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## Assessing the security implications of the ECOWAS protocol on free movement in Nigeria

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### Abstract

The study is designed to assess whether the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons has had negative implications for Nigeria's national security. The study used key informant interviews and secondary sources as instruments to collect qualitative and quantitative data. The study critiqued the economic integration theory, and the assumption of the theory is premised on the removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers among member states for the free movement of factors of production across national borders. It used the obtained qualitative and quantitative data to demonstrate how Nigeria's national security has been negatively affected by the free movement regime of ECOWAS. The study reveals that there is a relationship between the free movement enabled by the Protocol and the spread of Boko Haram terrorism, cattle rustling, armed banditry, and the activities of violent herders in Nigeria. Poor implementation of the Protocol by Nigeria, arising from the non-enforcement of Article 4 of the Protocol, the absence of a migration central database, porous borders, and socio-cultural affinities among border communities, are the challenges associated with the implementation of the Protocol in Nigeria. This study argues that proponents of the ECOWAS Protocol on free movement are mainly concerned about the economic benefits of the Protocol for member states without considering the socio-economic complexities associated with the window provided by the free movement regime occasioned by ECOWAS. It is upon this contextual premise that the study reveals that, unlike previous studies, every region has its own specificities to take into account when addressing the concept of free movement. Indeed, given the specific character of migratory movements in each region, there are perhaps as many different approaches to the subject as there are regions. In conclusion, despite the socio-economic benefits of the free movement regime, it has shown that the Protocol has been poorly implemented by Nigeria, with its attendant consequences on Nigeria's national security. This finding was arrived at by subjecting the conventional perspective of regional economic integration to scrutiny, using Nigeria as a case study. The study recommends that guided economic integration is more desirable for Nigeria's national security than the ideological allegory of the economic integration theory.

**Keywords:** Citizens and movement, ECOWAS, Security, Integration, West Africa.

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## 1. Introduction

The aspiration for economic progress and regional integration among West African countries gave rise to the idea of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Article 3, section 1 of the Treaty of ECOWAS, signed in Lagos, Nigeria, on May 28, 1975, outlines the community's objectives as improving economic stability, member state relations, cooperation, and integration to create an economic union in West Africa, as well as the advancement and development of the continent. In order to accomplish the integration component of these goals and objectives, the ECOWAS community passed the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Residence, and Establishment of West African Citizens [1]. After the Protocol took effect in May 1979, members of the group were free to live, travel, and establish themselves wherever they chose. According to Articles 2 and 3 of the Protocol, ECOWAS citizens, also known as community citizens, are free to enter and exit the community at any moment during a ninety-day period. Member states may gradually implement the Protocol on the free movement of persons, residence, and establishment over a fifteen-year period. Phases II and III were established by the Supplementary Protocol, respectively.

In 1985, during the first five years of the Protocol on Free Movement (Phase I), which ran from 1981 to 1985, all community members were to stop using visas. Aiming to actualize a borderless West Africa for rapid socio-economic integration, as expressed in Article 2, Section 2 of the Protocol, all member states accepted the right of residency (Phase II) in July 1986. As per the 1979 ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement, Article 3, Sections 1 and 2, citizens who possess a valid travel certificate and an international health certificate can enter and exit the community freely, without requiring a visa, for a maximum of ninety days. As stated in Article 2(2) of the Protocol, member states shall remove all obstacles to the implementation of the Protocol on Free Movement. The elimination of obstacles to trans-boundary movement was to serve as the foundation for sub-regional integration and collaboration in West Africa. Enacted in 1985, the Supplementary.

The protocol comprises provisions for implementing Phase II of the protocol and was also expected to be in effect for five years. Phase II aims to allow community members to work in well-paying employment within their community, provided they hold an ECOWAS residence card or permit. In terms of job security and participation in social and cultural activities, these sections mandate that member states treat migrant workers equally to citizens [2]. They also require member states to encourage migrant workers to follow the rules and guidelines governing their residence under the ECOWAS free movement system. Article 2(3) also covers Phase III of implementing the right to establishment in any state within the community in its third paragraph. 1995 was the projected completion year for Phase III, which consists of the final five years. By enabling citizens to establish businesses—that is, to access, participate in, and manage economic activities—in member states other than their own, this phase seeks to facilitate business.

After the five years spent implementing the right of residency, it ought to come to pass without any issues. Although Articles 2 and 3 of the Protocol declare that "member states shall reserve the right to refuse admission into their territory, and community citizens who fall within the category of inadmissible immigrants under its laws," Article 4 of the Protocol states otherwise. Thus, the Protocol gives the member countries the authority to decide what makes a citizen ineligible for entry. Among its citizens, the ECOWAS has formally fostered a culture of unrestricted trans-border movement, residency, and establishment since 1979. That being said, there are enough security concerns about the Boko Haram group, violent trans-border herders, cattle rustlers, and armed bandits to cast doubt on their relationship to the organization's trans-border travel policy.

This could be the cause of Opanike, et al. [3] claiming that Nigeria's security of life and property is now more vulnerable than it was before the start of the Boko Haram insurgency. Even from a historical standpoint, Nita [4]'s efforts to advance regional integration and the free movement of people in West Africa laid little or no emphasis on the security implications of the Protocol for Nigeria. However, by adopting Articles 2 and 3 of the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, Residence, and Establishment, there may be security ramifications for member states that are not yet known. The security complexities that accompany cross-border migration may stem from transnational organized crime, which includes drug trafficking, abduction, human trafficking, terrorism, and the smuggling of small arms and light weapons. The national security of the ECOWAS member states is under threat because of these issues. The trans-border mobility that the Protocol enables presents little to no security risk, but ECOWAS is nonetheless intent on implementing the Protocol in its entirety. The objective of this research is to ascertain whether there is a connection between the national security of member states—

especially Nigeria—and the execution of the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement. Past studies such as Adepoju [5]; Adepoju, et al. [6]; Clottey [7]; Opanike, et al. [3]; Yaro and Tsikata [8]; Garba and Yeboah [9]; Saka and Amusan [10] and Offiah [11] have not demonstrated the connection between Nigeria's national security and the Protocol using quantitative data. The goal of the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons is to provide a framework for policy that will facilitate the realization of the community's economic integration goals. The possibility that it provided the basis for trans-border crimes in Nigeria is the research issue that led to this investigation.

## **2. Research Question**

The research is guided by a research question.

- (i) To investigate if the implementation of the provisions of the Protocol has had implications on Nigeria's national security.

## **3. Conceptual and Theoretical Underpinnings**

The Economic Community of West African States is known as ECOWAS. It is a sub-regional integration organization dedicated to eliminating obstacles that can stand in the way of people and products flowing freely within the community across borders. Both the protocol for the free movement of persons and products within ECOWAS is in place. The purpose of these protocols is to support the sub-regional body's goal of free mobility. However, this research challenges the Economic Integration Theory, which offers a systematic means of comprehending the characteristics and nature of regional, global, or sub-regional integrative organizations.

The thesis, which has its roots in the foundations laid by Balassa [12], centers on the commercial policy of selectively lowering or eliminating trade barriers among participating nations. A common external trade policy, free movement of goods and services, policy harmonization, unification of national monetary policies, the removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers between member states, and the adoption of a single currency are all presupposed. According to Balassa [12], there are a number of reasons to pursue economic integrative plans, including increased economic development and growth. According to the idea, there are two ways that regional economic integration affects welfare: dynamically, through member states' long-term development rates, and statically, through consumer welfare and productive efficiency. Free trade zones, customs unions, common markets, economic unions, and regional integration are only a few of the elements that make up economic integration.

The viability of ECOWAS as a regional organization for economic integration is especially related to the Common Market doctrine of economic integration. Within the economic bloc, this idea places a strong emphasis on the free flow of production factors across national borders, as well as the free movement of products and services among member states. In keeping with this philosophy, the ECOWAS Protocol on the Free Mobility of Persons seeks to eliminate obstacles to mobility between its member states [13]. This encourages factor mobility, which balances market rewards on production factors. The main goal of fostering factor mobility is to improve the economic bloc's overall level of output, income, and welfare by encouraging a more effective distribution of labor and capital within the bloc. No wonder, in their discussion of migration governance in West Africa, Garba and Yeboah [9] covered the function of ECOWAS protocols in promoting mobility, as well as their connections to development.

The goal of free factor mobility, according to proponents of the ECOWAS integration program, is to generate income that will help reduce poverty in the area. In contrast to proponents of economic integration theory, the study does not take into account the potential security risks associated with allowing individuals to travel freely under the terms of the Protocol on Free Movement. Furthermore, member states must be strengthened to combat cross-border issues, including drug trafficking, armed smuggling, illegal migration, and undocumented migration. These issues were overlooked when ECOWAS was established as a model for a shared market [14]. By challenging the accepted understanding of economic integration theory, this work closes a gap in the literature. The following sections conduct a conceptual review of cross-border mobility and the ECOWAS integration policy within this framework.

## **4. The Assessment of the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons**

Examined in this part is the 1979 ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement, which allowed ECOWAS citizens to travel freely throughout the community. With five years allocated to each step of implementation, the Protocol specifies a fifteen-year timeline. Citizens have the authority to enter, dwell in, and establish themselves in member states according to Part II, "General Principles on Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment." The Right of Entry and Abolition of Visa, the Right of Residence, and the Right of Establishment are the three phases of the implementation.

For the ensuing stages of freedom of establishment and residency, the ECOWAS Commission may suggest more liberalization. The Protocol does not, however, stop member nations from rejecting the entry of undocumented immigrants. When private vehicles produce the necessary documentation, they can enter another member state and stay there for 90 days under Part IV, which deals with the movement of vehicles for transportation. Article 5's Section 2 describes cross-border transportation of commercial vehicles and stipulates that drivers must have the aforementioned documentation. The goal of the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, the Right of Residence, and Establishment, is to eliminate barriers to capital, goods, and people moving freely throughout the West African sub-region. Article 10 of the Protocol guarantees community members who are already residents and establishments in a member state to abide by the laws of that member state; it has no bearing on citizens who established prior to the Protocol's entry into force in 1980 in member state order.

Article 11 requires member states to cover the costs associated with removing a person from their state and to notify the concerned citizen, the government, and the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS of the decision to expel the citizen. The Protocol

on the Free Movement of Persons, the Right of Residence, and the Establishment was supplemented in 1986 with a code of conduct for its implementation. According to Article 2 of the 1986 Supplementary Protocol on the second phase (Right of Residence), nations must allow community members to live in their territory and pursue and conduct profitable economic endeavors. However, not all citizens can obtain residence permits for free; they must abide by the laws and policies of each member state. In conclusion, there are several phases to the implementation of the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, the Right of Residence, and Establishment, and each phase has its own additional Protocol.

Article 11 of the Protocol on the unfettered Movement of Persons allows member states to remove their citizens from their nations and assures unfettered admission into member states for ninety days without a visa. Nonetheless, the 1993 revision to the ECOWAS Treaty upheld persons' rights to entry, residency, and settlement in their respective regions. Citizens are not required to have a visa in order to enter, stay, or establish themselves in member states according to Article 2, Section 1 of the Protocol. The Protocol's spirit, however, forbids member states from having a reasonable conversation about the economic potential and effects of immigrant residents on their host nations. Because some migrants may turn into socioeconomic liabilities, this could result in socioeconomic liabilities for the destination countries. Article 3, Section 2 permits residents to enter any member state's territory through official entry points without a visa for visits lasting no more than 90 days.

The Protocol, however, did not take into account the expense of housing and business accommodations in the host state, nor did it take into account the economic prospects available to intended migrants. Article 5 does not require an additional document to show ownership, although it does allow private automobiles to cross borders within the community. This clause has ramifications for security and might encourage cross-border criminality. Member states may propose amendments to any section or provision of the Protocol under Article 8, however gains in regional economic integration cannot be attained at the expense of national interest, particularly national security. In conclusion, Article 9 exhorts member states to work together to exchange information in order to ensure the Protocol's successful implementation.

## 5. Research Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive research design, aiming to collect and systematically describe data on the characteristics, features, or facts about the implementation of the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement, Residence, and Establishment of West African Citizens and its relationship with national security in Nigeria. However, the study area comprises border communities in eight Nigerian states: Lagos, Ogun, Kwara, Niger, Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara, and Katsina.

### 5.1. Data Collection Methods

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining key informant interviews (KII) and secondary literature review:

(i) Key Informant Interviews (KII): KIIs were conducted with purposefully selected key informants who are major players in the study area and are conversant with the dynamics of border protocols. Their views were recorded, transcribed, and discussed according to the researcher's understanding of the study.

(ii) Secondary Literature Review: Secondary data were obtained from existing literature, including academic journals, books, and reports. This provided both qualitative and quantitative data, offering statistical answers to the research questions.

### 5.2. Selection of Key Informants

Key informants were purposefully selected from within the study population, including major players conversant with the dynamics of border protocols. The details of the key informants are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.**  
Ten Key informants purposively chosen

S/NO	Key informants	Number	Location
1	Teachers	3	Seme/ Idiroko/ Jibia
2	Officers of the Nigeria Immigration Service	4	Ilela/Mai Adu
3	Officers of the Nigeria Police Force	2	Bachaka/ Shinkafi
4	Officer of the Nigerian Army	1	Patigi
Total		10	

### 5.4. Data Analysis

The study used a mixed-methods approach for data analysis, combining the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative data from KII were analyzed thematically, while the quantitative data from secondary sources were analyzed statistically.

### 5.5. Justification for Mixed-Methods Approach

The mixed-methods approach was chosen to complement the strengths of each method, close gaps, and boost the resultant outcome of the research.

## 6. Analysis of Key Informant Interview

Below, beneath the interview questions are the major informant interview responses. According to a responder, there are several ways in which the Protocol may affect Nigeria. These include the following: (i) an increase in smuggling operations;

(ii) a rise in criminal elements in Nigeria; and (iii) a problem that will fall on the Nigerian security system (R01). No wonder, the study by Yaro and Tsikata [8] examines the ECOWAS free movement protocol with an emphasis on how it fosters regional integration. They contend that although the convention permits visa-free travel within the region for ECOWAS nationals, there are obstacles to its full implementation, such as national security concerns and economic inequality among member states. Yaro and Tsikata [8] work offers a thorough analysis of the ECOWAS Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, stressing both the difficulties and consequences involved in putting it into practice as well as its importance in regional integration initiatives.

According to another respondent, in addition to the security risks associated with people trafficking, drug trafficking, and prostitution, irregular migration is a major contributing factor. As such, there is a pressing need to investigate the movement of regular migrants both inside and outside the region (R02). He believed that in today's world of social, economic, and political uncertainty, unguided migration has created security threats and will always do so (R02). This is why Offiah [11] avers that the ECOWAS Protocol's window on free movement cannot be an exception. Rather, it is our ability to comprehend and manage these threats to ensure long-lasting peace and harmony.

According to a different respondent, Nigeria is unquestionably the country most affected by the problems posed by irregular migration from West Africa (R03). He claims that many of the continent's poor West Africans find Nigeria to be an extremely alluring target due to its purported economic abundance (R03). This is also due to the close borders of various West African nations with Nigeria, in addition to the citizens and other long-standing historical connections between the sub-regions. In his argument, he states that Nigeria, an ECOWAS member state, has unquestionably experienced social, economic, security, and political issues as a result of the unchecked migration wave that spread throughout West Africa (R03). This is why Garba and Yeboah [9] discussed the role of ECOWAS protocols in fostering mobility and its links to development in their analysis of migration governance in West Africa.

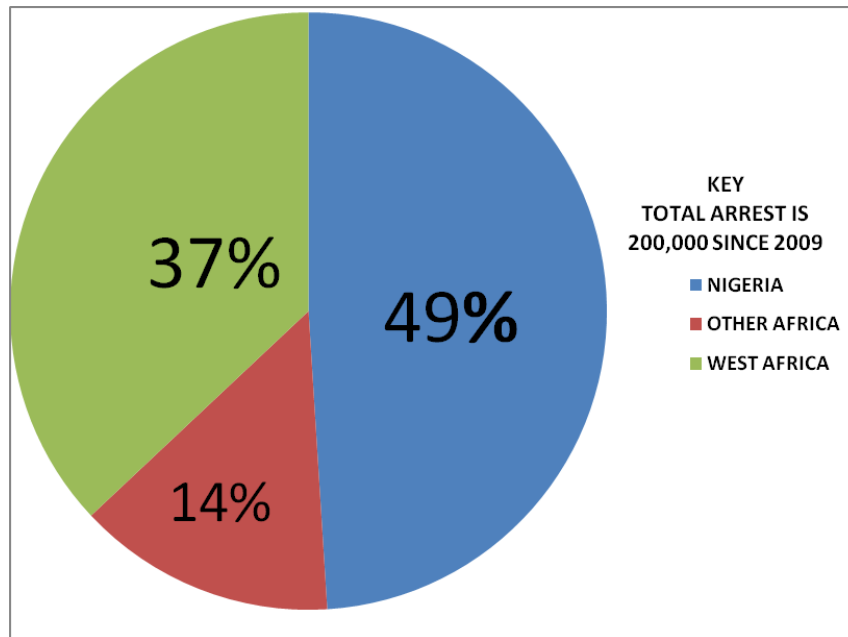
A respondent argues that migration is complex and ever-changing. Both normal and irregular migration are involved (R04). According to her, there are numerous difficulties associated with migrating, including security-related ones. She says that everyone's main goal, including governments and other relevant organizations, should be to comprehend the dynamics of migration and the various security-related obstacles to people's regular mobility (R04). The capacity to recognize a challenge or issue is typically the first step in trying to solve it. Aside from the economic and political risks connected to both regular and irregular migration, there is no doubt that human movement in today's globalized society, where distance is no longer an obstacle, has brought up new security issues like terrorism. She believes that immigrants may have a role in the conflict and criminality that exist in Nigeria. According to a response, for ages, West Africa, like other parts of the world, has experienced both regular and irregular migration in all its forms (R04).

No wonder, Yaro and Tsikata [8] argue that even before and after the massive Trans-Sahara trade, trade has always been a significant factor in determining migration both inside and across West African boundaries. However, a respondent argues that the migratory patterns of West Africans have taken on a new dimension as a result of the harsh economic realities of today, such as persistent unemployment, poverty, conflict, and starvation (R05). This notion implies that survival is the basic human instinct in difficult situations. This instinct is currently driving many underprivileged West Africans to migrate, posing a threat to member state security.

Another respondent stated that both regions are currently attempting to handle much larger difficulties as a result of the Protocol's accompanying security risks. Migration—both within and outside of Africa—seems complex to him (R06). It is through his lens that Offiah [11] asserts that the demerits of the implementation of the Protocol seem to have outweighed the merits security-wise for Nigeria. Another respondent argues that once the issues have been located, managing these obstacles demands having a solid understanding of the issues (R07). According to this respondent, migration is a human concern regardless of the difficulties involved (R08). To him, any attempt at finding a solution necessitates having a solid grasp of the problems and difficulties pertaining to migrant travelers, whether they are irregular or regular (R08). Meanwhile, respondent R09 contends that tackling the dual issues of migration and security may begin with developing the capacity to recognize and comprehend both regular and irregular migrants. He argues that the capacity to provide workable answers within a regional framework is essential; in the absence of such, the Protocol's security implications for Nigeria will soon materialize. Thus, this viewpoint relates to the argument of Offiah [11] using the thesis of pros and cons to dissect the Protocol. It is on this premise that the thrust of the next section is to discuss the threat that the implementation of the protocol poses to Nigeria's national security.

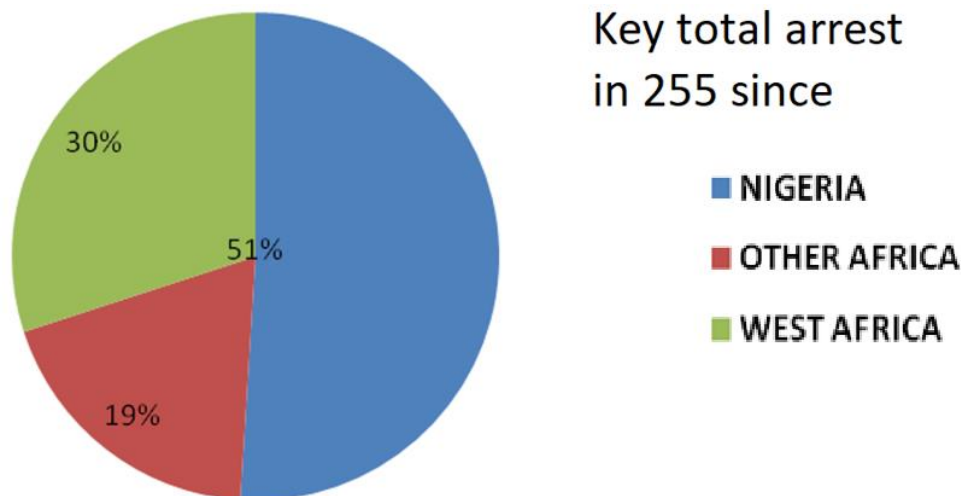
## **7. Threats to Nigeria's National Security**

The study explores the activities of the Boko Haram sect, cattle rustlers, armed bandits, and violent herders as threats to Nigeria's national security. The aim is to determine if aliens are part of these groups and if they take advantage of implementing Articles 2 and 3 of the ECOWAS Protocol on free movement to migrate into Nigeria illegally. Boko Haram, a terrorist group, emerged from the "Taliban" founded by Mohammed Yusuf between 2001 and 2002. Since 2009, its activities have made the North-Eastern part of Nigeria a major security threat. The sect has continued terror attacks, leading to increased fear and the deployment of regular police, mobile police, and Armed Forces personnel. The renewed engagement in their dangerous acts raises questions about their recruitment sources.



**Figure 1.**  
Members of the Boko Haram arrested since 2009.  
**Source:** Nigeria Defence Headquarters Records (2023) and bar chart constructed by the author.

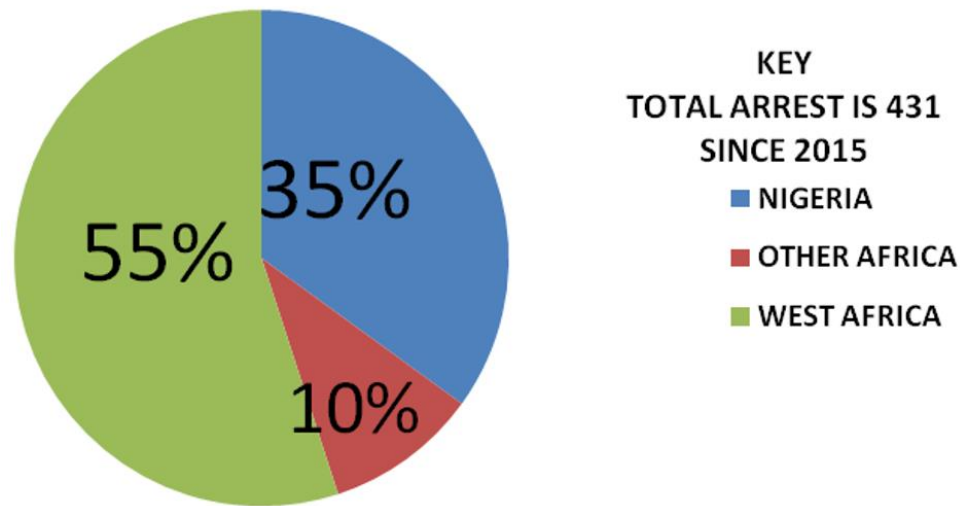
Nigeria's national security faces security challenges due to farmer and herder conflicts. The conflict escalated in 2014, causing over 2,000 deaths and displacement in Benue, Taraba, and Kaduna states. These confrontations have become more frequent in the last decade, worsening the insecurity situation. Many conflicts occur in remote areas, leaving rural areas unreported and impacting the rural poor.



**Figure 2.**  
Members of the violent herders apprehended by Nigerian security agencies.  
**Source:** Nigeria Defence Headquarters Records (2023) and bar chart constructed by the author.

Figure 2 shows the number of violent herders apprehended by Nigerian security agencies, including both Nigerians and non-Nigerian herders. These herders often migrate to Nigeria for open grazing due to climate change and desert conditions. The ECOWAS protocol of transhumance and the socio-cultural affinities of the Hausa-Fulani tribe of Nigeria and other non-Nigerian Fulani groups also contribute to their migration. The rite of passage for herders within the community is a concern, as it allows them to move with their livestock to Nigeria. Banditry in northwest Nigeria, particularly in Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna States, poses a significant security threat to Nigeria and its citizens. The armed bandits have killed over 1,000 people and kidnapped 106 individuals between January 2016 and 2019. The Nigeria-Niger borderlands face a major challenge in cattle rustling and armed banditry, with little evidence of their impact on affected victims.





**Figure 3.**

Armed bandits apprehended by Nigeria security agencies

Source: Nigeria Defence Headquarters Records (2023) and bar chart constructed by the author.

## 8. Discussion of Findings

The evil deeds of violent non-state actors like the Boko Haram sect, armed robbers, and violent herder gangs pose a threat to Nigeria's national security. The destructive activities of these evil groups have influenced and molded Nigeria's approach to national security. Figures 1-3 above illustrate how Nigerian security personnel have determined that certain members of these groups—the violent herder groups, the armed bandits, and the Boko Haram sect—are foreigners. Most of them are from places like Mali, Niger, and Benin. Interview, 13/1/2020: Even individuals from Chad declared themselves to be citizens of the Niger Republic. According to information obtained during an interview on January 13, 2020, the majority of the members of these sects who have been captured by security personnel arrived in Nigeria as a result of the ECOWAS Protocol on free movement. This information suggests a connection between Nigeria's national security and the ECOWAS window for transnational free movement.

As a result, the majority of these groups' arrested members have fled to nations recognized by the Protocol on Free Movement. By this logic, Nigeria's national security has suffered as a result of the Protocol's implementation. Advocates of the free movement Protocol, typified by the Integration Theory, did not anticipate its security implications since these sects are deliberately bringing members into Nigeria from other West African States by exploiting the ECOWAS window for free movement. From an analytical standpoint, this study differs from earlier research on regional integration by Pine and Ochoga [15]. These studies presented evidence in favor of the integration theory's underlying premises, viewing free movement as a tactic for achieving regional growth and integration without taking into account its covert implications for member nations' national security.

Even Opanike, et al. [3] and Pine and Ochoga [15] who connected trans-border crime in Nigeria to the Protocol, did not support their arguments with numerical evidence. Pine and Ochoga [15] study examined that address the advantages and disadvantages of ECOWAS's free movement of people policy. It emphasizes how the protocol has complicated political, social, and economic ramifications even though its goal is to encourage cross-border movement among citizens of member states. Pine and Ochoga [15] aver that failure of the ill-equipped, corrupt, and unorganized State-controlled agencies like the Nigeria Police Force, the Customs and the Nigerian Immigration Service, the Defence Intelligence Agency, the Nigeria Intelligence Agency, the Department of State Security Service, and other interrelated independent bodies involved in protecting the nation's border (harbors), the border posts, and border bi-national links within their areas of jurisdiction and in cooperation with the Government of neighboring States leaves much in doubt. Lastly, without official authorization, it was impossible for anyone to relocate within an independent state. As a result, Africans lost contact with one another as a result of colonialism and the various countries that emerged when it ended [16].

As a result, they had to control, within their boundaries and according to the letter of the law, the desires of their residents for cross-border and interstate activities. Examining the traditional relationship between Nigerian sedentary farmers and Nigerien nomadic pastoralists within the context of cross-border relations, the damage done to the traditional mode of life, migration, economic cooperation, and regional integration was vividly recounted as one of the major challenges of inter-state relations and cross-border activities. And the socio-cultural linkages that have historically existed between border areas in Africa have an impact on Nigeria's ability to handle immigration effectively. On a similar premise, the ECOWAS protocol on free movement of persons and its detrimental effects on Nigeria's national security were studied by Saka and Amusan [10]. According to Saka and Amusan [10], the protocol has improved mobility and made it easier for people to travel around, but it has also unintentionally created challenges to national security, especially in light of the subregion's transnational criminal activity and terrorist insurgency.

In fact, as Nigeria implements the ECOWAS Protocol on free movement, this historical informal connection is acting as a centripetal force working against the state-centric approach of border controls and migration management. Studies like Adepoju [5]; Adepoju, et al. [6] and Clottey [7] examined the economic advantages of the Protocol on free movement for

member-states without taking into account the socio-economic complexity that is associated with it, much as the economic integration theory has a monolithic view about regional economic integration. This study, which uses Nigeria as a case study, adds to the body of literature by critically examining the conventional view of regional economic integration. This is the contextual premise that this study has added to our understanding of because it employed empirical evidence to demonstrate how the ECOWAS free movement system has harmed Nigeria's national security.

Based on this contextual premise, the study shows that, in contrast to earlier research, each region has unique characteristics that need to be considered when discussing the idea of free mobility. In fact, there are probably as many distinct perspectives on the topic as there are regions, considering the unique nature of migratory patterns in each. Other than the monolithic perspective of the economic integration theory, the study has taken quite various techniques to conceptualize and analyze regional attempts to govern the movement of people at the regional level.

This study has provided new insights into how regional agreements should handle free movement of persons in accordance with member states' national security for scholars studying integration and security studies. It has made it possible to appreciate the variety of regional methods to migration management by providing a wide, multi-approach perspective of the subject. Socioeconomic disparities, the degree of formal (regional) institutionalization, and the way governments and supranational organizations frame the problem of free movement all influence these strategies, which are responses to various migratory backdrops. These are the kinds of factors that frequently go hand in hand with cross-border movement.

This study differs from earlier research on the ECOWAS Protocol by identifying national security as the primary obstacle to regional free movement. This is due to the fact that national security is an indisputable component. The works of Adepoku [5]; Adepoku, et al. [6] and Clottey [7] are not the same as this submission. Even the work of Saka and Amusan [10] that looked at the security implications of the Protocol was not designed to explain with empirical data how the immigration under the free movement window poses a serious threat to the idea of national identity, whether it be personal or societal. Even in the multicultural and diverse societies of today, citizenship and nationality remain the key characteristics that determine who is and is not a member of a certain nation. Consequently, regionalization and free movement of people have an impact on a wide range of social life features, including identity, citizenship, culture, and way of life. Efficient freedom of mobility has the potential to foster a sense of place or "regional consciousness."

In light of this, states must adjust to new dynamics brought about by the free movement of people. Because people migrate across borders for a variety of reasons, the concept of community citizenship as promoted by ECOWAS may only be operational for economic benefits but may conflict with member states' national security. As a result, both regional integration and the free movement of people call for a redefinition of the traditional concepts of statehood. Furthermore, ECOWAS's ongoing support of free movement calls into question the Westphalian understanding of the state by calling for a re-examination and reinterpretation of established concepts like sovereignty and the inviolability of international borders.

## 9. Concluding Thoughts

The study concludes that the implementation of the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Residence, and Establishment of West African Citizens has positive effects, such as intelligent sharing, counterterrorism, and fighting smuggling activities. However, the Protocol also discusses the inadmissibility of citizens into a member state, allowing Nigeria to profile citizens before entering the country. This raises concerns about the security complexity of mass migration, which could pose a threat to national security. ECOWAS has not addressed this issue, as it only has a military monitoring group (ECOMOG) to resolve internal conflicts. The porous nature of Nigeria's borders further complicates the implementation of the Protocol on free movement, as the Nigerian government's inability to effectively protect land borders encourages illegal and undocumented migration. The socio-cultural affinities of Nigeria-Niger and Niger-Benin border communities also contribute to illegal and undocumented migration. The ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Residence, and Establishment of West African Citizens is like a leper that Nigeria must embrace with caution in the interest of national security.

The 1990 Supplementary Protocol of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) outlines the economic activities that migrants can undertake in other states, aiming to prevent increasing unemployment. However, the Protocol's security weaknesses have overshadowed its economic benefits, as it does not consider the diverse socio-economic values of immigrant workers. Immigrants without basic education and skills may have little or no economic value to contribute to their host countries' socio-economic development. This study suggests that the 1979 Protocol is more idealistic than realistic, neglecting the security implications of undocumented and illegal migration, as well as uneducated and unskilled migrants. The economic integration theory, which advocates for the total removal of barriers against the movement of persons and goods, does not consider the socio-economic complexity of international migration. Guided economic integration is more desirable for Nigeria's national security, considering the economic costs and benefits against the national security implications of such an integrative policy.

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