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Globalization and Organized Transborder Crimes: A Trending Analysis in West Africa

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ABSTRACT: Globalization, while fostering economic interdependence, technological advancement, and mobility across borders, has also facilitated the proliferation of transborder crimes in West Africa. This study examines the nexus between globalization and the surge of cross-border criminal activities in the region, including drug trafficking, human trafficking, arms smuggling, money laundering, cybercrime, and irregular migration. Drawing on empirical data from regional security reports, UNODC assessments, and ECOWAS monitoring frameworks, the paper analyzes how porous borders, weak institutional capacity, governance deficits, and socioeconomic inequalities interact with global networks of organized crime. The findings reveal that transnational criminal syndicates exploit advancements in transportation, communication, and trade liberalization to expand illicit markets and evade detection. Moreover, the convergence of globalization and local structural vulnerabilities has deepened security and developmental challenges, undermining state authority and regional stability. The study argues for a multidimensional response anchored in regional cooperation, intelligence sharing, harmonized legal frameworks, and strengthened law enforcement institutions. It concludes that addressing the globalization–crime nexus requires not only robust security mechanisms but also inclusive governance and socioeconomic reforms that tackle the root causes of vulnerability across West Africa.

KEYWORDS: Globalization, organized transborder crimes, West Africa, security, regional governance

INTRODUCTION

The end of the cold war in late 1980s and early 1990s came with heightened Transborder crimes as global governance has failed to keep pace with economic globalization. In fact, as unprecedented openness in trade, finance, travel and communication characterized by globalization has created economic growth and well-being, it also has correspondingly given rise to massive opportunities for criminals to increase and prosper in their criminal merchandize. Therefore, organized crime across state boundaries globally became diversified reaching macro-economic proportions as illicit goods are sourced from one country or continent, trafficked across another as transit routes, and eventually get marketed in a third. Today, several violent non-state actors/mafias and their activities have truly become a truly transnational problem posing all forms of security threats to broader national, regional and even global security. These occurrences are more endemic especially among Sub-Saharan states in Africa particularly those found within the radius of the so-called "Sahelian Belt" comprising of Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal (African Renewal, 2025 online). West, Central and North Africa. These countries are not only poor and conflict-ridden countries but have become safe havens for many terrorist franchises to operate. The implication of this is that these globalized-induced Transborder crimes perpetrated and perpetuated across these countries continue to fuel corruption, normalize drug use and abuse, heighten human trafficking for prostitution and organ harvest, infiltrate business and politics, cause instability and hinder progress and development.

For example, revealing how preponderant the West African subregion has been reduced to transit route for illicit Transborder drug trafficking business and use, a recent survey by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GITOC) (2023) on the Global Organized Crime Index (GOCI) on Sierra Leone found that the country has long played a key role in the drug trade. It further observed that not only has the cocaine trade shown signs of increasing in recent years by following a growing regional trend but criminal organizations from South America and West Africa use Sierra Leone as a distribution and transit zone for cocaine destined for European consumption markets (GITOC, 2023: 7). Also, Sierra Leone operates as a transit point for other drugs to

North American, and increasingly, East and South East Asian markets as Freetown, the country's capital city, has become a primary hub for drug trafficking operations, particularly through maritime routes. This trend is encouraged given the widespread corruption at the port and vulnerabilities within law enforcement contributing to the lack of seizures and inadequate application of laws. There have been incidents of complicity involving high-level government officials who have been implicated in cocaine trafficking, suggesting a link between insecurity, drug trafficking, and the weakening of institutions with significant consumption of these drugs including the trending kush – 'a new drug with a mixture of cannabis, fentanyl, tramadol, formaldehyde, and human bones, according to some', among youths and ordinary people in the form of crack as observed in recent years (GITOC, 2023; The Conversation, 2024 online).

The same is true in other West African countries including Nigeria and The Gambia, to mention these two. In recent times, the threats of Transborder crimes remain high in Nigeria. Incidence of Transborder crimes ranging from drug and human trafficking, money laundering, proliferation and smuggling of small arms and light weapons (SALWs), illegal oil bunkering, serial bombing, hostage taking, armed robbery, banditry, kidnapping, as shown through the activities of trans-national organized criminal cartels and jihadists like the Boko Haram (BH), the Islamic State in West African Province (ISWAP), the Indigenous People of Biafra/Eastern Security Network (IPOB/ESN), various militant groups in the Niger Delta region, criminal activities of certain herdsmen and cartel of human traffickers operation from Nigeria and across the subregion have been adequately cited in literature (Usman, 2015; Usman & Obiyan, 2017; Usman, 2021; and Fagge, Danguguwa & Muhammad, 2021).

According to Akayaar (2023: 165), "the border management challenges and Transborder crimes resulting from poor border management of Nigeria have threatened national security". The author revealed that the common Transborder crimes across the Nigerian borders especially in the two decades covering the period of 2000 to 2020 include stolen travel documents, goods smuggling, trafficking in drugs, arms, and irregular migration movements. For Nigeria, several concerns have been raised over government's poor handling of the country's porous borders that have persisted over time precipitating border governance challenge that led to an increase Transborder crimes within the West Africa subregion.

Similarly, in The Gambia, according to the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GITOC) (2021) on the Global Organized Crime Index (GOCI), the country is reported to serve two main purposes in Transborder crime network. First, while it is a major source country for human smuggling, it is also a transit route for many trafficked drugs enroute to Europe, Asia, America and other parts of Africa. This became heightened since the civil war in Libya in 2011 when tens of thousands of young Gambians have attempted to cross the Mediterranean to Europe among other irregular routes to engage in prostitution and illicit drug business. These occurrences make Gambians to be consistently been one of the top ten nationalities taking boats across the Mediterranean to Europe (GITOC, 2021).

Thus, this chapter consists of introduction, conceptualization, a trending analysis of transborder crimes in West Africa, factors promoting transborder crimes in West Africa, impacts of transnational crimes in West Africa, responses to transnational crimes in West Africa, and conclusion and policy options.

Conceptualization – Globalization, Border, Transborder Organized Crimes, and Border Management

(a.) Border

For all practical purposes, the terms 'border' and 'boundary' are often used interchangeably and even risked by many for being the same, with only the difference being semantic. The concept of border has been described in different perspective by different scholars with related terms of meanings and ideas. In the thinking of Szary, Agnew, Secor, Sharpe and Mamadouh, (2015: 1), "boundaries have been a key component of the modern territorial vocabulary. They have origins in Euclidean thinking, which sees space as two-dimensional. They also fit in well with Kantian rationality, which considers space and time as two symmetrical conditions of human experience".

The Saxon etymology suggests that "boundary" or "border" could be "that which binds," a place of friction or meeting where alterity is negotiated. Probably, borders more than boundaries, are a kind of space where the relationship with otherness can be developed such a way as to allow for identity-building and place-making (Szary et al, 2015). This socio-anthropological definition of borders emphasizes the complex relations of the spatial divides with distance. It is possible to define a border as a way of "putting distance in proximity" (p. 2). Border could also be seen from the German-Polish word grenze meaning "milestone", used to demark private property before it bore a more political interpretation. The word was coined in the context of large borderlands where the line only existed as a mental construction tied to punctual signs in the landscape (Szary et al, 2015: 2).

A border can be a margin around the edge of something, such as a lawn, garden photograph, and sheet of paper even a country (Momoh, 1989), a line or narrow area that divides two countries or areas; the lands near this line (Concise English Dictionary, 2014), and geographic boundaries of political entities or legal jurisdictions, such as governments, sovereign states, federated states, and other subnational entities (Edward 2012). Under the international law, Meagher (2003) argued that each country is generally permitted to define the conditions which have to be met by a person to legally cross its borders by its own laws, and to prevent persons from crossing its border, when these laws are violated, adequate sanctions are applied. In order to cross borders, the presentation of passports and visas or other appropriate forms of identification are required by immigration. In the context of international law, to reside or work within a country's border, foreigners or aliens may need special immigration documents or permits that authorize them to do so (see Malechi & Mathias, 2021).

(b.) Globalization

In both academic literature and policy circle, the term globalization has become a subject of intense scholarly controversy. It has been defined differently by different authors (Usman, 2019). For this reason, scholars like Simon Riech argued that despite the breadth with which the term has been applied, the meaning of 'globalization' remains so elusive as to defy definition (Reich, 1998). He goes further to say that even scholars and learned participants at a symposium held at the University of Pittsburgh in the fall of 1996 had no clear idea of what globalization was. Since then, while several writers and policymakers have provided some candid perspectives in the bid to provide better insight in addressing this definitional issue there is no clear consensus on whether the term 'globalization' is employed as a historical epoch, a process, a theory, or as a new paradigm. Jan Aart Scholte says it "stands out for quite a large public spread across the world as one of the defining terms of late twentieth-century social consciousness". This undoubtedly makes its meaning remained unspecified. The point is a little bit stretched further when Reich agreed that globalization is a term in heavy current usage but one whose meaning remains obscure, often even among those who invoke it. This brings us to a question that Joseph Stiglitz has asked when he said, "Why has globalization – a force that has brought so much good – become so controversial?" (Stiglitz, 2002: 4).

Much as the concept suffers widely acceptable definitional deficiency it also suffers clarity on the actual period it emerged. For example, while Antony Gerald Hopkins, a British historian specializing in the economic history of Africa cum European colonialism on the continent believed that it has had a history going back in time to the great commercial and imperialist movements throughout Asia and the Indian Ocean since the fifteenth century (Hopkins, 2004), others like Grinin and Korotayev (2014) traced its historical origin to the fourth millennium BCE at least since the formation of the system of long-distance and large-scale trade in metals in the scale of systemic trade relations, which overgrew significantly the local level and became regional and even transcontinental in a certain sense. Yet, for others like Andre Gunder Frank in particular, globalization has been going on either since the first movement of people out of Africa into other parts of the world, or since the third millennium BC when the World System emerged (Frank 1990, 1993; Frank and Gills 1993), or since the so-called Axial Age (see Jaspers, 1953) in the first millennium BC, or only since the Great Geographical Discoveries, or in the nineteenth century, or after the year 1945, or only since the late 1980s towards the end of the Cold War politics era (Grinin & Korotayev, 2014; Usman, 2019). Although, the demise of the Cold War and Soviet socialism between late 1980s and early 1990s coincided with the onset of globalization, thereby raising the argument that there is a causal relationship between the globalization and the American hegemony called the New World Order. However, whether it is controversial in definition and unclear in historical origin, globalization has become one of the most discussed concepts in town especially within the development and policy circles and literature in the academia. Here we offer few illuminating explanations of the word itself means and what it portends to the world as a whole and Africa in particular.

According to Usman (2019: 167), the term globalization is today one of the most commonly used, and perhaps overused, to describe world political, economic, and cultural relations. And it is for such reason that we talk about political globalization, economic globalization, and cultural globalization, as variants of globalization. Defining it, Anthony Giddens says "globalization can be defined as the intensification of social relations throughout the world, linking distant localities in such a way that local happenings are formed as a result of events that occur many miles away and vice versa" (Giddens, 1991: 64). While Robertson described it as "the understanding of the world and the increased perception of the world as a whole", Albrow and Elizabeth King, perceive it as "all those processes by which the peoples of the world are incorporated into a single world society" (Robertson, 1992; Albrow & King, 1990). For McGrew, globalization is "higher intensity in economic cultural and political connection on a global scale, breaking down the differences between domestic and external distinctions" (McGrew, 2008).

Furthermore, in the opinion of the Swedish journalist, Thomas Larsson, globalization "is the process of the shrinking of the world, the shortening of distances, and the closeness of things. It allows the increased interaction of any person on one part of the world to someone found on the other side of the world, in order to benefit" (Larsson, 2001: 9). For Phillip Cerny, "globalization is defined as a set of economic and political structures and processes deriving from the changing character of the goods and assets that comprise the base of the international political economy – in particular, the increasing structural differentiation of those goods and assets (Cerny, 1995: 596).

As a favorite catch- or trap-word of journalists and politicians alike, Ali Mazrui noted that globalization carries two inter-related consequences whose English words of homogenization (making all of us look similar) and hegemonization (making one of us the boss) sound similar (Mazrui, 1999: 10). On the flip side of homogenization, Mazrui believes that globalization is all about increasing similarities among world societies, while on the hegemonization side it characterizes increasing world domination by a specific power or civilization, ultimately the West represented by the United States of America (Mimiko, 2012).

As enunciated by Mazrui, the table below presents the two sides of the same coin of globalization i.e. the contrast between the homogenization and hegemonization components of it.

Homogenization (expanding Homogeneity)	Hegemonization (emergence of Hegemonic centre)
Increasing similarities among world societies.	Increasing world domination by a specific power or civilization.
At the end of the 20th century people dress more the same all over the world than they did at the end of the 19th century.	But the dress which is the same is overwhelmingly Western dress code.
At the end of the 20th century the human race is closer to having world languages than it was in the nineteenth century - if by a world language we mean one which has at least 300 million speakers, has been adopted by at least 10 countries as a national language, has spread to more than one continent, and is widely used in four continents for special purposes.	But those world languages at the end of the 20th century are disproportionately European - especially English and French - although Arabic is putting forward a strong challenge as a world language in a different sense.
At the end of the 20th century, we are closer to a world economy than we have ever been in human history. A sneeze in Hong Kong or Tokyo can send shock waves around the globe.	But the powers who control that economy are disproportionately Western - especially the G-7 (USA, Germany, Japan Britain, France, Canada and Italy in that order of economic muscle).
At the end of the 20th century the internet has given us instant access to both information and mutual communication across huge distances.	But the nerve center of the global internet system is still located in the United States and has residual links with the US Federal Government.
The educational systems at the end of the 20th century are getting more and more similar across the world - with concepts of "associate professorships" and "twosemester" years; and with paradigms shared across the globe.	But those shared academic ranks, semesters and scholarly paradigms are disproportionately drawn from the United States and Western Europe.
The ideological systems of the world at the end of the 20th century are converging. Market economies are triumphant. Liberalization is being embraced or enforced. Even China has adopted market Marxism. Egypt is pushing the frontiers of Intifada. India is liberalizing.	The people who are orchestrating and sometimes enforcing marketization, liberalization and privatization are Western economic gurus - reinforced by the power of the USA, the World Bank, the IMF and the European Union. Indeed, Europe is the mother of all modern ideologies – good and bad – Liberalism, Capitalism, Marxism, Fascism, and Nazism. The most triumphant is Euro-liberal Capitalism.

Source: Ali A. Mazrui, "From Slave Ship to Space Ship: Africa between Marginalization and Globalization", African Studies Quarterly, Volume 2, Issue. 4, pp. 10 – 11.

For the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the identified four basic aspects of globalization are trade and transactions, capital movements and investment, migration and movement of people, and the spreading of knowledge (IMF, 2000).

(c.) Transborder Organized Crimes (TOCs)

While all international crimes are TOCs, not all TOCs are international crimes. No international crime is committed without having impacts or implications on people across territorial boundaries of states across the world, most times, Transborder crimes impacts are limited in scope to the region or subregion where there are committed. However, given the complexity of TOCs because of numerous things involved in it, the task of defining it is always herculean. Recognizing this, Ering (2011: 74) argued that "the task of defining or describing 'transborder crime' would not be an easy one, because many elements have been recognized as constituting it". Regardless of this difficulty however, various authors have offer insightful perspectives on what it means. For example, while Sunday and Okechukwu (2014) observed that "Transborder crimes include acts of human trafficking, money laundering, drug trafficking, arms smuggling or trafficking or weapons, terrorism, illegal oil bunkering, illicit trafficking in diamonds, corruption and business fraud". Also, to Adepoju and Dare (2020: 206), "Transborder crime is defined as the number of illegal and notorious activities carried out by individuals and groups across national and international borders, either for financial or economic benefits and also socio political cum religious considerations.

According to the United Nations Convention against Trans-national Organized Crime (UNCATOC) (2002) said that Transborder crimes are the crimes that have actual or potential effects across national borders as well as crimes that are intra-state but offend fundamental values of the international community. This presupposes that an organized criminal group is "a structured group of three or more persons existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences established in accordance with this Convention, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit". This is a rather wide definition, which does not consider organized crime solely in term of mafia-style organizations with a strict hierarchical structure; street gangs or vigilante groups could also fall within the definition of organized crime as it is set out here. In the case of West Africa, it is particularly misleading to think of organized crime groups as being solid structures resembling major corporations of crime. As will be discussed in due course, West African criminal networks are generally characterized by their great fluidity and flexibility, qualities that actually can be turned to great advantage in modern, globalized markets, including illegal ones.

Ering (2011) believed that it represents "a number of illegal and notorious activities carried out by individuals and groups across national and international borders, either for financial or economic benefits and also sociopolitical cum religious considerations". To Ering (2011), it is a set of criminal acts whose perpetrators and repercussions go beyond territorial borders. These would include human trafficking, money laundering, drug trafficking, arms smuggling or trafficking of weapons, cross-border terrorism, illegal oil bunkering, illicit trafficking in diamonds, corruption, business fraud, to mention but these notables few. Organized criminal groups or individuals carry out their illicit activities using major technological tools such as information networks, the financial system and other sophisticated means. They also take advantage of differences in legislation, legal systems and traditions, which often seriously hamper state efforts to respond adequately to the threat of organized or Transborder crimes.

Ortuno and Wiriyachai (2009) have maintained that the past few years have been characterized by a significant increase in global criminal activities such as money laundering, trafficking in human and nuclear technology and material, the trade in human organs and migrant smuggling. At the same time, emerging crimes such as modern piracy, and trafficking in toxic waste, counterfeit medicines, precious metals or natural resources have been added to the list of traditional illegal activities such as prostitution, drug trafficking and arms trafficking. In recent times, transnational crime has grown in scope and is characterized by increasingly global reach, involved in multiple forms of criminal activity, expanding criminal markets to include large-scale financial fraud and cybercrime. To protect their nefarious activities, the syndicates employ violent and ruthless means and are sometimes linked to international terror groups devising novel and notorious organizational strategies that either remove them from the security radar of states or position them to deter capture (Luna, 2008).

In view of the above, no region of the world is immune from global reach of transnational crime groups. Since the end of the Cold war, international organized crime groups continue to branch out beyond their traditional parameters, take quick advantage of new opportunities, and move more readily into new geographic areas. Thus, major international organized crime groups operate in Latin America, Southeast Europe, Asia, Russia and West Africa, other regions.

(d.) Border Management

In a broader sense, border management refers to the policies, procedures, and systems used by a country to regulate and control the movement of people, goods, and services across its borders. It includes security measures, immigration control, customs regulations, and trade facilitation to ensure national security, economic stability, and compliance with international laws. To Okumu and Ikelegba (2010), border management in the general context is defined as the government functions of immigration, customs and excise, and policing, with the goal of monitoring and regulating the influx or outflow of people and goods across a country's border/boundary in the national interest, particularly economic development, security, and peace. In similar vein, Ireland (2009) said border management comprises of the upkeep of boundary beacons that define the physical boundaries of the country's territory. Okumu and Ikelegbe (2010), as well as Ireland (2009), expand on this description by stating that border management is a collaborative activity between a country and its neighbors. It cannot be done alone and is most effective and efficient when done regionally, highlighting the concept of integrated border management.

In the opinion of scholars like Jana (2017), critical stakeholders in border management ranges from customs, immigration, police, military and paramilitary forces, and the ministry of agriculture for quarantine purposes, all of whom typically act separately and without networking or exchanging information. To this writer (Jana), the conclusion is that border management represents the territorial integrity of a state's sovereignty. This suggests that the failure of any state to control its borders does not only jeopardize its domestic interests but international legitimacy as the legal standing of any state or government is determined by how it administers and/or manages its borders. No doubt, effective border management balances security concerns with the need for smooth cross-border movement and as well, ensures national security while balancing economic growth and human rights. Onuoha (2013) and Spencer (2007) for example defend the synonymity of effective border management and national security. For Onuoha, while he maintained that "effective border management is vitally important for the preservation of national security" (p. 3), Spencer on the other hand insisted that "the border is the first line of defence against terrorism and the last line of a nation's territorial integrity" (p. 110).

Hence, the major aspects of border management include security and law enforcement (preventing illegal immigration, human trafficking, smuggling, and cross-border crimes), trade and customs regulation (facilitating legal trade and ensuring compliance with customs laws), immigration control (regulating the entry and exit of people, including visa and passport verification), border infrastructure and technology (using surveillance systems, biometric identification, and fencing to enhance border control), and international cooperation (collaborating with neighboring countries for efficient border policies).

Transborder Crimes in West Africa: A Trending Analysis

The emergence of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a subregional bloc formed in May 1975 and with subsequent adoption of the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons and the Right of Residence and Establishment in 1979, aims to promote intra-regional mobility by granting Community citizens the right to enter, reside, and establish themselves in member states, with a phased approach to removing barriers to economic growth and development. Thus, while the founding leaders of the Community were primarily motivated by the noble cause of achieving economic integration, a free trade area and customs union, a single market for goods and services produced and rendered within the Community, and promoting even economic development, peace, security, and prosperity for all member states, criminal elements are exploiting these ECOWAS core values for their own criminal purposes. Studies establishing a strong nexus between free movement across borders and creation of security threats within a subregion (see Usman, 2021, for example) exist. Compare to other regions in Africa, activities of smugglers, terrorists, traffickers, and armed robbers, transverse the West African subregional borders without major challenge (Usman, 2021; Ende & Paul, 2024).). This is further motivated by globalization, a process that creates a sense of villagization of the world or a community identity of people with common goals sort of, that places limitations on state security forces to act defending national security where they are not culpable in aiding and abetting. For instance, in its 2010 annual report, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2010) asserted the culpability of state security networks' collusion with criminal elements in certain circumstances to perpetrate and perpetuate transborder crimes within the subregion. Relying on the UNODC's report, Linda Darkwa opined that reports indicating the culpability of state security in aiding and abetting transborder crimes within the subregion are well established. It is instructive to quote his insightfulness here. He said,

There are also reports of some criminals successfully infiltrating the highest echelons of security and border control agencies in some countries in the subregion. The infiltration is particularly prevalent in countries with weak structures and limited capacities for promoting the rule of law. With their connections to government officials, these cross-border networks are able to undermine law enforcement efforts and operate with impunity (Darkwa, 2011: 7).

Adepoju and Dare (2020: 209, 210) further echoed both the UNODC Report's and Darkwa's concerns by exposing how high-profile political leaders and border guards especially in Nigeria and other West African countries are caught and prosecuted for encouraging transborder crimes within the West African subregion. Their findings highlight the responsibility of state elites and security services in fostering the transborder criminal network of money making-industry, which has proven profitable for them at the expense of broader regional peace and security. Others like Lewis (1996), Dauda (2010), (Brown, 2013), and Aning and Pokoo (2014) among others, highlighted not just the high prevalence of transborder crimes in the subregion but the involvement of states' leaders and their security agencies that encourage their continued existence. This explains why Sunday, Oji, and Okechukwu (2014) insisted that despite the efforts of cross-border security agencies like the police, customs service, immigration enforcement officers, West African borders remain porous allowing all sorts of cross border or transborder criminal activities such as human trafficking, trading in narcotics and dangerous drugs, to proliferation of the small arms and light weapons (SALWs). Given these incidences, the spate of cross-border criminal activities in West Africa continue to contribute to and undermines national security of states in the subregion and soil their national images abroad as well as impeding their external relations, particularly Nigeria.

Of course, the West Africa is a subregion of contrast and to a greater degree, the contrast put it at a critical juncture in its socioeconomic and political development as a result of the activities of transborder criminals. This point is well noted by Darkwa's (2011) study, which agreed that on the one hand, the subregion is well endowed in terms of natural resources, strategic location and large market with great potential for development and peace, and on the other, it is confronted with a number of challenges that render its rather fragile institutions and post-conflict societies vulnerable to political instability, economic crisis and violent conflict. To her (Darkwa), one of such challenges are evidenced through the threat of the proliferation of SALW occasioned from the outbreak and aftermath of civil wars in countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Côte d'Ivoire, the Tuareg revolts in Niger and Mali, the militant activities in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta area, and the more recent activities of the terror groups like the Boko Haram (and its breakaway affiliate like the Islamic State's West Africa Province, ISWAP, and the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, AQIM), bandits, and kidnappers mostly in Nigeria's fragile Northern region. This is coupled with the security threats posed in Nigeria's Southeastern part through the activities of the members of the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its security organization, the Eastern Security Network (ESN) as well as the so-called 'Unknown Gunmen'.

Some scholars like Usman (2015) and Obiyan and Usman (2017) have argued that the proliferation of these armed groups threatening security of lives, property and livelihoods of people of Nigeria in particular and those of West Africa (and to a larger degree, the Lake Chad Area comprising of Central African region) in general, turning the entire Sahel region as a belt of terror or headquarters of global terror franchise, are caused by two interrelated crises of unemployment and poverty. Darkwa (2011) corroborates this assertion when she said "In some countries [in West Africa], high levels of unemployment, weak governance and porous borders have rendered the subregion vulnerable to transnational and violent cross-border crimes (p. 7).

Additionally, the end of the Cold War between late 1980s and early 1990s no doubt saw the opening of a Pandora's box in several countries including those in West Africa. Most national governments that hitherto had grips on power that had been able to fend off the opposition suddenly found themselves in fierce battles with non-state actors. In some of these countries, states armed certain groups and individuals outside of their security agencies to intimidate oppositions to pave way for them to retain power at all costs (Darkwa, 2011). In certain situations, the need to dispose of Cold War weapon surpluses and expansion of production capacity led to a glut of weapons in arms-producing countries. Consequently, in the opinion of Naylor (2001: 216), the "desire to promote arms exports as a means of earning foreign exchange" resulted in the availability of weapons to non-state actors.

No doubts, as Cyril Obi has observed while writing on the performance assessments of the various ECOWAS peacekeeping efforts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and Coe d'Ivoire, he noted that the subregion has one of Africa's most sophisticated peace and security architectures (Obi 2009: 119), it still faces formidable intra-regional security challenges. Of note are the threats posed by the connections between the proliferation of SALW, violent conflict and the activities of transnational criminal networks operating in the region and peace, security and development in West Africa. These networks are well established in some West African countries, which are regarded as hubs for global criminal networks that engage in illegal activities such as drug and human trafficking, arms proliferation, illegal mining of minerals, cross-border crime and smuggling and piracy. There are also reports of some criminals successfully infiltrating the highest echelons of security and border control agencies in some countries in the subregion. The infiltration is particularly prevalent in countries with weak structures and limited capacities for promoting the rule of law (UNDOC 2010). With their connections to government officials, these cross-border networks are able to undermine law enforcement efforts and operate with impunity.

Fig. 1: Map of West African Subregion

Factors Promoting Transborder Crimes in West Africa

While there are several causative factors that have been identified by extant literature as responsible for the occurrence of transborder crimes within the subregion, these factors can be categorized into three broad areas, namely, state-induced, regional-induced and external-induced factors.

(1) Internal State-Induced Factors: These are enabling factors that individual states within the subregion caused in the perpetration and perpetuation of cross-border crimes within the area. They include among others, weak border control and security, compromised activities of states' national security and defence forces (aiding and abetting transborder crimes and criminal elements), corruption and weak governance (to strictly enforce the national laws due to corrupt law enforcement officers accepting bribes), and unemployment and poor economic conditions (that push many agile, able-bodied and competent youths who are willing to work but there are no available works or available ones are not attractive enough thereby pushing them into various crimes, including transborder ones). Others are political instability and armed conflicts (creating fertile and conducive environment for transborder crimes thrives as witnessed in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire etc.), weak legal and judicial systems (manifesting in terms of lack of strong legal frameworks outdated laws and loopholes in existing ones, and poor enforcement mechanisms resulting in criminals escaping justice), and lack of social adequate social services (to provide safety nets for the vulnerable groups within the society, hence, making crimes of national and transborder attractive to them) among several others.

(2) Regional-Induced Factors: Here, the study emphasizes causative factors for transnational crimes involving all or significant number of states within the region. These include the ECOWAS free movement policy (which, though, originally devised to be beneficial for trade, but often exploited by criminals to transport illegal substances, weapons, and trafficked persons across borders for their criminal enterprises and advantage), limited or lack of regional cooperation (in intelligence gathering, sharing and collective actions by West African leaders and their respective state securities to nib in the bud or neutralize transborder crimes and criminals), and the coterminous and porosity of the West African states' boundaries (influenced mainly by common socio-cultural ties that bound people across the modern states in the subregion. This, more than the colonial drawing of border, creates policing quite challenging of the contiguous West African borders both geographically and culturally speaking) (Onuoha, 2013).

(3) External-Induced Factors: Transborder crimes in West Africa are not only driven by internal state-induced and regional-induced factors but also influenced by external forces and interests. These factors originate from global economic, political, and security dynamics that make the region vulnerable to criminal and illegal activities such as drug trafficking, human smuggling, arms proliferation, and terrorism. Major external-induced factors contributing to transborder crimes in West Africa include but not limited to global drug trafficking networks (that make West Africa become a major transit hub for drug cartels transporting narcotics from Latin America to Europe and North America with international drug syndicates take advantage of weak governance, corrupt officials, and porous borders to smuggle cocaine, heroin, and synthetic drugs through the region), and proliferation of SALWs (by external actors, including arms dealers and international black markets that transact in illegal trade of arms and weapons flow into West Africa especially from war-torn regions like Libya, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe, which is possible due to weak border control and regional conflicts that make it easier for weapons to enter the hands of criminals, terrorists, and insurgent groups, escalating insecurity and violence). Others are influence of foreign terrorist organizations and networks (such as Al-Qaeda and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, ISIS, that provide funding, training, and logistical support to local terrorist cells like the Boko Haram, AQIM, and ISWAP radicalizing youths within the region by online propaganda and extremist ideologies spread by foreign groups), and human trafficking and migration networks (occasioned by external demand for cheap labor in developed countries driving illegal migration and human trafficking that exploit economic desperation in West Africa, charging high fees for risky and often deadly journeys across the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea to Europe, the Middle East, and North America).

This is in addition to globalization and technological advancements that necessitate the rise of global digital platforms that facilitate cybercrime and financial fraud making the subregion becoming a hub for internet scams like fraudulent acts popularly known as 419 or Yahoo-Yahoo or Yahoo Plus, money laundering, and identity theft. Criminals use international financial systems like cryptocurrencies, and offshore accounts to conduct illegal transactions while evading law enforcement and globalization has made it easier for traffickers to coordinate illicit trade across multiple countries within the subregion without being caught. Also, foreign economic interests represented by multinational corporations and foreign investors exploiting the abundant economic resources of the subregion sometimes collude with corrupt local officials enticing them with kickbacks to exploit oil, gold, diamonds, and timber without adequate regulation triggering chains of smuggling and other illegal trading activities.

Needless to say, that apart from weak international law enforcement and border policies, global climate change and environmental pressures like the recession of waters in Lake Chad used for human and animal consumption, irrigation farming and other uses contribute to the violent contest over access to the remaining volumes of water among various fighting groups within the subregion contributes to transborder crimes. Of course, global environmental changes like desertification and rising sea levels, have worsened food insecurity and displacement in West Africa leading to increased migration, competition over resources, and conflicts that create conditions for transborder crimes (see Natarajan, 2019).

Impacts of Transnational Crimes in West Africa

No doubt, organized crime has serious negative consequences for individuals, communities, nations, and the subregion. Criminal elements and organizations they represent have varying capacities to inflict untold economic physical, psychological, and societal harm. The greater their capacity to harm, the greater the danger they pose to society (Finckenauer & Voronin, 2001). Thus, policing organized and transnational crime is very challenging because of the amount of political power, wealth, connection, and use of violence associated with the perpetrators. Criminals deploy these factors against law enforcement agents. They use bribes to ensure the cooptation and protection of the lawmakers and law enforcement, as well as security, intelligence, and judicial officers and those occupying the highest offices in countries within the subregion. In certain instances, the perpetrators infiltrate law enforcement and intelligence agencies in order to have prior access to plans of action against them.

Responses to Transnational Crimes in West Africa

Following the menace that TOCs constitute for the subregion, West African nations have adopted and adapted several regional, continental, and international legal instruments to combat criminal activities within and across their borders. Some of the legal instruments that have been deployed so far to combat the hydra-headed monsters of TOCs are the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the UN Convention against Corruption, the African Union Convention against Corruption, the AU Drug Plan of Action, the ECOWAS Protocol on the Fight against Corruption, and the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons. Others are the ECOWAS Protocol on Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (1999), the Intergovernmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa, the West African Police Chiefs Committee, and the ECOWAS Convention on Assistance in Criminal Matter of July 1992 and the ECOWAS Convention on Extradition (see Alemika, 2013: 127-144).

CONCLUSION AND POLICY OPTIONS

In conclusion, we contend that, while globalization, as celebrated by its many apologists, has provided enormous benefits to the West African subregion and its people by facilitating economic growth through integration into the global capitalist economy and exposing the region to innovation and creativity in information and communication technology (ICT), it is not without challenges.

One of its major challenges is that it has also enabled transborder crimes to flourish due to weak governance, economic instability, and external criminal influences. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach and policy recommendations consisting of the following:

First, strengthening border security and law enforcement that enhance border surveillance using modern technologies such as drones, biometric identification, and satellite monitoring; increase funding for border security agencies and improve their capacity through specialized training; and establish joint border task forces among West African nations to improve intelligence-sharing and coordination. Second, combating corruption and improving governance by implementing strict anti-corruption measures within law enforcement and border control agencies; promote transparency and accountability in government institutions responsible for border management; and strengthen judicial systems to ensure the effective prosecution of transborder crime offenders. Third, enhancing regional and international cooperation by strengthening the role of ECOWAS in coordinating cross-border security operations; improve intelligence-sharing mechanisms between West African nations and international security organizations such as INTERPOL and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC); and develop bilateral agreements with neighboring regions, such as North Africa and Europe, to curb transborder crimes.

Furthermore, addressing economic drivers of crime through the creation of employment opportunities and entrepreneurship programs, especially for youth, to reduce the lure of criminal activities; support economic diversification initiatives to reduce dependence on illicit trade; and strengthen financial regulatory frameworks to prevent money laundering and illicit financial flows are some of the ways to mitigate transborder crimes in West Africa. Additionally, regulating global trade and technology use by enforcing stricter monitoring of international trade routes to prevent the smuggling of illicit goods; strengthen cybersecurity measures to combat online fraud and cyber-enabled crimes; and partner with global technology firms to track and dismantle criminal networks operating online, are plausible way forward. Again, tackling terrorism and proliferation of SALWs so as to improve arms control policies by strengthening monitoring of weapon imports and sales; work with international partners to dismantle foreign terrorist networks operating in West Africa; and provide deradicalization programs for individuals vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups, would be quite helpful.

Lastly, enhancing public awareness and community engagement through public awareness campaigns launch on the dangers of human trafficking, drug abuse, and illegal migration; engage local communities in border areas to act as informants and collaborators in crime prevention efforts; and strengthen civil society organizations to play a greater role in monitoring government actions on crime prevention.

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