

# Crossing Boundaries: Nature of Corruption At Nigeria's Boundary with Benin

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## **Abstract**

*Corruption is a pervasive issue at Nigeria's borders which manifests as a lack of accountability, transparency, and probity among border control officials. Due to gaps in the attributes of border corruption in Nigeria, this research aims to classify corruption at five border crossing points between Nigeria and Benin, focusing on its types and patterns through Jancsics's border typology. Grounded in conflict theory, which examines power relations and inequalities among different social classes, the study reveals key dynamics among customs and immigration officers and clients who navigate the border for their socioeconomic activities. A pilot survey conducted in June 2023 informed the theoretical framework, followed by a comprehensive nine-week field study from August to October 2023, involving 1,032 participants. Data collection methods included questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and non-participatory observations, providing an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences with corruption. Findings reveal a significant gender disparity, with 63.37% of participants being male; corruption predominantly involves traders (29.27%) and crossers (24.42%). A notable prevalence of smuggling (49.03%) and immigration-related corruption (22.10%) suggests systemic collusion between customs and immigration officers and clients. The study identifies seven primary causes of border corruption: weak accountability, high tariffs and lack of transparency and lack of probity among others. The findings indicate that with 42.3% and 52.5% respectively individual corruption is prevalent, at major crossing points of Seme and Idiroko, while collaborative corruption accounts for 53.85% and 52.9% respectively. The primary clients involved are unauthorised migrants and cross-border traders who collude with border officials to bypass legal checks. At medium-sized border points like Owode-Apa and Ilara, coercion is a significant form of corruption pattern, with officers extorting bribes from network of traders, smugglers of migrants and contraband goods with threats of delays or false accusations. At a small crossing like Ohumbe, smugglers are warned by officials of stricter enforcement to pay large amount, and traders leverage threats on officers. The pervasive corruption at Nigeria's border crossings—characterized by individual and collaborative practices among officials, traders, and smugglers—demonstrates an urgent need for comprehensive reforms to restore integrity, enhance accountability, and protect the nation's economic stability and public trust.*

**Key word:** Border corruption; Bribery and extortion; Cross-border traders and smugglers; Migration; Nigeria

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## **I. Introduction**

Corruption is a pervasive issue at Nigeria's borders which manifests as a lack of accountability, transparency, and probity among border control officials. It involves criminal or inappropriate behaviour of border officers who get advantages through illegal means (Myint, 2000; Mistree & Dibley, 2018). This environment complicates the government's efforts to secure borders and manage trade and migration flow effectively. Inconsistent tariffs on goods and restrictive migration policies further incentivise corrupt practices as officials may collect bribes and extort clients to undermine trade regulations and immigration rules (Calder, 2024; Ogbonna et al., 2023; Traca & Dutt, 2009). Defined as the misuse of power for personal gain (Bhandari, 2023; World Bank, 1997), corruption encompasses both coercive extortion and collusive bribery, which can either harm or mutually benefit involved parties (Zwolinski, 2018).

Corruption within border control agencies is notably high compared to other institutions globally (TI, 2005; Bennett, 2015; EC, 2017). Compromised customs and immigration officers facilitate the passage of illicit goods, engage in over-invoicing, and delay the clearance of legitimate goods, ask for irrelevant documents and frustrate migrants for extortion of money and collection of bribes. Such activities distort governmental objectives, harm border users and perpetuating a cycle of dependency that undermines public trust (Lindgren, 1999) especially within the ECOWAS region which Nigeria is part of. Despite the ECOWAS Protocol on the Fight Against Corruption, as outlined in Article 6 (ECOWAS, 2001), Ayodeji (2021) found that between 1995 and 2019 corruption push inflation to increasing level in the region, and that of Nigeria has been consistently higher than 10% since 2000. Unfortunately, the prohibitions against bribery and extortion detailed in Section 6 of the Code of Conduct for Public Officers in Nigeria's 1999 Constitution (FRN, 1999) has not stopped corruption in the country. A UNODC (2017) report revealed that nearly every adult Nigerian pays at least one bribe annually, with an estimated 82.3 million bribes totalling around 400 billion Nigerian Naira (approximately \$4.6 billion) paid to public officials each year. This amount represents 39% of the combined federal and state education budgets for 2016, with bribe-payers spending about NGN 28,200 annually which is roughly 12.5% of their average salary.

The situation has worsened, with \$1.26 billion disbursed as cash bribes in 2023, accounting for 0.35% of the nation's GDP and a notable rise in bribe payments within the private sector, increasing from 6% in 2019 to 14% in 2023 (UNODC, 2024). According to Awosusi & Valery (2024), these types of internal crises involving bribery and corruption are evident at the country's borders. In Nigeria, border officials frequently extort and collect bribes to allow the passage of (illicit) goods and cross-border movement without complying with regulatory statutes—including the ECOWAS Trade and Liberalisation Scheme and the ECOWAS Free Movement Protocols—thereby entrenching corruption (Bish et al., 2022; Ogbonna et al., 2023).

While several studies have explored border corruption in Nigeria, gaps remain regarding classifying border corruption into their attributes. Gbemre (2016) highlights that immigration officials focus more on extorting money from travelers than on verifying documents. Uzomah & Madu (2020) identifies corruption as one of the primary concerns in the context of domestic regulations in border crossings for the ECOWAS free movement protocol, while Okunade (2017) points out the proliferation of illegal routes exploited by criminals. Chikwanha (2007) noted that the Benin Republic, which borders Nigeria, pervasive poverty and poor economic conditions likely contribute to greater inequalities. This compels citizens who cross the border for livelihood and border officials who struggle with meagre salaries into corrupt practices that encourage smuggling goods and migrants and carjacking and organised crime (Saka et al., 2023). Our research aims to address this gap by investigating the types and patterns of corruption at Nigeria-Benin border. The findings will inform policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and civil society organisations about the specific challenges posed by border corruption, ultimately contributing to the development of targeted strategies and reforms that enhance trade integrity and improve migration and border management in a humane manner.

The structure of this research is divided into seven sections: The first section is the introduction, which reflects on the meaning of corruption and border corruption within the Nigerian context. The second section reviews the literature, elucidating some of the intrinsic themes related to corruption, such as bribery and extortion. The third section presents the theoretical framework and typological approach used in the research. It explains how the power asymmetries and inequalities outlined in conflict theory relate to customs and immigration officers on one hand and those who cross the border in search of livelihood include cross-border traders, crossers, clearing agents, commuters, smugglers, motorists and community members on the other hand contributes to corruption as they interact at Nigeria's border crossing points with Benin. It further elucidates how Jancsics's border typology fits into the types and patterns of corruption committed at these borders. The fourth section describes the methodology, detailing the approach used for data collection and analysis, as well as the sources of materials utilised in the research. The fifth section covers the results and discussion, exploring the characteristics of corruption at Nigeria's border with Benin and the causes, types and patterns of border corruption in relation to Jancsics's typology. The sixth section is the conclusion, which summarises the findings of the research and demonstrates the significance of border corruption for the development of Nigeria. Finally, the seventh section is the recommendations that suggest solutions to address border corruption in Nigeria.

## **II. Literature Review**

Corruption at borders frequently manifests through bribery and extortion, significantly impacting trade and security. Our study treats border corruption as the illegal exchange of resources between clients (cross-border traders, migrants, crossers, motorists, clearing agents, smugglers and community members) and border officials aimed at personal gains that undermines the official objectives of government processes and procedures.

According to Jancsics (2019), the typology of border corruption is grouped into six attributes based on two dimensions: 1) the type of the actor involved—whether an individual, informal group, or formal organisation—and 2) the pattern of the corruption, which includes bribery (given or coerced by the client), extortion (coercion by the officer), or collusion (collaborative actions between the client and officer). Collusion entails both the client and the officials benefiting from the transaction. For example, when a client bribes an officer (agent) to expedite the bureaucratic process for the passage of goods during a busy period at the port (Chene, 2018; Gounev et al., 2012). Collusion suggests that both parties, the client and the officer, benefit from the transaction. It indicates a horizontal relationship structure, exchanges between more or less equal partners while coercive corruption refers to a dependency-based unequal social relationship (Jancsics, 2019). Coercive entails one party forcing the other to participate in corruption. For example, when an officer slows down border traffic deliberately and return to normal pace after extorting money from the client (Ndonga, 2013; Wickberg, 2013).

The economic, social, and political significance of border corruption is profound, as it can hinder security and economic development while causing unnecessary bureaucratic delays that negatively affect the cost of doing business, consumer purchasing power, and government revenue collection (Chene, 2019). Corruption facilitates smuggling, allowing crime syndicates to operate effectively. Individuals crossing borders may bribe officials to overlook issues such as expired passports or minor smuggling activities involving goods like alcohol, tobacco, or fuel. This corruption can be categorised into coercion and collusion, impacting various stakeholders, including traders, community members, and border officials, such as customs and immigration officers (Jancsics, 2019).

At certain border points, collusive corruption may occur in the form of market corruption, where an officer and a client negotiate a corrupt deal without prior acquaintance, motivated solely by personal gain. In these instances, clients seek illegal advantages, while officers conceal the transaction, thereby benefiting personally without contributing to government revenue (Locatelli et al., 2017). Collusive corruption can develop into social bribery, characterised by ongoing interactions and trust between corrupt parties (Jancsics, 2019). Such relationships reduce the risks associated with corrupt transactions, leading individuals to prefer established corrupt partnerships over ad-hoc exchanges with strangers (Graycar & Jancsics, 2017). Family ties and social connections can further enhance this type of corruption (Litina & Varvarigos, 2018; Velkova & Georgievski, 2004), while businesses may incorporate bribery costs into their operating expenses. There is a clear distinction between the bribery practices of legitimate businesses and those employed by informal criminal entities. While legal enterprises may resort to bribery to enhance profits, organised crime groups establish long-term networks to profit from illicit activities, such as drug and human trafficking (Velkova & Georgievski, 2004).

Corruption is often rooted in various underlying factors, including weak institutional frameworks, poor governance, and underfunded customs and police services, which exacerbate vulnerabilities at many African borders (Chene, 2013). Customs and border officials frequently operate in remote areas with limited oversight, creating numerous opportunities for corrupt practices (Ferreira et al., 2007). Forms of corruption can include petty bribery, bureaucratic misconduct, misappropriation of resources, and political corruption (Chene, 2018). High tariff rates in trade policies can also motivate businesses to engage in corrupt practices (Fisman & Wei, 2004; McLinden, 2005).

The organisational structures and occupational roles within border agencies often drive corruption. The design of these entities, combined with the extensive discretionary powers granted to border officers over valuable goods, creates fertile ground for corrupt activities (Javor & Jancsics, 2016; Graycar & Prenzler, 2013). Low salaries for officials handling critical decisions regarding the entry of individuals or goods can lead to exploitation of authority for personal gain. Additionally, the high volume of transactions managed by border law enforcement officers increases the potential for corruption (Parayno, 2013).

While advancements in technology have reduced direct interactions in many public administration areas, the nature of border operations—requiring physical inspections—often facilitates corrupt transactions and fosters long-term corrupt relationships (McLinden, 2005). The scale of border crossings and the capabilities of enforcement agencies also influence corruption levels. For instance, in the European Union, larger border crossings and major international seaports are generally better staffed and equipped, often featuring advanced anti-corruption measures such as video surveillance. In these environments, corrupt practices may involve complex schemes with multiple officials (Centre for the Study of Democracy, 2012). In contrast, smaller crossings may see corruption manifest through informal favours among acquaintances.

In Africa, many countries including Nigeria, face significant corruption challenges at their borders. Research indicates that corruption in these regions adversely affects shipping costs, trade efficiency, revenue collection, and exacerbates organised crime and security issues (Chene, 2013). Factors contributing to corruption in border operations include inadequate external oversight, considerable autonomy of border officials, high tariffs, and complex regulatory frameworks. The influence of organised crime, coupled with low salaries and poor working conditions for border officials, further complicates efforts to combat corruption.

In Nigeria, data from a 2019 survey revealed that approximately two-thirds of bribes (67%) are paid before receiving a service from public officials, a figure slightly lower than the 69% reported in 2016. The remaining bribes are paid after the service (15%), simultaneously (11%), or in two instalments (2% each) (UNODC, 2019). As borders shape national centres and vice versa (Nugent, 2019), a country that upholds the rule of law will reflect these values through the processes and procedures at its borders. In contrast, a nation where bribery and illegalities thrive will exhibit various types of corrupt activities at its borders (Uzomah & Abdullahi, 2023). However, existing studies on border corruption in Nigeria primarily focus on their effects in Nigeria. For instance, Chinedu (2019) noted that some corrupt border officials even sell weapons to criminals, highlighting the severe implications of corruption for security. Oladopo et al. (2021) emphasised that porous borders facilitate the influx of counterfeit goods, negatively impacting the economy. George-Okoli (2024) found that corruption within border control and law enforcement agencies significantly hampers Nigeria's efforts to combat drug and human trafficking, allowing traffickers to exploit corrupt officials and facilitating the operations of sophisticated transnational criminal networks. While these studies provide valuable insights into border corruption in Nigeria, they do not classify the attributes of the border corruption in terms of types and patterns. Our research aims to fill this gap by examining the causes, types and patterns of corruption at Nigeria's border with Benin Republic.

### **III. Theoretical Framework**

This research is grounded in conflict theory, originating from Karl Marx's work and further developed by sociologists like Max Weber and Georg Simmel. Conflict theory examines power relations and inequalities in society, particularly among different social classes. In the context of border corruption involving customs and immigration officers, cross-border traders, migrants (including those without travel documents), commuters, smugglers, and local community members, key dynamics emerge.

Customs and immigration officers hold significant power at border crossings, enabling them to enforce laws, inspect goods, and control passage. This authority allows them to exploit their positions for personal gain, while traders, cross-border migrants, commuters, and community members often find themselves dependent on these officials, vulnerable to their demands (Hayes, 2024). The tendency of customs and immigration officers to engage in corrupt practices is often linked to low salaries, inadequate resources, and job insecurity, leading them to seek for bribes and exploit those crossing the border in search for livelihood. In parallel, traders and smugglers aim to maximise profits, and cross-border migrants strive to navigate bureaucratic obstacles and avoid deportation. This environment incentivises all parties to engage in unwholesome activities, perpetuating a cycle of corruption.

Conflict theory highlights how marginalised groups respond to their circumstances. Traders, migrants (especially those without documents), and commuters may feel pressured to comply with corrupt demands from officials due to fears of delays or legal repercussions which may result in incarceration, deportation or rejection of exit or entry. However, they may also form alliances to report abuses or use informal networks to negotiate better crossing terms. Social inequality complicates the relationship between border officials and border users. Border users often consist of marginalised individuals who lack access to information or legal recourse. Cross-border migrants, particularly those without travel documents, face increased risks, fearing deportation if they assert their rights (Kakela, 2020), traders are afraid of high tariff and smugglers are afraid of their contraband goods being seized or the person being handed over to the higher authorities. This power imbalance fosters helplessness, making border users susceptible to exploitation, while officers reinforce their authority. Cultural perceptions of corruption significantly shape behaviours at borders. In many contexts, bribery is seen as a normal part of navigating bureaucratic processes. Customs officials may justify their actions by claiming they are simply following societal norms or needing bribes to support their families. Similarly, traders, smugglers and migrants may view bribery as a necessary survival tactic in a competitive environment.

The ongoing tensions between border officials and border users have broader societal implications. Corruption undermines government authority and public trust and erodes institutional legitimacy. It perpetuates economic disparities, benefiting those who can afford to pay bribes while marginalising those who cannot (Boone et al., 2019). Traders, commuters, crossers and cross-border migrants, especially those without travel documents, become increasingly vulnerable at the whims and caprices of border officers creating avenue for bribery and extortion.

### **IV. Material And Methods**

A pilot survey which lasted for one week was conducted in June 2023 at Seme and Ohumbe border crossing points helped shape the theoretical framework and analytical approach for the research. The field work was conducted for nine weeks between August 2023 and October 2023 at five border crossing points on the southern part of Nigeria-Benin border. They include Ilara post between Ketu in Plateau Department of Benin and Imeko in Ogun State of Nigeria; Idiroko post between Ifangni and Sakete in Plateau Department of Benin

and Owode in Ogun State of Nigeria; Ohumbe post between Pobe in Plateau Department of Benin and Ilaro in Ogun State of Nigeria; Seme post between Adjarra and Krake in Queme Department of Benin and Badagry in Lagos State of Nigeria; and Owode-Apa post between Djeregbe in Queme Department of Benin and Badagry in Lagos State of Nigeria. These locations were selected due to the diverse activities occurring there, as indicated by the information gathered from our pilot survey.

A total of 1032 cross-border traders, crossers, commuters, migrants, clearing agents, smugglers, commercial motorists and members of the border communities were purposively selected and surveyed with questionnaire: 260 in Seme, 238 in Idiroko, 170 in Ohumbe, 220 in Owode-Apa and 144 in Ilara. Twenty-two (22) semi-structured interviews and 31 instant conversations were also conducted with them and border officers, and non-participatory observation was used to monitor the processes and procedures at the border. Due to confidentiality, their names will not be mentioned. The researcher and research assistants stood at both ends of each border crossing points - first on the Benin side interacting and walking along with the participants to the Nigerian side or vice versa – to explain to them about the significance of the research assuring them that the information they provide is important for the research. They subsequently consented to be surveyed and/or interviewed. Five research assistants from the local communities, all of whom had completed tertiary education, were employed for data collection. Based on the seven causes identified during our pilot survey, the participants were asked to identify what they believe as the main causes of corruption at the border. They were also asked to specify the category of the corruption they recently experienced, that is if it is individual based (a trader, a migrant or a border officer), informal group (of traders and community members) or formal group (as organised crime group or collaborating with customs agency or immigration command). They were further asked to specify the pattern of the corruption, if it was bribery initiated by the client (trader or migrant) or coerced by border officers or a collaborative between the client and border officers.

Jancsics (2019) topology of border corruption was used to group them into six attributes (three types of actors and three patterns of corruption). These classifications illustrate the different levels and dynamics of corruption, emphasising how both individual actions and group behaviours contribute to the overall phenomenon of corruption at border crossings. Secondary data from journal articles, textbooks, newspapers and online materials on the theme of border corruption were also used.

## **V. Results And Discussion**

### ***Characteristics of those who use the border***

Table 1 shows the characteristics of the research participants. The majority of cases involved males (63.37%). This signals that border corruption just like other criminalities is a male dominated venture (Enfield, 2019). However, considering that in African society, which is traditional in nature, the involvement of women in such venture is frowned at. A total of 29.27% of the corruption cases revolves around traders, 24.42% around crossers and 21.23% around migrants who cross the border. This suggests that traders are overrepresented among those who participate in corrupt practices at the border. This is not surprising as many people who cross these borders are traders, and their goal is to make maximum profit.

The modal category for the participants' age was 28 – 37 years (36.05%). The modal category for years of interaction with border was 0 – 4 years (36.63%), and the minimum is 20 years and above (4.07%) reflecting a downward trend in the years of interaction at the border. This shows that the longer people do business at the border, the more they get tired and uninterested in cross-border activities which is always stressful and dangerous, because the peripheries of a country are violent (Donko et al., 2022; Shahriar & Abdullahi, 2023).

Smuggling of contraband goods and immigration related issues with 49.03% and 22.10% respectively dominated the cases while 8.33% fell into others like port health issues, extortion of motorists and stealing. Considering the main mission of custom and immigration officers is to checkmate the movement of goods and migrants to and fro Nigeria, the high percentage of smuggling of contraband goods and immigration issues is a reflection of compromise by these two border agents. They collide with traders, clearing agents, migrants and smugglers to allow passage of illicit goods and unauthorised migrants. The small number of those who did not want to give information about what happened to them after arrest (1.74%) and those who faced prosecution in the court after arrest (0.58%) shows that majority of the offenders were arrested and released after they gave bribe or extortion while only 8.92% were released without bribery. Many who were released without bribery end up working as informant passing information to border officers on traders and smugglers as revealed in instant conversations.

Almost half of the cases (48.26%) took place at Seme and Idiroko border points (Table 3). This is not surprising. Unlike others, Seme and Idiroko carries large amount of business activities involving goods and people. Also, individual type and collaborative pattern with 36% and 40% respectively are the highest attribute of border corruption in the study area.

**Table 1: Characteristics of the participants**

Items	Frequency	Percent
Sex		
Male	654	63.37
Female	378	36.63
Occupation		
Traders	302	29.27
Crossers	252	24.42
Commuters	118	11.43
Migrants	220	21.32
Community members	77	7.46
Motorists	42	4.07
Clearing agents	21	2.03
Age		
18 – 27	132	12.79
28 – 37	372	36.05
38 – 47	216	20.93
48 – 57	166	16.09
58 – 65	92	8.91
66 and above	54	5.23
Type of case		
Trade related issue	212	20.54
Smuggling of contraband goods	506	49.03
Immigration related issue	228	22.10
Others	86	8.33
What happened after arrest?		
Gave bribe and got released on the spot	822	79.65
Taken to custody and released after bribery	94	9.11
Taken to custody and released without bribery	92	8.92
Prosecuted at the court	6	0.58
I don't want to talk about it	18	1.74
Years of interaction at the border		
0 – 4	378	36.63
5 – 9	314	30.43
10 – 14	224	21.70
15 – 19	74	7.17
20 and above	42	4.07
Total	1032	100

Author's computation (2024)

**Table 2: Causes of corruption**

Question	percent
Weak or lack of accountability	78
High tariff and lack of transparency	73
Lack of probity in the agencies.	64
Administrative corrupt practices and nepotism	61
Systemically transferred from one generation to another	58
Existence of low level of automation	53
Informal social network	51

Author's computation (2024)

The causes of border corruption as chosen by the respondents are grouped into 7 main causes as shown in Table 2:

- 1) From Table 2, a total of 78% of the participants agreed that weak or lack of accountability is a major contributor to border corruption in Nigeria. Weak or lack of accountability of which type of goods are being cleared after officials might have taken bribes from traders or clearing agents. Sometimes migrants with complete documents are held without any tangible reason but just to make them feel frustrated. So, rather than traveling with official documents, some migrants prefer to pay bribes since they will be delayed or detained upon presenting their documents whereas if they will be allowed to cross immediately if they pay some bribes. This attitude facilitates smuggling of all manner of things including contraband goods, human beings, illicit drugs, and arms. Weak accountability contributes to the flow of contraband and illicit goods like arms and ammunition, drugs and used cars and tyres. Sometimes due to weak accountability, border officials deliberately allow goods to be heaped at the borders than normal in order for the clients to pay demurrage. This transforms the border into hard border increasing the amount paid by businessmen and clearing agents as demurrage. But as long as bribes are paid, slowly and steadily, the goods whether genuine or contraband pass through the border, though some are sometimes confiscated to deter smugglers.
- 2) Those who agreed that high tariff and lack of transparency is a problem are 73% (Table 2). High tariff and lack of transparency in the clearance process making the ease of doing business burdensome. This is evident in vagueness and inconsistencies in who determines and the amount of tariff to be paid before clearing vehicle at the border. For example, in the past, clearing cost of vehicles was based on size and year of manufacture of the vehicle. After 2015, the cost is based on the initial cost of the vehicle – 35% duty and 35% levy on the cost of the vehicle, adding up to 70% of the initial cost of the vehicle. This is required to be paid to clear the vehicle, whereas the old tariff was 22%. Therefore, a tariff of ₦2.45 million (\$7,000) is required to be paid for the clearance of a vehicle bought at ₦3.5 million (\$10,000). Many importers and clearing agents usually find ways to prevaricate the payment of this huge tariff, and this makes custom officials susceptible for corruption. The inconsistency and high cost of clearing goods at the border is an incentive for corrupt border officials to take bribe from clearing agents. Additionally, the amount paid by those travelling without documents is not stipulated. Some are asked to pay less than a thousand Naira while others are extorted up to multiple thousands of Naira.
- 3) For lack of probity, 64% agrees it is a major problem (Table 2). Lack of probity in the agencies. The lack of adequate supervision on border control officials while they use discretionary powers which afford them avenues to extort money from traders and migrants is widespread. This attitude by the officials has continued without rectification despite cautions from the authorities as eluded by an official. The junior officers often lack adequate supervision since their seniors have share in any money extorted from border users. Therefore, all the officials enjoy extensive discretionary powers reflecting the findings of Campos & Pradhan (2007) which stated that such discretionary power gives border control officials opportunities to extract bribes from those that cross the border to transact businesses.
- 4) Those who agreed that administrative corrupt practices and nepotism is a big issue are 61% (Table 2). Administrative corruption practices and nepotism within border control institutions at, especially at Seme border, is an issue. Some border control officials pay kickbacks to get appointments, promotions, and transfers, much of which are also done based on outright nepotism or existing relationship rather than meritocracy and standards. Some of the officials refuse to be transferred since they have established a corruption ring in their current work locations. The established corruption ring continues to perpetuate bribery and extortion on individual border users and organisations as well as smugglers of goods and migrants.
- 5) A total of 58% of the participants agreed that generational transfer of corruption is a major problem as shown in Table 2. Corruption at the border is systemic process which is transferred from one generation of officials to another. Staff that are newly transferred to 'lucrative' or corrupt offices, finds it difficult to resist corruption because it is the status quo. Reneging to participate exposes the new staff to ridicule and maybe intimidation by others. More so, border control officials are not well remunerated, with chain of extended family members to carter for, which is typical of African society. The combination of poor salary, tacit agreement by senior officials and little probability of detection provides both incentives and opportunities for border officials to be corrupt. Thus, it is difficult for officials to resist soliciting bribes which serve as strategy to enhancing their insufficient salary. Some officials are involved in the smuggling proper. A Nigerian trader complained that:  
"An immunisation agent who was supposed to administer vaccination and issue vaccination card to me at the border was openly and proudly discussing and bargaining how to smuggle second handed clothes instead of attending to my request since I was not allowed to cross the border without the card".

All cadres of border officials collect bribes. Bribes are paid for officials to look other way while illegal activities go on, to alter or reduce duty or taxation liabilities, and to ensure exemption from standard administrative procedures at the border.

- 6) Participants who agree that the existence of low level of automation is a major issue are 53% (Table 2). Existence of low level of automation even though ICT equipment is provided for the officials. This is as a result of negligence in form of weak controls and oversight which is usually deliberate in order to facilitate corrupt practices. Much physical intervention of ICT for the valuation process brings additional cost to traders. Unnecessary time delays and lengthy bureaucratic processes abound in clearing of goods at the border crossings. Traders transporting goods across the borders often find it easier to simply bribe officials than comply with burdensome and complicated import procedures and high tariffs which makes border officials susceptible to bribery. This is in tandem with the work of Flores (2017) which states that traders transporting goods across borders frequently opt to bribe officials rather than navigate the cumbersome and complex import procedures and high tariffs.
- 7) Informal social network around the border crossing points was agreed to be a major problem by 51% of the respondents as shown in Table 2. The presence of informal social network that develops in casual places like roadside restaurants, bars, video (football) viewing houses and betting centres provides the platform for smugglers and border officials to meet in a conducive atmosphere both on Nigerian side and Beninois side of the border. Also, traders who pass border frequently, develop casual relationships with specific officials. These informal interactions usually metamorphose into corrupt arrangements.

**Classification of border corruption in Nigeria**

**Table 3: Types and Patterns of corruption at the five border crossing points**

Border crossing point	Topology 1 (Type)			Topology 2 (Pattern)			Total
	Individual	Informal	Formal	Coercion by officials	Coercion by clients	Collaboration	
Seme	110 (42.3%)	60 (23.1%)	90 (34.6%)	110 (42.3%)	10 (3.85%)	140 (53.85%)	260 (25.19%)
Owode-Apa	56 (25.5%)	134 (60.9%)	30 (13.6%)	126 (57.3%)	50 (22.7%)	44 (20%)	220 (21.32%)
Idiroko	125 (52.5%)	40 (16.8%)	73 (30.7%)	98 (41.2%)	14 (5.9%)	126 (52.9%)	238 (23.07%)
Ilara	50 (34.7)	68 (47.2)	26 (18.1)	61 (42.4%)	26 (18%)	57 (39.6%)	144 (13.95%)
Ohumbe	40 (23.52)	48 (28.24)	82 (48.24)	32 (18.8)	90 (52.9)	48 (28.3)	170 (16.47%)
Sub Total	371 (36%)	350 (33.9%)	311 (30.1%)	392 (38%)	225 (22%)	415 (40%)	<b>1032</b> <b>(100%)</b>

Authour’s computation (2024)

From Table 3, using Jancsics’s border typology to classify border corruption shows that with 42.3% for Seme and 52.5% for Idiroko, individual corruption is the highest type of corruption in both border crossings. The major corruption pattern is collaborative corruption which stands at 53.85% and 52.9% respectively for both crossings. These are major official border crossing points, and the clients are mainly individual migrants without travel documents and traders with their goods who connive with border officials to make deals that enable them pass without legal checks. These activities are administrative and market corruption done very fast in an ad-hoc manner. The migrants and traders usually do not know the officers or have special bonding with them as explained by a cross-border trader in the interview below:

“Whenever I am crossing my goods, I try to conceal them in order not to pay high tariffs because they are foreign goods. I will meet any random custom officer first and negotiate with them. I am always in a haste, because if other custom officers should know, the amount of bribe I will pay may increase or the goods might be seized, and I will lose my money. The officers do not care about you losing your money, after all they do not know you before, they are not from your village or family members and they careless about your predicament. What is important to them is the money they will get from you. So, why should they bother about you and you losing your contraband goods?”

Thus, the trader bribes the officers in this manner to avoid paying taxes or tariffs and the officers allow them to pass their goods illegally. In some cases, travel documents and other necessary documents are ignored after bribes have exchanged hands. At Seme and Idiroko borders, there are official rates of bribery. For example, it is an open secret that port health officers collect two thousand Naira (₦2000) from client and allow them



passage through the border without providing a valid vaccination card. Bribes are also paid to facilitate the smuggling of petrol and soft drinks from Nigeria to Benin and rice and tomato paste from Benin to Nigeria.

For social bribery, at Seme and Idiroko, clients in informal organisations engage in collaborative corruption, which manifests as ad-hoc market corruption and/or social bribe corruption. For example, group of traders sometimes choose to bribe officers on duty to overlook overweight vehicles or undeclared goods, permit under invoiced goods, speed or skip inspection, issue import licenses or warehouse approvals without proper justification. However, because of the risk involved in market corruption and interest of the traders to reduce uncertainties, they develop interpersonal ties with other traders for the sake of social bribery. They traders seek to evade payment of tariffs on permanent basis by seeking personal connections among border officers in order to have a clear-cut amount to pay for bribery and make the corruption more predictable. This trust makes provision for the strategic alliance of the actors involved in the corrupt transaction.

At Seme and Idiroko, the formal groups are majorly organised criminal groups involved in car smuggling. The corruption here is of collaborative or collusion pattern which manifests itself as social bribery, a recurring activity, that assumes some level of trust and social bonds between the clients and officers. Due to the fact that the cars are contraband, the amount of bribery paid is too high. The smugglers usually stick with the same group of officers as the illegal transactions can lead to loss of money and long jail terms. They keep the same officers to grow some level of trust, confidence and reliability. This turns the ad-hoc impersonal exchange and market corruption into a social bribe that fosters reliable relationship. The corruption is also entrenched as many of the smugglers are native of the surrounding areas where family ties and social relations are very strong.

At Owode-Apa and Ilara with 60.9% and 47.2% respectively, the major corruption group is informal, and the major corruption pattern is coercion by officer: 57.3% for Owode-Apa and 42.4% for Ilara (Table 3). These are medium-size border crossing points with less traffic, and the corruption manifests when group of traders are forced by officer(s) to pay bribe in order to get fair treatment. Such treatment includes paying extra money not to be delayed, paying not to falsify or label the product as contraband and paying not to disallow passage with huge amount of money. These are also market corruption where the client minimises the costs that were intentionally generated by the officer. A crosser explained

“On several occasions I have witness border officials extorting money from traders, migrants and travellers by making up offenses such as missing documents and other papers. Officers will deliberately ask for documents that are not part of the requirements in other to put fear on the clients, and by so doing the client will pay money because of the fear of the unknown. Some of the travellers and traders are ignorant of which papers are required”.

At Owode-Apa and Ilara, coercion by officers also comes in form of deliberate delays by border officials of transporters from big companies who are conveying perishable goods such as tomatoes and contraband goods like poultry products. The transporters are forced to pay in order not to allow these perishable goods to destroy due to delays or the poultry products to be seized. They sometimes bribe the officials with some of the goods they are conveying. The smuggling industry, especially the officials, encourages the sustenance and entrenchment of corrupt border officers in order to perpetrate their activities. An officer stated that:

“Some of the officers are dastardly corrupt; since they know the ground very well, they find ways to bypass every string measure put in place by the task force. Some officers have been arrested, including some navy officers, dismissed and handed over for prosecution”.

At Ohumbe border crossing point exists majorly coercion by clients (52.9%) on formal group (48.24%) (Table 3) where smuggling ring pays bribe to officers or threaten to kill them or members of their household. Instant conversation reveals that this usually happens in the form of institutionalised corruption where officers have already threatened the smuggling ring or companies they will be caught in their future illegal activities if they do not pay large amount of money. In some cases, some of the officers are vulnerable people who are prone to infidelity or drug or alcohol abuse. Their dependency and addiction put them in precarious position and make them susceptible to be used by the smuggling ring and drivers of companies' vehicles who will pay for their indulgent including soliciting for prostitutes. They develop this relationship for long-term purposes and use it to facilitate regular smuggling of (illicit) goods and migrants. There also exist a “bureaucracy-to bureaucracy” transaction, where parties exchange organisational resources instead of private or community resources. For example, Nigeria government allows only six firms to be importing milk, but other companies who import milk collude with these six companies to import milk into the country. As part of the cost of doing business, export/import firms even calculate how much should be paid to border officers as bribery for such transaction.

The Ohumbe border crossing as well as that of Ilara normally have moderate to low traffic, and security checks are not sophisticated. Therefore, when other border points become difficult to cross due to heavy checks, smugglers revert to using these borders to pass migrants or their goods such as contraband vehicles from Benin to Nigeria and petroleum products in the opposite direction.

In general, there are instances, when collusion and coercion overlap each other at these borders. For example, traders do not pay taxes and revenue before clearing their goods but rather bribe officials to prevaricate such payments. When smugglers or traders are cut bringing in contraband goods, instead of taken them to court for persecution, officials take money from them and let them off the hook. Another example is some businessmen and people who use the border (Nigerians and foreigners alike) normally do not have the relevant documents for their goods, instead of disallowing them entrance or exit as the case maybe, officials collect bribe and allow them to pass the goods. Additionally, migrants who do not have travel documents or their smugglers are allowed access after money have changed hands between them and border officers. These are cases of collusion where both the officials and clients benefit whereas the country loses by allowing contraband goods or unauthorised migrants passage. This is a classical form of collusion corruption between the client and officials. The government or country is usually the loser because the money that should accrue to it is ultimately not collected, and migration flows are not regulated. Even with the establishment of One-Stop Border Posts at Seme, procedures and processes still experience limited automation. Officials handle procedures manually, including physically climbing onto vehicles to check goods at all the borders. In some cases, despite having complete documentation, the passage of certain goods is deliberately delayed by agents, and clearance is only granted after bribes are paid by the officers. This is coercion corruption otherwise known as extortion. Both in coercive and collusion corruption, officials routinely collect money from violators not to enforce the law. A member of the community stated:

“Officials even use their vehicles to carry illicit goods for the smugglers from Benin republic into Nigeria. They also escort contraband second handed vehicles into Nigeria. I have also seen where they are helping to transport all these girls who are going to do prostitution abroad”.

## **VI. Conclusion**

This article addressed a gap in corruption at Nigeria's border crossings revealing a deeply entrenched system characterised by various types and patterns of corrupt practices. At key points like Seme and Idiroko, individual corruption stands out as the predominant type, facilitated by informal agreements between traders, migrants, and border officials. This pattern of corruption is driven by the urgency and desperation of clients seeking to evade high tariffs and navigate cumbersome regulatory processes. Collaborative corruption is particularly alarming at these crossings, representing a significant pattern where both officials and clients engage in illicit transactions, thereby undermining the rule of law and economic stability. The testimonies of traders and migrants illustrate the attributes of these corrupt practices, where bribery becomes a necessary strategy for survival in a system that prioritises personal gain over public duty.

Moreover, coercive tactics employed by border officials at crossings such as Owode-Apa, Ilara, and Ohumbe exemplify another type of corruption. These officials exploit their power to extract bribes under the threat of delays, seizure, or fabricated legal infractions. This coercive pattern is further complicated by the presence of organised criminal groups that capitalise on the vulnerabilities of both border officers and clients to perpetuate a cycle of corruption that is difficult to dismantle.

The study enriches the academic debate on border corruption by providing a detailed, empirical examination of corruption dynamics at Nigerian borders. It emphasises the importance of understanding the relational and social aspects of corruption, the mechanisms involved, and the broader implications for governance and policy. As such, it serves as a valuable contribution to both the literature on corruption and the practical considerations for addressing these pervasive issues in border management and migration policy and implications for policy and economic development.

## **VII. Recommendations**

The following are recommendations to combat border corruption based on the identified causes and patterns:

1. Implement Transparent Processes at Seme Border: Establish clear and publicly accessible tariff structures and customs procedures at the Seme border crossing. Regular workshops with traders can clarify guidelines and reduce the ambiguity that leads to bribery and extortion.
2. Enhance Monitoring and Accountability at Seme and Idiroko Borders: Creating an independent oversight body to monitor operations at the Seme and Idiroko border crossings which should conduct regular audits and investigate allegations of bribery and collusion to ensure that officials are held accountable for their actions is necessary.
3. Increase Salaries and Improve Conditions for Officials: Addressing the low remuneration and working conditions for border officials by for example increasing salaries and providing better resources can help reduce the reliance on corrupt practices while encouraging officials to act with integrity.
4. Utilise Technology for Efficient Processing Across All Borders: Investing in digital platforms for customs and immigration processes at all border crossing points for automation and streamlining procedures to reduce direct interactions between officials and clients can minimise opportunities for corruption.

5. Conduct Community Awareness Campaigns: Launching of campaigns and educational programs in local communities near the border crossings, particularly at Ohumbe focusing on traders and migrants will inform them about their rights and the negative impacts of corruption and empower them to resist corrupt practices.
6. Strengthen Legal Enforcement Mechanisms: Reviewing and enhancing the legal frameworks governing border management and corruption enforcement will ensure that corrupt officials are prosecuted and that legal consequences are well-publicised to deter future misconduct, particularly at high-risk points like Idiroko and Seme. By implementing these targeted recommendations, authorities can work toward reducing corruption and improving the overall integrity of border management systems at Nigeria's border crossings.

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