

Boarder Management and National Security in Nigeria: International Best Practices and the Prospects for Institutional Reform

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Abstract:

This paper examines Nigeria's border management framework and its consequences for national security. Nigeria shares land and maritime frontiers with Benin, Niger, Chad and Cameroon, and governs them through a fragmented arrangement of statutory mandates, regional obligations under the Economic Community of West African States, and operational practices distributed across several agencies with overlapping powers. Recent studies record about 86 approved control posts against more than 1,400 unapproved crossing points, a ratio that has enabled terrorism, small arms trafficking, smuggling, irregular migration and trafficking in persons. The paper reviews the legal and institutional framework governing Nigerian borders, identifies the critical issues that weaken border governance, and draws lessons from the European Union model of integrated border management, the Egyptian experience on the Libyan frontier, and the technical standards promoted by the International Organization for Migration. It proposes legislative reforms to consolidate scattered mandates into a single border management statute, institutional reforms to establish a lead coordinating authority with binding powers, administrative reforms to professionalise frontier operations, enforcement mechanisms directed at corruption and collusion at control posts, and the systematic expansion of biometric and surveillance technology. The expected impact of these reforms span security, economic, legal and regional integration outcomes. Implementation challenges include agency rivalry, obligations under the ECOWAS free movement protocol, weak infrastructure at remote posts, funding constraints and the neglected welfare of border communities. The paper provides recommendations for short-term and long-term reform, implementation strategies, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Keywords: Border management, National security, Integrated border management, ECOWAS, Legal reform.

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1. INTRODUCTION

At the heart of the modern state's responsibility for the protection of its territory, the regulation of people's entry and exit, and the security of people and property within its borders is border management. Boundaries are a fundamental aspect of statehood; security in their administration is crucial to state and society building (Adedigba, 2024). Nigeria has an approximate land frontier of 4,500 kilometres with Niger, Cameroon, Chad and Benin, and has a very long maritime boundary along the Gulf of Guinea (Lenshie & Miapyen, 2024).

The size of the frontier in Nigeria is not in itself the problem. It is the ratio of regulated crossing points to unregulated ones that's the issue. Nigeria has approximately 86 legal access points and over 1,400 illegal access points, making it one of the most porous border jurisdictions in the world (Lenshie & Miapyen, 2024). The figure of about 1497 illegal routes into Nigeria and the inability of the agencies to police them have been subjects of interest to legislators several times (Adedigba, 2024). These lines are used by transnational criminal networks, which operate with low levels of disruption.

Measurable security implications can be found. The Lake Chad frontier has been used by Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa Province in recruiting, regrouping, resupplying and launching attacks and armed banditry in the northern part of Nigeria, which has taken a cross-border dimension that is akin to terrorism both in its modus operandi and financing (Ojewale, 2021). Ogbonna et al. (2023) contend that the Nigerian political class has reacted to these developments in a securitising manner, handling the influx of foreigners rather than tackling the governance failures that fuel the threat.

The question of porosity is the most pointed one in the case of arms traffic. For the displacement, organised crime and human security in Nigeria, it is evident from Aja (2024) that small arms and light weapons have become the weapon of choice for organised criminal groups and violent extremists due to their accessibility, durability and ease of use. Amali and Buthelezi (2025) build on this and include an analysis of the supply and demand sides of the illicit arms market, based on information gathered from the Office of the National Security Adviser and the national small-arms control machinery. The national survey conducted by the Small Arms Survey (2021) is the first evidence-based attempt to estimate the number of guns held by civilians in Nigeria. It gives a picture of the trafficking routes that supply the domestic market.

There has been a swing from closure to facilitation. In August 2019, the Federal government closed its borders with Niger, Cameroon, Chad, and Benin, ostensibly to stop smuggling and arms inflow, a measure that was maintained until the end of 2020 (Ogbonna et al., 2023). Lenshie and Miapyen (2024) evaluate the impact of closure and conclude that it has increased the cost of legitimate trade for border communities without disrupting unapproved trade networks. The episode illustrates that physical limitations are not a substitute for institutional capacity.

More recent interventions have been technological. In 2016, the Federal Government adopted the Migration Information & Data Analysis System (MIDS) as a national border management information system. It has since been rolled out to five international airports, fourteen land borders, four sea borders, eight state commands and the

headquarters of the Nigeria Immigration Service (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2023). Thirty-one points of entry were assessed for further deployment between 2015 and 2023, through joint technical assessments (IOM, 2024). An Advanced Passenger Information System has been introduced at Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja, and Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos, to assist in identifying persons on international watch lists. At the same time, automated border control gates have been installed at the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja and Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos (Federal Ministry of Interior, 2025). On May 1, 2025, the visa-on-arrival regime was replaced by an electronic visa system and automated landing and exit cards (Aluko & Oyebode, 2025).

While welcome, these measures are partial. They focus on the air frontier, where traffic is already recorded, and the land frontier is hardly affected – and that is where the security risk lies. This paper thus reviews the legal and institutional arrangements of Nigerian border management, identifies key weaknesses in Nigeria's border management system, compares it with integrated border management systems in other countries and recommends a reform programme. The analysis is based on peer-reviewed literature from 2020 to 2026 and draws on international best practices within the Nigerian socio-political context, as well as institutional reports and policy documents.

2. THE CURRENT LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 The Nigerian border governance system

The governance of Nigeria's borders is carried out at three overlapping levels. The first is domestic law, which mandates that various agencies carry out entry control, customs, boundary delimitation, and territorial defence. The second is regional law, in particular the ECOWAS treaty regime and its protocol on the free movement of persons, goods and services. The third is policy and strategy, manifested in national instruments and donor-supported technical programmes. These layers have created a system of diffuse responsibility and accountability, as noted by Adedigba (2024).

Nigeria does not have a single consolidating statute, unlike other jurisdictions that have adopted integrated approaches. Eselebor and Okunade (2020) refer to the operational impacts, noting that different agencies operating at the same control post often use different SOPs, records, and report to different command structures. This means that there is duplication at approved posts, and absence at unapproved posts.

2.2 Statutory mandates and lead agencies

The Nigeria Immigration Service is mainly responsible for controlling the entry and exit of persons, issuing travel documents, and administering points of entry. The Nigeria Customs Service is in charge of the movement of goods and collection of duty. Delimitation and demarcation are the role of the National Boundary Commission, and the armed forces continue to be responsible for territorial defence. According to Adedigba (2024), this is because of practical challenges that can arise when these mandates come together in the same physical space, and the lack of a legally binding coordination mechanism.

The absence of coordination at the frontier is not new and is recognised as a threat to national security rather than an administrative inconvenience (Adedigba, 2024). Where agencies fight over the consignment or the traveller, where the same could be subject to agency enforcement, enforcement is negotiable, and negotiability at a control post is the precondition for the operation of corruption.

2.3 The regional framework

The nature of any national border regime's action is determined by Nigeria's duties under the ECOWAS Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, Goods and Services. Okunade and Ogunnubi (2021) explore the possibility that the protocol is a West African version of the Schengen system and find that there was a high level of agency from Africa in its design. Still, implementation has been inconsistent among member states. The protocol establishes rights of entry and residence which limit unilateral restriction – this was tested directly during the closure in 2019.

The regional framework has since been complicated by the African Continental Free Trade Area, which entails greater cross-border commercial movement (Okunade & Ogunnubi, 2023). Prokoph et al. (2023) demonstrate the presence of two opposed logics of governance in West African borderlands: a regional, liberalising logic and an externally imposed and restrictive logic, which the European Union exports to the region through its own governance priorities. Nigeria is at the nexus of both pressures.

2.4 Policy and strategy instruments

The Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) National Border Management Strategy is the most comprehensive effort to define a national stance regarding the drivers of migration, as well as the institutional and technological needs at land, sea, and air borders (Nigeria Immigration Service, 2019). It has required substantial technical and financial assistance from outside sources for its implementation. The IOM (2024) reports on handbooks for the training of border officers, a handbook on gender mainstreaming, a technical assessment report on the need for information technology and solar power for operations at 31 points of entry, and a joint technical assessment report, which was prepared with inputs from the Ministry of Health and Sanitation. Reliance on donor cycles for core border infrastructure is structurally weak.

3. CRITICAL ISSUES IN NIGERIAN BORDER MANAGEMENT

3.1 Border porosity and unapproved crossing points

Nigerian frontier is characterised by porosity. The state has documented access points at only about 86 per cent, while more than 1,400 access points exist through which persons and goods move (Lenshie & Miapyen, 2024). Idrees et al. (2023) look at the case of the Nigeria and Niger border and the effects this imbalance has on human trafficking, drug smuggling, arms proliferation and terrorist mobility across a border that both countries are unable to control effectively.

Some limitations of the porosity argument must be noted. Ogbonna et al. (2023) show that a significant portion of Nigeria's insecurity can be attributed to domestic governance failure, elitism, and institutional weakness, and that the argument about the physical state

of the border is more political than anything else. Reform, therefore, needs to tackle both the frontier and the institutions that underpin it.

3.2 Cross-border terrorism and insurgency

The frontier of Lake Chad has served as a space for Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), where they operate freely and can move from Nigeria to Niger, Chad and Cameroon, which are not covered by the counter-terrorism operation. Ojewale (2021) reports on the concurrent emergence of armed banditry in the northern part of the region, with the groups operating across the Niger border committing mass abductions, rustling cattle and engaging in extortion, all of which are hallmarks of terror groups. The migration through the Nigeria-Niger corridor is not without implications for the sustainability of security on both sides, as evidenced by Edet and Chinazaekpere (2020).

3.3 Proliferation of small arms and light weapons

Illicit arms enter Nigeria principally through unmanned land routes and through maritime channels in the Gulf of Guinea. Aja (2024) links proliferation directly to the deterioration of the national security architecture, showing that the weapons themselves do not create conflict but decisively raise its lethality and duration. Amali and Buthelezi (2025) argue that policy has concentrated too narrowly on the supply route and too little on domestic demand, which is generated by the collapse of local security provision and by the profitability of armed predation. The Small Arms Survey (2021) provides the evidentiary base for both positions, documenting trafficking routes, institutional control capacity and public perception of security provision.

3.4 Smuggling, revenue loss and the closure experience

Smuggling of petroleum products, rice, textiles, vehicles and pharmaceuticals in the western and northern borders hurts customs collections and local industries. The decision to close the land borders in 2019 was based on these reasons. Lenshie and Miapye (2024) evaluate the dialectics of that decision and conclude that in effect, the closure, imposed costs on legitimate traders and border communities, and that smuggling routes adjusted through both unofficial and official methods. Adenipekun (2022) compares the Nigerian and Benin national security policies on cross-border crime and highlights non-harmonised enforcement standards as the common weakness.

3.5 Irregular migration, trafficking and gendered insecurity

Forwards migration, inwards migration and transit migration are three routes of irregular migration through Nigeria, each of which uses the country as a transit point to other parts of the world, especially North Africa and Europe. Ikotun (2023) explores the Nigeria and Niger borderland and demonstrates that women face unique and heightened risks during these movements, such as sexual violence, exactions by informal border crossers and lack of access to formal protection. Any border management that does not consider this dimension will not protect those most vulnerable to harm.

3.6 Inter-agency rivalry and corruption

If more than one agency has concurrent authority over a CP and no formal coordination exists, enforcement outcomes may be negotiated between agency representatives. Adedigba (2024) recognises inter-agency conflict at Nigeria's borders as a direct threat to

the country's security rather than a mere administrative untidiness. Eselebor and Okunade (2020) further state that operations at Nigeria's frontiers are rife with smuggling, which is also abetted by some officials and therefore cannot be corrected solely by technological deployment.

3.7 Neglect of border communities

Communities on the Nigerian frontier suffer from low levels of public investment, poor service provision, and limited economic opportunities other than cross-border trade. Prokoph et al. (2023) demonstrate that, across West Africa, borderland communities, in particular, tend to rely more heavily on informal networks when confronted with restrictive measures, as these networks are the only source of livelihood. Such a border regime would lose the local cooperation essential to successful border control and would view these communities only as threats to its security.

4. BORDER MANAGEMENT IN OTHER SELECTED JURISDICTIONS

4.1 The European Union model of integrated border management

Overall, the EU has the most institutionally advanced model of integrated border management in operation today. The Wagner (2021) paper charts its development and explains how it responds to transnational threats through a multi-dimensional, collectively coordinated framework at the intra-agency, inter-agency, and international levels, covering territory, personnel, communication, technology, equipment, training, and cooperation.

The legal structure is clearly defined. Under the European Border and Coast Guard Regulation, European integrated border management is split into its two components, and a multiannual strategic policy cycle is needed to guide implementation. At the operational level, this cycle offers a framework for the day-to-day operations of over 120,000 European Border and Coast Guard officers from national authorities and from Frontex (European Commission, 2022). This was reiterated in the communication outlining the follow-up strategy, which was based on a strategic risk analysis of global inequality, climate change, demographic pressure, and geopolitical volatility (European Commission, 2023).

Three aspects of the European model are readily transferable. The second is legal consolidation – when a single regulation establishes the elements of border management and requires all border management agencies to adhere to them. The second is the risk analysis cycle, which allocates resources based on threat level rather than on administrative decisions. The third is the need for national strategies in each member state, aligned with the common framework, for evaluation and revision.

4.2 Egypt and the Libyan Frontier

The Egyptian situation is one in which a State faced a disturbed neighbour on a long desert border with few people. In her analysis, Faraq (2020) compares border management in Egypt with that in Libya using two approaches: military and international assistance/institutional development. The point for Nigeria is that the deployment of the military is one thing that secures the ground, but not the intelligence, documentation, and

inter-agency capacity needed to sustain frontier control. Nigeria has been heavily dependent on military deployments along the Lake Chad border, with the same weaknesses.

4.3 MIDAS (Migration Information and Data Analysis System) Model, and International Technical Standards (ITS)

Initial work has been done on a technical standard for collecting border data, which has been widely applied in Nigeria by the International Organization for Migration. The Migration Information and Data Analysis System gathers, processes, stores, and analyses traveller information, synchronising it through a national border network in real time, enabling watch list screening and migration statistics for policy planning (IOM, 2023). The system is the largest and most complex deployment in Nigeria.

The IOM (2024) briefier documents the institutional aspects, including officer training handbooks, a gender mainstreaming handbook, a trilingual operational guide for cross-border collaboration on the Niger border, and technical evaluations of information technology and solar energy needs for use at remote posts. The final one is important to note. Biometric systems need their own power when the electricity grid is unavailable, and, up to now, this has been the real impediment to expansion at land borders.

4.4 Key Lessons for Nigeria

Four lessons emerge. First, there is a legal merger before an operational one. The European Union already provided a clear definition of integrated border management in a single binding instrument before its implementation at the national level, which Nigeria lacks (European Commission, 2022; Wagner, 2021). Second, it must be legally required and not voluntary coordination – agencies with their own statutory mandates won't coordinate with a body that doesn't have the authority to make them.

Thirdly, technology can provide value only if the required infrastructure is in place. In Nigeria, experience with the deployment of MIDAS has indicated that deployment at land borders requires solar power provision, connectivity, and trained personnel, and must be planned as part of the system rather than an add-on. Fourthly, there are legal commitments in the region that need to be addressed in managing borders. Nigeria should not adopt a restrictive stance that is inconsistent with the ECOWAS free movement protocol. Still, it should move towards harmonised standards with neighbouring states, which Adenipekun (2022) reveals are missing in bilateral practice.

5. PROPOSED REFORMS

5.1 Legislative reforms

Nigeria needs a comprehensive Border Management Act that outlines the elements of integrated border management, assigns roles to the agencies involved – Nigeria Immigration Service, Nigeria Customs Service, National Boundary Commission, Armed Forces, and security agencies – and establishes a binding coordinating mechanism at each border point. This should be done in the statute, which should establish approved and unapproved crossing points, define offences for the use of unapproved routes, and set evidentiary standards for taking enforcement action. It should also clarify the correlation between national border control and Nigeria's commitment to the ECOWAS protocol,

such that officers at the cross-border will not have to reconcile the two in any particular case (Okunade & Ogunnubi, 2021).

The statute should also establish a legal foundation for the collection, retention, and dissemination of biometric traveler data, along with the security measures to be taken in the collection of said data. Nigeria has implemented biometric systems ahead of a comprehensive statutory body to regulate them; thus, the absence of such a body compromises the privacy of biometric system users and poses evidential challenges in the prosecution of offenders.

5.2 Institutional and coordination reforms

A lead coordinating authority should be established with statutory authority to issue binding operational instructions for all agencies involved at a point of entry, to maintain a national border information system, and to conduct a national risk analysis. The European model illustrates the need for an institution with a clear mandate for integration, rather than a standing committee (European Commission, 2022). A joint command structure needs to be established at every control post, and one officer - regardless of parent agency - should be responsible for operations at a given control post.

Equivalent institutionalisation is needed for bilateral and multilateral coordination. Adenipekun (2022) demonstrates that Nigeria and its neighbours are operating in parallel rather than in harmonious policies in the fight against cross-border crime. Joint patrol arrangements, access to a shared watch list, and harmonised documentation standards with Niger, Benin, Chad, and Cameroon would solve the problem of the corridor, as Idrees et al. (2023) have documented.

5.3 Administrative reforms

Professionalisation of the frontier service should be the first step towards administrative reform. Officers stationed on out-of-the-way land borders face harsh conditions, low levels of supervision, and smaller career incentives, the usual components of collusion. This could be directly addressed by structured tours of duty, hardship allowances based on proven posting, rotation policies that prevent local networks and mandatory pre-deployment training. IOM support has been provided to create training handbooks and a trilingual operational guide, which provide a basis for the existing training curriculum.

By risk category, there should be a national register of approved points of entry and mapped and monitored unapproved routes. Allocation of resources should be based on that assessment. At this time, deployment is not based on threat assessment but rather on historical deployment.

5.4 Enforcement mechanisms

Collusion is an issue that needs to be included in enforcement reform. Allegations of corruption at points of entry should be investigated by an independent border integrity unit that is outside the operational chain of command and has the authority to recommend prosecution and require redeployment while under investigation. Sanctions should include forfeiture of proceeds and disqualification from further public service. There should be complementary protections for officers reporting misconduct; otherwise, it will not be reported.

An important aspect of arms control enforcement must be emphasised. Amali and Buthelezi (2025) demonstrate that the interdiction of illicit arms at the border only addresses the supply side of the illicit market, and that we also need to implement demand-side strategies, such as marking weapons, tracing, and recovery, through the national small arms control machinery.

5.5 The role of technology

The use of technology needs to be extended from the air borders to the land frontier, where security threats are concentrated. The deployment of the existing MIDAS should be scaled up to all land and sea posts approved (IOM, 2024); solar power and connectivity should be integrated into the deployment. Mobile deployment can provide a solution for seasonal and low-volume posts where fixed deployment is not economically viable.

The ability to monitor and analyse movement data and sensor networks should be built for the time periods between authorised posts. The European Border Surveillance System is an example of the added value of a common situational picture among actors (European Commission, 2023). The existing Advanced Passenger Information System (APIS) in Nigeria should be connected to the unified border information system to ensure that the watch list screening is done on a single record (Federal Ministry of Interior, 2025). The electronic visa (e-visa) system implemented in May 2025 is an additional data source that should also be integrated into the same system (Aluko & Oyeboode, 2025).

6. EXPECTED IMPACT OF THE REFORMS

6.1 Economic impact

Better customs service at customs posts would improve the collection of revenue currently lost to smuggling and speed up and make the processing of legal cross-border transactions more predictable, which would lower the transaction costs of legitimate trade. This is significant for the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which assumes increased trade flows between West African countries (Okunade & Ogunnubi, 2023). The 2019 closure was proof of the price of the alternative strategy of restriction, which penalises legal trade while leaving illegal trade untouched (Lenshie & Miapye, 2024).

6.2 Legal impact

A progressive and comprehensive law would consolidate all existing powers, create a consistent structure, minimise conflict between enforcement agencies, and provide a clear foundation for the prosecution of border offences. It would also make the practice in Nigeria more aligned with the international instruments to which Nigeria has subscribed and give it a statutory basis, which is currently missing.

6.3 Regional integration

With the harmonisation of standards with neighbouring states, Nigeria can continue to maintain control and effectively implement ECOWAS obligations, which is often a source of tension that results in uneven practices at the frontier (Okunade & Ogunnubi, 2021). However, the creation of shared watch lists and joint patrols would tackle the corridor dynamic that can only be handled by both states (Idrees et al., 2023).

7. IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

7.1 Institutional resistance

There may be opposition within agencies with a statutory mandate to remain subordinate to a coordinating authority, and the legislative process will be subject to lobbying to retain that mandate. The level of inter-agency discontent and conflict at Nigeria's borders, as documented by Adedigba (2024), is a testament to the resistance consolidation would face. Thus, the reform will need political backing from the very top level of government, that continues through the legislative and implementation processes.

7.2 Regional obligations and political sensitivity

Strengthening Nigerian border controls, as analysed in the context of the ECOWAS free movement protocol, may be considered as being restrictive by ECOWAS partners (Okunade & Ogunnubi, 2021). The 2019 closure strained relations with neighboring countries and drew criticism from the region. Reform should therefore be sought through a consultative process at the regional level, with a focus on harmonisation rather than restriction. Prokoph et al. (2023) advise against establishing control priorities imposed by outsiders that are not in West Africans' interests.

7.3 Resource, infrastructure and administrative barriers

There are barriers and constraints to expansion of infrastructure and administration. Many approved land posts lack grid electricity, network connectivity, secure accommodation, and access roads (IOM, 2024). Technology deployment must keep pace with supporting infrastructure, which is capital-intensive at remote posts and beyond the scope of recurrent budgets.

This programme, as described above, requires significant and ongoing investment in infrastructure, equipment, staffing, and training. Insufficient coordination with external donors who have different priorities and funding cycles that do not match with national planning (IOM, 2023, 2024). Sustainability requires budgetary provision at home, ring-fenced against reallocation, and, if structured correctly, public-private partnership arrangements, such as those used to install automated gates, can increase capacity.

7.5 Enforcement and corruption

Collusion at points of entry is how formal controls can be circumvented and can only be addressed by statute and technology to a limited degree. Independent monitoring, secure reporting, and political commitment to prosecute high-ranking officers are required. According to Ogbonna et al. (2023), security failure in Nigeria is not just an issue of institutional weakness but also an issue of elite interests; hence, this implies the domain in which enforcement resistance may be encountered.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Short-term reforms

The National Assembly should pass a comprehensive Border Management Act that defines integrated border management, sets agencies' mandates, and provides a legal basis for collecting biometric data. The Federal Government should publish a national register of approved points of entry, and unapproved routes should be risk-classified.

Joint command needs to be formalised at all approved posts, and an independent border integrity unit needs to be set up.

8.2 Long-term reforms

In the long term, the government should expand the unified border information system to all approved land and sea posts, incorporating solar power and connectivity as part of the system. The ability of surveillance should be built up between posts. To harmonise the documentation systems, make the watch lists available and organise joint patrolling, bilateral agreements with Niger, Benin, Chad and Cameroon have to be negotiated. Investing in infrastructure and livelihoods in border communities should be integrated into the border security programme rather than treated as development expenditure.

8.3 Implementation strategies

Implementation should be done through a phased plan with defined sequencing. Legal consolidation, institutional establishment, infrastructure and technology deployment, prioritised risk, are all in order. The responsible agencies, state governments in frontier states, traditional authorities in frontier communities, and technical partners should be represented on a national steering committee. For border communities, public consultation should be conducted at the beginning rather than at the end of implementation, as local cooperation is critical to the effectiveness of operations. Capacity building can be based on training curricula developed with IOM support.

8.4 Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms

A monitoring mechanism should be agreed upon with measurable indicators, including the percentage of crossing points subject to documented control measures, interdicted arms and contraband, processing time at approved crossing points, customs revenue collected, and the number of integrity investigations completed. A multiannual review cycle based on the European model would make it possible to review the strategy against assessed risks rather than as a function of administrative habit (European Commission, 2022, 2023). Publication of results is necessary as transparency is the main external discipline on border agency performance.

9. CONCLUSION

The size of the frontier is not the limitation on effective Nigerian border management, but rather the division among the institutions responsible for the frontier. The distribution of some 86 approved control posts and over 1,400 unapproved crossing points indicates a policy framework that has never been unified in a single legal and operational framework. The impact is seen in cross-border terrorism, proliferation of arms, smuggling, trafficking in persons and undermining state authority in border areas.

The reforms put forward in this document tackle that fragmentation head-on. A single law, a coordinating body with effective powers, professionalisation of the frontier service, independence of the integrity watchdog, and technology deployment from air to land borders would yield tangible benefits for security, revenues, and regional cooperation. The European model illustrates the possibility of integration when a legal framework is

in place before the operation. In contrast, the Egyptian model illustrates the limits of a primarily military response.

Implementation will face challenges such as institutional resistance, regional political sensitivity, infrastructure gaps, funding shortfalls, and entrenched corruption. None of these is determinative if the reform is carried out with political power, with consultation and transparent evaluation at the regional level. Border management is not a purely technical issue for which equipment must be purchased. The issue at hand is institutional design, and Nigeria still has the power to redesign the institutions in question.

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