and Ungoverned Spaces in Nigeria

Banditry generally, is a loosely defined concept. Banditry in Nigeria involves armed violence aimed at human life and property by criminal actors (Okoli and Okpaleke, 2014). Bandits in Nigeria engage in criminality such as looting of villages, kidnapping for ransom, extortion of local communities, armed robbery, rustling, and related armed violence. Banditry activities have been prevalent in the northwest zone of the country but have grown extensively in Zamfara state in the last decade (Gadzama, Saddiq, Oduchie, and Dariya, 2018). Extant literature has documented the different perspectives on the reason for the rise of criminality and banditry in Nigeria. The first school of thought argues that politicians armed and sponsored youths in the 2011 election and failed to recover the arms given to them in the preselection period. The politicians abandoned the thugs in the post-election era, who then went into cattle stealing, robbery, drug abuse and later transformed into armed gangs terrorising villages (Gadzama, Saddiq, Oduehie, and Dariya, 2018). The position is strengthened by the position of Rafai (2021) that the first set of motorbikes used for attacks for banditry activities mist especially in Zamfara state are donated by politicians in the build-up to the 2011 elections.

Another school of thought argues that the banditry springs up as a response to injustice against the agro-pastoral communities (Shettima & Tar, 2008; Olaniyan & Yahaya 2016; Okoli and

Abubakar, 2021). In line with this position is the narrative that bandits started from the mercenary fighters who fought and defend the herders in their confrontation with the farmers. Rufai (2021) argues that at the formative stage, the goal of the group was to ensure the oneness of the herders in their quest for social justice (Rufai, 2021). This perspective holds that the mercenary fighters later turned to criminals who started with cattle rustling and later turned to kidnappers (International Crisis Group, 2020).

These narratives are important to the understanding of the development of banditry. However, they may not be right because arguments exist in the literature that the colonial government in the pre-independent era also responded to the menace of rural banditry by deploring policemen to the strategic locations across Sokoto province to curb the act and other cross border crimes in the province (Garba, 2021). Whatever the sources of banditry are. They have become a major security concern in Nigeria, with the northwest geopolitical zone as the epicentre.

Thousands have died in the northwest zone as a result of banditry. In recent years the situation has degenerated with gangs kidnapping for ransom, laying ambush for travellers, and looting of villages. Villagers across the states in the zone claim they pay tax to the bandits to avoid violence occurrence (Ladan and Matawalli. 2021). The report of a committee set up by the Zamfara state Government to investigate the activities of the bandits claimed that between 2011 and 2019 report that about 6,319 people died: 4000 kidnapped; N2, 805,049,748 ransom paid; 6, 483 widows and 25,000 orphans were left behind by the victims in the period. The report also shows that more than 21,000 cows, 141,000 sheep, and about 20,000 donkeys and camels rustled. More than 3587 houses and 1400 motorcycles and vehicles were burnt (Adegboruwa, 2021).

Virtually all the states in the northwest are affected by banditry. In Sokoto state, the security situation has been alarming especially in the 8 local governments- Sabon Birni, Gada, Isa, Wuni, Goronyo, Illela, Rabah, and Gwabawa as a result of banditry. In Kaduna state, bandits have been terorising Birnin Gwari, Chikun, Kajuru, and Igabi local governments. Bandit kingpins are holding swayin Katisna local government- Jibia, Safana, Batsari, Danmusa, Kankara, Dutsin Ma-Faskari, Kurfi, Dandume, and Sabuwa. In Kebbi state, Fakai, Sakaba, Danko-Wasagu local government areas have been affected. In all these areas affected, each bandit's leaders maintain a territory and carry out their operation in many situations unchallenged. Villagers pay them to have access to their farms, graze their animals, and take their farm produce to local markets (Mohammed, Liman, and Babangida, 2021; UNHCR, 2021).

The bandits' leaders in the states have carved out areas of operation for themselves. They ransack villages, block highways, massacre civilians, and challenge the security apparatus of the state. The available data in the literature suggests that they are known by the citizens, security agencies, and state government as some of them have participated in negotiations with the authorities. Table 1 details the bandit leaders operating in some of these local governments. As it has been noted, ungoverned spaces are areas that lay beyond the coverage of the government and pose a threat to stability and security. Ungoverned spaces are often seen as fertile grounds where terrorist groups thrive and incubate. Evidence of such is manifested in the several bandit hideouts in Kwiambana, Ajjah, Birnin Kogo, Rugu, Shiroro, Borgu forests that span across Zamfara,

Kaduna, Katsina, Niger states, and some parts of the Niger Republic among others that serve as hideouts for the bandits. This argument is corroborated by the view of Olaniyan and Yahaya (2016) that most of the forest reverses are out of the reach of the security forces. The forest reserves offer a criminal hideout from the security forces.

In addition, Clunan and Harold (2010) give an inclusive argument on ungoverned spaces, she argues that the concept transcends the presence of the government in an area. It involves the presence of the informal economies, criminals, and dominance of traditional nomadic tribes, the presence of the primordial tribal, hierarchies, customs, and religious institutions. In this view, governance revolves outside the established authority of the state. For instance, the constitution of the state placed the natural resources in the hand of the government, there are indications that the informal gold economy in the state gives rise, to insecurity in the region. While some argue that the bandits are working with the artisanal who exchange the illegal gold for weapons at the borders, others argue that the wave of the banditry in the region is said to be an effect of the dominance of warlords struggling for a piece of the pie (Ogonnaya, 2020; Igwe, 2021; Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime, 2021). The report of a committee set up by the Governor of Zamfara state indicted five emirs and 33 heads of districts in the state. Also, Muslim clerics like Shaik Gumi have been supporting and negotiating with the bandits who have committed many atrocities. These revelations coupled with the findings of Rofai (2021) show the existence of state and non-state actors operating in the same territory.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Securitization Theory

This study adopts securitization theory. Securitization theory explains a manipulation of a phenomenon to create the idea of threat to enable one actor to use possible means to dispel a danger, whether perceived or real. The theory is generally attributed to works by Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, Jaap de Wilde and others of the famous Conflict and Peace Research Institute (COPRI) in Copenhagen during the early 1990s. The theory is largely credited to the reflections from Waever such as *The Speech Act* (1989), *Securitization and Desecuritization* (1995) and *Concept of Security* (1997). The theory holds that securitization is established when an actor, in international relations, employs the use of rhetoric to create an existential threat with the intention of blowing a normal situation out of proportion in order to justify using certain powers which would ordinarily be deemed excessive. In securitization, normal political discourse is deemed exceptional because it is in the interest of a securitizing actor, which is usually stronger, on the weaker or protected actor in order to justify an action.

The security threats from ungoverned spaces and Nigeria's pattern of securitization show why it makes sense to use the theories of ungoverned spaces and securitization. The American think tank RAND Corporation coined the phrase "ungoverned spaces," whereas Ole Waever and Barry Buzan, among others, are prominent proponents of the Copenhagen School's securitization theory (Lenshie, 2018; Okoli & Lenshie, 2018). It was Hilary Clinton, the former United States Secretary of State, who popularised the ungoverned space thesis by addressing Afghanistan-

Pakistan borders as ungoverned spaces (Chalk, 2007; Marsden, 2017). Ungoverned spaces consist of spaces or territories that are amenable to control by violent non-state actors (Raleigh & Dowd, 2013; Clunan & Trinkunas, 2010; Whelan, 2005, 2006). These spaces can be tangible and intangible, otherwise physical and non-physical, where, either deliberately or not, the authority of the state is out of reach. In some instances, the authority of the state may be present but dormant or ineffective due to vested interests. Ungoverned spaces are the resultant implications of poor governance, under-governance, and governance breakdown (Taylor, 2016; Lamb, 2008; Lenshie, 2018). In ungoverned spaces, shadow authority or statehood emerges to pose security threats to the state's sovereignty and survival (Taylor, 2016; Mallet, 2010; Whelan, 2006).

According to Keister (2014), ungoverned spaces are a general condition of a fragile or non-existent state's authority in a geographical location. Beyond Keister's conception, ungoverned spaces also reflect a situation of governance deficit or absence, creating anarchic zones (Taylor, 2016) that threaten referent objects. A governance deficit or absence does not always imply military, technological, or political incapacity; it could also imply a deliberate state's decision not to apply legitimate force against threats from ungoverned spaces.

Conditions that necessitate ungoverned spaces may include the 'cosmetic and ineffective presence of the state in its frontier zones and the presence of large urban slums not effectively controlled by the government' (Menkhaus, 2007). Other conditions are population growth, urbanisation, globalisation, increasing wealth levels of non-state actors, and technological advancement (Julum & Evans, 2015).

The security threats from ungoverned spaces in domestic and global security contexts necessitate the securitization discourse. As stated, the state has, under international law, the sovereign prerogative to protect its territory, lives, and properties. The state exercising normal authority and legitimately using force within its territorial boundaries is an expression of sovereignty. Therefore, securitization means ensuring the state's sovereignty and the freedom of the people from fear and harm of whatever kind. Central to the securitization theory is the use of illocutionary speech by the securitizing actor to label an issue a security threat, requiring the use of extraordinary measures (Waever 1995a). To effectively label a security threat, Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde (1998) stated that the security actor must be able to (1) identify an existential threat, (2) identify a threatened referent object, (3) present a situation requiring emergency action, and (4) apply extraordinary measures (Kasim, 2013). To take the right security action (Waever, 1995b, 1989; Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde, 1998; Kasim, 2013), the securitizing actor must know how to use language, follow the rule of illocutionary speech act (social and inter-subjective construction of security threat), seek audience acceptance, and hold a position based on contextual and social factors (Waever, 1995b, 1989; Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde, 1998; Kasim, 2013).

The theoretical constructs have been criticised for being excessively theoretical and imaginary. Despite the enormity of criticism, the theories offer a plausible understanding of the interplay of ungovernable spaces due to security challenges in Nigeria. The ungoverned spaces thesis points to the existence of physical and non-physical ungovernable spaces as a basis for insecurity in Nigeria—the near absence of government presence and control of critical domains of

Nigeria's wider territorial spaces, such as the physical and maritime boundaries, forest areas, cyberspace, the mainland, airways, and waterways. In Nigeria's countryside, security governance suffers from acute ungovernable spaces as the expanse of its borders, rangelands, and forests are physically and functionally separated from effective control and management by the state (Okoli & Lenshie, 2018).

Over the years, violent non-state actors have used ungoverned spaces in Nigeria to engage in the illicit arms trade, kidnapping, and abduction, human trafficking, and building networks in and outside the country. The pattern of securitization has been consequential for arms smuggling and proliferation and the level of organised ethnic, religious, political, and social violence in Nigeria. The role of the government in security governance within and at the country's borders is essential for the protection of the lives and properties of the people. The failure of internal security governance enables the transnational flow of arms and proliferation used to challenge the state's sovereignty. The prevailing security challenges in Nigeria reveal the attitude of securitizing actors and the pattern of securitization they have adopted to deal with security threats within and at the borders of Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This paper was approached from a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. It adopted both the attributes of survey and descriptive research design. To achieve the first objective, the researcher use data from the database of Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED). ACLED is a project that collects information on the dates, actors, location, fatalities, and types of all reported violence and protests around the world. Specifically the researcher collected data on violence on civilians between 2020 and 2024 in 20 border communities which have large expanse of ungoverned land spaces, 10 in Nigeria and 10 in Niger. These purposively selected from the Dosso, Tahoua, Maradi, Zinder and Diffa regions of Niger and the Nigerian States of Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara, Katsina, Jigawa. Communities were selected from each region and state, respectively. The number of attacks on civilians between 2020 and 2024 were tested using spearman's rank correlation to determine whether there is relationship between ungoverned spaces and cross border crime within the borderline of Nigeria and Niger.

Table 1: Aggregation of Attacks on Civilians in Ungoverned Border Communities Across Nigeria and Niger Borderline Between 2020 and 2024

Country- Niger Republic			**Country- Nigeria**		
Region	**Community**	**Number of attacks**	**State**	**Community**	**Number of attacks**
Diffa	1. Bosso 2. Diffa 3. Maine soroa	16 13 4	**Katsina**	1. Zango 2. Baure 3. Jibia	189 152 48
Zinder	4. Magaria	19	**Jigawa**	4. Maigatari	24
Tahoua	5. Bangui 6. Tsernaoua 7. Birni-N'Konni	12 23 9	**Kebbi**	5. Kwalaye 6. Maiyama 7. Nageda	209 438 321
Dosso	8. Doumega 9. Sabon birni	21 29	**Zamfara**	8. Rafin tsaka 9. Sabon birni	684 892
Maradi	10. Guidan Roumdji	35	**Sokoto**	10. Tunugara	735

Source: ACLED 2025

Furthermore, face to face interview was conducted with the Executive Secretary of Nigeria's Border Communities Development Agency, and a telephone interview with the Head of Le Commission Nationale des Frontiers du Niger, a department under the Nigerien Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The interview was to elicit information on how the Nigerian and the Nigerien governments have taken advantage of the NNJCC to promote the presence of government in these vulnerable border communities.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

For the first specific objective of this paper. The following Spearman's Rank Correlation Formula was applied to not only determine whether there is relationship between ungoverned spaces and the security of borderline communities but also determine the strength of these relationships. The spearman's rank correlation formula applies

$$1 - \frac{6\sum d^2}{n(n^2-1)} = \rho$$

Where;

ρ = spearman's rank correlation coefficient

d = difference between the two ranks of each observation

n = number of observations.

The decision rule for spearman's rank correlation states that a perfect positive monotonic relationship should result in +1, conversely, a perfect negative relationship will result in in-1.

However, in interpreting the strength of the relationships, spearman's rank correlation coefficients are ranked as follows;
0 to 0.20: Negligible
0.21 to 0.40: Weak
0.41 to 0.60: Moderate
0.61 to 0.80: Strong
0.81- 1.00: Very Strong.

Table 2: Spearman Ranking for Attacks on Civilians in Ungoverned Border Communities Across Nigeria and Niger Borderline Between 2020 and 2024

S/N	Attacks in Niger X	Attacks in Nigeria Y	RX	RY	D	D^2
1.	16	189	6	7	-1	1
2.	13	152	7	8	-1	1
3.	4	48	10	9	1	1
4.	19	24	5	10	-5	25
5.	12	209	8	6	2	4
6.	23	438	3	4	-1	1
7.	9	321	9	5	4	16
8.	21	684	4	3	1	1
9.	29	892	2	1	1	1
10.	35	735	1	2	-1	1
						52

$$1 - \frac{6\sum d^2}{n(n^2-1)} = \rho$$

$$1 - \frac{6 * 52}{10(100-1)} = \rho$$

$$1 - \frac{312}{990} = \rho$$

$\rho = 0.68$

This means that there is a strong relationship between ungoverned spaces and security challenges along the communities in Nigeria-Niger borderlines. This implies that due to the inactiveness of both the Nigerian and the Nigerien governments in border communities have strong relationship with the escalation of violence against citizens in these communities.

Having established the relationship between ungoverned spaces and border management problems, it suffices to interrogate the efforts of the Nigerian and Nigerien governments in accommodating these frontiers communities into the national mainstream. This interrogation

assumes the regime of securitization. The existence of bilateral agreement- NNJCC, which goes beyond ECOWAS and the AU, portends hopes for border communities, however, the reality shows stack difference. According to the Executive Secretary of the Nigeria's Border Communities Development Agency, the reason for the poor presence of the government in most border communities are not unconnected to the problems of coordinating government activities at those extremes. According to Him, *it is true that government has not done enough to cater for border communities in terms of institutions, but the Nigerian government has constantly catered for the social need of the people in these areas, for instance, the agency is constantly in touch with residents on boundaries and borderlines who feel marginalized by the government, to restore their hopes in the government. Although, everyone should appreciate the position of the government because if ever there are government institutions in these areas, they will not only be patronized by well-meaning Nigerians, rather it will be used to service foreign nationals in the region.*

On his part the Head of Le Commission Nationale des Frontiers du Niger, does not fully share the sentiments of his Nigerian counterpart. He maintained that the NNJCC provided a platform for a more elaborate collaboration that mere concern for borderline communities. Speaking through an interpreter, he said, *the government of Niger must not build institutions in border communities to prove that it is respecting the NNJCC agreement. Every policies and programmes of our government are for all Nigeriens no matter their place of residence. When there are infractions anywhere, be it in the border, we respond to it, so I can't say that there is absence of government anywhere in Niger. Maybe we can say that recent time there has been some security challenges, but insecurity is a global phenomenon. You can see that, despite our political differences, we are still collaborating with our sub-regional neighbours to stem the tide of insecurity. We try to tackle insecurity in every part of Niger without considering the area in focus. As part of our concerns towards the frontiers, we also work with local intelligence, so there is no area of Niger that is ungoverned.*

Perhaps the positions of both Executive Secretary of the Nigeria's Border Communities Development Agency and the Head of Le Commission Nationale des Frontiers du Niger have certain implications. First, they were both playing down the effects of ungoverned border communities on insecurity in the management of these borders. This ultimately implies that there is currently no joint effort to tackle insecurity in border communities through addressing the problem of ungoverned spaces. In fact, their positions reveal that ungoverned spaces have not been characterised as a key factor aiding insecurity in the borderlines. In addition, these responses reveal that the criminal elements operating in these ungoverned spaces are emboldened by the fact that no existing bilateral approach to address the vulnerability of ungoverned spaces in the border regions. Above all, there is no end in sight for criminal elements operating in ungoverned border communities not only because of the absence of governance in these areas but also the limitrophe nations have not identified it as a threat to borderline security.

Conceivably, the idea of bringing government closer to the people is the whole essence of local government. This discussion will be incomplete without examining the role of local government, but the place of local government is limited by several factors, first, local governments in Nigeria

have no constitutional powers to engage international government without the Federal Government. Secondly, the challenges of local government's capacity to provide adequate security in all the local government areas in Nigeria has been extensively studied. The ongoing debates about state police in the Nigeria's National Assembly is a step in the right direction if it eventually comes to fruition because the state can gain intelligence on the sociology of borderline communities with more security agents in the ranks of the state. However, the onus is on the federal government to coordinate the efforts of other levels in order to ensure that borderline communities are integrated into the mainstream of national life.

CONCLUSION

The literature on insecurity in the Sahel areas sub-Saharan Africa is awash with studies on border porosity, weak institutional mechanisms, and the impact of external influence. Quite a few studies have paid attention to ungoverned spaces but none of them has empirically establish how ungoverned spaces relate to border management challenges. This paper has applied a combination of quantitative and qualitative research approaches to examine the empirical relevance on ungoverned spaces and insecurity along the borderlines of Nigeria and Niger republic. The paper found that there is a strong relationship between ungoverned spaces and attacks on civilians in border communities both in Nigeria and Niger Republic. The study also found that there is currently no bilateral agreement to address the issues of ungoverned spaces in these border communities. These findings by implication led this paper to conclude that the absence of governance in most border communities is a source of border management challenges between Nigeria and Niger Republic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from this study, the following recommendations were make;

1. The Nigerian and Nigerien governments across federal, state, and local government levels, where applicable, should strategically locate government institutions within border communities.
2. In order to promote the presence of government in most border communities, the Nigerian government should expedite action in creating state police which will enable frontier states to spread intelligence networks to areas previously out of coverage.
3. The federal government of Nigeria should expand the agro-rangers initiatives to also improve the presence of government, especially members of the intelligence community, to hitherto ungoverned border communities.
4. In order to promote crossborder policies that will promote presence of governance in border communities, the governments of Nigeria and Niger Republic should set aside their political differences and enter into an agreement that will condition both countries to make sizeable investment in border communities.

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