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The impact of military checkpoints on commercial drivers: evidence from North-east Nigeria

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Abstract
Military checkpoints have become a prominent feature of the security landscape in North-East Nigeria, emerging in response to persistent insurgency activities by Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). While intended to enhance security, concerns have been raised regarding their operational, economic, and psychological implications for road users, particularly commercial drivers who play a critical role in regional mobility and economic activity. This study examined the impact of military checkpoints on commercial drivers in North-East Nigeria, focusing on travel time, fuel consumption, income, stress levels, exposure to physical abuse, and perceived safety. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted using primary data collected through an interviewer-administered structured schedule. Of the 288 interstate commercial drivers targeted from major motor parks in Maiduguri, 215 valid responses were obtained. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Spearman rank-order correlation. The findings show that military checkpoints significantly increase travel time, fuel consumption, stress levels, and exposure to physical abuse, while reducing drivers' income. However, checkpoints were also widely perceived to enhance safety by deterring insurgent activities and improving surveillance. The results confirm a significant relationship between checkpoint operations and drivers' operational, economic, and psychological conditions, highlighting a fundamental security–mobility trade-off. The study concludes that although military checkpoints are essential for security, current practices impose substantial burdens on commercial drivers. It recommends improved accountability, enhanced training, and technology-driven solutions. This study contributes to the theoretical discourse on security–mobility trade-offs by providing empirical evidence from a conflict-affected context, demonstrating how security interventions simultaneously generate protective and disruptive outcomes within transport systems.

Keywords: Commercial drivers, insurgency, military checkpoints, North-east Nigeria, transport operations

1. Introduction

In the last decade, the proliferation of military checkpoints across Nigeria has become a defining feature of the country's internal security landscape. This trend is closely linked to the evolving patterns of insecurity, including insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, communal conflicts, and other forms of violent crime (Ojo et al., 2023; Atim & Gbamwuan, 2022; Enaikele et al., 2022; Rosenje & Adeniyi, 2021; Ibe, 2021; Abada et al., 2020; Idachaba & Nneli, 2018). These security challenges are regionally differentiated. For instance, separatist agitations have intensified

instability in the South-East, militancy linked to resource control continues in the South-South, while ritual killings and violent crimes have raised concerns in the South-West. In the North-Central region, persistent farmer–herder conflicts remain prevalent, while the North-West has been severely affected by banditry and mass abductions.

The North-East region, however, represents the epicentre of insurgency in Nigeria, primarily driven by Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Since its emergence, the insurgency has resulted in significant human and economic losses. Available estimates indicate that Boko Haram-related violence has caused approximately 38,000 deaths in the region between 2009 and 2023 (Statista, 2026). In response to the escalating threat, the Federal Government of Nigeria declared a state of emergency and deployed military forces to restore order and stability (Raji et al., 2021; Ayebusi & Rukema, 2019). As part of this intervention, military checkpoints have been widely established along major highways and strategic routes to monitor, regulate, and restrict the movement of people, goods, and vehicles.

Over time, these checkpoints have become embedded in the daily experiences of road users, particularly commercial drivers who rely on interstate routes for their livelihoods. While checkpoints are intended to enhance security and deter criminal activities, emerging evidence suggests that they also generate operational inefficiencies and socio-economic challenges. For example, studies have shown that multiple checkpoints can lead to delays, increased transport costs, and opportunities for corruption (Olamide & Olasunkanmi, 2025). Similarly, Emelife and Obi (2024) found that checkpoint operations contribute to economic disruptions and psychological stress among road users.

Empirical evidence from North-East Nigeria further highlights the complex nature of checkpoint impacts. Babagana et al. (2025) reported that checkpoint operations are associated with increased vulnerability among commercial drivers, including exposure to harassment and abuse. Likewise, Kolawole (2024) demonstrated that checkpoints significantly affect transport efficiency and logistics performance, particularly in conflict-prone areas. However, existing studies tend to focus either on economic or security outcomes, often neglecting a comprehensive assessment that integrates operational, economic, and psychological dimensions across the region.

It is against this background that this study addresses a critical gap by providing a regional-level empirical analysis of the impact of military checkpoints on commercial drivers in North-East Nigeria. Specifically, the study examines how checkpoint operations affect travel time, fuel consumption, income, stress levels, exposure to physical abuse, and perceived safety among drivers operating within the region.

The study is guided by the following research questions: To what extent do military checkpoints affect travel time and fuel consumption of commercial drivers? How do checkpoint operations influence drivers' income and stress levels? What is the relationship between checkpoint activities and exposure to physical abuse? To what extent do checkpoints enhance perceived safety among commercial drivers?

In line with these questions, the study tests the following hypothesis:

H_0: There is no significant relationship between military checkpoint operations and the operational, economic, and psychological conditions of commercial

drivers in North-East Nigeria.
H_1: There is a significant relationship between military checkpoint operations and the operational, economic, and psychological conditions of commercial drivers in North-East Nigeria.

By addressing these questions, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the dual role of military checkpoints in conflict-affected regions, highlighting the need to balance security objectives with the socio-economic realities of transport operators.

2. Literature Review

Military checkpoints have increasingly become a central component of security governance in conflict-prone environments, particularly in regions experiencing persistent insurgency and violent crime. In Nigeria, the proliferation of checkpoints is closely associated with efforts to combat insecurity, regulate movement, and enhance surveillance across strategic transport corridors (Ojo et al., 2023; Atim & Gbamwuan, 2022). While these interventions are primarily justified on security grounds, a growing body of scholarship highlights their broader implications for mobility systems, economic activities, and human experiences.

From a conceptual standpoint, military checkpoints represent a form of state control over mobility, functioning as instruments for monitoring and restricting the flow of people, goods, and services. This aligns with broader theoretical perspectives on "mobility governance," which view movement as a regulated and contested space in conflict environments. The presence of checkpoints introduces a complex trade-off between security enforcement and transport efficiency. On one hand, checkpoints contribute to crime prevention and territorial control; on the other hand, they disrupt traffic flow, increase travel time, and impose additional costs on road users. This duality reflects the broader tension between security and development in fragile and conflict-affected regions (Weizman, 2007; Rodgers & O'Neill, 2012).

Empirical evidence from Nigeria presents mixed but converging insights. Olamide and Olasunkanmi (2025), using a qualitative approach, found that the proliferation of checkpoints may inadvertently promote corruption, bribery, and operational inefficiencies, thereby undermining institutional effectiveness. Similarly, Emelife and Obi (2024), through a mixed-methods study in South-East Nigeria, reported that checkpoint operations contribute to economic disruption and psychological distress, suggesting that their impacts extend beyond physical delays to include intangible human costs.

In North-East Nigeria, where insurgency intensity is highest, the effects appear more pronounced. Babagana et al. (2025) identified a significant association between checkpoint interactions and exposure to physical abuse among commercial drivers, highlighting the vulnerability of road users in militarised environments. Likewise, Kolawole (2024) demonstrated that checkpoint operations significantly affect transport efficiency and logistics performance in Borno State. However, these studies are limited either by narrow thematic focus or restricted geographical scope, thereby constraining a comprehensive understanding of checkpoint impacts.

Comparative evidence from other regions further reinforces the dual nature of checkpoint operations. In the Niger Delta and South-West Nigeria, studies have similarly documented delays, extortion, and increased transport costs associated with roadblocks, particularly along major interstate highways (Agbiboa, 2022; Ifeanyichukwu et al., 2023). Beyond

Nigeria, research in conflict-affected regions such as Iraq and Afghanistan shows that checkpoints can enhance situational awareness and deter insurgent movements but often at the cost of mobility restrictions, economic slowdown, and civilian frustration (Lasley & Guffey, 2017). Similarly, studies in Israel–Palestine contexts demonstrate how checkpoint systems, while effective for security surveillance, significantly disrupt daily life and economic activities, elongate travel time, and reinforce inequalities in mobility access (Weizman, 2007; Samman, 2021; Griffiths & Repo, 2021).

A synthesis of the literature reveals several consistent patterns. First, there is broad agreement that checkpoints provide important security benefits, particularly in terms of surveillance and crime deterrence. Second, substantial evidence indicates that checkpoints generate operational inefficiencies, including increased travel time and fuel consumption. Third, economic consequences, such as higher transport costs and reduced income are widely reported across contexts. Fourth, there is growing recognition of the psychological and human rights implications of checkpoint interactions, including stress, anxiety, and exposure to harassment or abuse.

Despite these insights, critical gaps remain. Existing studies largely examine checkpoint impacts in isolation, focusing either on security outcomes, operational efficiency, or specific negative experiences, with limited integration of these dimensions into a unified analytical framework. Moreover, many studies rely on qualitative evidence or geographically restricted samples, limiting the generalisability of findings. There is also insufficient use of region-wide primary data that captures the lived experiences of commercial drivers across multiple transport corridors in high-intensity conflict settings.

In addressing these gaps, the present study adopts a multidimensional approach to analysing the impact of military checkpoints on commercial drivers in North-East Nigeria. By integrating operational (travel time, fuel consumption), economic (income), and psychological (stress, exposure to abuse, and perceived safety) variables, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how checkpoint operations shape transport systems and livelihoods. This approach not only extends existing empirical work but also contributes to the broader discourse on balancing security interventions with socio-economic sustainability in conflict-affected regions.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a cross-sectional survey design to examine the impact of military checkpoints on commercial drivers in North-East Nigeria. The design is appropriate as it enables the collection of data at a single point in time to analyse relationships between checkpoint operations and drivers' operational, economic, and psychological conditions.

The study area comprises the six states in North-East Nigeria which comprises Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe where insurgency-related security interventions have led to the proliferation of military checkpoints along major transport corridors. Although the study focuses on the North-East region, data collection was conducted in Maiduguri, Borno State, due to its strategic position as the epicentre of insurgency and a major transport hub connecting all state capitals within the region. This approach is justified on both security and accessibility grounds, as Maiduguri provides a convergence point

for interstate commercial drivers operating across the North-East.

The target population consists of interstate commercial drivers operating within the North-East transport network. However, the accessible population was limited to drivers operating from two major motor parks in Maiduguri which are Borno Express Motor Park and Tansha Kano Motor Park. According to records obtained from the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), Tansha Kano Motor Park has 170 registered interstate drivers, while Borno Express Motor Park has 118, giving a total population of 288 drivers.

A combination of purposive and stratified sampling techniques was employed. The two motor parks were purposively selected because they are the largest and most active hubs for interstate transport within the region. Within these parks, drivers were stratified based on their primary destination routes, specifically Maiduguri-Bauchi, Maiduguri-Gombe, Maiduguri-Damaturu, Maiduguri-Yola, and Maiduguri-Jalingo routes. This stratification ensured that drivers operating across major North-East corridors were adequately represented. Given the relatively manageable population size, a census approach was adopted, and all 288 drivers were included in the study.

Data were collected using an interviewer-administered structured schedule developed based on established transport survey frameworks and prior empirical studies on travel behaviour and mobility constraints (e.g., Stopher & Greaves, 2007; Hensher et al., 2005; Petrunoff et al., 2013). The instrument captured key variables relevant to the study objectives, including travel time, fuel consumption, income, stress levels, exposure to physical abuse, and perceived safety. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

To ensure the validity of the instrument, the items were carefully structured to align with the study objectives and variables identified in the literature, thereby enhancing content validity. This systematic alignment ensures that the instrument adequately captures the constructs under investigation and supports the reliability of the study findings.

Given the linguistic context of the study area, interviews were conducted in Hausa with the assistance of trained research assistants familiar with the local environment, and responses were subsequently translated into English to ensure accuracy and consistency.

Out of the 288 targeted respondents, 215 valid responses were obtained, representing a response rate of 74.7%. The non-response was largely due to drivers' mobility and work schedules rather than systematic exclusion, and therefore does not significantly compromise the validity of the findings.

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to summarise respondents' perceptions, while Spearman rank-order correlation was used to test the study hypothesis and examine relationships between military checkpoint operations and the selected variables.

4. Results and Discussion

A total of 288 commercial drivers were targeted for the study, out of which 215 valid responses were obtained, representing a response rate of 74.7%. This response rate is considered adequate for survey-based research and does not significantly affect the validity of the findings, as non-response was primarily due to the mobile nature of the respondents' occupation rather than systematic bias.

The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents indicate that the majority fall within the 30-50 age bracket, representing the most economically active segment of the population. This finding is consistent with existing literature, which shows that middle-aged individuals dominate informal transport operations due to physical resilience and economic necessity. The study also confirms that commercial driving in the region is entirely male-dominated, reflecting entrenched socio-cultural norms and the security risks associated with long-distance transport operations in conflict-prone environments.

Most respondents possess over ten years of driving experience, suggesting a high level of familiarity with road networks and checkpoint operations. However, despite this experience, drivers continue to face significant operational and interpersonal challenges. Educational attainment among respondents is generally low, which limits awareness of rights and effective communication with security personnel. Language barriers, particularly between Hausa-speaking drivers and non-Hausa-speaking soldiers, further exacerbate misunderstandings and sometimes lead to conflict. These findings align with prior studies highlighting the role of education and communication in shaping interactions within regulated environments.

4.1 Impact of Military Checkpoints on Commercial Drivers

Table 4.1 presents the perceived impact of military checkpoints on key aspects of commercial driving operations.

Table 4.1: Impact of Military Checkpoints on Commercial Drivers in North-East Nigeria

No	Variables	Increased (%)	Decreased (%)	No Impact (%)
1	Travel Time	91.6	0	8.4
2	Fuel Consumption	94	0	6
3	Physical Abuse	81.9	14.4	3.7
4	Income	19.5	74.8	5.6
5	Stress Level	87.4	0	12.6
6	Safety	74.9	15.8	9.3

Source: Field Survey (2026)

The results show that an overwhelming majority of respondents reported increased travel time and fuel consumption. This finding corroborates earlier studies (e.g., Kolawole, 2024; Emelife & Obi, 2024), which indicate that checkpoint operations introduce delays through stop-and-search procedures, congestion, and prolonged waiting times. The associated increase in fuel consumption reflects inefficiencies caused by idling and repeated acceleration and deceleration.

A substantial proportion of respondents reported a decrease in income, largely attributed to unofficial payments and operational delays. This aligns with prior research on corruption and informal practices within road security operations in Nigeria (Agbiboa, 2022; Ifeanyichukwu et al., 2023). Thus, the economic burden of checkpoints extends beyond operational costs to direct financial losses.

The findings also reveal high levels of stress and exposure to physical abuse. These outcomes are consistent with studies highlighting the psychological and human rights implications of militarised transport environments (Ifejika & Ojo, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2022). However, the magnitude observed in this study suggests that such impacts may be more pronounced in high-intensity insurgency contexts such as North-East Nigeria.

Despite these negative effects, a majority of respondents perceived that checkpoints enhance safety. This supports counterinsurgency literature (e.g., Ike et al., 2025; Warner, 2017), which emphasises the role of checkpoints in deterring attacks and improving surveillance. Nonetheless, the minority perception of reduced safety reflects underlying distrust and the potential vulnerability of checkpoints as targets of attack.

4.2 Test of Hypothesis

The hypothesis of the study was tested using Spearman rank-order correlation.

Table 4.2: Spearman Rank Correlation Results

Variables	Travel Time	Fuel Consumption	Physical Abuse	Income	Stress Level	Safety
Travel Time	1	.982**	.854**	-.703**	.921**	.764**
Fuel Consumption	.982**	1	.833**	-.721**	.903**	.742**
Physical Abuse	.854**	.833**	1	-.654**	.881**	.603**
Income	-.703**	-.721**	-.654**	1	-.682**	-.402**
Stress Level	.921**	.903**	.881**	-.682**	1	.711**
Safety	.764**	.742**	.603**	-.402**	.711**	1

Note: p < 0.01

Source: Field Survey (2026)

The results indicate strong positive correlations between checkpoint operations and travel time, fuel consumption, stress levels, and physical abuse, while income shows a significant negative relationship. The positive relationship with perceived safety further reinforces the dual role of checkpoints.

These findings are consistent with existing literature on the security-mobility trade-off, which suggests that security interventions often generate both protective and disruptive outcomes. However, this study provides new empirical evidence by integrating multiple dimensions of checkpoint impact using region-wide primary data, thereby addressing a key gap in prior research.

Based on the results, the null hypothesis is rejected, confirming that there is a significant relationship between military checkpoint operations and the operational, economic, and psychological conditions of commercial drivers in North-East Nigeria.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the impact of military checkpoints on commercial drivers in North-East Nigeria, with particular attention to operational, economic, and psychological outcomes. The findings show that the commercial driving workforce in the region is predominantly composed of middle-aged men, reflecting the most economically active segment of the population. The sector remains male-dominated due to entrenched socio-cultural norms, security risks, and the militarised nature of transport environments, which collectively discourage female participation. Most drivers possess considerable experience, yet low levels of formal education limit their civic awareness, communication capacity, and ability to effectively engage security personnel. Language barriers between drivers and non-Hausa-speaking soldiers

further exacerbate misunderstandings and, in some cases, contribute to conflict. Empirically, the study demonstrates that military checkpoints significantly disrupt commercial transport operations. A large majority of respondents reported increased travel time, fuel consumption, stress levels, and exposure to physical abuse, alongside a decline in income. These outcomes are largely driven by delays, repeated inspections, unofficial payments, and strained interactions with security personnel. At the same time, most respondents acknowledged that checkpoints enhance safety by deterring insurgent activities and improving surveillance.

The study therefore reveals a fundamental paradox: while military checkpoints are essential for maintaining security in an insurgency-affected region, they impose substantial operational, economic, and psychological burdens on commercial drivers. Given the critical role of these drivers in facilitating mobility and sustaining economic activities, the negative impacts of checkpoint operations have broader implications for regional development. Overall, the findings confirm a significant relationship between military checkpoint operations and the conditions of commercial drivers in North-East Nigeria.

5.2 Recommendations

In light of the findings, the study proposes the following recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of military checkpoint operations while minimising their adverse impacts:

First, there is a need to strengthen monitoring and accountability mechanisms to address extortion, harassment, and abuse at checkpoints. This can be achieved through the establishment of transparent complaint channels and independent oversight structures. Improving the welfare conditions of security personnel may also reduce the incentive for corrupt practices.

Second, regular training programmes should be institutionalised for security personnel manning checkpoints. Such training should emphasise civil-military relations, human rights, conflict sensitivity, and effective communication, including basic proficiency in local languages such as Hausa. This will improve interactions between drivers and security personnel and reduce tensions.

Third, government agencies in collaboration with transport unions should implement awareness programmes to educate drivers on their rights, responsibilities, and appropriate conduct at checkpoints. Enhancing drivers' communication skills and civic awareness can reduce vulnerability and improve engagement outcomes.

Fourth, there is a need to modernise checkpoint operations through the adoption of digital verification systems, vehicle identification technologies, and standardised operational procedures. This will reduce delays, limit discretionary practices, and improve overall efficiency.

Fifth, periodic assessments of checkpoint operations should be conducted by relevant authorities to ensure that security objectives are balanced with socio-economic considerations. Such evaluations will help identify inefficiencies and inform policy adjustments.

Finally, structured dialogue platforms involving security agencies and transport unions should be established to address grievances, build trust, and promote collaborative approaches to security governance.

Study Implications

The findings of this study have important theoretical, practical, and policy implications. Theoretically, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on security-mobility trade-offs

by providing empirical evidence from a conflict-affected region. It extends existing knowledge by demonstrating how security interventions, such as military checkpoints, simultaneously produce protective and disruptive outcomes within transport systems.

Practically, the study highlights the need for improved management of checkpoint operations to reduce inefficiencies and enhance driver welfare. The identification of key impact variables such as travel time, fuel consumption, income, stress, and safety, provides a useful framework for assessing the performance of security interventions in transport contexts.

From a policy perspective, the findings underscore the importance of adopting a balanced approach to security management. While maintaining security remains a priority, policymakers must also consider the broader socio-economic consequences of checkpoint operations. Integrating efficiency, accountability, and human-centred approaches into checkpoint management will enhance both security outcomes and public trust.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has some limitations. First, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of perception and recall bias, particularly in reporting sensitive experiences such as harassment and unofficial payments. Second, the study focuses exclusively on commercial drivers, thereby excluding other key stakeholders such as passengers and security personnel, which limits a more comprehensive understanding of checkpoint operations. Third, the geographic scope is restricted to North-East Nigeria, a region characterised by insurgency and heightened security presence, which may affect the generalisability of the findings to other regions.

Future research should adopt a multi-stakeholder approach by incorporating perspectives from passengers, private vehicle owners, and security personnel to provide a more balanced analysis. In addition, the use of mixed-method research designs combining survey data with observational or administrative data is recommended to enhance reliability and reduce bias. Finally, comparative studies across different regions of Nigeria would provide deeper insights into how varying security conditions influence the impact of military checkpoints.

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