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INSTITUTIONAL AND POLICY GAPS IN REGIONAL SECURITY GOVERNANCE AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MULTILATERAL BORDER SECURITY COOPERATION IN THE LAKE CHAD BASIN (2020–2025)

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Abstract

Persistent insecurity in the Lake Chad Basin has continued despite the establishment of regional security mechanisms such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), raising concerns about the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation. Although previous studies have examined regional insecurity, counterinsurgency, and security cooperation, limited empirical attention has been given to how institutional deficiencies and policy inconsistencies jointly influence the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation, particularly during the period 2020–2025. This study examined the influence of institutional deficiencies and policy inconsistencies on the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation in the Lake Chad Basin. Guided by Regional Security Complex Theory, the study adopted a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eleven purposively selected key informants drawn from regional security institutions, policy agencies, and academia, complemented by documentary analysis. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal weak institutional coordination, fragmented operational structures, inadequate intelligence-sharing mechanisms, overlapping mandates, and resource constraints significantly constrain the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation. The study further found that policy inconsistencies, reflected in divergent border management procedures, intelligence-sharing protocols, rules of engagement, and national security priorities, weaken coordinated regional responses and create operational gaps exploited by insurgent and transnational criminal groups. The study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that institutional effectiveness and policy coherence are mutually reinforcing determinants of successful multilateral border security cooperation within an interconnected regional security complex. It concludes that strengthening institutional coordination and harmonising regional security policies is essential for improving regional security governance and achieving more effective and sustainable border security outcomes in the Lake Chad Basin.

Keywords: Regional Security Complex Theory; Multilateral Border Security Cooperation; Institutional Deficiencies; Policy Inconsistencies; Lake Chad Basin.

1. Introduction

The increasing complexity of transnational security threats, including terrorism, insurgency, arms trafficking, irregular migration, and organised crime has significantly challenged the capacity of individual

states to secure their borders. Because these threats transcend national boundaries, they cannot be effectively addressed through unilateral action alone. Consequently, multilateral border security cooperation has become a central feature of contemporary security

governance, with regional organisations establishing mechanisms for intelligence sharing, joint military operations, policy coordination, and collaborative border management. Despite these initiatives, persistent insecurity across many regions indicates that the effectiveness of multilateral security arrangements is frequently constrained by institutional weaknesses and inconsistencies in implementation (United Nations, 2023).

The Lake Chad Basin represents one of Africa's most significant transnational security hotspots. Shared by Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, the Basin has experienced prolonged insecurity arising primarily from the activities of Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). In response, regional institutions have strengthened multilateral security cooperation through mechanisms such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC). These initiatives have enhanced joint military operations, intelligence sharing, and cross-border coordination. Nevertheless, insurgent groups continue to exploit porous borders, weak institutional coordination, and differences in national security priorities among member states. The humanitarian consequences have been profound, with the conflict contributing to more than 350,000 deaths and displacing over three million people across the region (UNDP, 2023; UNHCR, 2024). These realities raise important questions regarding the effectiveness of existing multilateral security arrangements in addressing the region's evolving security challenges.

Existing studies have examined terrorism, counterinsurgency, regional security cooperation, and border governance within the Lake Chad Basin. While these studies have generated valuable insights, they have generally examined institutional deficiencies and policy inconsistencies as separate issues, with limited attention to how their interaction shapes the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation. In addition, relatively few empirical studies have focused specifically on the period 2020–2025, during which regional security cooperation evolved alongside persistent insurgency and other

cross-border security threats. This limitation represents an important gap in the literature, as understanding the relationship between institutional capacity and policy implementation is essential for explaining why multilateral security cooperation has produced uneven outcomes despite sustained regional efforts.

Statement of the Problem

Despite extensive scholarship on terrorism, insurgency, and regional security in the Lake Chad Basin, limited attention has been paid to how institutional deficiencies and policy inconsistencies interact to influence the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation. Existing studies have largely examined institutional weaknesses, policy challenges, and security outcomes as separate issues, providing only a partial explanation of why regional security frameworks have produced limited success (Adeniran & Okoro, 2022; Adelaja, 2023; Sempijja et al., 2023). Moreover, empirical evidence on the period 2020–2025 remains limited despite significant changes in insurgent tactics and renewed regional security interventions (International Crisis Group, 2023; Institute for Security Studies, 2024).

This gap is reflected in the continued insecurity across the Lake Chad Basin. Although regional mechanisms such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) were established to strengthen intelligence sharing, coordinate joint operations, and promote collective security, the region continues to experience insurgent attacks, cross-border criminality, humanitarian crises, and population displacement (UNDP, 2023; UNHCR, 2024). This persistent insecurity suggests that existing institutional arrangements have not translated into the expected security outcomes.

Available evidence indicates that weak institutional coordination, fragmented intelligence-sharing systems, overlapping mandates, inadequate funding, and divergent national security policies continue to constrain effective multilateral border security cooperation (Institute for Security Studies, 2024; Williams, 2020). However, the combined influence of

these institutional and policy factors has not been sufficiently examined within a single analytical framework. This study addresses this gap by investigating how institutional deficiencies and policy inconsistencies jointly affect the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation in the Lake Chad Basin between 2020 and 2025. In doing so, it contributes to a better understanding of the constraints on regional security governance and provides evidence to inform more coherent policy and institutional responses.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

Empirical research on regional security governance consistently demonstrates that institutional capacity is a critical determinant of the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation. Studies examining the Lake Chad Basin generally report that institutional weaknesses including fragmented organisational structures, inadequate funding, overlapping mandates, weak coordination mechanisms, and limited intelligence-sharing capacity constrain the ability of regional institutions to respond effectively to transnational security threats. For example, Adelaja (2023) found that institutional fragmentation and inadequate coordination significantly reduced the operational effectiveness of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), while Sempijja, Brito, and Moutaouakil (2023) similarly identified weak institutional capacity and governance deficiencies as major obstacles to collective security interventions in the Basin. Although these studies differ in analytical scope, they converge on the conclusion that strengthening institutional coordination is essential for improving regional security outcomes.

Despite these important contributions, the existing empirical evidence is primarily centred on counterinsurgency operations and governance reforms rather than the broader effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation. Consequently, limited empirical attention has been devoted to explaining how institutional deficiencies influence the overall

effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation within the changing security environment of the Lake Chad Basin between 2020 and 2025.

A second strand of empirical literature focuses on policy coordination among member states. Existing studies generally agree that policy coherence is fundamental to successful regional security governance because it facilitates coordinated border management, intelligence exchange, and joint military operations. Adeniran and Okoro (2022) demonstrated that divergent border security policies, inconsistent legal frameworks, and varying enforcement standards undermine coordinated regional responses, while Okafor and Bature (2023) reported that differences in rules of engagement, intelligence-sharing protocols, and national counterterrorism strategies weaken the effectiveness of joint security operations in the Lake Chad Basin. These findings collectively suggest that policy inconsistency remains a persistent obstacle to sustainable multilateral security cooperation.

However, empirical literature has largely examined policy harmonisation as an independent issue, with limited consideration of how policy inconsistencies interact with institutional weaknesses to shape the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation. Moreover, relatively few studies have examined these relationships within the specific context of the Lake Chad Basin during the period 2020–2025, when evolving insurgent tactics, renewed multinational military cooperation, and changing regional security priorities significantly altered the operational environment.

Overall, the empirical literature demonstrates broad consensus that both institutional deficiencies and policy inconsistencies undermine regional security governance. Nevertheless, these factors have generally been investigated independently, resulting in limited understanding of their combined influence on the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation. By examining the interaction between institutional deficiencies and policy inconsistencies within the Lake Chad Basin between 2020 and 2025, this study addresses an important empirical gap and

contributes to a more integrated understanding of regional security governance in one of Africa's most complex transnational security environments.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) developed by Barry Buzan (1991) and further refined by Buzan and Wæver (2003). The theory provides an appropriate analytical framework for understanding how geographically proximate states respond collectively to shared security threats. RSCT argues that security is regionally clustered because neighbouring states are interconnected through geographical proximity, historical interactions, political relationships, and strategic interdependence. Consequently, the security of one state cannot be analysed in isolation from that of its neighbours, as threats frequently transcend national boundaries and generate mutual security vulnerabilities (Buzan, 1991; Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

At the core of RSCT is the concept of the regional security complex, which refers to a group of neighbouring states whose security concerns are sufficiently interconnected that the actions or insecurity of one state significantly influence the security of others within the region. While external powers may affect regional security dynamics, the theory maintains that the principal sources of insecurity, as well as the most effective responses, are primarily regional. This perspective has become increasingly relevant as contemporary security threats including terrorism, violent extremism, arms trafficking, irregular migration, and organised crime operate across national borders and challenge the capacity of individual states to respond independently (Collins, 2022; Floyd, 2023).

The Lake Chad Basin exemplifies the assumptions of RSCT. Shared by Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, the region has experienced persistent insecurity arising from Boko Haram, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), arms trafficking, smuggling, and other forms of transnational criminal activity. The transboundary nature of these threats has necessitated collective security responses through regional

institutions such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC). These institutions facilitate intelligence sharing, joint military operations, coordinated border management, and broader security cooperation among member states. Their continued relevance reflects the regional interdependence that lies at the centre of RSCT and underscores the necessity of multilateral cooperation in addressing shared security challenges.

Although RSCT has been criticised for adopting a predominantly state-centric perspective and for offering limited explanation of institutional performance and policy implementation, these limitations do not diminish its suitability for the present study. Rather, they highlight the need to complement the theory with empirical analysis of the institutional and policy conditions that shape regional security outcomes. This study therefore extends the explanatory value of RSCT by examining how institutional deficiencies and policy inconsistencies influence the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation within an interdependent regional security complex.

The relevance of RSCT to this study lies in its ability to explain why effective border security in the Lake Chad Basin depends on coordinated regional action rather than unilateral national responses. From the perspective of the theory, institutional deficiencies—including weak coordination mechanisms, fragmented operational structures, inadequate intelligence-sharing systems, overlapping mandates, and resource constraints reduce the collective capacity of regional security institutions to address transnational threats. Similarly, policy inconsistencies reflected in divergent border management procedures, rules of engagement, intelligence-sharing protocols, and national security priorities weaken policy coherence and undermine coordinated regional responses. These institutional and policy weaknesses ultimately reduce the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation by limiting the collective action required to manage security challenges within an interconnected regional security complex.

Accordingly, RSCT provides a coherent analytical lens for explaining the relationship between multilateral relations and border security in the Lake Chad Basin. Its emphasis on regional interdependence, collective security, and coordinated responses aligns directly with the objectives of this study and provides a strong theoretical foundation for analysing how institutional deficiencies and policy inconsistencies shape the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation between 2020 and 2025.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine how institutional deficiencies and policy inconsistencies influence the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation in the Lake Chad Basin between 2020 and 2025. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it facilitates an in-depth understanding of institutional processes, policy dynamics, and regional security governance within their real-world context. The Lake Chad Basin was selected as the case because it represents one of Africa's most significant regional security complexes, where transnational threats such as terrorism, insurgency, arms trafficking, and cross-border criminality require coordinated multilateral responses.

Data were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eleven purposively selected key informants drawn from the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), the Nigerian Armed Forces, the Nigeria Immigration Service, the Nigeria Customs Service, the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), research institutions, and universities with expertise in regional security governance. Purposive sampling was adopted because it enabled the selection of participants with specialized knowledge and practical experience relevant to multilateral border security cooperation in the Lake Chad Basin.

Secondary data comprised official policy documents, communiqués, institutional reports, strategic frameworks, and peer-reviewed academic literature relating to regional security governance, border security cooperation, and counterinsurgency efforts in the Lake Chad Basin. The integration of documentary evidence with interview data enhanced the credibility of the study through methodological triangulation, enabling the verification and corroboration of information obtained from different sources.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts and documentary evidence were systematically coded to identify recurring themes relating to institutional deficiencies, policy inconsistencies, and the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation. The emerging themes were interpreted in relation to the study objectives and the analytical perspectives provided by Regional Security Complex Theory and Neoliberal Institutionalism. This approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the institutional and policy factors shaping regional security cooperation in the Lake Chad Basin.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings demonstrate that institutional deficiencies significantly undermine the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation in the Lake Chad Basin. Weak institutional coordination, fragmented operational structures, inadequate intelligence-sharing mechanisms, overlapping mandates, and resource constraints reduce the capacity of regional security institutions to coordinate effective responses to transnational threats. These findings suggest that the existence of regional institutions alone does not guarantee effective security cooperation; rather, institutional effectiveness depends on the capacity of participating institutions to coordinate operations, share intelligence, mobilize resources, and implement collective security strategies efficiently.

The findings are consistent with Adelaja (2023), who identified institutional fragmentation, inadequate funding, overlapping mandates, and weak intelligence-sharing mechanisms as major impediments to regional

security operations in the Lake Chad Basin. Similarly, Sempijja, Brito, and Moutaouakil (2023) found that weak institutional capacity and poor coordination among security actors undermine regional security governance. The findings further support the governance perspective advanced by Pierre and Peters (2020), which emphasizes that effective governance depends on the ability of institutions to coordinate actors, resources, and decision-making processes toward common objectives. They also reinforce the assumptions of Regional Security Complex Theory (Buzan & Wæver, 2003), which argues that geographically interconnected security threats require coordinated regional responses. Within the Lake Chad Basin, institutional weaknesses reduce the collective capacity of member states to respond effectively to insurgency and other transnational security threats. Consequently, strengthening institutional coordination, improving intelligence-sharing mechanisms, clarifying operational mandates, and ensuring sustainable resource mobilization are essential for enhancing the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation.

The study also found that policy inconsistencies among member states significantly weaken multilateral border security cooperation. Differences in national security priorities, border management regulations, intelligence-sharing procedures, legal frameworks, and operational protocols limit the ability of member states to coordinate joint security operations effectively. These inconsistencies create operational gaps that are exploited by insurgent groups and transnational criminal networks, thereby undermining collective efforts to address terrorism, arms trafficking, smuggling, and other cross-border security threats.

This finding corroborates the work of Adeniran and Okoro (2022), who reported that divergent border security policies and inconsistent legal frameworks weaken regional security integration and coordinated border management. It also supports the findings of Okafor and Bature (2023), who observed that differences in operational procedures, intelligence-sharing protocols, and national counterterrorism

strategies reduce the effectiveness of joint security operations within the Lake Chad region. From a theoretical perspective, the findings align with Neoliberal Institutionalism (Keohane, 1984; Keohane & Nye, 1977), which maintains that institutions facilitate cooperation only when member states comply with agreed rules and commitments. Likewise, Regional Security Complex Theory suggests that because security threats within the Lake Chad Basin transcend national borders, fragmented policy responses by individual states inevitably weaken regional security outcomes. The findings therefore underscore the importance of greater policy harmonization, standardized operational procedures, and stronger political commitment among member states as prerequisites for effective multilateral border security cooperation.

The findings demonstrate that institutional deficiencies and policy inconsistencies are the principal factors limiting the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation in the Lake Chad Basin. Evidence from interviews and documentary analysis indicates that weak institutional coordination, fragmented operational structures, inadequate intelligence-sharing mechanisms, overlapping institutional mandates, resource constraints, and inconsistencies in policy implementation continue to undermine regional security governance. These weaknesses reduce the capacity of regional institutions to coordinate timely and effective responses to transnational threats, thereby creating operational gaps that are exploited by Boko Haram, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), and other cross-border criminal networks.

With respect to institutional deficiencies, the findings reveal that the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation depends not merely on the existence of regional institutions but on their operational capacity to coordinate security actors, mobilize resources, facilitate intelligence sharing, and implement agreed security strategies. This finding supports Adelaja (2023), who identified institutional fragmentation, overlapping mandates, inadequate funding, and weak intelligence-sharing mechanisms as

major impediments to regional security operations in the Lake Chad Basin. Similarly, Sempijja, Brito, and Moutaouakil (2023) found that weak institutional capacity and poor coordination undermine collective security governance, while Pierre and Peters (2020) argued that effective governance depends on the ability of institutions to coordinate actors and resources towards shared objectives. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that institutional effectiveness is a prerequisite for sustaining multilateral border security cooperation within a complex regional security environment.

The findings further show that policy inconsistencies among member states significantly weaken regional security cooperation. Variations in border management regulations, intelligence-sharing procedures, legal frameworks, operational protocols, and national security priorities reduce policy coherence and limit the effectiveness of joint security operations. Although member states participate in common regional security arrangements through the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), inconsistent implementation of agreed policies continues to constrain collective security outcomes. These findings are consistent with Adeniran and Okoro (2022), who found that divergent border security policies and inconsistent legal frameworks weaken regional security integration, and with Okafor and Bature (2023), who reported that differences in operational procedures and intelligence-sharing protocols undermine joint security operations in the Lake Chad Basin.

The findings also provide empirical support for Regional Security Complex Theory. Consistent with the theory's central proposition, the transnational nature of insecurity in the Lake Chad Basin makes unilateral security responses inadequate and necessitates sustained regional cooperation. However, this study demonstrates that regional interdependence alone does not guarantee effective security outcomes. Rather, the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation depends on the institutional capacity of regional organisations and the ability of member states

to implement coherent and coordinated security policies. Institutional deficiencies and policy inconsistencies therefore weaken the collective action required to address shared security threats within the regional security complex.

These findings contribute to the literature by integrating institutional deficiencies and policy inconsistencies within a single analytical framework, demonstrating that their interaction—not merely their independent effects—shapes the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation. This provides a more comprehensive explanation of regional security governance in the Lake Chad Basin and extends existing scholarship on security cooperation in Africa.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined how institutional deficiencies and policy inconsistencies influence the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation in the Lake Chad Basin between 2020 and 2025. The findings demonstrate that the persistence of transnational security threats in the region cannot be attributed solely to the existence of insurgent and criminal networks but is also shaped by weaknesses in regional security governance. In particular, weak institutional coordination, fragmented operational structures, inadequate intelligence-sharing mechanisms, overlapping mandates, resource constraints, and inconsistent policy implementation continue to undermine the capacity of regional security institutions to deliver effective collective responses.

Drawing on Regional Security Complex Theory, the study demonstrates that the interdependent nature of security within the Lake Chad Basin makes effective multilateral cooperation indispensable. However, regional interdependence alone does not guarantee successful security outcomes. Rather, the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation depends on the institutional capacity of regional organisations and the ability of member states to implement coherent and coordinated security policies.

The study contributes to the literature by integrating institutional deficiencies and policy inconsistencies within a single analytical framework, demonstrating that their interaction provides a more comprehensive explanation of the effectiveness of multilateral border security cooperation than approaches that examine these factors independently. Beyond its theoretical contribution, the study offers practical evidence to support policy reforms aimed at strengthening institutional coordination, enhancing intelligence-sharing mechanisms, harmonising border security policies, and reinforcing regional cooperation among the Lake Chad Basin states. These measures are essential for improving regional security governance and achieving more effective and sustainable border security outcomes

The findings have important implications for regional security governance in the Lake Chad Basin. First, regional institutions should strengthen institutional

coordination by improving intelligence-sharing mechanisms, integrating operational command structures, clarifying organisational mandates, and ensuring sustainable financial and logistical support for joint security operations. These measures would enhance operational efficiency and reduce the institutional fragmentation that continues to undermine collective security efforts.

Second, member states should prioritise policy harmonisation through the adoption of common border management frameworks, standardised intelligence-sharing protocols, harmonised rules of engagement, and coordinated counterterrorism strategies. Greater policy coherence would strengthen collective responses to terrorism, insurgency, arms trafficking, and other transnational threats while reducing the operational gaps that insurgent and criminal networks continue to exploit across national borders.

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