



ILLICIT TRADE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON NATIONAL SECURITY: AN ASSESSMENT OF SEME-KRAKE JOINT BORDER POST

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ABSTRACT

Studi ini meneliti dampak perdagangan ilegal terhadap keamanan nasional, dengan fokus pada Pos Perbatasan Bersama Seme-Krake antara Nigeria dan Republik Benin. Menggunakan teori jaringan sebagai kerangka teoretis, studi ini menganalisis secara komprehensif interaksi kompleks antara perdagangan ilegal dan keamanan perbatasan di wilayah ini. Metode penelitian kualitatif digunakan untuk mencapai tujuan studi, termasuk wawancara dengan pejabat perbatasan, analisis dokumen, dan analisis jaringan. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan ancaman signifikan yang ditimbulkan oleh perdagangan ilegal terhadap keamanan nasional Nigeria, menyoroti banyaknya barang ilegal, tantangan yang dihadapi oleh badan perbatasan, serta dampak yang lebih luas terhadap stabilitas ekonomi, kesehatan masyarakat, dan keamanan politik. Studi ini menyimpulkan dengan merekomendasikan peningkatan kerja sama antar badan perbatasan, peningkatan investasi dalam infrastruktur perbatasan, dan penerapan teknologi canggih untuk memerangi perdagangan ilegal secara efektif.

This study examines the implications of illicit trade on national security, focusing on the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post between Nigeria and Benin Republic. Employing network theory as a theoretical framework, the study comprehensively analyzes the complex interplay between illicit trade and border security in this region. Qualitative research methods were used to achieve the study's objectives, including interviews with border officials, document analysis, and network analysis. The findings revealed the significant threat posed by illicit trade to Nigeria's national security, highlighting the prevalence of various illicit goods, the challenges faced by border agencies, and the broader implications for economic stability, public health, and political security. The study concludes by recommending enhanced cooperation between border agencies, increased investment in border infrastructure, and the implementation of advanced technologies to combat illicit trade effectively.

1. INTRODUCTION

Illicit trade has become a global phenomenon, facilitated by transnational organized criminal networks operating across borders. These networks exploit vulnerabilities in international supply chains and utilize advanced technologies to evade law enforcement. They engage in a wide range of illicit activities, including drug trafficking, arms smuggling, human trafficking, and the trade of counterfeit goods. These networks often have deep-rooted connections and substantial financial resources, enabling them to successfully evade law enforcement efforts and exert considerable influence over entire geographical regions (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2023). They employ sophisticated techniques, such as encrypted communication, hidden compartments, and bribery, to conceal their activities and evade detection. These networks often have global reach, operating across multiple countries and continents.

The illicit trade of drugs, weapons, counterfeit products, and human beings has serious consequences for national security, public health, and economic stability. Drugs can lead to addiction, overdose, and the spread of infectious diseases across the globe (National Security Council).

The Seme-Krake Joint Border Post, which is strategically situated on the border between Nigeria and Benin with a high volume of trade is faced with the challenge of illicit trade. This study identifies the type of illicit goods that are trafficked through the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post; assesses the various and multifarious challenges that border agencies encounter in their efforts to combat illicit trade activities at the border post; explores the far-reaching implications of such illicit trade on national security, with a concentrated and focused examination of the economic, social, and political consequences that may

arise as a result; and identify potential and feasible strategies that can be employed to effectively address and mitigate the issue of illicit trade at the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post. By understanding these factors, policymakers can develop more effective countermeasures to combat illicit trade and protect national interests.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS

2.1. Conceptualization of Illicit Trade

Illicit trade refers to the illegal movement of goods and services across borders in violation of domestic or international laws. It encompasses a wide range of activities, including drug trafficking which is the illegal trade of controlled substances, such as narcotics and psychotropic drugs. This includes the production, distribution, and sale of illegal drugs, which can have serious health (International Health Partners, n.d.) and social consequences (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2023).

Another prominent form of illicit trade is arms trafficking which is the illegal trade of weapons, ammunition, and explosives. This can contribute to conflicts, violence, and human rights abuses (Reemtsma - Smuggling & Product Piracy, 2023).

Similarly, human trafficking which is the exploitation of individuals for labor or sexual purposes is also a form of illicit trade. This is a serious human rights violation that can have devastating consequences for victims (Interpol, 2022).

The trade in counterfeit goods is another dimension of illicit trade, involving the production and sale of fake or substandard products. This illegal activity harms consumers, undermines legitimate businesses, and reduces government revenues. Wildlife trafficking, which involves the illegal trade of endangered species and their derivatives, threatens biodiversity and contributes to environmental degradation (International Fund for Animal Welfare, n.d.).

Illicit financial activities like money laundering, where illegally obtained funds are disguised to conceal their origins, also fall under illicit trade. Money laundering enables criminals to hide their activities and evade law enforcement (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2021). Additionally, sanctions evasion—where entities circumvent economic sanctions imposed on individuals or countries—undermines international efforts to promote peace, security, and human rights.

Lastly, intellectual property theft, which involves the unauthorized use or exploitation of intellectual property such as patents, trademarks, and copyrights, can damage businesses and stifle innovation (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2021).

Transnational organized crime networks play a significant role in facilitating these illicit trade activities. These networks operate across borders, utilizing their resources and connections to evade law

enforcement and move illicit goods. Research by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) underscores the growing sophistication and reach of these criminal networks (GI-TOC, 2021; UNODC, 2023).

2.2. Border Security

Border security refers to the measures taken to protect a country's borders from unauthorized entry or exit, as well as to prevent the smuggling of illicit goods. It involves a range of activities, including physical barriers such as the construction of fences, walls, or other physical barriers to control border crossings. These barriers can help to deter unauthorized entry and facilitate the detection of illicit activities (World Customs Organization, 2020).

It also involves border patrols such as the deployment of law enforcement personnel to monitor borders and intercept unauthorized individuals or goods. Border patrols can provide a visible deterrent to illicit trade and help to identify and apprehend smugglers.

It involves technology such as the use of surveillance equipment, such as cameras, sensors, and drones, to enhance border security. Technology can improve the ability of border agencies to detect and respond to threats (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2019).

It involves international cooperation such as collaboration with neighboring countries to share information and coordinate border control efforts. International cooperation can help to address transnational organized crime and prevent illicit goods from crossing borders.

It involves risk assessment such as identification and prioritization of potential threats to border security. Risk assessment can help to allocate resources effectively and focus on the most significant risks.

It involves border management systems such as the Implementation of advanced technology systems to facilitate the flow of legitimate trade while enhancing border security. These systems can help to streamline customs procedures and improve the efficiency of border operations. Border security is essential for protecting a country's sovereignty, national security, and economic well-being. It helps to prevent the entry of criminals, terrorists, and illicit goods, while also regulating trade and immigration (Interpol., 2018).

2.3. Empirical Studies

Existing research on illicit trade and border security provides valuable insights into the challenges and implications associated with this phenomenon. Studies by various scholars and organizations have highlighted the role of transnational organized crime networks in facilitating illicit trade, the economic costs of illicit activities, and the impact on public health and security. Previous research has also examined the

effectiveness of different border control measures, including joint border posts, in combating illicit trade. Key studies and their contributions include the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2023) World Drug Report 2023 provides a comprehensive overview of global drug trends, including illicit trade, and highlights the challenges faced by governments in combating this issue. The UNODC report utilizes a variety of methodologies, including documentary analysis, and data analysis, to gather information on illicit drug markets and trends.

International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) (2022) World Crime Report (2022) analyzes global crime trends, including illicit trade, and identifies emerging threats. Interpol's report relies on data collected from its member countries, as well as intelligence analysis and expert assessments. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) (2021) work on Transnational Organized Crime provides an overview of transnational organized crime, including its structure, methods, and impact. The GI-TOC report draws on a range of sources, including academic research, government reports, and media analysis, to provide a comprehensive understanding of transnational organized crime.

World Customs Organization (WCO). (2020) report on the Global Threat Assessment of Customs. Brussels assesses the global threat posed by illicit trade to customs administrations and provides recommendations for combating it.

The WCO report is based on data collected from customs administrations around the world, as well as expert assessments and analysis. These studies emphasize the significant role of transnational organized crime networks in facilitating illicit trade, the economic costs of illicit trade, including revenue loss, increased costs of law enforcement, and negative impacts on legitimate businesses, the impact of illicit trade on public health and security, such as the spread of infectious diseases and the funding of terrorism, the effectiveness of different border control measures in combating illicit trade. They highlight enhanced border security measures, such as increased investment in technology and personnel, improved international cooperation to combat transnational organized crime, addressing the underlying factors that contribute to illicit trade, such as poverty and inequality, and promoting sustainable development to reduce incentives for illicit activities.

Despite the valuable contributions of these studies, there are still gaps that this paper aims to fill. For example, this study focuses specifically on the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post, which is a major land border post in West-Africa, providing a more in-depth analysis of the challenges and opportunities in this region. Additionally, this paper examines the implications of illicit trade on national security in greater detail, considering both economic and non-economic factors. It contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing a case study of a specific

border post between Nigeria and the Benin Republic. The focus on the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post between the two countries allows for a more detailed analysis of the challenges and opportunities faced by border agencies in this region, explores its broader implications for national security, and crafts effective strategies for combating illicit trade

2.4. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that enables the proper understanding of illicit trade and its implications on national security: an assessment of the Seme-Krake joint border post is network theory. Network theory is a framework for analyzing the structure and dynamics of complex systems represented as networks. It provides a set of techniques for studying the interactions and relationships between the components (nodes) of a system, which can be individuals, organizations, or even abstract entities like ideas or concepts (What Is Network Theory? 2023). The theory constitutes an appropriate theoretical framework that meticulously examines both the structural composition and the dynamic processes inherent within social networks. It enables a comprehensive understanding of the interactions among various entities within those networks (What Is Network Theory? 2023).

The advocates and proponents of network theory encompass a diverse array of scholars, including sociologists, anthropologists, and economists, all of whom have diligently engaged in the rigorous study of an extensive range of social phenomena. Among the pivotal figures who have played a significant role in the evolution and development of network theory are Stanley Milgram, Mark Granovetter, and Barry Wellman

2.5. Relevance of Network Theory to the Study

Network theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the complex interplay between illicit trade and border security at the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post. By analyzing the structure and dynamics of social networks, network theory facilitates the identification of key actors, the flow of information, and vulnerabilities within illicit trade networks.

Network analysis can help to identify key players and vulnerabilities within illicit trade networks. By mapping the relationships between different actors involved in illicit trade, such as smugglers, traffickers, and corrupt officials, network theory can reveal central figures and weak links that can be exploited to disrupt the network. For example, network analysis can identify key individuals or organizations that are critical to the functioning of a smuggling network, allowing border agencies to focus their efforts on disrupting their activities.

Network theory can also be used to examine the flow of information within illicit trade networks. By understanding how information is shared and disseminated, border agencies can identify potential

targets for disruption. For instance, network analysis can reveal the communication channels used by smugglers to coordinate their activities or the sources of intelligence that can be exploited to undermine their operations.

Furthermore, network theory can help to identify vulnerabilities within illicit trade networks, such as weak links or central nodes. By targeting these vulnerabilities, border agencies can disrupt the operations of these networks. For example, network analysis can identify key individuals or organizations that are critical to the functioning of a smuggling network, allowing border agencies to focus their efforts on dismantling their activities.

In addition to its applications in identifying key actors, information flow, and vulnerabilities, network theory can also inform the development of effective countermeasures against illicit trade. By understanding the structure and dynamics of these networks, border agencies can design strategies to disrupt their operations and dismantle their infrastructure. For instance, network analysis can help to identify the most effective ways to target key players, disrupt supply chains, and dismantle smuggling networks

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts a qualitative method to achieve its objectives. To gain a comprehensive perspective, documentary analysis was meticulously performed, which entailed a thorough examination of a diverse array of sources that encompassed official governmental reports, a variety of news articles, official records and meticulously maintained databases that are managed by border agencies alongside other relevant organizations that deal with these issues and an extensive body of academic literature that pertains to the intricacies of illicit trade, border security, and the specific dynamics of the Seme-Krake region. The wealth of information contained within these documents furnished invaluable context, rich historical data, and profound insights into the overarching trends as well as the multifaceted challenges that are linked to the phenomenon of illicit trade.

To further enrich the data pool, semi-structured interviews were systematically carried out with border officials stationed at the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post, aiming to collect firsthand accounts and detailed information regarding the specific types of illicit goods that are trafficked across borders, the myriad challenges that border agencies encounter in their daily operations, and the strategic measures that are implemented to effectively combat the issue of illicit trade. These interviews were conducted in the English language and subsequently transcribed and coded thematically for thorough analysis. The approach that was employed in this study served to facilitate the triangulation of evidence, thus yielding a more extensive and robust comprehension of the research topic at hand concerning the pressing issues

of illicit trade and border security at the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post.

3.1. Illicit Trade through the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post

Based on a series of in-depth interviews that were meticulously conducted with about ten randomly selected senior customs officers stationed at the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post 2024, a comprehensive array of illicit goods was systematically identified and documented. The insights gathered from these experienced officers underscore the urgent challenges and shifting patterns in smuggling activities that impact not only the economy but also public health and national security.

Assistant Comptroller Adetayo Olusegun drew attention to the significant rise in the trafficking of illicit drugs through the border. His observations indicate that smugglers have diversified their portfolios, moving beyond traditional narcotics to include counterfeit medicines, synthetic opioids, and other high-risk substances. The influx of misused prescription medications suggests a worrying trend where traffickers exploit the increasing demand for certain drugs, with potentially devastating consequences for public health. This calls for a more nuanced approach to drug interdiction, one that anticipates the evolving strategies of smugglers.

Chief Superintendent of Customs (CSC) Olanrewaju Olaogu, with a deep understanding of the terrain, highlighted the prevalence of food smuggling. According to him, the interception of items such as parboiled rice, spaghetti, and vegetable oils is a persistent issue, reflecting an entrenched network of illegal trade. Beyond economic concerns, his insights raise crucial questions about food safety and the health implications for consumers who may unknowingly purchase substandard products. This reality demands a holistic strategy that not only targets the supply chains of these goods but also engages with local communities to understand the underlying drivers of such trade.

Superintendent of Customs (SC) Asimi Kehinde brought into focus the pervasive smuggling of premium motor spirit (PMS), a trade that inflicts deep economic wounds on the nation. The illegal movement of PMS across borders distorts local fuel markets, creates artificial shortages, and contributes to revenue losses that have far-reaching effects on economic stability. The persistent nature of this trade suggests that border enforcement must extend beyond seizures to tackling the root causes, including market distortions and the incentives that fuel smuggling.

Further compounding the challenges, SC Umar Dalhatu discussed the troubling presence of weapons and explosive devices being smuggled across the border. His account serves as a stark reminder that the Seme-Krake corridor is more than just a transit point for economic goods; it is also a potential gateway for dangerous materials that threaten

national security. Addressing this issue requires not only enhanced physical border controls but also intelligence-driven operations that can pre-emptively disrupt such networks.

SC Mani Zomi's observations on the trade in counterfeit medicines shed light on another critical dimension of illicit trade. The flow of fake drugs, often indistinguishable from genuine medications, poses severe health risks to unsuspecting consumers and undermines the credibility of the healthcare system. His insights suggest that tackling this challenge goes beyond border interdictions; it demands a robust regulatory framework that can trace and disrupt the supply chains of counterfeit products before they reach the market.

SC Olili Ugochukwu added that despite intensified efforts, the trafficking of narcotics such as cannabis sativa remains a significant challenge. His experience suggests that while enforcement has achieved notable successes, traffickers have adapted, finding new methods and routes to continue their activities. This observation underscores the need for adaptive strategies that are as dynamic as the threats they seek to counter.

Assistant Superintendent of Customs (ASC I) Adamu Joshua and ASC II Adebayo Nahim highlighted a surge in synthetic opioid trafficking, noting that these substances are increasingly prevalent at the border. The rise of synthetic opioids presents a particularly daunting challenge, as these substances are often more potent and harder to detect than traditional narcotics. Their insights point to the necessity for advanced detection technologies and international cooperation to stem the flow of these dangerous drugs.

Collectively, the accounts from these Customs officers reveal a multifaceted threat landscape at the Seme-Krake border, where economic crimes intersect with health and security risks. The issues extend far beyond smuggling interdictions; they demand a comprehensive approach that addresses the systemic factors enabling these illegal trades. The question now is whether current strategies can evolve rapidly enough to meet the escalating complexities or whether a new paradigm is needed, one that integrates technology, intelligence, and community engagement to secure the border and protect the nation's future.

In conjunction with the various prominent forms of illicit goods identified, the interviews conducted also yielded critical information regarding the intricate trafficking routes and networks that facilitate this illegal trade. Smugglers typically employ a myriad of methods to transport these illicit goods across the border, utilizing not only vehicles and boats but also well-trodden footpaths that are less monitored. Also, transnational organized crime groups play an instrumental role in orchestrating and facilitating this illicit trade within the region, as they meticulously coordinate smuggling operations while deftly

exploiting vulnerabilities in border security measures that are meant to deter such activities (The Destructive Impact of Illicit Trade and the Illegal Economy on Economic Growth, Sustainable Development, and Global Security, n.d.).

3.2. Data Analysis

The questionnaire distributed and responses obtained were further analyzed as follows.

Section A: Impact of Illicit Trade on National Security

- Illicit Trade is Prevalent at the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post
 - Seventy-five percent - 75% (30 respondents) agreed that illicit trade is prevalent, indicating that most participants recognize the scale of the issue.
 - Only five percent - 5% (2 respondents) were neutral, whereas twenty percent - 20% (8 respondents) disagreed.
- Illicit Trade Poses a Significant Threat to National Security
 - An overwhelming eighty-seven and half percent - 87.5% (35 respondents) strongly agreed or agreed, indicating a nearly unanimous belief that illicit trade presents a significant threat to national security.
 - Five percent-5% (2 respondents) were neutral, and seven and half percent - 7.5% (3 respondents) disagreed.
- Strong Link Between Illicit Trade and Organized Crime
 - In a similar vein, eighty-seven and half percent - 87.5% (35 respondents) agreed that there is a significant connection between illicit trade and organized crime.
 - Five percent - 5% (2 respondents) were neutral, and seven and half percent - 7.5% (3 respondents) disagreed. (Table II & See Fig. 1a).

Section B: Law Enforcement and Illicit Trade Prevention

- Law Enforcement Officers are Adequately Trained
 - Only twenty-five percent - 25% (10 respondents) agreed that officers are adequately trained, whereas a significant seventy percent - 70% (28 respondents) disagreed, indicating a common belief in inadequate training.
 - Five percent - 5% (2 respondents) were neutral.
- Integrity Issues Among Law Enforcement
 - Seventy percent - 70% (28 respondents) agreed that integrity issues among law enforcement officers contribute to the persistence of illicit trade, highlighting a significant concern about corruption.

- Five percent - 5% (2 respondents) were neutral, and twenty-five percent - 25% (10 respondents) disagreed.
- Strengthening Integrity of Law Enforcement Can Reduce Illicit Trade
 - Eighty-seven and half percent - 87.5% (35 respondents) agreed that enhancing integrity would significantly reduce illicit trade.
 - No respondents were neutral, and twelve and half percent - 12.5% (5 respondents) disagreed.
- Insufficient Inter-agency Cooperation
 - Eighty-five percent - 85% (34 respondents) agreed that there is insufficient cooperation between agencies at the border, emphasizing the need for stronger collaboration.
 - Two and half percent - 2.5% (1 respondent) was neutral, and twelve and half - 12.5% (5 respondents) disagreed.
- Limited Use of Modern Technology
 - Seventy five percent - 75% (30 respondents) agreed that modern technology for monitoring and preventing illicit trade is limited, suggesting the need for technological upgrades.
 - Ten percent - 10% (4 respondents) were neutral, while fifteen percent - 15% (6 respondents) disagreed (Table II & Fig. 1b).

From Table III (see in appendix), between 2020 and 2024, a total of five hundred and sixty-nine (569) seizures were recorded by the NCS at the Seme-Krake Border, reflecting the consistent efforts of officers to uphold public health and national security. Key intercepted items included 65 weapons, 89 counterfeit goods, 60 explosive devices, 75 synthetic opioids, 85 narcotics, 97 cases of premium motor spirit, and 98 instances of unhealthy foods. These seizures underscore the commitment to combating illicit trade and protecting the border, as showing the bar chart above (Fig.II).

Thus, unhealthy foods such as rice and spaghetti were the most frequently smuggled goods, accounting for 17.22% of the total seizures. This highlights the persistent challenge of food smuggling, possibly driven by local demand for cheaper or prohibited imports. Premium Motor Spirit (PMS), commonly known as petrol, ranks just behind unhealthy foods, representing 17.05% of total interceptions. The smuggling of PMS is often linked to fuel subsidies and price differentials between Nigeria and neighbouring countries, making it a lucrative target for smugglers. Counterfeit goods accounted for 15.64% of the total interceptions. This highlights the rampant issue of fake products entering the market, which can harm consumers and damage legitimate businesses. (See Fig. III)

Narcotics, representing 14.94% of the interceptions, reflect ongoing concerns about drug

trafficking. The rise of synthetic opioids and other illicit substances presents a serious challenge for enforcement agencies. Synthetic opioids alone make up 13.18% of the seizures, further reinforcing the trend of increased drug trafficking in the region. These dangerous drugs have severe public health and safety implications. Weapons smuggling accounted for 11.42% of the total, indicating ongoing security threats at the border. The trafficking of arms poses significant risks to national security, fuelling violence and political instability. Lastly, explosive devices, making up 10.54% of the interceptions, signal a concerning trend of potential terrorism-related activities and the need for heightened vigilance at the border. (See Fig. III)

3.3. Challenges Faced by Border Agencies

Based on the extensive interviews that were meticulously conducted with various customs officials stationed at the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post 2024, it has become abundantly clear that the border agencies operating within the confines of the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post are confronted with a multitude of significant and complex challenges that severely impede their efforts in combating the pervasive issue of illicit trade. These formidable challenges can be systematically categorized into three primary areas that require urgent attention: the severe limitations imposed by resource constraints, the deeply entrenched issue of corruption, and the extraordinarily sophisticated tactics that are meticulously employed by transnational organized crime networks that operate with a high degree of sophistication and cunning.

Resource constraints represent a particularly significant and formidable obstacle that border agencies must navigate as they strive to fulfill their mandates effectively. The glaring lack of adequate personnel, modern equipment, and sufficient funding can severely hinder their overall capability to monitor and control the border with the level of efficacy that is required. When border posts are chronically understaffed, compounded by the challenges posed by outdated technology and a scarcity of essential resources, it becomes exceedingly difficult for border officials to detect, intercept, and address the flow of illicit goods that continuously threaten the integrity of national security (Authors' elaboration based on the information from the Interviewees).

Corruption emerges yet another major and deeply concerning challenge that border agencies find themselves grappling with daily. The insidious practices of bribery, extortion, and collusion with smugglers can significantly undermine the integrity and effectiveness of border officials, consequently facilitating the illicit trade that they are tasked with combating. In many instances, smugglers may resort to offering substantial bribes to border officials in exchange for the illicit passage of goods, while at the same time, border officials may engage in extortion, demanding money from individuals or businesses as a

means of perpetuating corrupt practices. Furthermore, the dangerous collusion that can develop between border officials and smugglers creates a deeply entrenched network of complicity that is exceedingly difficult to dismantle and eradicate (Authors' elaboration based on the information from the Interviewees).

Transnational organized crime networks are known to employ extraordinarily sophisticated tactics that are specifically designed to evade detection and facilitate the seamless flow of illicit trade across borders. These criminal networks often possess access to advanced technologies that include but are not limited to, drones, encrypted communication devices, and cleverly concealed compartments, all of which can be strategically utilized to hide illicit goods and avoid detection by law enforcement agencies. Additionally, they may resort to employing complex and intricate smuggling methods, such as using legitimate trade shipments as deceptive cover for transporting illicit goods or exploiting vulnerabilities and weaknesses that exist within border infrastructure to their advantage (Authors' elaboration based on the information from Interviewees)

3.4. Economic Implications of Illicit Trade

Based on the comprehensive interviews that were meticulously conducted with customs officials stationed at the bustling Seme-Krake Joint Border Post 2024, several critical implications of illicit trade on national security were thoroughly identified and analyzed, revealing a complex interplay of factors. These implications can be categorized into three main areas: the economic, social, and political ramifications stemming from illicit trade activities.

When it comes to the economic implications of illicit trade at Seme-Krake Joint Border Post, it is crucial to recognize that such activities can drastically diminish government revenue by redirecting essential resources away from legitimate economic endeavors, which are vital for the overall functioning of the state. For instance, the rampant smuggling of counterfeit goods poses a significant threat to legitimate businesses, ultimately eroding the tax revenue that governments rely on, which can consequently lead to a substantial decline in their overall financial resources (Authors' elaboration based on the information from Interviewees).

Additionally, another pressing economic implication that arises from illicit trade is the noticeable reduction in investment opportunities at the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post. The pervasive uncertainty and instability that illicit trade fosters serve as a significant deterrent for potential investors, resulting in a marked decrease in investment activities in the area. This decline in investment severely hinders economic growth and development, as businesses may become increasingly reluctant to commit their capital in an environment fraught with

risks of disruptions caused by various illicit activities (The Destructive Impact of Illicit Trade and the Illegal Economy on Economic Growth, Sustainable Development, and Global Security, n.d.).

Furthermore, the issue of economic instability emerges as yet another detrimental consequence of illicit trade at the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post, which can wreak havoc on the economy by causing disruptions in supply chains, inflating operational costs for businesses, and ultimately undermining consumer confidence. For example, the illicit smuggling of drugs and weapons can incite violence and create an atmosphere of instability, which, in turn, can dissuade potential investors and significantly disrupt the normal flow of economic activities within the region (Authors' elaboration based on the information from Interviewees).

3.5. Social Implications of Illicit Trade

The social implications at Seme-Krake Joint Authors' elaboration based on the information from Border Post derived from the perspectives and agreements of those interviewed regarding illicit trade indicate that it is a significant factor contributing to the escalation of criminal activities within society. Illicit trade is intricately connected to rising crime rates, primarily because criminal organizations frequently participate in a myriad of other illegal endeavors, including but not limited to extortion, the trafficking of illegal drugs, and the exploitation of individuals through human trafficking. This disturbing situation can foster an environment characterized by fear and insecurity among community members, consequently paving the way for social unrest and a noticeable deterioration in the overall quality of life experienced by the residents.

The social ramifications associated with illicit trade extend to posing substantial public health hazards at the bustling Seme-Krake Joint Border Post. The covert transportation of illegal drugs alongside counterfeit medications can introduce severe dangers to the health and well-being of the public. The consumption of illicit substances has the potential to lead to addiction, fatal overdoses, and the dissemination of contagious diseases among the population. Moreover, counterfeit medications can not only prove to be ineffective but may also be detrimental to individuals' health, thereby putting countless lives at significant risk (Authors' elaboration based on the information from Interviewees).

The presence of illicit trade can significantly exacerbate social instability and unrest, as it can undermine the established rule of law while simultaneously diminishing the public's trust in governmental institutions. When citizens perceive that their government is incapable of regulating illicit trade effectively or safeguarding their interests, this discontent can manifest in various forms, such as protests, demonstrations, and an overall atmosphere of social unrest that can have far-reaching

consequences (Authors' elaboration based on the information from Interviewees)

3.6. Political Implications of Illicit Trade

The political implications stemming from the illicit trade occurring at the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post 2024, as articulated by the consensus of the interviewees, point to a significant erosion of governmental authority and legitimacy. Engaging in illicit trade has the potential to severely undermine the power and credibility of governmental institutions, particularly when corrupt officials find themselves entangled in the facilitation of such nefarious activities, leading to a breakdown of order and governance. This pervasive corruption can profoundly erode public trust in government, thereby diminishing its capacity to govern with efficacy and integrity in the eyes of the citizens (Authors' elaboration based on the information from Interviewees).

In terms of financing terrorism, engagement in illicit trade serves as a crucial source of financial support for various terrorist organizations, which consequently equips them with the necessary resources to execute their heinous attacks and foster instability within the region. The ramifications of such activities can culminate in a grave threat to national security, thereby endangering the safety and well-being of the populace that resides within the affected areas (Authors' elaboration based on the information from Interviewees).

Furthermore, another significant political consequence associated with the illicit trade at the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post, as reflected in the views of the interviewees, is the pervasive issue of corruption that it engenders. The existence of illicit trade can cultivate an environment rife with corruption within government agencies, as officials may find themselves increasingly tempted to accept bribes or engage in other forms of unethical and illegal activities. This rampant corruption can lead to a substantial degradation of the integrity of governmental institutions, thereby undermining the fundamental principles of the rule of law that are essential for a just society (Authors' elaboration based on the information from Interviewees).

3.7. Strategies for Addressing Illicit Trade

According to the extensive interviews that were meticulously conducted with the customs officials stationed at the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post 2024, several comprehensive strategies have been distinctly identified for effectively addressing the pervasive issue of illicit trade that plagues the region. This includes investing in technology, increasing personnel, improving infrastructure, fostering international cooperation, and addressing underlying factors such as poverty and inequality (Authors' elaboration based on the information from Interviewees).

Moreover, another effective strategy for addressing illicit trade lies in active participation in

international initiatives (Ndou, 2004). By implementing these strategies, governments can enhance border security, disrupt smuggling networks, and reduce incentives for illicit activities.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The findings derived from the comprehensive analysis conducted in this study unequivocally reveal a remarkably significant prevalence of illicit trade activities occurring through the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post. Among the most commonly encountered types of illicit goods that have been seized by authorities are drugs, weapons, counterfeit products, and even human beings, all of which present serious and multifaceted threats to national security as well as public health and the overall economic stability of the region. Border agencies, in their relentless endeavor to combat the pervasive issue of illicit trade at the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post, face an array of numerous and formidable challenges that significantly hinder their effectiveness. Key obstacles include not only resource constraints and rampant corruption but also the highly sophisticated tactics that are expertly employed by transnational organized crime networks, which complicate enforcement efforts. Often, border officials find themselves lacking the requisite equipment, comprehensive training, and sufficient personnel necessary to effectively monitor and intercept the flow of illicit goods that traverse the border. Furthermore, the presence of corruption within border agencies can inadvertently facilitate the very illicit trade activities that they are tasked with preventing, thereby undermining the overall effectiveness of the various border control measures that have been put in place.

The implications of illicit trade for national security are significant and far-reaching. Engaging in illicit trade severely undermines economic stability by diverting essential resources and drastically reducing government revenue, which is critical for maintaining public services. For instance, the smuggling of counterfeit goods not only poses a threat to legitimate businesses but can also erode the tax revenue that is necessary for the operation of governmental functions. Moreover, it is imperative to recognize that illicit trade has the potential to fund terrorism and various other criminal activities, thereby posing a direct and escalating threat to public safety in general. A pertinent example of this is the trafficking of weapons, which can exacerbate conflict and instability within the region, leading to devastating consequences.

Additionally, it is essential to understand that illicit trade can have grave implications for public health as well. The smuggling of counterfeit medicines can result in a plethora of adverse health outcomes, including incorrect dosages, ineffective treatments, and dangerous side effects that can jeopardize the well-being of individuals. The trafficking of illicit drugs can further contribute to issues of substance abuse and addiction, which are associated with a wide

range of health problems, encompassing mental health disorders, infectious diseases, and social dysfunction that can ripple through communities. Furthermore, illicit trade can facilitate the spread of infectious diseases, such as HIV/AIDS and malaria, particularly through the movement of people and goods across borders, thereby posing a public health crisis.

Beyond the direct health consequences that arise from illicit trade, it is equally important to acknowledge the indirect impacts on public health that can result from this pervasive issue. For instance, the economic instability that is often caused by illicit trade can lead to a significant reduction in access to healthcare services and critical social safety nets that vulnerable populations rely upon. Additionally, the social disruption that is engendered by illicit trade can contribute to an increase in crime rates and violence within communities, which in turn can have detrimental and negative health consequences for individuals and the community as a whole, creating a cyclical pattern of harm.

5. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusions

Illicit trade at the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post remains a serious threat to national security, closely tied to organized crime. The persistence of this issue is largely driven by inadequate capacity building and integrity challenges among law enforcement officers. Additionally, limited use of modern technology and poor inter-agency cooperation hinder effective border enforcement, exacerbating the problem.

5.2. Recommendations

- i. Improve Law Enforcement Training: Develop comprehensive training programs tailored to equipping officers with skills to effectively tackle illicit trade.
- ii. Address Integrity Issues: Implement stringent integrity audits and ethical standards to enhance same and improve enforcement efficiency.
- iii. Adopt Modern Technology: Invest in cutting-edge technology such as surveillance systems and data analytics to enhance monitoring and interdiction efforts.
- iv. Enhance Inter-agency Collaboration: Strengthen cooperation between customs, law enforcement, and security agencies to ensure a unified and efficient response to illicit trade.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Thematic Analysis of Interviews with Customs Officers Purposively Sampled at the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post

Research Question	Theme	Coded Phrases
What types of illicit goods are trafficked through the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post?	Illicit Trade through the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post	Illicit goods (drugs, weapons, counterfeit goods, human beings), seizure data, trafficking routes
What challenges do border agencies face in combating illicit trade at the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post?	Challenges Faced by Border Agencies	Resource constraints, corruption, technological limitations, cross-border cooperation
What are the implications of illicit trade on national security, focusing on the economic, social, and political consequences?	Implications of Illicit Trade on National Security	Economic impact, social unrest, political instability, public health
What potential strategies can be implemented to address illicit trade at the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post and improve border security?	Strategies for Addressing Illicit Trade	Border infrastructure, technology, cooperation, policy recommendations

Source: Authors' Compilation, 2024

The themes from the table form the basis of the analysis of this study.

Table II: Responses Collected from the Questionnaire Administered Among Customs Officers at the Seme Border

Impact of Illicit Trade on National Security	Strongly Agree/Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Total
Illicit Trade are prevalent at the Seme-Krake Joint Border Post	30	2	8	40
Illicit trade significantly threatens national security	35	2	3	40
There is a strong link between illicit trade and organized crime	35	2	3	40
Section B: Law Enforcement and Illicit Trade Prevention	Strongly Agree/Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Total
Law enforcement officers are adequately trained to handle illicit trade at the Seme-Krake Border Post.	10	2	28	40
Integrity issue among law enforcement officers contributes to the persistence of illicit trade.	28	2	10	40
Strengthening the integrity of law enforcement can significantly reduce illicit trade.	35	0	5	40
There is insufficient inter-agency cooperation at the border to combat illicit trade.	34	1	5	40
Modern technology (e.g., surveillance, data analytics) is limited to effectively monitor and prevent illicit trade.	30	4	6	40

Source: Authors' Compilation 2024.

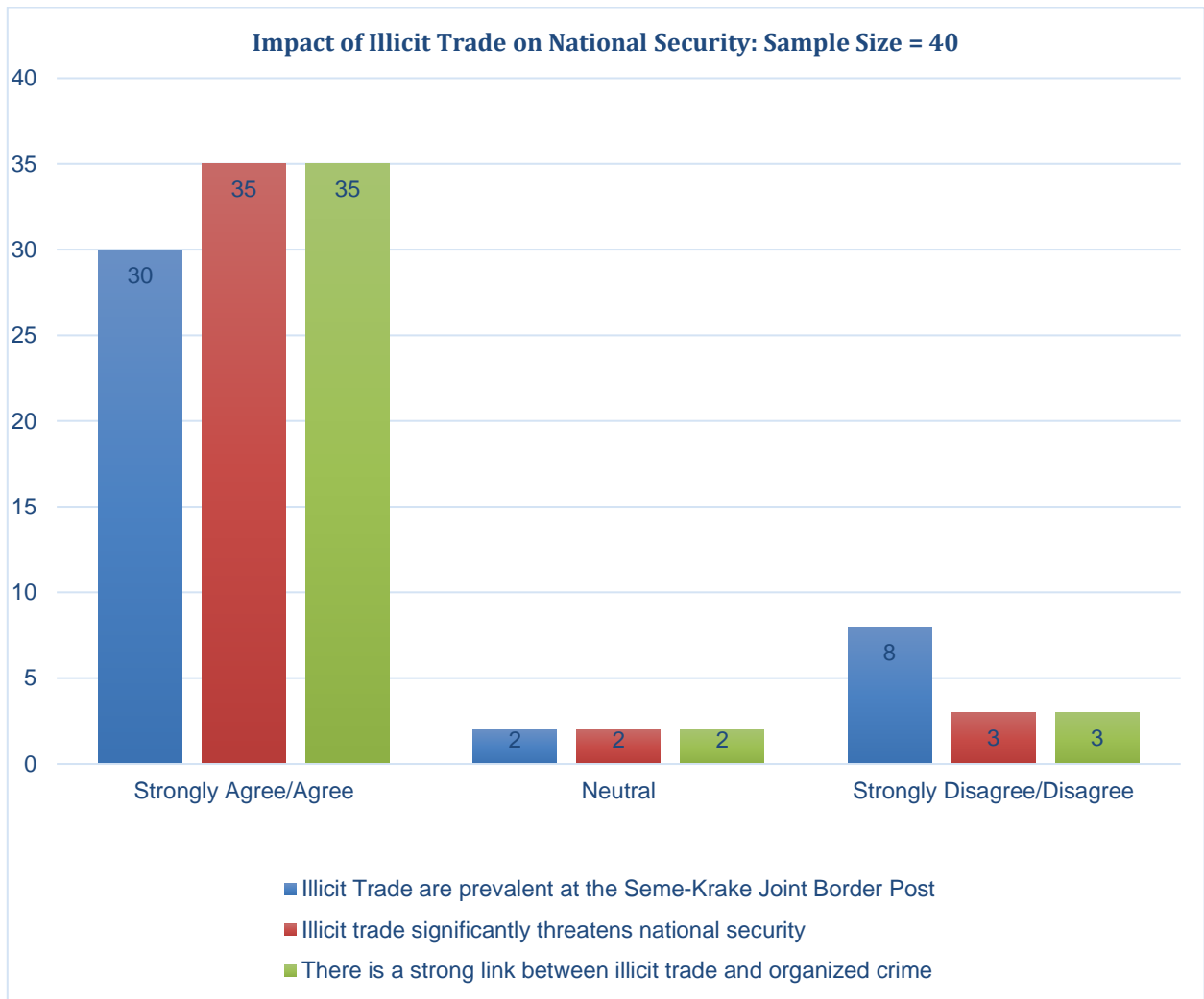


Fig. 1a: Bar Chart showing the number of responses obtained from the questionnaire administered.

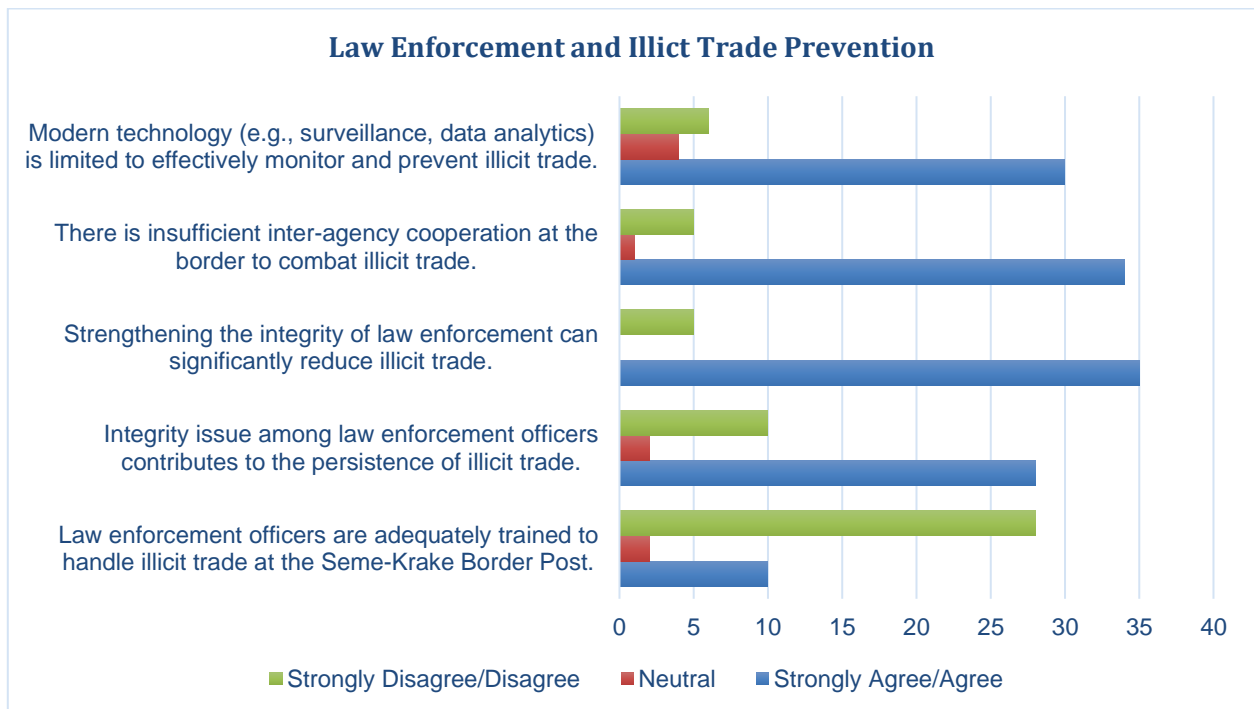


Fig. 1b: Histogram showing the number of responses obtained from the questionnaire administered.

Table III: NCS Interventions on Illicit Trade at the Seme-Krake Border (2020 – 2024)

Goods Smuggled based on NCS Interceptions	Frequency	Percentage of Interceptions (%)
Weapons	65	11.42
Counterfeit goods	89	15.64
Explosive Devices	60	10.54
Synthetic Opioids	75	13.18
Narcotics	85	14.94
Premium Motor Spirit	97	17.05
Unhealthy Foods (Rice, Spaghetti etc)	98	17.22
Total	569	100

Source: NCS Enforcement Statistics.

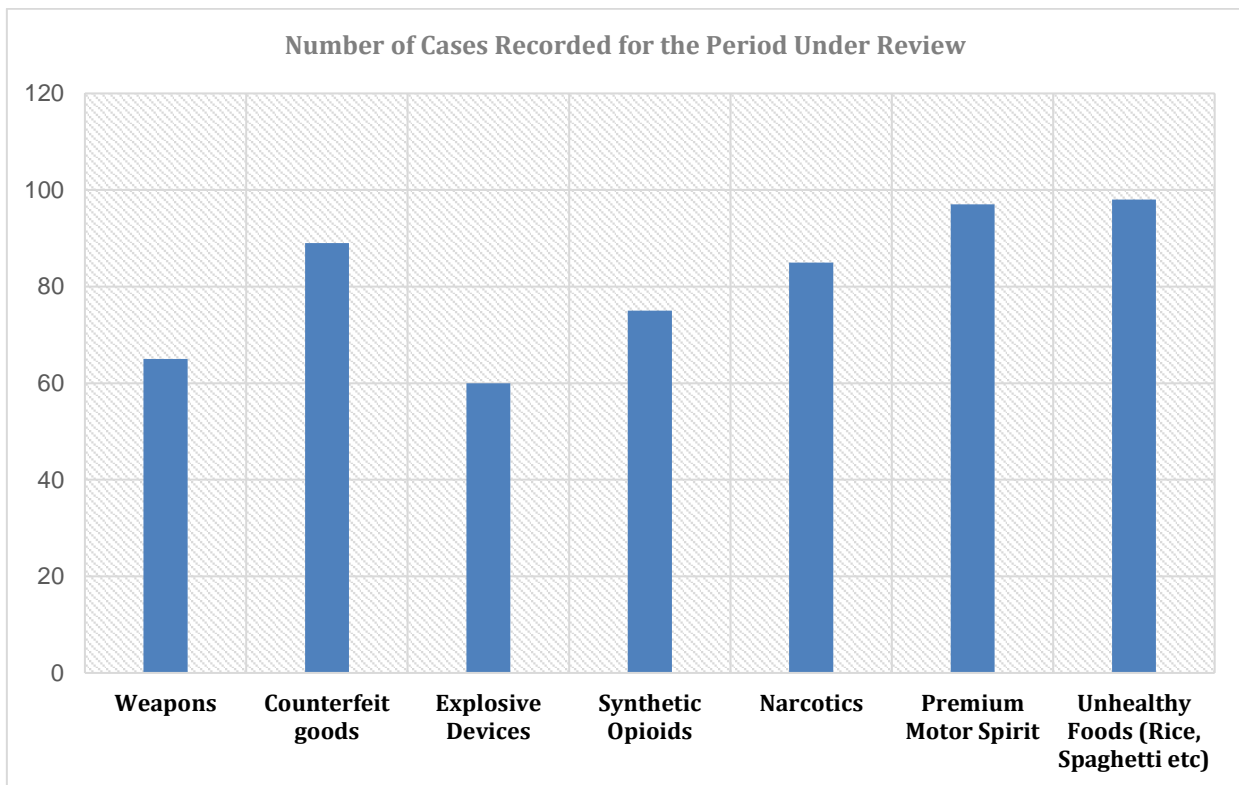


Fig. II: Bar Chart showing the total number of interceptions recorded by the NCS (2020 -2024).

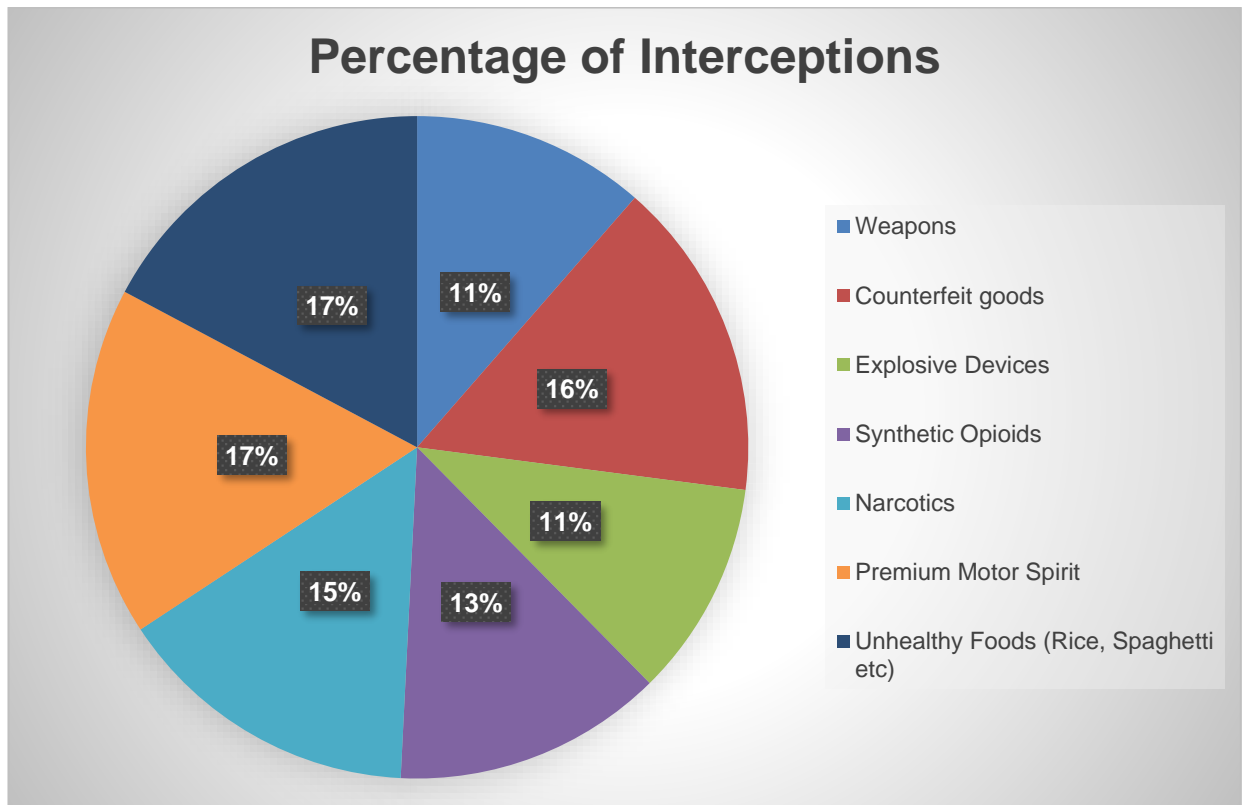


Fig. III: Pie Chart Showing the % of Illicit Items Seized for the Period Under Review (2020 – 2024)

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