Transnational Organised Crime in Botswana: Exploring Security Threats and Policy Responses

Mothusi Sendi[1*], Brainley Malambo[1], Innocent Kumwenda[1]; Charles Ewald Eiseb[2]; Alex Kambulu[1], Davy Mainde[1]

[1]Africa Research University, Lusaka-Zambia

[2] Namibia University of Science and Technology

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ABSTRACT

Transnational organised crime has emerged as a major non-traditional security threat that undermines national security, governance and sustainable development through increasingly sophisticated cross-border criminal networks. Although Botswana is recognised for its political stability and strong governance institutions, it has become increasingly exposed to crimes such as human trafficking, migrant smuggling, wildlife trafficking, money laundering and illicit financial flows. Existing studies have examined these crimes independently, leaving limited understanding of transnational organised crime as an integrated security and policy challenge. This study explored the nature and scope of transnational organised crime in Botswana, analysed its implications for peace and security, examined implementation of the country's legal, institutional and regional policy responses. Guided by interpretivism research philosophy, the study employed a qualitative exploratory design. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 30 purposively selected employed participants from government agencies and supplemented by documentary analysis. The data was analysed thematically. The findings reveal that transnational organised crime in Botswana is increasingly interconnected and facilitated by porous borders, technological innovation and regional integration with significant implications for human security, economic stability and institutional governance. Botswana established comprehensive legal and institutional frameworks, their effectiveness is constrained by implementation gaps, limited institutional capacity and uneven regional cooperation. It concludes that strengthening intelligence-led policing, interagency coordination, border security and regional collaboration is essential for Botswana's effective response to transnational organised crime. It contributes evidence to the limited literature on transnational organised crime in Botswana and provides policy insights for strengthening security governance across the Southern African region.

Keywords: Transnational Organised Crime, Security threat, National Security, Policy Responses; Regional Cooperation, Criminal Networks.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Transnational Organised Crime (TOC) has evolved from localised criminal enterprise into a major non-traditional security threat across international borders. Globalisation advances in information and communication technologies, increased international mobility, and the liberalisation of trade and financial systems have strengthened the capacity of transnational organised criminal networks to operate across national borders with greater speed and sophistication (Kaypak & Yilmaz, 2019; UNODC, 2023). Transnational criminal organisations exploit interconnected political, economic and high-tech systems to facilitate illicit enterprises, launder proceeds of crime, evade law enforcement agencies, undermining state sovereignty, state integrity, domestic governance, the rule of law, and socio-economic sustainable development (UNODC, 2023; Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC), 2023). Transnational organised crime gained formal international recognition in 1995 and was institutionalised through the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) adopted in 2000 and enforced by individual sovereign countries across international community. The UNTOC defines organised criminal groups as structured associations of three or more persons acting together over time to commit serious crimes across national borders for financial or material benefit (UNODC, 2004). Since the adoption of the Palermo Convention, Transnational organised crime has evolved into a sophisticated global illicit economy, involving illicit drug trafficking, human trafficking, migrant smuggling, illicit financial flows, firearms trafficking, wildlife crime and environmental crimes. These enterprises generate hundreds of billions of United States dollars while simultaneously weakening governance institutions, distorting legitimate economies, threatening global peace and security across the global village (UNODC, 2023).

Across Africa, Transnational organised crime has become deeply embedded within political, economic, and social systems, posing a significant integrated threat to human security, democratic governance, and sustainable development. Although the manifestations of TOC differ across sub-regions, illicit enterprises are increasingly facilitated by structural vulnerabilities including weak governance, socio-economic inequalities, youth unemployment, political instability, fragile border security and limited institutional capacity (Ras, 2023; Muleya, 2024). These vulnerabilities facilitate the increase and resilience of transnational criminal networks across sub-regions (Ras, 2023). As a result, the convergence of transnational organised crime, corruption, illicit financial flows, and cyber-enabled crimes has further complicated national and regional security responses across the continent (GI-TOC, 2023; Ojolo & Singh, 2024).

Within the Southern African Development Community (SADC), transnational organised crime has become a major and complex integrated security threat driven by porous borders, extensive cross-border mobility, and uneven law enforcement capacities (Mabalane, 2021). These structural conditions enable criminal networks to operate several illicit enterprises across the region while exposing persistent weaknesses in regional legal frameworks, intelligence sharing and coordinated cross-border law enforcement agencies (Shaw & Reitano, 2021; Mabalane, 2021).

Botswana is observed as one of Africa's most politically stable countries with strong governance institutions, and adherence to the rule of law; however, its geographical location has increasingly exposed it to transnational crimes (Mogomotsi, 2021; Balule & Dambe, 2023; Mogomotsi et al., 2020). Its geographical position within Southern Africa is coupled with extensive and porous borders shared with the Republic of South Africa, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Mogomotsi et al., 2020). Recent evidence demonstrates that Botswana has become both a transit corridor and destination for interconnected networks involved in human trafficking, migrant smuggling, illicit financial flows, cyber-enabled fraud and wildlife crimes (Mogomotsi et al., 2020; Rakenosi, 2020; Mabvurira et al., 2022). For example, in mid-2023, Botswana security agencies intercepted forty undocumented Ethiopians concealed in a cargo truck at Ngwasha Disease Control Gate attempting to be trafficked towards South Africa (Xinhua News, 2023). Another case, law enforcement agencies infiltrated a transnational organised criminal network accused of defrauding Batswana through an online investment platform that resulted losses amounting to approximately BWP 170 million (Mmegionline, 2025).

These cases illustrate the increasing convergence of cyber-enabled fraud, human smuggling and other illicit enterprises demonstrating that transnational organised crime in Botswana has evolved into an integrated security threat rather than a collection of isolated crimes. Despite Botswana's commitment to domesticate international conventions and regional protocols, criminal networks remain highly adaptive and resilient (Mogomotsi, 2021; Balule & Dambe, 2023). This suggests that legal reforms and border security management alone are insufficient to address transnational organised crime without integrated institutional coordination, intelligence sharing and regional security cooperation (Balule & Dambe, 2023). Furthermore, existing scholarship predominately examines specific markets in isolation, limiting understanding of transnational organised crime as a multidimensional security threat that requires comprehensive and coordinated policy responses (Rakenosi, 2020; Mabvurira et al., 2022). This fragmented body of scholarship has created a significant gap concerning the nature, scope and effectiveness of institutional and policy responses to forms of transnational organised crime in Botswana. The previous studies have documented specific forms of transnational organised crime resulting in limited understanding of how these integrated illicit enterprises affect security, governance, and policy responses within Botswana’s borders. This article addresses this gap by examining how transnational organised crime poses as an integrated threat to peace and security in Botswana.

The study is strictly guided by the following research questions.

1. What is the nature and scope of transnational organised crime in Botswana?
2. How does transnational organised crime threaten national peace and security in Botswana?
3. How are Botswana's legal, institutional and regional policy responses implemented in addressing transnational organised crime?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualising Transnational Organised Crime

Transnational organised crime has increasingly been recognised as a complex non-traditional security threat shaped by globalisation, modem technological advancement, and increased cross-border connectivity. These dynamics have expanded the operational capacity of interconnected networks enabling them to exploit governance gaps, disparities in criminal justice, jurisdictional variations, and porous borders across national borders (Allum & Gilmour, 2012; UNODC, 2023). While the concept of transnational organised crime is widely used in security studies and policy discourse remains systematically contested, particularly regarding its definitional boundaries, organisational structure, and the scope to which it differs from other forms of crime. Palermo Convention provides the most authoritative and widely adopted definition conceptualising transnational organised crime as serious crimes committed by structured groups operating across national borders for financial benefit (Mlazi, 2020). This legal definition has been instrumental in standardising international law enforcement responses and strengthening cooperation mechanisms such as mutual legal assistance, extradition arrangements, and joint investigative frameworks (Ebonyi & Bello, 2024). However, this juridical definition has limitations as it tends to privilege state-centric and offence-based classifications while underestimating the fluid, adaptive and networked nature of criminal enterprises across international borders. Contemporary scholarship argues that transnational groups have evolved beyond rigid hierarchical into decentralised, flexible and technologically enabled criminal networks that mirror, and in some cases exploit the structures of globalisation (UNODC, 2023). This transformation complicates traditional law enforcement methods that are premised on identifiable leadership structures and territorially bounded criminal enterprises. TOC should not be understood merely as a collection of illicit enterprises transcending borders, but as an adaptive system embedded within global political economy dynamics, capable of reshaping and exploiting weak governance environments. This evolution exposes a persistent tension between static legal definitions and dynamic realities of criminal practice. International legal frameworks provide essential normative and operational tools for policing cooperation, often lag behind the rapidly changing modalities of TOC. This significant gap creates law enforcement vulnerabilities where state capacity is uneven and institutional coordination is weak. Consequently, effective responses to TOC require not only harmonised legal frameworks, but also intelligence-led, community oriented, and technologically adaptive policing strategies capable of engaging with the fluidity of transnational criminal networks (UNODC, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Securitisation Theory and complemented by Network Governance Theory to explain both the framing of TOC as an integrated security threat and the policy responses adopted in Botswana. Securitisation Theory developed by Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (1998), argues that issues become security concerns when they are constructed through political and institutional discourse as existential threats that justify exceptional measures. This theory is useful for explaining how transnational organised crime in Botswana has shifted from a narrow criminal justice system issue to being outlined as an integrated threat to national security, governance, and stability. While the theory is effective in explaining the political construction of security threats, its limitation lies in its emphasis on discourse at the expense of the structural and operational conditions that enable transnational organised crime. It therefore does not fully account for how institutional responses are practically coordinated and implemented beyond the act of labelling phenomenon as a security threat. In the context of Botswana, this creates an analytical gap between the securitisation of transnational organised crime and the security mechanisms used to respond to it. To address this limitation, Network Governance Theory is used as a complementary theoretical framework. This theory argues that complex transnational threats require coordinated action across multiple actors rather than reliance on a single institution. It therefore provides an explanatory lens for understanding how responses to transnational organised crime in Botswana is operationalised through mutual cooperation among national law enforcement agencies and international partners such as SADC, SARPCCO, INTERPOL, and UNODC. The two theories provide a comprehensive analytical framework. Securitisation Theory explains how transnational organised crime is constructed as a security issue that legitimises extraordinary policy attention, Network Governance Theory explains how a constructed threat is practically managed through multi-actor coordination. The combination therefore allows for a more complete analysis of both the discursive framing and institutional implementation of Botswana's legal, institutional and regional responses, while also highlighting the gap between security framing and governance capacity.

Nature and Scope of Transnational Organised Crime

Contemporary scholarship conceptualises transnational organised crime as a dynamic and adaptive threat that extends beyond conventional criminal enterprises to undermine governance institutions, economic development, fundamental human rights, and human security. The processes associated with the process of globalisation particularly technological advancement, liberalised international trade and governance deficits have enabled organised criminal networks to operate fluidly across international borders diversify illicit enterprises to maximise financial gain while evading security interventions (Boyd & Henkin, 2022; Chang, 2022; Akinyetun & Bakare, 2021; UNODC, 2023). Consequently, criminal enterprises are increasingly recognised as a multidimensional threat that weakens public institutions, facilitates corruption, threatens global peace and stability (Mlambo, 2021;). TOC is increasingly framed not merely as a law enforcement concern but as a structural challenge to state authority and global governance. Its impacts are multidimensional encompassing the erosion of institutional legitimacy, misrepresentation of legitimate markets, entrenchment of corruption, and undermining of human security. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2023) further indicated that transnational organised criminal networks are characterised by increasing decentralisation, flexibility, and technological sophistication. Transnational criminal networks routinely utilise encrypted communication platforms, cryptocurrencies, and complex transnational financial systems to facilitate criminal enterprises across international borders. This diversification reflects not only opportunistic expansion but strategic adaptation to intensified international enforcement regimes. The persistence and evolution of TOC also reflect structural inequalities within the global system, particularly the uneven distribution of regulatory capacity, national interest, and economic opportunity between the developed and developing world.

In the African context, these dynamics are intensified by porous borders, governance issues, weak institutional coordination, oversight institutions, and persistent socio-economic vulnerabilities, which create enabling environments for illicit economies and transnational criminal networks to flourish (Ebonyi & Bello, 2024; Muleya, 2024). Transnational organised groups are able to embed themselves within legal and illicit markets simultaneously, often blurring the boundaries between legal commerce and illicit enterprise, despite regional legal and policy initiatives (Ebonyi & Bello, 2024).

Botswana reflects these broader regional dynamics. Although recognised for political stability and relatively strong governance within the Southern African Development Community has increased its exposure to wildlife crimes, illicit drug trafficking, human trafficking, migrant smuggling, illegal artisanal mining, cybercrime, money laundering and illicit financial flows (Mogomotsi, 2021; Rakenosi, 2020; Mabvurira et al., 2022). However, existing research has predominantly examined these specific crimes providing limited understanding of how their transnational nature collectively threatens Botswana's peace, security and principles of governance or how existing legal, institutional and regional policy responses address these evolving non-traditional threats. This study addresses this significant gap by offering an integrated analysis of the nature and scope of transnational organised crime and its implications for national security and policy responses in Botswana.

Transnational Organised Crime as a Security Threat

The literature increasingly recognises transnational organised crime as a multidimensional security threat that extends beyond traditional crimes to undermine state security, governance, political sanity and sustainable development. Transnational criminal networks are challenging the capacity of states' apparatuses to respond through traditional law enforcement approaches alone (UNODC, 2023; GI-TOC, 2023). This contemporary security shift has repositioned transnational organised crime as an integrated security issue requiring integrated frameworks, institutional coordination and regional law enforcement cooperation. Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde (1998) argues that security threats should not be viewed solely through a military lens but also in terms of political, economic and societal vulnerabilities. Consistent with this argument, transnational organised criminal networks weaken state sovereignty, border security and institutional effectiveness by exploiting governance deficiencies, facilitating illicit enterprises and employing sophisticated technologies that outpace conventional policing capabilities (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998; Mlambo, 2021). Transnational organised crime also undermines human security by exposing vulnerable human populations to trafficking, exploitation, violence, illicit drugs, and environmental crimes with far-reaching consequences for community safety, livelihoods and social cohesion (UNDP, 2022; UNODC, 2024). Its economic consequences are equally significant, as illicit financial flows, money laundering, corruption and cyber-enabled financial crime distort legitimate markets, reduce public revenue, weaken financial integrity and institutional accountability (OECD, 2023; FATF, 2024). These perspectives demonstrate that implications of transnational organised crime are mutually reinforcing affecting national security, human security, governance, the rule of law, and socio-economic development, while simultaneously need comprehensive and coordinated policy interventions rather than fragmented sectoral responses.

Policy and Institutional Responses to Transnational Organised Crime

The literature demonstrates that effectively addressing transnational organised crime requires integrated legal, institutional and regional governance rather than conventional law enforcement alone, as transnational organised networks are increasingly exploit jurisdictional fragmentation, technological advancement and governance weaknesses across international borders (UNODC, 2023; GI-TOC, 2023). Although international and regional frameworks, including the Palermo Convention, African Union and Southern African Development Community have strengthened legal harmonisation and cross-border cooperation, their effectiveness remains constrained by inconsistent implementation, limited institutional capacity and weak interagency coordination (Khan et al., 2024; Banda, 2023). Botswana reflects these national broader challenges. Despite comprehensive legal frameworks, specialised security institutions and active regional engagement, implementation continues to be limited by inadequate modern technological capacity, fragmented information sharing and resource constraints (Balule & Dambe, 2023; Mlazi, 2020; Igwe, 2023). Collectively, the literature suggests that strengthening institutional interoperability, intelligence sharing and collaborative governance is more critical than legislative reform alone. However, limited empirical evidence exists on how Botswana's legal frameworks, institutional and regional policy responses are implemented in practice, a gap this study seeks to address.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted an interpretivist research philosophy and a qualitative exploratory design to examine the nature and scope of transnational organised crime, its implications for peace and national security, and Botswana's legal, institutional and regional policy responses within the City of Francistown. The target population comprised adult residents aged 19 to 70 years who had resided in Francistown for at least six months and 30 employed participants were purposively selected based on their occupational roles to provide informed insight on enterprises associated with transnational organised crime, its security implications and policy responses in Botswana’s borders. A total of 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposively selected participants from relevant government agencies. Sample size was determined by the principle of data saturation rather than numerical representativeness. Data collection continued until saturation was reached, at point no new themes or meaningful insights were identified relevant to study objectives resulting in a final sample size of 30 participants. Primary data was generated using semi-structured interviews and secondary data using legislation, government policy documents, reports from international organisations and relevant scholarly literature. Qualitative exploratory design was adopted to generate in-depth insights about the phenomenon from knowledgeable participants rather than achieving statistical representativeness. The data was analysed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes aligned with the study objectives. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Africa Research University Research Ethics Committee, with additional authorisation was granted by the Ministry of State President, Defence and Security of the Republic of Botswana. Participation was voluntary, based on informed consent. Participants were guaranteed anonymity, confidentiality, and right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Data generation process adhered to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to ensure the trustworthiness of the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussion in relation to the study's objectives and research questions. The analysis is organised thematically, with each research question presented alongside its corresponding sub themes to provide a coherent examination of the nature and scope of transnational organised crime, its implications for peace and national security in Botswana, and the implementation of the country's legal, institutional and regional policy responses.

Nature and Scope of Transnational Organised Crime in Botswana

The first research question sought to explore the nature and scope of transnational organised crime (TOC) in Botswana. The analysis of the interview data revealed that TOC has evolved into a multifaceted security threat characterised by diversified criminal markets, sophisticated criminal networks and increasing exploitation of Botswana's strategic geographical location within the Southern African region. Participants consistently indicated that organised criminal groups are no longer engaged in isolated criminal enterprises but increasingly operate through interconnected networks involved in human trafficking, migrant smuggling, wildlife trafficking, cyber-enabled crime, money laundering, illicit drug trafficking, illicit financial flows and cross-border goods smuggling. Four interrelated themes emerged from the analysis.

Evolving Organised Criminal Networks

Most participants observed that organised criminal groups operating within Botswana have become increasingly organised, adaptive and transnational. Rather than functioning as isolated local gangs, criminal groups collaborate across national borders through well-established criminal networks that facilitate the movement of people, wildlife products, illicit goods and financial resources. Informant A said,

> "Transnational organised crime is no longer committed by isolated criminals. We are dealing with organised networks operating across Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia and South Africa. syndicate involved in migrant smuggling today may tomorrow be involved in money laundering or cyber fraud because these criminal enterprises are becoming increasingly flexible."

The findings demonstrate that criminal networks in Botswana are increasingly characterised by flexibility, transnational collaboration and diversification of criminal activities. These findings corroborate those of Ebonyi and Bello (2024), who argue that contemporary organised criminal groups increasingly function through decentralised networks rather than rigid hierarchical organisations. Similarly, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2023) observes that organised crime has evolved into interconnected criminal enterprises capable of adapting rapidly to changes in policing strategies and technological innovation. Comparable findings are reported by Mabalane (2021), who notes that criminal syndicates operating within the Southern African Development Community increasingly exploit regional integration and porous borders to facilitate organised criminal activities. From the perspective of Securitisation Theory, these findings suggest that organised crime has evolved beyond conventional criminality into a significant security threat requiring coordinated and extraordinary policy responses.

Botswana as a Transit and Destination Corridor

Participants consistently described Botswana as both a transit and destination country for transnational organised crime due to its strategic geographical position, relatively stable economy and extensive international borders. Consolidated views from participants M & W indicate that,

> "Botswana is increasingly being used as a transit route. Migrants from East Africa often pass-through Botswana towards South Africa, while organised criminal groups facilitate their movement using illegal crossing points."

These findings reinforce existing scholarship identifying Botswana as an increasingly important transit corridor within Southern Africa. Rakenosi (2020) found that organised criminal networks exploit Botswana's extensive borders to facilitate wildlife trafficking and other illicit activities. Similarly, Mabvurira et al. (2022) demonstrated that Botswana increasingly serves as both a transit and destination country for migrant smuggling and human trafficking. The findings further support observations of Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (2023) that transnational criminal enterprises strategically exploit countries characterised by regional connectivity, influx of human migration, expanding transport infrastructure routes and porous borders. Within the framework of Network Governance Theory, these findings indicate that the effective responses require coordinated cross-border governance involving multiple national and regional institutions rather than isolated domestic interventions.

Diversification of Organised Criminal Markets

Participants reported that transnational organised criminal groups no longer specialise in single criminal enterprises but increasingly engage simultaneously in multiple illicit markets. Participant J said,

> "Money laundering has become the common denominator. Criminal proceeds generated from wildlife trafficking, cyber fraud and human trafficking eventually enter the financial system through sophisticated laundering mechanisms."

The findings indicate increasing convergence among organised criminal markets. This observation is consistent with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2023), which reports that transnational criminal groups increasingly diversify criminal portfolios to maximise profits while reducing operational risks across international jurisdictions. Likewise, Boyd and Henkin (2022) argue that contemporary organised crime is characterised by overlapping illicit markets linked through sophisticated financial systems and logistical networks. Ebonyi and Bello (2024) similarly conclude that transnational organised criminal groups operating in Africa increasingly integrate human trafficking, illicit trade, financial crimes and cyber-enabled offences within the same criminal enterprises. These findings demonstrate that transnational organised crime within Botswana’s borders has evolved into an interconnected criminal economy rather than isolated organised criminal markets or enterprises.

Transnational Organised Crime as a Threat to National Peace and Security in Botswana

The second research question sought to examine how transnational organised crime threatens peace and security within Botswana’s national borders. Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed that participants perceived transnational organised crime as a multidimensional security threat extending beyond conventional crime to undermine national security, human security, economic stability and public confidence in state institutions. Participants consistently observed that cross-border organised criminal networks exploit Botswana's geographical location, porous borders and technological advancement to facilitate illicit enterprises that weaken border security management, increase insecurity, compromise governance and erode socio-economic sustainable development.

Threats to National and Border Security

Participants consistently indicated that transnational organised crime has increasingly undermined Botswana's national security by exploiting porous borders, facilitating irregular migration and expanding organised criminal operations across the country. They explained that organised criminal groups have become more sophisticated, making border surveillance and law enforcement considerably more challenging. Informant D revealed that,

> "Human smuggling, illegal migration, vehicle theft and the movement of illicit goods have become interconnected. These activities place enormous pressure on law enforcement agencies responsible for safeguarding national security."

These findings demonstrate that transnational organised crime has become an important national security concern by weakening border management and increasing the operational capacity of organised criminal groups. The findings corroborate those of Shaw and Reitano (2021), who argue that transnational organised criminal networks increasingly exploit weak border governance and regional integration within Southern Africa to facilitate cross-border criminal activities. Similarly, Ras (2023) contends that porous borders and institutional capacity constraints continue to expose Southern African states to transnational criminal enterprises. The findings also support those of Mabalane (2021), who observes that transnational organised criminal syndicates operating in the Southern African Development Community increasingly exploit regional transport corridors to facilitate illicit trade and human mobility. From the perspective of Securitisation Theory, these findings demonstrate that TOC constitutes an existential threat to state security because it directly challenges territorial integrity, border control, and the state's capacity to maintain internal security.

Threats to Human Security and Community Safety

Participants reported that transnational organised criminal activities increasingly threaten human security through human trafficking, migrant smuggling, labour exploitation, cyber-enabled fraud and increasing crime fear within affected communities. They further observed that vulnerable human populations, particularly women, children and undocumented migrants remain the principal targets of transnational organised criminal networks. According to participant K,

> "Communities living near border areas increasingly experience insecurity because transnational organised criminal groups use those areas as transit routes for illegal activities."

The findings indicate that transnational organised crime poses significant threats to human security by exposing vulnerable populations to exploitation while simultaneously reducing community safety. These findings support those of Muleya (2024), who argues that transnational criminal networks increasingly undermine human security by exploiting socio-economic vulnerabilities across Africa. Likewise, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2024) reports that human trafficking, migrant smuggling, illicit drugs, and cyber-enabled crime continue to expand globally because transnational criminal organisations are increasingly targeting vulnerable communities through sophisticated recruitment and deception strategies or modus operandi. Similarly, Ojolo and Singh (2024) contend that transnational organised crime is increasingly threatens sustainable development by undermining social cohesion, community resilience and public safety. These findings reinforce the argument that TOC should be understood as both an integrated national and human security concern.

Threats to Economic Security and National Development

Participants overwhelmingly agreed that transnational organised crime significantly undermines Botswana's economy through illicit financial flows, money laundering, corruption, tax evasion and the expansion of the informal criminal economy. They further noted that these activities reduce government revenue, discourage legitimate investment and distort market competition. Sharing his experience, participant S said,

> "Illicit financial flows deprive government of resources that could otherwise support public services, infrastructure and national development."

These findings demonstrate that TOC extends beyond criminal justice concerns to become a significant threat to economic governance and sustainable development. The findings support Mogomotsi et al. (2020), who estimate that illicit economic activities generated substantial financial losses within Botswana over the past two decades. Similarly, Boyd and Henkin (2022) argue that criminal enterprises undermine economic growth by facilitating illicit financial flows and infiltrating legitimate markets. The findings are also consistent with Akinyetun and Bakare (2021), who contend that transnational organised crime weakens economic governance through corruption, tax evasion and financial crimes that divert national resources away from sustainable development priorities. These findings therefore illustrate the multidimensional economic consequences of TOC for Botswana.

Threats to Governance and Institutional Integrity

Participants observed that organised criminal groups increasingly attempt to exploit institutional weaknesses through corruption, document fraud, bribery and interference with law enforcement processes. They argued that although Botswana maintains relatively strong public institutions, organised criminal networks continuously seek opportunities to undermine governance structures. According to informant U,

> "Organised criminal groups constantly test institutional weaknesses. Where governance systems become complacent, criminal networks quickly exploit those vulnerabilities."

The findings suggest that TOC presents an important governance challenge by eroding institutional integrity and reducing public confidence in state institutions responsible for maintaining security and enforcing the rule of law. These findings support Balule and Dambe (2023), who argue that legislative reforms alone cannot effectively combat organised crime without strong institutional coordination and accountability. Similarly, Ebonyi and Bello (2024) observe that corruption and weak governance continue to facilitate the expansion of organised criminal markets across Africa. The findings further support Network Governance Theory, which argues that effective responses to complex security threats require strong institutional coordination, intelligence sharing and collaboration among domestic, regional and international actors. Consequently, combating TOC requires not only robust legal frameworks but also resilient governance systems capable of responding collectively to evolving criminal threats.

Botswana's Legal, Institutional and Regional Policy Responses to Transnational Organised Crime

The third research question sought to examine how Botswana's legal, institutional and regional policy responses are implemented in addressing transnational organised crime. Thematic analysis revealed that Botswana has established relatively comprehensive legal and institutional frameworks for combating transnational organised crime through domestic legislation, specialised security agencies and regional cooperation mechanisms. Nevertheless, participants consistently indicated that implementation remains constrained by evolving transnational criminal networks, institutional capacity limitations, inadequate technological resources, fragmented interagency coordination and varying levels of regional commitment among neighbouring states.

Implementation of Botswana's Legal Framework

Participants acknowledged that Botswana possesses a robust legal framework including Arms and Ammunition Act and Proceeds & Instruments of Crime Act for combating transnational organised crime through domestic legislation and international legal instruments. However, the participants highlighted that effectiveness of these laws depends largely on enforcement capacity, continuous legislative review and the ability of institutions to respond to rapidly evolving criminal methods. Participant B shared that,

> "Botswana has enacted strong legislation against organised crime, money laundering and human trafficking. The challenge is not the absence of laws but ensuring that implementation keeps pace with increasingly sophisticated criminal networks."

Participant D added that

> “The domestic legal frameworks addressing forms of TOC within Botswana’s include the Arms and Ammunition Act, Financial Intelligence Act, Anti-Human Trafficking Act, Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substance Act, Proceeds & Instruments of Crime Act, and Wildlife Conversation and National Parks Act”

These findings indicate that Botswana's legislative framework provides a sound legal basis for addressing transnational organised crime but needs continuous adaptation to respond to emerging criminal trends. The findings corroborate Khan et al. (2024), who identify the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime as the principal international legal framework guiding national responses to organised crime. Similarly, Banda (2023) argues that regional legal instruments adopted by the Southern African Development Community provide comprehensive policy guidance, although their implementation varies considerably among member states. The findings further support Balule and Dambe (2023), who contend that legislative reforms alone cannot effectively combat transnational organised crime without corresponding investments in institutional capacity, specialised investigation units and effective criminal prosecution. From the perspective of

Securitisation Theory, legal frameworks represent extraordinary policy instruments through which states respond to emerging security threats that transcend conventional criminal justice responses.

Institutional Responses to Transnational Organised Crime

Participants regarded Botswana's specialised agencies as essential in combating transnational organised crime within the country's borders but noted that increasing criminal sophistication has placed considerable pressure on institutional resources, investigative capabilities and interagency coordination. According to Participant Z indicate that,

> " Botswana Police Service, Directorate of Intelligence and Security, Directorate on Corruption and Economic Crime and Financial Intelligence Agency each play distinct roles, but transnational organised crime requires a more integrated operational approach."

The findings suggest that Botswana has institutional architecture of responding to transnational organised crime, although its effectiveness depends on sustained collaboration among national security agencies. These findings support Mlazi (2020), who argues that contemporary organised crime requires integrated policing approaches based on intelligence-led investigations rather than isolated institutional interventions. Similarly, Igwe (2023) maintains that effective responses to transnational organised crime depend upon institutional coordination, intelligence sharing and specialised investigative capabilities. The findings also reinforce Balule and Dambe's (2023) observation that institutional effectiveness depends not only on legal frameworks mandates but also on operational cooperation, technical expertise and adequate resource allocation. Within the framework of Network Governance Theory, these findings illustrate that effective governance of transnational organised crime depends upon collaborative institutional networks rather than independent organisational action.

Regional and International Cooperation

Participants unanimously identified regional and international cooperation as indispensable for addressing organised criminal activities that transcend national borders. They emphasised the importance of intelligence sharing, joint investigations, extradition arrangements and coordinated border management through regional and international organisations. Consolidated views from participant N & T indicated that,

> "Our collaboration through SARPCCO, INTERPOL and SADC have strengthened intelligence sharing and coordinated operations against organised criminal groups operating across Southern Africa."

These findings demonstrate that Botswana's response to organised crime increasingly depends upon regional and international partnerships. The findings corroborate Banda (2023), who argues that SADC protocols provide an important framework for regional cooperation against organised crime, although implementation remains inconsistent across member states. Likewise, Mlazi (2020) and Igwe (2023) conclude that intelligence sharing, mutual legal assistance and coordinated policing significantly improve the capacity of law enforcement agencies to combat transnational criminal enterprises. These findings further reinforce the principles of Network Governance Theory, which emphasises that complex transnational security threats require collaborative governance involving domestic institutions, regional organisations and international partners working within interconnected security networks. The findings also indicate that principal security challenge confronting Botswana is not the absence of legal or institutional frameworks but ensuring their effective implementation within an increasingly dynamic criminal environment. These findings support Balule and Dambe (2023), who argue that institutional coordination and operational capacity remain more significant determinants of success than legislation alone. Similarly, Khan et al. (2024) observe that the effectiveness of international legal frameworks ultimately depends upon domestic implementation and sustained political commitment. Banda (2023) further argues that although regional cooperation mechanisms have strengthened policy harmonisation within Southern Africa, inconsistent implementation continues to undermine collective responses to organised crime. From the perspective of Securitisation Theory, these findings suggest that states must continuously adapt legal and institutional responses to match evolving security threats, while Network Governance Theory highlights the importance of sustained policing cooperation among national, regional and international actors to strengthen implementation capacity.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the nature and scope of transnational organised crime in Botswana, analysed its implications for national peace and security, and evaluated the implementation of the country's legal, institutional and regional policy responses. The findings demonstrate that transnational organised crime has evolved into a multidimensional security threat characterised by adaptive cross border criminal networks involved in human trafficking, migrant smuggling, wildlife trafficking, cybercrime, money laundering, illicit financial flows and cross-border goods smuggling. These enterprises undermine national security, economic stability, human security and institutional governance, highlighting the need to address transnational organised crime as a strategic security challenge rather than solely as a criminal justice issue. Although Botswana has established comprehensive legal and institutional frameworks, therefore their effectiveness continues to be constrained by implementation challenges, evolving organised criminal modus operandi, the need for stronger interagency coordination and regional cooperation. The study reinforces the relevance of Securitisation Theory and Network Governance Theory in explaining security implications of transnational organised crime and paramount importance of collaborative governance in responding to increasingly sophisticated transnational criminal networks. By providing empirical evidence from Botswana, the study fills an important gap in the literature and offers policy and scholarly insights that can inform institutional reforms and future research on transnational organised crime within Botswana and the wider Southern African region. The study provides context specific insight that may be transferable to other jurisdictions facing transnational organised crime and security threats.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Government of Botswana should enhance integrated border management by investing in advanced surveillance technologies, intelligence-led policing, and interagency information sharing to improve the detection and prevention of transnational organised crime.
2. Botswana should improve the operational capacity of key national security institutions through continuous specialised training, adequate resource allocation, advanced investigative technologies, and stronger coordination among the Botswana Police Service, Directorate of Intelligence and Security, Directorate on Corruption and Economic Crime, Financial Intelligence Agency, Botswana Unified Revenue Service, and the Judiciary to effectively respond to evolving criminal networks.
3. Botswana should strengthen collaboration with Southern African Regional Police Chiefs Cooperation Organisation, INTERPOL, the African Union and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime by expanding intelligence sharing, joint operations, harmonising legal frameworks and implementing regional protocols to improve collective security responses to transnational organised crime.

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