



ROLES OF THE NIGERIA CUSTOMS SERVICE ON BORDER SECURITY AND PUBLIC SAFETY IN NIGERIA



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Abstract

Border protection is fundamental to state security and public safety. This study examines the role of the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) in border security and its impact on public safety in Nigeria. Using Social Systems Theory and Marxist Political Economy Theory, the study adopted a qualitative documentary research design and relied on secondary data analysed through description, comparison, and interpretation. Despite Nigeria's vast borders, spanning 4,332 kilometres of land and 3,000 kilometres of navigable waterways, the NCS regularly seizes contraband, including weapons, drugs, currencies, petroleum products, pharmaceuticals, and other illicit goods, while arresting and prosecuting suspects nationwide. A key example is the 27 October 2010 seizure of 13 forty-foot containers of firearms, ammunition, and other dangerous weapons at Apapa Port, which led to the arrest of four suspects. The paper finds that these enforcement activities contribute to border security and public safety by reducing the circulation of dangerous goods capable of intensifying terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, violent crime, economic sabotage, and public health risks. The study also shows that the NCS supports legitimate trade while preventing illicit cross-border flows, thereby linking customs enforcement directly to national security and community safety. It concludes that the NCS plays a preventive security role that extends beyond revenue generation, especially in a border environment characterised by porous routes and transnational criminal networks. It recommends intensifying border patrols with modern geospatial and surveillance technologies, including GPS, drones, scanners, radar systems, and cargo-tracking devices, and constructing double-layer fencing in high-risk border corridors.

Keywords: Border, border security, public safety, smuggling.

Introduction

Every state bears the fundamental responsibility of protecting its borders against perceived threats to national security and the safety of its citizens. Border protection involves controlling the movement of people, animals, and goods across national frontiers to promote trade, prevent illicit activities, curb illegal immigration, and defend sovereignty. The strength and stability of nations, including their economic prosperity, are measured by their ability to secure borders against external aggression from states and non-state actors that undermine security and economic interests.

Borders represent more than geographical boundaries. For some, they are physical symbols of national identity that demand preservation (Dominic, 2008). Spencer (2007) characterises borders as the first line of defence against terrorism and the last line of defence of territorial integrity. Brunet-Jailly (2010) emphasises borders as strategic locations where states employ military might to protect sovereignty. Others view borders through an economic lens, as assets facilitating cross-border flows of goods and services in a globalised economy (Nye & Keohane, 1971; Stephen, 2000).

In West Africa, and specifically in Nigeria, border security remains a pressing concern. The National Counter Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST, 2016, p22) identifies Nigeria's major security vulnerability as "the ease with which persons and goods enter and leave the country through inadequately protected borders". The strategy highlights porous borders that enable illicit trade, drug trafficking, illegal immigration, weapons proliferation, human trafficking, and smuggling.

Nigerian scholars also document how poorly controlled borders create cross-border organised crimes and regional insecurity with severe consequences for national security, public safety, and the economy (Alemika, 2013; Adetula, 2015; Antonio, 2007). Adams (2012) identified varied threats across different border regions: human trafficking, illegal immigration, arms smuggling, petroleum product smuggling, and narcotics trafficking. These activities threaten not only Nigeria's stability but also regional and global security. Adams (2012, p.1) pointed out an endemic "culture of graft, corruption, greed, and parochial interest" as the most formidable challenge to improving border security.

These concerns provide the problem context for the present study. Although the NCS has recorded several preventive and enforcement achievements through seizures of contraband, interception of arms and ammunition, and arrests of suspects, such efforts operate within a difficult border environment shaped by porous borders, an inadequate workforce,

limited operational equipment, corruption, and the transnational effects of globalisation (Alemika, 2013; Adetula, 2015; Nosiri & Ohazurike, 2016; Awosusi & Valery, 2024). These factors are not treated in this study as independent subjects of inquiry, but as contextual conditions that affect the extent to which NCS enforcement activities can strengthen border security and public safety in Nigeria.

Against this backdrop, this paper assesses the role of the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) in border security and its impact on public safety. The analysis specifically examines the border management measures and enforcement activities deployed by the NCS, including surveillance operations, seizures of contraband, and arrests of suspects, and evaluates their contribution to national security and public safety outcomes.

However, despite NCS's preventive activities, which have resulted in seizures of contraband and arrests of suspects, smuggling and other cross-border crimes persist, suggesting that enforcement successes have not produced sufficient deterrence (Omale, 2018; Amdii, 1991; Gbemiga, 2022). Consequently, porous borders, under-resourced agencies, and the destabilising effects of globalisation are treated in this study as contextual factors shaping NCS operations, rather than as independent subjects of inquiry (Alemika, 2013; Adetula, 2015; Nosiri & Ohazurike, 2016; Awosusi & Valery, 2024)

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarifications

Border

The federal Government of Nigeria officially defines a border as any entry or exit point to or from a country by air, sea, land, or inland waterways for the passage of people, animals, or goods (Customs and Excise Management Act, CEMA 55, Sections 12-15, now NCS amendment Act 2023). Hence, governments designate official crossing points: airports for air travel, seaports (wharves) for maritime traffic, and land borders (Customs stations) for terrestrial movement. However, numerous unauthorised entry and exit points exist across most countries' borders, including Nigeria.

Going by this simple official definition, Ejotubu & Onyemekihian (2021), Awosusi & Valery (2024) also see the border as a line that demarcates areas or countries and provides means for the control exercised by states. Beyond this simple definition are other concepts of the border as a symbol of national sovereignty and an economic asset that must be defended by

military might (Brunet-Jailly, 2010). From this perspective, borders are economic assets that form bridges, connecting rather than dividing nation-states by ensuring the seamless movement of people, goods, and services across frontiers (Brunet-Jailly 2010; Awosusi and Valery 2024).

Border Security

Border security encompasses all legislative and operational measures adopted by border control agencies to manage borders, maintain order, safeguard sovereignty and territorial integrity, protect economic interests and national values, and ensure citizens' security (Awosusi and Valery, 2024; Nosiri & Ohazurike, 2016; Dominic, 2008; Marrus, 1985; Brunet-Jailly, 2010). In Nigeria, border security involves a comprehensive approach involving multiple agencies: the Nigeria Customs Service, the Nigeria Immigration Service, the Nigeria Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), the Nigeria Police, the Department of State Security (DSS), the Nigerian Armed Forces, the Port Health, the Agricultural Quarantine Service, and the Standards Organisation of Nigeria.

These agencies collectively pursue several objectives: control and monitor cross-border movement while facilitating legitimate trade; prevent firearms, ammunition, and drug trafficking; stop illicit financial flows and petroleum product smuggling; intercept contraband harmful to the economy or public health; prevent disease transmission across borders; screen individuals with questionable backgrounds; and develop border communities to create legitimate employment alternatives to smuggling.

From a military perspective, border security includes physical barriers and buffer zones between states, especially hostile neighbours like the defunct Berlin Wall of 1961, which separated East Germany and West Germany, and the demilitarised (buffer) zone between North Korea and South Korea. (Merritt, 1973; Victor & Raman, 2023; Fraser, 2009).

Public health agencies focus on preventing epidemic spread affecting humans, animals, and plants, as witnessed during the recent past COVID-19 pandemic, when many countries around the world established quarantine stations where suspected travellers were held (Okoroiwu, 2020; The New York Times, 26/3/2020).

Public Safety

Public safety represents the government's responsibility to protect citizens from common crimes and natural disasters that threaten their well-being (Setareh 2024). Acha *et al.* (2025) define public safety as encompassing efforts to prevent crime and the establishment of emergency response programmes for disaster mitigation. Describing the state of public safety

in the coastal town of Oron in Akwa Ibom state, these authors observed that the business environment there is risky, characterised by high rates of theft, fraud, and vandalism, and is further compounded by the effects of climate change, such as coastal erosion and flooding.

Hence, closely related to national security, public safety focuses on immediate community-level protection, whereas national security addresses broader threats to the country's overall well-being, including citizens, values, institutions, and economy. According to Setareh (2024), public safety involves maintaining a safe and orderly society by preventing crime, attending to emergencies, and implementing safety measures. Former President Obasanjo linked the two concepts, defining national objectives as strengthening the Federal Republic, advancing its interests, containing instability, controlling crime, eliminating corruption, and improving citizen welfare and quality of life (Eric, 2017, p. 6).

Major public safety challenges in Nigeria include terrorism and insurgency (Boko Haram, Islamic State of West Africa (I.S.W.A) in the Northeast; communal clashes, kidnapping, banditry, and cattle rustling in the Northwest and North Central regions; and ethnic militia activities, armed robbery, kidnapping, and attacks on law enforcement in Southern states.

While the Nigerian Police primarily handle public safety interventions, military involvement becomes necessary during severe hostilities. The NCS, though not a primary intervention force, significantly impacts public safety since many threats like religious terrorism, banditry, connected to cross-border firearms, drug trafficking, and money laundering are within its statutory mandate.

Smuggling

Smuggling is the illegal importation/ exportation of goods, including contraband (prohibited goods) and free goods. It is an illicit cross-border trade in goods and currency. In Nigeria, smuggling refers to a wide range of activities like drug trafficking, money laundering, trafficking in light weapons and ammunition (arms), illegal movement of petroleum products, pharmaceutical products, vehicles, textile materials, rice and other foodstuffs, used tyres across the border (Alemika, 2013; Omale, 2013).

However, in Customs parlance, smuggling generally refers to contraventions of import, export, and excise provisions to evade or not pay appropriate duties (Omale, 2013). Contraventions may include wrong declaration of goods, concealment of goods, under-invoicing of goods, and wrong tariff classification.

Smuggling activities are mostly cross-border or transnational crimes, often referred to as organised crime because they involve different people united in a goal and actions spread along the international supply chain of goods, cutting across national frontiers (Alemika, 2013; Omale, 2013; Adetula, 2015).

Review of Related Studies

Extensive researches address border security in West Africa and Nigeria (Alemika, 2013; Antonio, 2007; Oludotun, 2018; Ejotubu & Onyemekihian, 2021; Nosiri & Ohazurike, 2016), though most studies focus broadly on security agencies rather than specifically on the NCS. Alemika (2013) describes West African borders as generally porous, inadequately patrolled, and staffed by ill-equipped, uncoordinated, and corrupt officials who sometimes work at cross-purposes. This situation enables weapon proliferation used by ethnic militias, bandits, rebels, political thugs, and smugglers.

Alemika (2013) identifies major cross-border organised crimes: corruption and money laundering; human and drug trafficking; arms smuggling; advance fee fraud; internet fraud; vehicle robbery; piracy; petroleum and mineral resource smuggling; substandard product dumping; and illicit foreign exchange transactions.

Antonio (2007), Eric (2016), and Daniel (2018) trace some cross-border crimes to the Arab Spring, which destabilised North African states. Political crises gave Tuareg rebels access to heavy weapons used to destabilise Sahel region military regimes in Niger, Mali, and Mauritania. Weapon proliferation from conflicts in Chad and Sudan extended these problems.

Oludotun (2018) and Ola (2011) observe that West African conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone provided smugglers unhindered weapon access, sold to armed groups committing violence throughout the sub-region, including Nigeria. Ejotubu & Onyemekihian (2021), Nosiri & Ohazurike (2016), and Awosusi & Valery (2024) examine how porous borders and challenges in border management affect Nigerian national security.

Only a few scientific studies specifically examine the NCS. Most are position papers by government officials. Existing research focuses on particular aspects: Olomu *et al.* (2018) studied intelligence use in border security; Adeniji (2018) examined Information Communication Technology (ICT) contributions to trade facilitation; Adegbe (n.d.) analysed Customs duties' economic contributions; Sanusi (2012) presented on NCS national security roles; Omale (2013) discussed

transnational crime impacts (with focus on smuggling) on the economy. Omale (2018) examined the roles of the NSC in the prosecution of smuggling offences in Nigeria.

Amdii (1991) provides the most comprehensive scientific work: a centenary celebration publication documenting NCS's evolution from the colonial to the post-independence period, showing revenue contributions and anti-smuggling measures. However, globalisation and information technology have created complex security challenges unforeseen in 1991 (Akinyemi, 2013; Gbemiga, 2022; Njoku *et al.*, 2025; Adeniji, 2018). Although these studies have made useful contributions to the understanding of border security, transnational crime, porous borders, trade facilitation, intelligence gathering, and Customs enforcement in Nigeria and West Africa, they leave important gaps that justify the present study. Studies such as Alemika (2013), Antonio (2007), Adetula (2015), Ejotubu & Onyemekihian (2021), Nosiri & Ohazurike (2016), and Awosusi & Valery (2024) focus largely on border insecurity, transnational organised crime, and the general consequences of porous borders. However, they do not provide a sustained analysis of the Nigeria Customs Service as a specific border-security institution. Similarly, studies by Adeniji (2018), Olomu *et al.* (2018), Ugwuibe *et al.* (2023), ThankGod (2024), Zakari *et al.* (2025), and Omale (2018) examine particular aspects of Customs operations, such as ICT deployment, intelligence gathering, anti-smuggling strategies, arms interception, and prosecution of smuggling offences. However, they do not sufficiently synthesise how these functions collectively affect border security and public safety outcomes in Nigeria. The gap in the literature, therefore, lies in the absence of a focused study that links the NCS's statutory, preventive, enforcement, and intelligence roles to concrete public safety implications. This study addresses that gap by examining how NCS border management measures, seizures, arrests, anti-smuggling operations, and inter-agency enforcement activities contribute to border security and public safety in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This paper employs Social Systems Theory and Marxist political economy as its analytical framework. Systems Theory views society as a complex network of interrelated, interdependent elements (individuals, institutions, values) that work together as a whole (Gibson, 2025). Traceable to the work of biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy, the theory seeks universal principles that explain how systems operate across all sciences.

While Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim established foundational concepts of society as a system (Dillon, 2014; Haralambos *et al.*, 2013), modern social systems theory emphasises increasing complexity through structural differentiation rather than evolution toward perfection. Radcliffe-Brown and Talcott Parsons developed concepts of function and structural functionalism, examining how system components interact to provide essential prerequisites while emphasising integration, cohesion, and stability.

Social Systems Theory is relevant to this study based on its key assumptions, such as a holistic approach to understanding social phenomena, emphasis on element interdependence and interconnections, recognition of constant change and adaptation to internal and external forces, and acknowledgement of feedback loops that influence future interventions (Singh & Azman, 2022).

However, the theory has limited applicability to specific circumstances due to its macro-level features. Additionally, implementing macro-level findings at cultural or policy levels proves difficult without specific environmental studies (Singh & Azman, 2022).

Due to these limitations, Marxist political economy is chosen to address the weaknesses of social system theory.

Marxist political economy, also called conflict theory, holds a holistic view of society as a social system but differs in its conception of the nature of the relationships among its parts. The following are the basic assumptions of this theory: Society is broadly composed of two major parts. The first is the economic base, which refers to the forces of production (land, capital, and labour) and the social relations of production (positions occupied in the production process). The second is the superstructure, which refers to the legal, political, religion and all non-material aspects of people's culture (Marx, 1970; Marx, 1974; Ake, 1981; Hirst, 1975; Haralambos *et al.*, 2013).

Every economic system has its own inherent contradiction, perceived as the cause of social change through dialectical materialism (the conflict of opposites), which drives society toward a higher socio-economic formation (Marx, 1970; Ake, 1981).

There is a dialectical relationship between the economic base of society and its superstructure, but it is the former that initiates change through historical materialism. Marx contends that man was naturally forced to till (cultivate) the soil to provide himself with food and other basic sustenance, making it his first historical Act. Consequently, it is man's material being

that determines his social consciousness (Marx, 1970; Beckman, 1982; Ake, 1981).

However, Marxist conflict theory has its own weaknesses, which include: Its emphasis on economic factors as cause for social change over the superstructure (Weber, 1958; Haralambos *et al.*, 2013), its inability to explain why capitalist societies of Western Europe and North America have not advanced to socialism as predicted (Dillon, 2014; Rao, 2009) and its inability to explain why social inequality still exists in the so-called socialist countries of Russia, Poland, China, Cuba and North Korea (Rao, 2009; Haralambos *et al.*, 2013).

Despite these weaknesses, Marxist political economy provides a powerful framework for understanding the mechanisms behind the growth of capitalism in Europe and its internationalisation (through imperialism) to other parts of the world. It would enable us to understand the interrelated nature of the global economy, in which what happens to one part adversely affects others (Dillon, 2014).

The theory is suitable for this study because it provides a potent framework for mirroring the complex interrelated and interdependent relationship (dialectics) amongst the parts of the Nigerian society, namely the Nigeria Customs Service and other agencies, the state and the various competing interest groups and social classes in the course of capitalist development in neo-colonial Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative documentary research design and relied on secondary data. This design is appropriate because the study examines the role of the Nigeria Customs Service in border security and its implications for public safety, using evidence from academic literature, official publications, legal instruments, policy documents, and institutional reports (Bowen, 2009; Johnston, 2014).

The data for the study were derived from books, peer-reviewed journal articles, government publications, legal documents, official Nigeria Customs Service materials, policy reports, newspapers, and other relevant documentary sources. These materials were analysed qualitatively through description, comparison, and interpretation to identify recurring themes and patterns in border management measures, anti-smuggling operations, seizures, arrests, and their implications for public safety in Nigeria (Bowen, 2009; Johnston, 2014).

To address the limitations commonly associated with secondary data, such as incompleteness, inconsistency, and source bias, the study triangulated

information from multiple sources. Priority was given to peer-reviewed academic works, official documents, and verifiable institutional records. Where discrepancies or incomplete records were observed, such materials were cross-checked against more authoritative sources before being used in the analysis. This procedure helped to minimise bias and improve the credibility and validity of the study's findings (Bowen, 2009; Johnston, 2014).

The Role of Customs on Border Security and Its Impact on Public Safety

Nigeria's Border Context

The NCS faces the daunting task of securing Nigeria's vast land, air, and sea borders. Nigeria occupies a strategic position in the Gulf of Guinea, bordered from southeast to northeast by Cameroon and the Republic of Chad, from northeast to northwest by the Republic of Chad, Niger, and the Republic of Benin, and from northwest to southwest by the Republic of Benin down to the Atlantic Ocean. Nigeria shares maritime borders with Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, and São Tomé and Príncipe (Danfulani, 2014; Amdii, 1991).

Nigeria's landmass covers approximately 923,768 square kilometres, with land borders extending about 4,332 kilometres and 3,000 kilometres of navigable waterways (Nosiri & Ohazurike, 2016; Okeke & Okechukwu, 2015). Beyond its vast territory, Nigeria's population of approximately 200 million (NBS, 2022) and significant economy make it an attractive destination and business hub in West Africa. Consequently, the NCS must remain vigilant to ensure that borders are properly manned to enhance economic prosperity, individual safety, and national sovereignty.

The Customs and Excise Management Act (CEMA) No. 55 of 1958, amended as the Customs Service Amendment Act 2023, establishes NCS statutory duties to include: control and restriction of all imports and exports via designated seaports, airports, and land borders for examination and revenue collection; securing borders against illegal import/export of prohibited goods threatening national security, economic interests, or public health; generating revenue from import, export, and excise duties; enforcement of government fiscal policies regarding import, export, local production (excise), transit, transshipment, and warehousing; and designating approved loading and unloading areas at ports and borders (Customs Service Amendment Act 2023; Omale, 2018; Amdii, 1991; Yabayanze, 2024).

Customs also issues excise licenses to excise traders and regulates activities in excise factories for the purpose of collecting excise duties (Sections 108 & 109 of the NCS Amendment Act, 2023).

The government, from time to time, increases or reduces tariffs on imports for certain goods, or suspends or even prohibits the importation or exportation of some goods, as a means of protecting local industries, which the Customs department enforces (The NCS external tariff; Yabayanze, 2024).

NCS also facilitates international trade by building bridges across borders to enable the free flow of goods and services through ICT, and by providing public trade hubs to access trade information. Information on prohibited and free goods, their tariff classification, and the rates of duty is provided, which makes trade easier (Adeniji, 2018).

NCS also encourages local production for export through the federal government intervention scheme, like the export processing zones (EPZ) at Calabar, Cross River State; Oil and Gas export free zone (OGEFZ) at Port Harcourt, Rivers state and export processing factories (EPF) which are scattered in cities of Lagos, Ibadan, Kano, and Sapele. Customs monitor activities in these factories to stimulate production for export in both the oil and non-oil sectors of the Nigerian economy (Amdii, 1991; Yabayanze, 2024).

Border Management Measures

Beyond the above statutory functions of the NCS, the NCS also adopts measures to ensure border security and public safety, which are broadly categorised into legislative and operational measures.

Legislative Measures: According to Adetula (2015), laws are enacted to legitimise actions or responses to national threats in a democratic setting, primarily through the National Assembly. In Nigeria, the National Assembly has passed some laws for the purpose of tackling transborder organised crimes and jihadist activities which include Anti-Terrorism Act, money laundering and terrorism financing (prohibition) Act and anti-piracy Act (Adetula, 2015) with particular reference to NCS, the National Assembly in 2023 passed a law amending the Nigeria Customs and Excise management act (CEMA) NO.55 of 1958 as Customs Service amendment Act 2023. This Act empowers the NCS to designate official airports, seaports, and land borders, and to channel all imports and exports through these points for examination. Under the law, deviations constitute criminal offences punishable by the Federal High Courts of Nigeria (Omale, 2018). The Act also enables NCS to enforce federal fiscal policies through the

Common External Tariff (CET), organised into schedules including Schedule 3 (Import prohibition list), Schedule 4 (Absolute import prohibition list), and Schedule 6 (Export prohibition list) (Omale, 2013; and Yabayanze, 2024).

Enforcement/Preventive Measures: Adetula (2015) views enforcement measures as encompassing all efforts to improve the operations of Customs and Immigration services to combat transnational crime and jihadist activities, such as installing detection equipment at airports, seaports, and land borders. It also refers to internal security and policing. These efforts, according to the author, would include extensive personnel training and improved intelligence gathering to face the new threats.

A thematic review of the literature shows three major patterns in scholarly discussions of the NCS and border security. The first area of convergence is that scholars generally agree that the NCS performs a strategic security function beyond revenue generation. Amdii (1991) conceptualises the security role of Customs as combating smuggling, piracy, economic sabotage, and border-related threats, while Omale (2018) links NCS enforcement functions to the prosecution of smuggling offences. Similarly, ThankGod (2024) shows that joint checkpoints, patrols, import restrictions, tariff measures, and arrests of smugglers constitute important anti-smuggling strategies. These studies converge on the point that the NCS contributes to border security by preventing the illegal movement of prohibited goods, especially firearms, drugs, and other contraband that threaten public safety.

The second theme concerns the role of technology and intelligence in strengthening Customs operations. Adeniji (2018) argues that the introduction of ICT into Customs clearance and border management improved trade facilitation, revenue generation, risk management, and anti-smuggling operations. This position is supported by Ugwuibe *et al.* (2023), who found that the Cargo Tracking Note and related port-monitoring technologies contributed to the interception of arms shipments at Nigerian ports. Olomu *et al.* (2018) also emphasise the importance of intelligence gathering, particularly human intelligence, imagery intelligence, signal intelligence, and open-source intelligence, in improving NCS border-control capacity. These studies therefore converge on the view that modern border security increasingly depends on the effective use of technology, surveillance, and intelligence-led operations.

However, the literature also reveals areas of divergence. While Adeniji (2018) presents ICT deployment as a major contributor to improved Customs performance, Ugwuibe *et al.* (2023) take a more cautious stance, arguing that technology alone cannot guarantee effective border security when corruption, poor accountability, and weak institutional discipline persist. In the same vein, Amdii (1991) identifies workforce shortages and lack of specialisation as constraints on Customs effectiveness, while Olomu *et al.* (2018) note that reliance on human intelligence can be expensive, time-consuming, and vulnerable to manipulation. These divergent positions show that although technology and intelligence are important, their effectiveness depends on institutional capacity, personnel integrity, inter-agency coordination, and proper operational management.

A third theme is the link between NCS enforcement activities and public safety outcomes. Studies by Omale (2018), Ugwuibe *et al.* (2023), Gbemiga (2022), and Zakari *et al.* (2025) show that seizures of arms, ammunition, narcotics, and other illicit goods have implications beyond Customs revenue protection. Such seizures reduce the circulation of dangerous weapons and harmful goods that could otherwise intensify terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, violent crime, and public health risks. Zakari *et al.* (2025), for instance, connect anti-smuggling activities in Rivers State to the reduction of border-security threats, especially through the interception of firearms and live ammunition. This suggests that the public safety value of the NCS lies not only in revenue protection but also in its preventive contribution to reducing the material resources available to criminal networks.

Overall, the reviewed studies show both convergence and divergence. They converge on the point that the NCS contributes to border security through anti-smuggling enforcement, surveillance, intelligence gathering, seizures, arrests, and prosecution of offenders. They diverge, however, on the extent to which these measures are effective in the face of persistent institutional weaknesses, such as an inadequate workforce, corruption, weak accountability, and poor technology deployment. This study, therefore, builds on the existing literature by synthesising the NCS's statutory, preventive, technological, intelligence, and enforcement roles and linking them directly to border security and public safety outcomes in Nigeria.

Recent Enforcement Achievements

The NCS's enforcement achievements are best understood not merely as official seizure records, but as empirical indicators of the Service's

preventive role in border security and public safety. Academic studies have shown that Customs enforcement contributes to national security by disrupting smuggling networks, intercepting prohibited goods, reducing the circulation of illicit arms, and supporting the prosecution of offenders (Amdii, 1991; Omale, 2018; Gbemiga, 2022; Ugwuibe *et al*, 2023). Therefore, the seizure records presented below are interpreted alongside scholarly findings on anti-smuggling enforcement, arms trafficking, intelligence-led border control, and the public safety implications of Customs operations.

Two special anti-smuggling units, code-named “operation spite fire” and “operation shock 90,” recorded the following seizures between November 1989 and 20 January, 1990, and between 21 May 1990 and 21 July 1990, respectively.

Item	Operation spite fire: Seizure value (₦) 20/11/1989 - 20/1/1990	Operation shock 90: Seizure value (₦) 21/05/1990 to 21/07/1990	Grand Total (₦)
Total value of seizures	17,671,711.40	16,933,308.00	54,605,079.40
Total duty involved	13,476,330.10	13,897,528.27	27,373,388.37
Total duty paid value	31,148,101.50	30,830,834.27	61,978,935.77
Total No. of seizures	146	109	255
Total No. of arrests	43	8	51
Total No. of vehicles seized	25	13	28

Source: Report of Director of Customs and Excise at the 1990 senior staff seminar, Bauchi, 8th to 12th October, 1990, lifted from Amdii (1991, p.237).

In 1991, the Service also made 847 seizures, including 56 vehicles and 5 canoes, and arrested 117 persons (Amdii, 1991)

These historical records support Amdii’s (1991) argument that Customs’ security role extends beyond revenue collection to include the prevention of smuggling, economic sabotage, and border-related threats. The number of seizures and arrests recorded between 1985 and 1990 demonstrates that

anti-smuggling enforcement had long been central to the NCS mandate. However, the data also suggest that seizure figures alone cannot fully capture deterrence, as continued smuggling indicates the persistence of organised cross-border networks. This supports Omale’s (2018) position that enforcement must be linked not only to seizure of contraband but also to investigation, prosecution, and conviction of offenders.

Seizure of Contraband Goods, Hard Drugs, and Indian Hemp Between 1985 and 1990

Year	No. of seizures of smuggled goods	Value (million ₦)	Qty. of hard drugs seized (kgs)	Qty. of Indian hemp seized (kgs)
1985	699	74.46	—	—
1986	571	45.142	—	—
1987	275	24.196	10.4	429.1
1988	410	37.217	29.2	95.5
1989	385	57.198	80.6	24.6
1990	463	75.128	16.2	74.22

Source: Osaje (1991), as cited in Amdii (1991, p. 238).

Referring to these seizures, the then Director of Customs and Excise, Dr Bello H. Muhammad, said that seizures not only demonstrate success in the department’s anti-smuggling drive but also serve a deterrence effect, which is not easily quantifiable (Amdii, 1991, p. 231).

Gbemiga (2022) also acknowledged the seizure of 1,100 and 470 pump action rifles in January 2017; 661 pump action rifles in May 2017; 440 guns in September 2017, and 73 locally made firearms, 891 cartridges and 5,200 rounds of ammunition also in 2017. He, however, noted that due to weak legal and regulatory systems, the state’s policing response to arms trafficking has been ineffective.

Omale (2018) also recorded seizures made across the country by the NCS between January 2005 and April 2006, including some arms and 40,716 rounds of ammunition, with 5 arrests.

In February, 2009, a 190 magnum automatic pump action rifle hidden in a truck moving along the Ijebu Ode/ Benin expressway was seized. The arms were concealed inside sacks of clothes (Omale, 2018).

In September, 2009, during a routine physical examination of containers at the Ports and Terminals multi-services limited (PTML) Lagos Command,

officers intercepted a large cache of arms and ammunition (10,200 pieces) hidden in vehicles parked inside a container (Omale, 2018).

In January, 2017, NCS federal operations zone ‘A’, Lagos patrol team intercepted one 40ft container released from Apapa port carrying 661 pieces of pump-action rifles, with 2 suspects, who were later handed over to the Department of State Security Service (Omale, 2018).

On 27 October, 2010, 13 (40ft) containers of arms and ammunition were intercepted at Apapa port, Lagos. The consignment arrived on board the MV CMA CGM Everest Ship from Iran and was incorrectly declared as building materials. This consignment contained 100 pieces of 107mm Katyusha artillery rockets, mortars of different sizes, rocket launchers, grenades and explosives. Four people were arrested, including an Iranian (Azim Aghajani), who was later sentenced to 5 years jail term (Vanguard News Nigeria, 11/12/2010; BBC News, 27/10/2010; Journal of West Africa, 14/12/2010).

In May 2013, Nigerian security forces raided a warehouse at No.3 Gaya road, Bompai Area of Kano and found AK-47 rifles, anti-tank weapons, rocket propelled grenade with missiles, sub-machine guns, hand grenades, explosives and massive amounts of ammunition. All these weapons were stored professionally in sawdust, ready for deployment. Nigeria’s intelligence linked it to Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed militant group in Lebanon, 3 Lebanese were arrested (BBC News, 29/11/2013; Vanguard News, 29/11/2013; Premium Times, 31/05/2013).

Ugwuibe *et al.* (2023) documented arms shipments to Nigeria that were intercepted at Apapa and Tin Can Island ports between 2010 and 2020, including:

- i. November- Apapa (2010) 21,441,995
- ii. November-Tin Can (2016) 7,505
- iii. September- Tin Can (2013) 143, (2017) 1,575
- iv. July-Tin Can (2018) 432
- v. June-Tin Can (2010) 516
- vi. May- Tin Can (2017) 440
- vii. February-Tin Can (2011) 46
- viii. January- Apapa (2017) 661

Total-	2010	2011	2013	2016	2017	2018	
Grand Total	21,442,511	46	143	7,505	2,676	43	21,453,313

Source: Ugwuibe *et al.* (2023)

On 21 June, 2024, Port Harcourt Area II Command intercepted one 40-foot container from Turkey at Onne containing 844 rifles and 112,500 rounds of live ammunition concealed among doors, furniture, plumbing fittings, and leather bags. Three suspects were arrested. Duty-paid value reached ₦4,171,710,000 (Zakari *et al.*, 2025).

In the first quarter of 2025, the CGC reported approximately 572 seizures valued at ₦10.59 billion, including smuggled foreign rice, illicit drugs, used clothing, and vehicles. Emphasising anti-smuggling's dual purpose, the CGC stated: "Our anti-smuggling drive is not just about protecting revenue but also safeguarding the health and economic integrity of the Nigerian people" (Nigeria Customs Service, 2025).

However, the persistence of smuggling despite these enforcement achievements suggests that seizures and arrests, while important, require stronger institutional support, intelligence coordination, prosecution outcomes, and border surveillance to produce sustained deterrence (Omale, 2018; Gbemiga, 2022; Ugwuibe *et al.*, 2023).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the role of the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) in border security and public safety in Nigeria. The paper established that the NCS contributes to border security through its statutory, preventive, enforcement, intelligence, and trade-control functions. These functions include regulating imports and exports, monitoring border routes, intercepting prohibited goods, conducting anti-smuggling operations, seizing contraband, arresting suspects, and collaborating with other border-control agencies.

The findings show that NCS enforcement activities have direct implications for public safety. The interception of firearms, ammunition, narcotics, harmful pharmaceuticals, petroleum products, and other contraband reduces the circulation of dangerous goods that could intensify terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, violent crime, economic sabotage, and public health risks. The documented seizures at Apapa, Tin Can Island, and Onne ports demonstrate that the NCS performs a preventive security role that goes beyond revenue generation.

The study further found that seizures and arrests are important indicators of enforcement capacity, but their deterrent value depends on sustained surveillance, intelligence-led operations, inter-agency cooperation, effective prosecution, and institutional accountability. Therefore, strengthening the operational capacity of the NCS remains essential for improving border security and protecting public safety in Nigeria.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Federal Government should strengthen the NCS's technological capacity by providing modern border-surveillance and cargo-examination equipment, including scanners, drones, radar systems, cargo-tracking devices, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and real-time data-sharing platforms.
2. The NCS should intensify intelligence-led border management by improving human intelligence, open-source intelligence, signal intelligence, risk profiling, and inter-agency intelligence sharing. This will enhance early detection of smuggling networks and other cross-border criminal activities.
3. The government should improve workforce development, specialist training, welfare, and operational logistics for NCS personnel, especially officers involved in preventive and enforcement duties at seaports, airports, land borders, and high-risk corridors.
4. The NCS should strengthen internal accountability and anti-corruption mechanisms. Officers who aid smuggling, compromise cargo examination, or obstruct enforcement should be investigated and sanctioned to protect the integrity of Customs operations.
5. The NCS should deepen collaboration with sister agencies and neighbouring countries through joint patrols, coordinated enforcement operations, shared intelligence, and harmonised border-control strategies.
6. Government should prioritise high-risk border corridors and ports for targeted security infrastructure, including improved checkpoints, surveillance posts, rapid-response units, and double-layer fencing where necessary.

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