

**Cross-Border Banditry and the Erosion of Regional Stability in the Sahel: Evidence from
Zamfara State, Nigeria**

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Abstract

Cross-border banditry has emerged as a significant security challenge in the Sahel, where porous borders, illicit arms flow, weak border governance, and limited regional security cooperation have created conditions conducive to transnational criminal activities. This study examines the relationship between cross-border banditry and the erosion of regional stability in the Sahel, using Zamfara State in northwestern Nigeria as a case study. Guided by Security Complex Theory, the study adopts a quantitative research design and analyses survey data obtained from 114 valid respondents selected from a target population comprising security officials, community leaders, academics, civil society actors, and affected community members. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson Product Moment Correlation, and Chi-square tests at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings reveal a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between cross-border banditry and regional insecurity in the Sahel ($r = 0.71$, $p < 0.001$). The analysis further establishes that banditry and cross-border insecurity have statistically significant implications for regional stability ($\chi^2 = 53.17$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.001$). The findings indicate that porous borders, illicit arms trafficking, weak border surveillance, and inadequate regional security cooperation contribute to the transnational character of banditry and its wider security consequences. The study argues that the persistence of banditry in Zamfara should be understood as part of an interconnected regional security complex rather than as an isolated domestic criminal problem. It recommends strengthened border governance, intelligence sharing, coordinated regional security operations, and greater institutional cooperation among Nigeria and neighbouring Sahelian states. The study contributes empirical evidence to debates on transnational insecurity by demonstrating how localized banditry can generate wider consequences for regional stability.

Keywords: Cross-Border Banditry, Regional Stability, Sahel, Zamfara State, Nigeria

1.0 Introduction

The Sahel has become one of the most fragile security environments in Africa, characterized by the convergence of armed conflict, violent extremism, organized crime, weak governance, and humanitarian crises. While terrorism and insurgency have traditionally dominated discussions of security in the region, the expansion of armed banditry has increasingly become an important component of the wider security landscape. In parts of West Africa, particularly in areas characterized by weak state presence and poorly governed borderlands, armed groups and criminal networks have exploited porous borders, illicit arms markets, and institutional weaknesses to sustain violent activities. Consequently, security threats that may initially appear localized increasingly acquire transnational dimensions, challenging the capacity of individual states to manage insecurity within their territorial boundaries.

Nigeria's northwestern region represents an important setting for understanding this transformation. Zamfara State has experienced persistent armed banditry involving kidnapping, cattle rustling, attacks on rural communities, displacement, and the disruption of agricultural livelihoods. The scale and persistence of the violence have made Zamfara a major centre of Nigeria's banditry crisis. However, the security challenges confronting the state cannot be fully understood through a purely domestic perspective. Its geographical proximity to Niger Republic and its position within a wider network of informal cross-border movements connect the state's security challenges to broader dynamics of insecurity in the Sahel.

The cross-border dimension of the crisis is particularly important because criminal actors do not necessarily operate within the territorial boundaries of a single state. The porous Nigeria–Niger frontier provides opportunities for the movement of armed groups, illicit weapons, stolen livestock, and other trafficked goods. Weak border surveillance and limited institutional coordination may allow criminal networks to exploit gaps between national jurisdictions. The resulting security environment complicates conventional state-based responses because military or policing operations conducted within one country may be undermined when armed actors can move across borders or access resources through transnational networks (Dankwendo & Ahmadu, 2022; Nnadi & Okoye, 2022; Ogundare, 2021).

The relationship between cross-border insecurity and banditry is therefore central to understanding the persistence of violence in Zamfara State. The availability of illicit arms, the movement of criminal actors, and the existence of informal cross-border routes may strengthen the operational capacity of armed groups. These dynamics are compounded by weak border governance and inadequate intelligence sharing between neighbouring states. The problem is further complicated by the broader instability of the Sahel, where fragile governance structures and insecurity have created spaces in which different forms of organized violence can interact and reinforce one another (Lacher, 2020; Thurston, 2020).

The security implications extend beyond Zamfara State. Persistent cross-border banditry can contribute to wider regional insecurity by facilitating the movement of weapons and criminal

actors, disrupting legitimate economic activities, increasing population displacement, and creating additional pressure on already fragile state institutions. The weakening of local governance and the emergence of ungoverned spaces may also create opportunities for other forms of transnational crime and violent organizations to expand their activities. Thus, the consequences of banditry are not confined to the communities directly affected by attacks but may extend across national boundaries and influence the wider security environment of the Sahel.

This regional dimension is consistent with the Security Complex Theory (SCT) developed by Buzan and Wæver (2003). The theory maintains that security threats are often interconnected within geographically proximate regions and that the security concerns of individual states cannot always be adequately understood in isolation from those of neighbouring states. States within a regional security complex are connected through patterns of security interdependence, meaning that insecurity in one state may generate consequences for others. From this perspective, the cross-border dimensions of banditry in Zamfara State provide an important case through which to examine the interconnected nature of security in the Sahel.

The relevance of Security Complex Theory to the present study lies in its ability to move the analysis beyond the conventional treatment of banditry as an isolated domestic criminal problem. The theory provides a framework for understanding how insecurity can circulate through geographical proximity, shared borders, transnational networks, and interconnected political and security environments. In the case of Zamfara State, cross-border banditry may be understood as part of a wider regional security process in which insecurity in one location affects neighbouring states and contributes to broader patterns of instability (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

The situation is particularly significant because the Nigeria–Niger border forms part of a wider Sahelian security environment characterized by extensive informal cross-border movement. Historically, these borderlands have supported trade, migration, pastoral mobility, and social interaction. However, the same geographical openness can be exploited by criminal actors. Weak border management may facilitate the trafficking of arms and the movement of armed groups, while insufficient coordination between national security institutions can make it difficult to monitor and respond effectively to transnational criminal activities (Abdullahi, 2019; Nnadi & Okoye, 2022).

The wider regional context further intensifies these concerns. The Sahel has experienced prolonged instability associated with armed extremist groups, organized crime, weak governance, and state fragility. The persistence of insecurity in countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger has created a complex security environment in which different forms of violence increasingly overlap. Lacher (2020) argues that state fragility in the Sahel is both a consequence and a driver of insecurity, producing cycles that make stabilization increasingly difficult. Within this environment, the expansion of banditry in northwestern Nigeria represents an additional layer of insecurity that may reinforce existing regional vulnerabilities.

The cross-border nature of banditry also raises questions about the effectiveness of state-centric approaches to security management. Where armed groups can move across national boundaries, acquire weapons through transnational networks, or exploit differences in border-control regimes, unilateral security responses may have limited effectiveness. The creation of regional security mechanisms and the participation of states in joint security arrangements demonstrate growing recognition that transnational threats require collective responses. However, weak intelligence sharing, uneven border surveillance, institutional limitations, and political tensions may continue to constrain effective regional cooperation (International Crisis Group, 2020; Thurston, 2020).

Against this background, this study examines cross-border banditry and the erosion of regional stability in the Sahel, with evidence from Zamfara State, Nigeria. Unlike studies that focus primarily on the domestic causes of banditry, this article concentrates specifically on two interconnected questions: whether cross-border banditry is significantly associated with regional insecurity and whether banditry and cross-border insecurity have significant implications for regional stability. This narrower focus allows the study to develop a quantitative assessment of the transnational security dimensions of the Zamfara crisis.

The study is particularly relevant because existing scholarship has extensively examined poverty, unemployment, weak governance, resource competition, arms proliferation, and environmental pressures as drivers of banditry in northwestern Nigeria (Mustafa, 2024; Nadama, 2019; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; Ojo et al., 2023). Other studies have examined porous borders, ungoverned spaces, and regional security cooperation as factors enabling cross-border crime (Abdullahi, 2019; Dankwendo & Ahmadu, 2022; Nnadi & Okoye, 2022). However, comparatively less empirical attention has been directed toward quantitatively connecting cross-border banditry in Zamfara State with regional insecurity and regional stability within the Sahel.

This study responds to that gap by using quantitative evidence to examine the relationship between cross-border banditry and regional insecurity and to assess the implications of cross-border insecurity for regional stability. The analysis is grounded in Security Complex Theory and seeks to demonstrate that the security consequences of banditry extend beyond the immediate territorial boundaries of Zamfara State. The central argument is that where insecurity is facilitated by porous borders, illicit arms flow, criminal mobility, and inadequate regional cooperation, the resulting security challenge becomes inherently regional in character.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The persistence of armed banditry in Zamfara State represents a serious security challenge with consequences that extend beyond local communities. Despite military deployments, counter-banditry operations, negotiation efforts, and other government interventions, the crisis has remained resilient. The continued violence raises questions about the adequacy of approaches that treat banditry primarily as a domestic criminal problem. The persistence of the crisis suggests that the underlying security dynamics may extend beyond the immediate territorial and institutional boundaries of Zamfara State.

A major concern is the cross-border dimension of the problem. Zamfara's proximity to Niger Republic and the permeability of the Nigeria–Niger border creates opportunities for the movement of armed groups, weapons, and criminal networks. Such movements may enable bandits to evade security operations, establish temporary bases, access illicit arms, and maintain logistical connections across national boundaries. Weak border surveillance and inadequate intelligence sharing further complicate the capacity of individual states to prevent or contain such activities (Thurston, 2020).

The problem is not limited to the movement of criminal actors. Cross-border insecurity may have broader consequences for regional stability by contributing to population displacement, disrupting agricultural and commercial activities, weakening state authority, and creating opportunities for other forms of transnational crime. The humanitarian and economic consequences of insecurity can place additional pressure on neighbouring states and regional institutions, particularly in a region already affected by terrorism, violent extremism, political instability, and weak governance (International Crisis Group, 2020; Lacher, 2020).

Despite these concerns, the relationship between cross-border banditry and regional stability remains insufficiently established through quantitative evidence. Existing studies have identified porous borders, illicit arms trafficking, weak governance, and regional insecurity as interconnected challenges, but fewer studies have empirically tested the relationship between cross-border banditry in Zamfara and regional insecurity or statistically examined its implications for regional stability.

This creates an important research and policy gap. Without empirical evidence demonstrating the strength and significance of these relationships, responses may continue to focus primarily on localized military interventions while underestimating the regional dimensions of the crisis. This study therefore addresses the problem by quantitatively examining the relationship between cross-border banditry and regional insecurity and assessing whether banditry and cross-border insecurity have significant implications for regional stability in the Sahel.

1.3 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between cross-border banditry in Zamfara State and regional insecurity in the Sahel?
2. What are the implications of banditry and cross-border insecurity in Zamfara State for regional stability in the Sahel?

1.4 Research Objectives

The broad objective of this study is to examine the relationship between cross-border banditry and regional stability in the Sahel, using Zamfara State, Nigeria, as a case study.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the relationship between cross-border banditry in Zamfara State and regional insecurity in the Sahel.
2. Assess the implications of banditry and cross-border insecurity in Zamfara State for regional stability in the Sahel.

1.5 Research Hypotheses

The study tests the following null hypotheses:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between cross-border banditry in Zamfara State and regional insecurity in the Sahel.

H₀₂: Banditry and cross-border insecurity in Zamfara State have no significant implications for regional stability in the Sahel.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Cross-Border Banditry and Insecurity

Banditry in northwestern Nigeria has increasingly evolved from localized criminal activity into a complex security phenomenon involving kidnapping, cattle rustling, armed attacks, extortion, and territorial control. While domestic factors such as poverty, unemployment, weak governance, and competition over resources remain important, the availability of illicit weapons and the ability of criminal groups to exploit poorly governed borderlands have added a transnational dimension to the crisis (Mustafa, 2024; Nadama, 2019; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019).

The cross-border character of banditry is particularly significant in Zamfara because of its geographical proximity to Niger Republic. The extensive borderland provides opportunities for the movement of people, livestock, commercial goods, and, potentially, illicit commodities. Where formal state controls are weak, informal routes may be exploited by criminal actors. This can make it difficult for national security agencies to distinguish between legitimate cross-border movement and activities linked to organized crime (Abdullahi, 2019; Nnadi & Okoye, 2022).

Cross-border criminality can also be reinforced by illicit arms flows. The circulation of small arms and light weapons across the Sahel has contributed to the capacity of armed groups to sustain violent activities. The movement of weapons through regional trafficking routes can strengthen the operational capabilities of criminal groups and increase the lethality of local conflicts. The availability of arms, combined with weak border governance, creates an enabling environment in which banditry can become increasingly organized and difficult to contain.

The relationship between cross-border banditry and insecurity is therefore not necessarily linear. Rather, the two may reinforce one another. Insecurity can weaken state presence and border governance, while weak border governance can, in turn, facilitate criminal mobility and the expansion of insecurity. This creates a cycle in which local insecurity becomes connected to wider regional security dynamics.

2.2 Cross-Border Insecurity and Regional Stability

Regional stability refers broadly to the capacity of states within a geographical region to maintain effective governance, manageable levels of insecurity, peaceful relations, and conditions conducive to socioeconomic development. In the Sahel, regional stability has been undermined by the interaction of armed conflict, violent extremism, organized crime, political instability, and weak institutional capacity (Arowona & Abdulkadir, 2024, Lacher, 2020).

The implications of cross-border banditry for regional stability are multidimensional. First, insecurity may weaken state authority by reducing the ability of governments to exercise effective control over remote territories. Second, persistent violence can contribute to displacement, humanitarian pressures, and declining economic activity. Third, the movement of weapons and criminal networks can facilitate the expansion of other forms of organized crime. Finally, insecurity can place additional demands on regional security institutions and reduce the capacity of states to contribute effectively to collective security initiatives.

The Zamfara case is particularly relevant because Nigeria occupies a strategically important position within West African regional security. Persistent domestic insecurity can constrain the country's ability to provide regional leadership and participate effectively in collective security mechanisms. The implications therefore extend beyond Nigeria's national borders and may affect the wider capacity of regional institutions to respond to transnational threats.

2.3 Empirical Gap

The existing literature provides substantial evidence on the domestic causes and consequences of banditry in northwestern Nigeria. Studies have emphasized poverty, unemployment, weak governance, environmental pressures, resource competition, and arms proliferation (Mustafa, 2024; Nadama, 2019; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). Other scholars have highlighted governance failures and ungoverned spaces as important conditions supporting criminal activity (Abdulrahman & Akuva, 2020; Obinna, 2021).

Research on cross-border insecurity has similarly identified porous borders, weak border management, illicit arms trafficking, and inadequate regional cooperation as important drivers of transnational crime (Abdullahi, 2019; Dankwendo & Ahmadu, 2022; Nnadi & Okoye, 2022). However, these studies have generally not provided a quantitative assessment of the relationship between cross-border banditry in Zamfara State and regional insecurity or its implications for regional stability.

This study addresses this gap by empirically testing these relationships. It therefore shifts the analytical focus from the domestic causes of banditry toward the regional consequences of cross-border insecurity. This approach is important for understanding whether the Zamfara crisis should be treated as a localized security problem or as part of a broader regional security complex.

2.4 Theoretical Framework: Security Complex Theory

This study adopts Security Complex Theory, developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver. The theory argues that security dynamics are often clustered geographically because states and societies within the same region are connected through patterns of security interdependence. The security concerns of one state may therefore become inseparable from those of neighbouring states (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

The central proposition is that threats do not necessarily remain confined within national borders. Geographic proximity, shared borders, historical relationships, population movements, and transnational networks create conditions through which insecurity can spread across states. Within a regional security complex, the actions taken by one state to address insecurity may also influence the security calculations and vulnerabilities of others.

The theory is particularly relevant to the present study because the banditry crisis in Zamfara is situated within a region characterized by interconnected security challenges. The state's proximity to Niger, the movement of people and goods across the border, the circulation of illicit weapons, and the activities of transnational criminal networks demonstrate how domestic insecurity can acquire regional dimensions.

Applied to this study, SCT suggests that cross-border banditry in Zamfara should not be examined solely as a domestic Nigerian security problem. Instead, it should be understood as part of a wider pattern of security interdependence in the Sahel. If cross-border banditry is significantly associated with regional insecurity, and if this insecurity has significant implications for regional stability, then the evidence would support the theory's central proposition that security challenges within a region are interconnected.

The theory also provides a useful basis for interpreting the findings of this study. The strong positive relationship identified between cross-border banditry and regional insecurity suggests that the security environment in Zamfara is connected to wider regional dynamics. Similarly, the significant implications of banditry and cross-border insecurity for regional stability demonstrate that the consequences of insecurity extend beyond the immediate location of the violence.

Nevertheless, the application of SCT to banditry requires some caution. The theory was initially developed largely around state-based security relations, whereas banditry involves non-state criminal actors. The present study therefore extends the theory's application by considering how non-state actors can generate regional security interdependence through cross-border mobility, illicit networks, and criminal activities. This adaptation is consistent with the evolving nature of security studies, in which non-state actors increasingly influence regional security dynamics.

3.0 Methodology

The study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between cross-border banditry, regional insecurity, and regional stability in the Sahel. The study is derived from the quantitative component of a broader mixed-method investigation of banditry and cross-border insecurity in Zamfara State between 2015 and 2025. For the purposes of this article, the analysis is restricted to the two research objectives concerning cross-border activities and their implications for regional stability.

The study was conducted in Zamfara State, northwestern Nigeria. The state was selected because of its central position in the banditry crisis and its geographical proximity to Niger Republic. The border connection provides a relevant setting for examining the relationship between domestic banditry and wider regional security dynamics. The target population comprised security officials, community leaders, academics and researchers in security and conflict studies, civil society actors, and members of communities directly affected by banditry. The original study identified a target population of 1,607,588 persons across these categories.

Applying the Taro Yamane (1967) formula to a population of 1,607,588, a sample size of 120 respondents is not statistically justified at the conventional 5% margin of error.

The formula is:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

- n = sample size
- N = population size
- e = margin of error (0.05)

Step 1: Substitute the values

$$n = \frac{1,607,588}{1 + 1,607,588(0.05)^2}$$

Since:

$$(0.05)^2 = 0.0025$$

Then:

$$\begin{aligned} n &= \frac{1,607,588}{1 + 1,607,588(0.0025)} \\ n &= \frac{1,607,588}{1 + 4,018.97} \\ n &= \frac{1,607,588}{4,019.97} \\ n &= 399.90 \\ n &\approx 400 \end{aligned}$$

However, due to security challenges in these areas it makes it convience for the setting up of purposive sampling of 120 questionnaires. A structured questionnaire was administered to 120 selected respondents using simple random sampling. Of these, 114 questionnaires were validly completed and retrieved, representing the dataset used for the quantitative analysis. The questionnaire contained items measuring perceptions of cross-border banditry, porous borders, cross-border arms trafficking, border security, regional security cooperation, regional insecurity, and implications for regional stability. The items were measured using a Likert-type response format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The questionnaire structure directly reflected the variables examined in the two selected research objectives.

The quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 25. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondents' views, while inferential statistics were applied to test the study's hypotheses. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to examine the relationship between cross-border banditry and regional insecurity, while the Chi-square test was used to determine whether banditry and cross-border insecurity had significant implications for regional stability. The hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

The analytical approach was selected because the first hypothesis concerns the statistical association between two variables, while the second examines the statistical significance of the broader implications of banditry and cross-border insecurity for regional stability. The findings are presented in relation to the research questions and interpreted within the framework of Security Complex Theory.

4.0 Results and Analysis

4.1 Cross-Border Banditry and Regional Insecurity

The first objective examined the relationship between cross-border banditry in Zamfara State and regional insecurity in the Sahel. Respondents were asked to assess the extent to which porous borders, cross-border movement, illicit arms trafficking, weak border security, and inadequate regional cooperation contribute to the persistence and spread of banditry.

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Between Cross-Border Banditry and Regional Insecurity

Test Statistics	Value
Pearson Correlation (r)	0.71
p-value	0.000
Level of Significance	0.05
Decision	Reject H ₀

Source: Researcher's Computation, 2026.

The responses indicated broad agreement that porous borders between Nigeria and Niger facilitate bandit activities and that armed groups exploit cross-border routes to move between jurisdictions. Respondents also identified illicit arms trafficking and weak border security as important factors sustaining cross-border insecurity. The findings further suggested that existing regional security

arrangements have not sufficiently addressed the transnational character of the crisis. These perceptions are consistent with the study's broader argument that the operational environment of bandit groups extends beyond the territorial boundaries of Zamfara State.

To empirically test the relationship, Pearson Product Moment Correlation was applied. The result produced a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.71$ with a p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value is below the 0.05 significance threshold, the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between cross-border banditry and regional insecurity is rejected.

The result indicates a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between cross-border banditry and regional insecurity. The magnitude of the coefficient suggests that higher levels of cross-border banditry are associated with higher levels of regional insecurity. The finding provides quantitative support for the argument that cross-border criminal activities constitute an important component of the wider security challenges confronting the Sahel.

4.2 Implications for Regional Stability

The second objective examined the implications of banditry and cross-border insecurity in Zamfara State for regional stability in the Sahel. Respondents assessed the effects of insecurity on peace and stability, agricultural production, rural livelihoods, transnational crime, economic development, and the need for stronger regional security cooperation.

Table 2: Chi-Square Test of Banditry, Cross-Border Insecurity, and Regional Stability

Test Statistics	Value
Chi-Square (χ^2)	53.17
Degree of Freedom (df)	3
p-value	0.000
Level of Significance	0.05
Decision	Reject H_0

Source: Researcher's Computation, 2026.

The responses indicated that persistent banditry has consequences that extend beyond the immediate communities affected by violence. Respondents associated the crisis with threats to regional peace, disruption of agricultural production and rural livelihoods, the spread of transnational crime, and challenges to economic development. They also expressed strong support for greater regional cooperation and for addressing socioeconomic conditions such as poverty and unemployment.

The Chi-square test was employed to determine whether the observed pattern of responses was statistically significant. The result produced a Chi-square value of $\chi^2 = 53.17$, with 3 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value is below the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis is rejected.

The finding demonstrates that banditry and cross-border insecurity have statistically significant implications for regional stability in the Sahel. The result suggests that the security crisis in

Zamfara cannot be treated as an isolated domestic problem. Rather, its consequences extend into wider regional political, economic, humanitarian, and security processes.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The first major finding demonstrates a strong and statistically significant relationship between cross-border banditry and regional insecurity in the Sahel. The correlation coefficient of $r = 0.71$ indicates that cross-border banditry is strongly associated with regional insecurity. This finding supports the argument that the Zamfara crisis cannot be fully understood through a domestic security lens. The movement of armed groups, illicit weapons, and criminal networks across borders creates security linkages that connect local violence to wider regional instability.

The result is consistent with previous studies that have emphasized the importance of porous borders, illicit arms flow, and weak border governance in sustaining transnational insecurity (Abdullahi, 2019; Dankwendo & Ahmadu, 2022; Nnadi & Okoye, 2022). It also supports Thurston's (2020) broader argument that insecurity in northern Nigeria has increasingly acquired transnational dimensions that cannot be separated from wider Sahelian security dynamics.

The finding also provides empirical support for Security Complex Theory. The theory proposes that security threats within a region are interconnected and that the security of individual states is influenced by the security conditions of neighbouring states (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). The strong positive correlation found in this study suggests that cross-border banditry and regional insecurity are not independent phenomena. Instead, they form part of an interconnected security environment in which insecurity can move across territorial boundaries.

The second major finding establishes that banditry and cross-border insecurity have statistically significant implications for regional stability. The Chi-square result of $\chi^2 = 53.17$, $p < 0.001$ indicates that the consequences of the crisis extend beyond localized violence. The finding suggests that banditry affects regional stability through multiple pathways, including population displacement, disruption of economic activity, weakening of state authority, expansion of ungoverned spaces, and pressure on regional security institutions.

This finding is consistent with the broader literature on Sahelian insecurity, which identifies the interaction between weak governance, state fragility, organized violence, and transnational criminal networks as a major obstacle to regional stabilization (International Crisis Group, 2020; Lacher, 2020). It also supports the argument that prolonged insecurity can generate feedback loops in which weakened institutions create opportunities for armed and criminal groups, while the activities of those groups further weaken state capacity.

The findings therefore have important implications for regional security policy. If cross-border banditry is significantly related to regional insecurity and has significant implications for regional stability, then responses based solely on national military operations are unlikely to provide a durable solution. The problem requires coordinated approaches involving border management,

intelligence sharing, joint security operations, arms-control measures, and socioeconomic interventions.

5.0 Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between cross-border banditry and regional stability in the Sahel, using Zamfara State, Nigeria, as a case study. Guided by Security Complex Theory, the study focused specifically on the relationship between cross-border banditry and regional insecurity and the implications of banditry and cross-border insecurity for regional stability.

The quantitative findings provide clear evidence that the cross-border dimension of banditry is significantly associated with wider regional insecurity. The Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.71$ demonstrates a strong and positive relationship between cross-border banditry and regional insecurity. The study also found that banditry and cross-border insecurity have statistically significant implications for regional stability, as demonstrated by the Chi-square result of $\chi^2 = 53.17$, $p < 0.001$.

These findings support the central argument of Security Complex Theory that security threats within geographically connected regions are interdependent. The Zamfara crisis therefore represents more than an isolated domestic security problem. Its cross-border dimensions connect it to broader security processes across the Sahel.

The study concludes that the persistence of banditry in Zamfara and its implications for regional stability require a shift from predominantly national and reactive responses toward coordinated regional security strategies. Addressing the crisis requires stronger border governance, improved intelligence sharing, coordinated action against illicit arms trafficking, and sustained cooperation among Nigeria and neighbouring states.

5.1 Policy Implications and Recommendations

First, Nigeria and neighbouring states should strengthen coordinated border governance. Border security should move beyond conventional military deployment toward integrated systems involving intelligence, customs, immigration, local authorities, and community-based mechanisms.

Second, regional intelligence sharing should be institutionalized and strengthened. The strong relationship between cross-border banditry and regional insecurity indicates the need for timely information exchange concerning armed groups, arms trafficking routes, criminal networks, and emerging security threats.

Third, joint cross-border security operations should be expanded. Because criminal groups can exploit jurisdictional boundaries, security operations should be coordinated across national borders, subject to appropriate legal and diplomatic arrangements.

Fourth, regional efforts to control illicit arms trafficking should be intensified. The circulation of small arms and light weapons strengthens the capacity of criminal groups and increases the severity of insecurity. Regional arms-control initiatives should therefore form part of broader strategies for addressing banditry.

Fifth, regional security institutions should strengthen their focus on banditry as a transnational threat. While counterterrorism remains essential, the findings demonstrate that organized banditry also has regional security consequences and should receive greater attention within regional security frameworks.

Finally, security responses should be complemented by socioeconomic interventions. Addressing poverty, unemployment, weak governance, and limited economic opportunities is essential for reducing the structural vulnerabilities that allow criminal networks to recruit and operate.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

The study is limited by its reliance on survey data obtained from respondents connected to or knowledgeable about the Zamfara security crisis. Although the sample provides valuable empirical insight, the findings should be interpreted within the context of the study area and the characteristics of the respondents. The cross-sectional nature of the quantitative analysis also limits the ability to establish long-term causal relationships.

Future studies could employ larger samples across Zamfara and neighbouring states, particularly Katsina, Sokoto, and Kebbi, to examine regional variations in cross-border insecurity. Comparative research involving Nigeria and Niger could also provide stronger evidence regarding how differences in border governance and regional security cooperation affect the spread of banditry. Longitudinal studies would further help to assess changes in cross-border banditry and the effectiveness of regional security interventions over time.

5.4 Contribution to Knowledge

The study makes three principal contributions. First, it contributes empirical evidence to the literature on transnational insecurity by demonstrating a strong and statistically significant relationship between cross-border banditry and regional insecurity in the Sahel. Second, it demonstrates that the consequences of banditry in Zamfara extend beyond local and national boundaries and have statistically significant implications for regional stability. Third, it extends the application of Security Complex Theory to a non-state security challenge by demonstrating how criminal actors and cross-border networks can generate regional security interdependence.

The study therefore advances the argument that contemporary regional security analysis must account not only for inter-state conflicts and violent extremism but also for the growing role of transnational criminal networks. The Zamfara case demonstrates how localized insecurity can become regionally consequential when it interacts with porous borders, illicit arms flow, weak governance, and limited regional cooperation.

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