



TOPOGRAPHY AND BORDER MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA: ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SECURITY ARCHITECTURE, 1999–2021

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Abstract

Nigeria's topography is characterized by diverse physical features and extensive borderlands, making it one of the most strategically positioned countries in Africa. The country shares vast land and maritime boundaries with several neighboring states, creating opportunities for regional integration, trade, and economic development. Ideally, the openness and accessibility of these borders should facilitate the expansion of markets for Nigerian products and strengthen cross-border relations. However, the persistent insecurity along many of Nigeria's international boundaries has transformed these advantages into significant national security challenges. Unsecured borders have contributed to the proliferation of transnational crimes, including smuggling, illegal migration, arms trafficking, and the infiltration of criminal and insurgent groups, thereby threatening national stability and economic growth. Against this backdrop, this study critically examines the relationship between Nigeria's topography, its borderlands, and the effectiveness of the country's security architecture. The central argument is that, despite the extensive nature of Nigeria's borders, different measures have been implemented to ensure their effective surveillance and protection. The study seeks to assess the efforts made by government agencies to secure these border regions and to determine the extent to which existing security frameworks address emerging threats. Furthermore, it evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of Nigeria's current security architecture and proposes practical strategies for enhancing border security and national safety. The research relies on qualitative method with aim of using secondary sources of data, including textbooks, academic journals, monographs, newspapers, magazines, internet resources, and other relevant documentary materials. The study concludes by offering policy recommendations aimed at strengthening border management and promoting sustainable national development.

Keywords: Border, Border Management, Security, Security Architecture and Topography

1.0 Introduction

Nigeria is currently confronted with multifaceted security challenges that threaten its stability, unity, and national development. Across the country's six geopolitical zones, various criminal and insurgent groups have emerged, engaging in activities that undermine public safety and challenge the authority of the state. The

security situation has deteriorated to the extent that movement between regions has become increasingly risky, with incidents of banditry, kidnapping, terrorism, and armed attacks occurring along major transportation routes. Consequently, many roads have been abandoned by commuters due to fears of violence and insecurity. Given these persistent threats, there is a pressing need to



critically examine Nigeria's security architecture in order to understand the factors responsible for its apparent inability to effectively address contemporary security challenges. Globally, security has become a major concern, particularly with advances in information and communication technologies that facilitate coordination and communication among criminal groups. These technological innovations have been exploited by criminal elements to perpetrate crimes, resulting in significant loss of lives and property in many parts of the world.

In Nigeria, the rise in criminal activities since the return to democratic governance in 1999 has generated widespread concern. Despite the absence of direct military conflict with neighbouring countries, internal security threats have continued to increase at an alarming rate. High levels of unemployment, poverty, and socio-economic inequalities have further exacerbated the situation, raising questions about the underlying causes of these security challenges (Osita, Chike and Charles, 2010). Several factors have been identified as contributors to the prevailing insecurity. These include the effects of globalization and the adoption of neoliberal economic policies such as privatization, deregulation, liberalization, and commercialization, which have had significant socio-economic implications. Equally important is the porous nature of Nigeria's international borders, which has facilitated the infiltration of criminal elements, illegal arms, and other transnational threats into the country (Adebayo, 2002). Against this backdrop, this study examines Nigeria's topography and borderlands, explores the concept of border security, evaluates the country's security architecture, assesses the threats posed by unsecured borders, and highlights the opportunities associated with effective

border management. The study further seeks to establish the relationship between Nigeria's prevailing insecurity and the challenges arising from its geographical and border security realities.

The Geographical Configuration and Border Areas of Nigeria

Nigeria covers a total land area of approximately 923,773 square kilometres, representing about one-seventh of the inhabited and productive land area of West Africa (Adeyinka, Bankole & Olaye, 2005). The country is endowed with diverse physical features and landforms that contribute to its unique geographical character. Although much of Nigeria consists of low-lying plains, generally less than 610 metres above sea level, its eastern border with the Republic of Cameroon is marked by mountainous terrain. This region includes Chappal Waddi, the highest point in Nigeria, which rises to approximately 2,419 metres above sea level (Udo, 1970).

One of Nigeria's most significant physical features is the River Niger, from which the country derives its name. The river originates in the highlands of Guinea, flows through several West African countries, and enters Nigeria through the northwestern region. It subsequently converges with the River Benue at Lokoja before flowing southward into the Gulf of Guinea. Near its outlet, the River Niger divides into numerous distributaries, forming the extensive Niger Delta, a vast swampy region covering approximately 45,000 square kilometres (Falola, & Heaton, 2008).

Situated in West Africa, Nigeria occupies a strategic position on the Gulf of Guinea and is the largest geopolitical entity in the sub-region. The country shares international boundaries with the Republic of Benin to the west, Niger Republic to the north, Chad to the northeast, and the Republic of Cameroon



to the east. Nigeria lies between latitudes 4°N and 14°N, the longitude 3° E and 15° E, entirely within the tropical zone, and exhibits a wide range of ecological environments, from the semi-arid Sahel in the north to the tropical rainforests of the south. It is also the most populous country in Africa (Eluwa, Ukogwu, Nwachukwu, & Nwaubani, 1988)

Among Nigeria's neighbouring states, Chad has a land area of approximately 1,284,000 square kilometres, while Niger covers about 1,267,000 square kilometres. Nigeria ranks third with a landmass of 923,773 square kilometres, Cameroon has a total landmass of approximately 475,440 square kilometers, it came fourth position in land mass. The Republic of Benin has the smallest land area among its immediate neighbours, covering about 114,763 square kilometres (Ofomata, 2009).

Nigeria possesses extensive international borders that have significant implications for national security, trade, and regional integration. The Nigeria–Cameroon border is the longest, stretching approximately 1,975 kilometres from the Chad tripoint in the north to the Atlantic coast in the south. The Nigeria–Niger border follows with a length of about 1,608 kilometres, while the Nigeria–Benin border extends for approximately 809 kilometres. The shortest international boundary is shared with Chad, measuring about 87 kilometres. Collectively, Nigeria's international land boundaries extend for roughly 4,479 kilometres, underscoring the strategic importance of effective border management and security (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024).

The Concept of Border Security

International borders constitute a critical security concern for all sovereign states. Under international law, states are recognized as having the authority and

responsibility to maintain security within their territorial boundaries. Consequently, governments are mandated to safeguard their territories and protect their citizens from both internal and external threats. Indeed, a state's ability to effectively secure its borders is often used as a measure of its strength and capacity, distinguishing strong states from weak or failed ones. Beyond security considerations, effective border security facilitates the legitimate movement of people, goods, and services while preventing the unauthorized movement of individuals, contraband, and other illicit materials (Aron, 2021).

The primary responsibility of any state is to ensure the safety and well-being of its citizens. In this regard, border security is closely associated with border control, which involves regulating and monitoring the movement of people, animals, goods, and services across national boundaries. Border control generally encompasses two major dimensions. The first concerns the security and surveillance of borderlands, including activities that occur along the territorial boundaries. The second involves the control and management of ports of entry, such as seaports, border posts, and airports located within a state's jurisdiction. In simple terms, border security refers to the measures and mechanisms put in place to protect a country's borders and ensure that only authorized persons, goods, and services enter or leave its territory (Bigo, 2002).

Effective border management is fundamental to the successful implementation of border security policies. This responsibility is typically shared among agencies such as the Immigration Service, Customs Service, Police, and other relevant institutions charged with regulating and monitoring cross-border activities. Border management also includes the maintenance



of boundary markers and beacons that define the physical limits of a state's territory. However, border management cannot be carried out in isolation; it requires cooperation and coordination with neighbouring states. As a result, effective border management is often pursued at regional or sub-regional levels through collaborative frameworks and partnerships (Adejuyigbe, 2012).

The key stakeholders involved in border management include:

- i. Government agencies such as the Customs Service, Immigration Service, Police, Armed Forces, Ministry of Agriculture (for quarantine and phytosanitary services), and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (for diplomatic and international relations matters).
- ii. Shipping and maritime companies.
- iii. Airline operators and aviation service providers.
- iv. Border communities and local authorities.
- v. International business organizations and private sector actors engaged in cross-border trade.
- vi. Individuals residing in border areas, as well as travellers, traders, and tourists who regularly cross international boundaries.

These stakeholders perform complementary functions aimed at reducing the vulnerabilities associated with poorly managed borders (Immigration and Border Management, 2026). Their collective efforts contribute to enhancing national security, facilitating legitimate trade and movement, promoting economic development, and improving the overall quality of life of citizens. Effective border security also minimizes risks to a nation's economic stability and territorial integrity (Andreas, 2003). The absence of a well-coordinated

and efficient border management system remains one of the major challenges confronting Nigeria today, thereby necessitating a critical assessment of the country's security architecture and border governance framework.

An Overview of Nigeria's Security Architecture

Security is a normative and multidimensional concept whose meaning varies according to context, societal values, and individual perceptions. Broadly, security refers to the condition of being protected from threats, harm, or danger. It encompasses the protection of valuable and vulnerable assets, including individuals, communities, institutions, and states. The Institute for Security and Open Methodologies (ISECOM) defines security as a form of protection achieved through the creation of a separation between assets and potential threats (Osimen, Anegbode, Akande, & Oyewole, 2021). This separation is maintained through various forms of control designed to minimize vulnerability and enhance safety.

In the Nigerian context, the structure of the country's security architecture has often been criticized for concentrating excessive authority at the federal level. This over-centralization is widely regarded as one of the factors limiting the effectiveness of security agencies in addressing contemporary security challenges, including the protection of Nigeria's extensive and porous borders. Consequently, the increasing incidence of violent crimes, terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, and other forms of insecurity has been linked to the highly centralized nature of the nation's security apparatus.

Historically, the Nigeria Police Force was established during the colonial era by the British administration primarily to maintain



law and order and safeguard colonial interests. Its origins can be traced to the West African Frontier Force, which served as an instrument for enforcing colonial policies and facilitating administrative control. The police institution was designed largely to ensure compliance with colonial regulations and to support the economic objectives of the colonial government (Bayley, 1969). More than six decades after independence, Nigeria's policing system remains largely centralized. Unlike federal systems where policing responsibilities are shared among national, state, and local authorities, Nigeria continues to operate a predominantly centralized police structure. Despite growing demands for community-based and state policing as mechanisms for addressing grassroots security challenges, the federal government retains exclusive control over the Nigeria Police Force and the Armed Forces.

The National Security Architecture of Nigeria comprises several institutions and agencies responsible for safeguarding the country's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and internal stability. At the apex of this structure is the National Security Council (NSC), a constitutional body established to advise the President on matters relating to public security and the operations of agencies charged with maintaining national security.

The National Security Council is composed of:

- The President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Chairman)
- The Vice President (Deputy Chairman)
- The Chief of Defence Staff
- The Minister of Interior
- The Minister of Foreign Affairs

- The National Security Adviser (NSA)

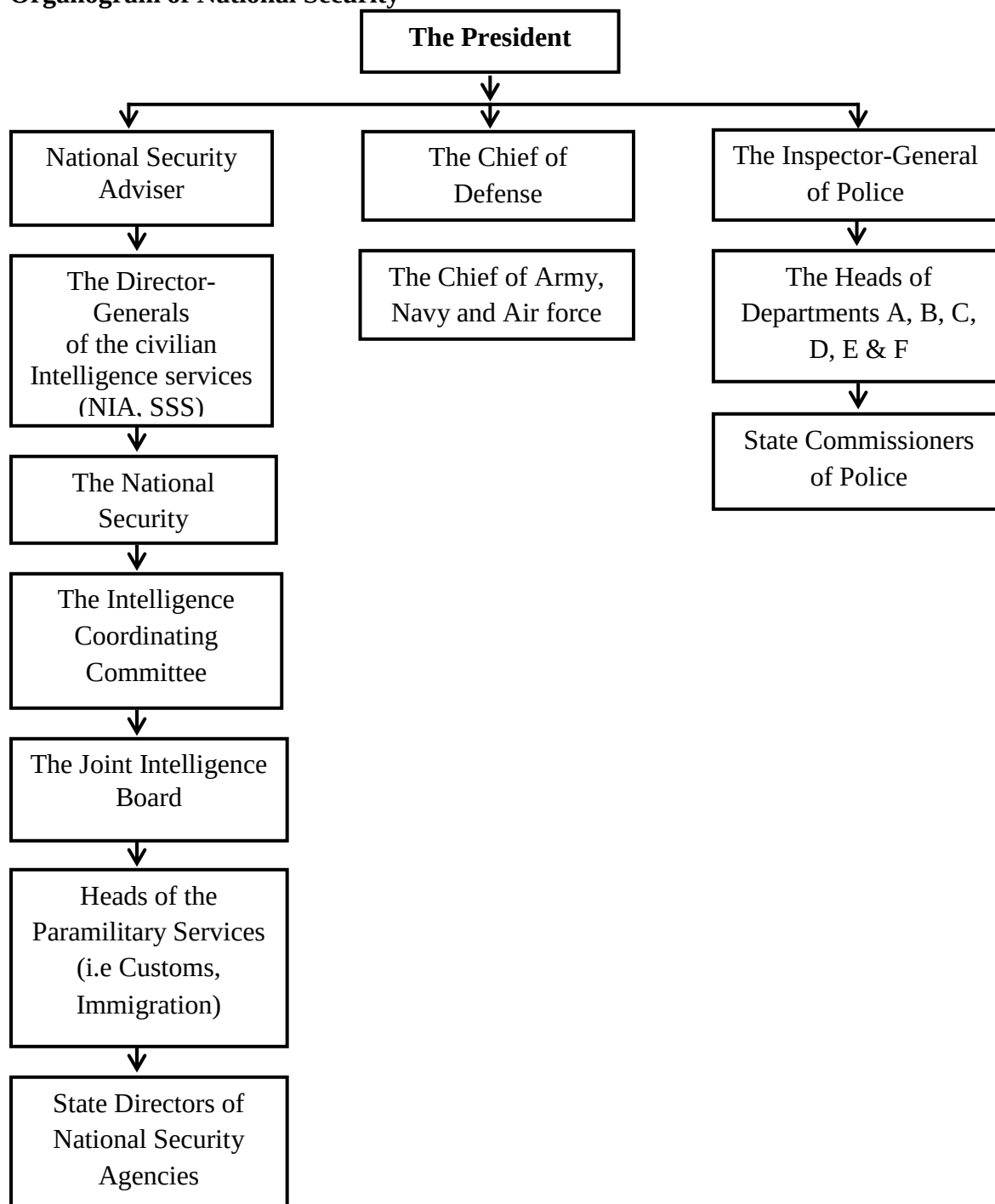
- The Inspector-General of Police

The Council convenes periodically to deliberate on critical security issues affecting the nation and to formulate appropriate policy responses (National Security Adviser, 2014).

A central institution within Nigeria's security framework is the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA). The ONSA is responsible for coordinating, supervising, and harmonizing national security activities on behalf of the President. It serves as the principal coordinating body for the country's security and intelligence community through structures such as the National Security Council (NSC), the Joint Intelligence Board (JIB), and the Intelligence Community Committee (ICC) (Ojo, 2014).

As the principal adviser to the President on national security matters, the National Security Adviser plays a pivotal role in formulating security policies, coordinating intelligence operations, and ensuring effective collaboration among security agencies. Beyond addressing conventional security threats, the office contributes to broader aspects of human security, including the protection of critical national assets and the creation of conditions necessary for citizens' welfare, economic stability, and sustainable development (Alemika, (2013).

The foregoing analysis demonstrates the central role of the Office of the National Security Adviser within Nigeria's security architecture and highlights the importance of institutional coordination in addressing the country's evolving security challenges as follows:

**Organogram of National Security**

Source: Sokoto Journal of the Social Sciences Vol. 4: No. 1 June, 2014, Department of Sociology, Usman Danfodiyo Univeristy, Sokoto¹⁴.



The Threats Posed by Unsecured Borders

Given the extensive international boundaries surrounding Nigeria, it is essential to examine the numerous routes utilized by traders and other individuals moving across the country's border regions. According to the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), there are more than 1,400 illegal border routes across the country. In contrast, Nigeria has only 84 officially recognized land border control posts. Numerous footpaths and informal crossing points connect Nigeria to neighbouring countries such as Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, with further linkages extending to Mali, Libya, and Sudan (David, 2026). Local estimates suggest that more than 250 such routes exist within the Damaturu–Maiduguri axis alone, providing direct access to Cameroon. Many of these routes remain outside the effective surveillance of security agencies, thereby creating opportunities for cross-border criminal activities. Common means of transportation along these illegal routes include donkeys, camels, and cattle, which are often used to facilitate the smuggling of arms, ammunition, narcotics, and other prohibited goods (African Union Border Programme, 2019).

Despite its abundant natural and human resources, Nigeria faces numerous challenges arising from both human activities and environmental factors. Among these challenges is the difficulty of effectively securing its vast and porous borders. This raises an important question: does Nigeria possess adequate manpower and resources to effectively monitor and protect its extensive territorial boundaries? Nigeria occupies a land area of approximately 923,773 square kilometres, making border surveillance a formidable task. Within this territory lies the Sambisa Forest, which was originally designated as a

game reserve but has, over time, become a stronghold for terrorist organizations such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). The forest extends across seven states and covers approximately 6.5 percent of Nigeria's total landmass. Its vast expanse has provided insurgent groups with strategic hideouts, training grounds, and operational bases, thereby complicating counterterrorism efforts (Nigeria Immigration Service, 2020). The scale of territory exploited by insurgent groups raises concerns regarding the capacity of Nigeria's security forces to effectively contain and eliminate these threats. Security experts often argue that successful counterinsurgency operations require a favourable troop-to-insurgent ratio. However, the Nigerian Armed Forces, with personnel deployed across the country's thirty-six states and the Federal Capital Territory, face multiple security challenges simultaneously, including terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, piracy, and communal conflicts. Consequently, military personnel are often overstretched, placing significant pressure on available resources and operational effectiveness (Nigeria Defence Headquarters, 2022).

The frequency and intensity of terrorist attacks in recent years have further underscored the magnitude of Nigeria's security challenges. Repeated attacks by insurgent groups in the North-East and other parts of the country have resulted in substantial loss of lives, displacement of communities, and destruction of infrastructure. These developments highlight the urgent need for more effective border management, enhanced intelligence gathering, improved surveillance systems, and stronger coordination among security agencies (Abraham, & Iro, 2026). While the efforts of the Nigerian Armed Forces and



other security institutions should be acknowledged, the persistence of terrorist and criminal activities demonstrates the complexity of the threats confronting the nation. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach involving government agencies, local communities, and civil society organizations. Greater public support and cooperation are also necessary to complement security operations and improve intelligence gathering (Onuoha, 2015).

Furthermore, the media has an important role to play in supporting national security efforts. While criminal activities often receive extensive publicity, the achievements of security agencies in combating crime and terrorism frequently receive less attention. Balanced and responsible reporting of arrests, prosecutions, and successful security operations can enhance public confidence, discourage criminal activities, and demonstrate the effectiveness of security institutions. Adequate documentation and dissemination of security successes may also serve as a deterrent to potential offenders and contribute to the broader effort of promoting national security and stability (Saleh, 2026).

The Prospects of Nigeria's Borders

The persistent security challenges confronting Nigeria have generated widespread concern among citizens and policymakers alike. The increasing incidence of terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, and transnational crimes has created the impression that the country's borders no longer serve as effective barriers against external threats. Nevertheless, despite these challenges, Nigeria's border regions possess enormous potential for economic growth, regional integration, and national development if appropriate security and

governance measures are implemented. Realizing these opportunities requires a collaborative approach involving the federal government, state authorities, security agencies, border communities, and other relevant stakeholders. Public participation and civic engagement are particularly important in fostering effective border management and enhancing national security. Through adequate sensitization and public orientation programmes, citizens can be encouraged to actively support government efforts aimed at securing the nation's borders and combating criminal activities (African Union Border Programme, 2029).

One strategy that may facilitate this process is the application of the Concentric Circle Theory of Public Relations developed by Elmo Roper in 1945 (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006). The theory explains how ideas, opinions, and information spread through society in successive layers, similar to the ripple effect produced when a stone is thrown into water. Applied to border security and national security management, the theory suggests that information and security awareness can be disseminated through different categories of individuals who influence public opinion and behaviour within their respective communities.

Roper identified six levels through which information can effectively spread across society:

i. Great Thinkers: These are innovators and opinion leaders who generate ideas and influence others through their knowledge, expertise, and vision. Their ideas often shape public discourse and inspire action among those who share similar perspectives.

ii. Great Disciples: This group consists of individuals who closely follow and support the ideas of the Great Thinkers.



Because they are directly influenced by these thought leaders, they possess the capacity to persuade others within their social and professional networks.

iii. Great Disseminators: These individuals receive and transmit ideas from the Great Disciples to wider segments of society. Although they may not interact directly with the original source of the ideas, they play a vital role in spreading information and shaping public understanding.

iv. Lesser Disseminators: This category includes influential figures such as religious leaders, traditional rulers, community leaders, teachers, and other respected individuals. Their social standing and moral authority enable them to effectively communicate ideas and mobilize people toward collective action.

v. Participating Citizens: These are members of the public who actively engage in civic activities, political discussions, and community affairs. While they may not occupy leadership positions, they contribute significantly to the dissemination of information and public awareness.

vi. Politically Inert Citizens: This group comprises individuals who may not actively participate in political or public affairs but whose attitudes, decisions, and behaviours are nonetheless influenced by information circulating within society.

Applying these levels to Nigeria's security architecture could enhance intelligence gathering, public cooperation, and crime prevention. A decentralized and community-oriented approach to security management would encourage citizens to actively monitor developments within their local environments and promptly report

suspicious activities to relevant authorities. Since security is a collective responsibility, effective collaboration between security agencies and local communities is essential for achieving sustainable peace and stability (Olakunle, & Ake, 2021).

Integrating citizens into security processes, particularly within border communities, would improve information sharing and strengthen early warning mechanisms. Such collaboration would also create an enabling environment for legitimate cross-border trade and economic activities while reducing the incidence of arms smuggling, human trafficking, terrorism, and banditry. As security improves, border communities would be better positioned to benefit from economic opportunities arising from regional commerce and integration.

The Concentric Circle Theory therefore offers a useful framework for strengthening intelligence gathering and public participation in security governance. It emphasizes the importance of assigning appropriate responsibilities to different categories of actors within society and integrating them into national security strategies. Furthermore, Nigeria's security policy should be restructured to promote greater decentralization and community involvement while maintaining effective national coordination (Babajide, 2020).

At the external level, Nigeria's national security objectives should be broadened beyond the protection of its territorial boundaries to include the stability and security of neighbouring states and the wider West African sub-region. Such an approach would strengthen regional cooperation, improve border management, and contribute to the long-term security and prosperity of Nigeria and its neighbours.



Conclusion

Nigeria's topography is characterized by diverse geographical features and abundant natural resources that provide significant opportunities for economic growth and national development. However, the extensive and porous nature of the country's international borders has undermined its ability to fully harness these resources and ensure the safety and well-being of its citizens. The persistent challenges associated with border insecurity have contributed to the proliferation of transnational crimes, terrorism, banditry, arms trafficking, and other threats to national stability. These realities underscore the necessity of critically evaluating Nigeria's security architecture, particularly within the context of the Fourth Republic, which commenced in 1999.

This study has examined the geographical configuration of Nigeria and the security implications of its extensive borderlands. It has also assessed the effectiveness of the country's security architecture in addressing contemporary security challenges and proposed measures for improving border management and national security. The findings reveal that the current security framework has not fully achieved the nation's security objectives, particularly in relation to border protection, intelligence gathering, and community participation in security governance. To address these shortcomings in this study, the following recommendation are enumerated:

i. There is a need for a proactive and inclusive national security strategy anchored on the principles of human security. Such a strategy should recognize security as a collective responsibility and encourage the active participation of citizens at all levels of society.

ii. The application of the Concentric Circle Theory provides a useful framework for fostering cooperation between government institutions, security agencies, community leaders, and ordinary citizens in the prevention and control of crime.

iii. Furthermore, the study advocates the decentralization of security management through the empowerment of states, local governments, and communities to play more active roles in maintaining security within their respective jurisdictions. Such an approach would promote a bottom-up security framework in which individuals, households, communities, local governments, states, and the federal government collectively contribute to the protection of lives and property.

iv. Ultimately, effective security governance in Nigeria requires a well-coordinated, participatory, and decentralized system capable of responding to local realities while maintaining national cohesion. Strengthening border security, enhancing intelligence gathering, and promoting community involvement remain essential steps toward achieving sustainable peace, stability, and national development.

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