



Governing through Resilience Redistributes Authority in Nigeria's Stabilisation and Border Governance

Dr. Kunle Olawunmi

ORCID: 0009-0009-8889-2261

Associate Professor of International Relations, Intelligence and Strategic Studies, Department of International Relations, Chrisland University, Abeokuta, Nigeria

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*Corresponding Author: Dr. Kunle Olawunmi

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Abstract

Resilience has become a familiar language of contemporary security assistance, but its authority effects remain under-specified. This article argues that resilience operates as security governmentality when it renders insecurity governable through risk rationalities, audit practices, data infrastructures, and coordination routines. Its political significance lies not only in asking institutions and populations to adapt to insecurity, but in redistributing practical authority among donors, security institutions, civilian agencies, implementing partners, and communities made visible by programme design. Using an interpretive documentary analysis of Nigeria's Northeast stabilisation field and border governance field, the article shows that authority shifts differently according to the object being governed. In stabilisation, resilience territorialises intervention through site selection, access management, perception measurement, and narrative verification of recovery. In border governance, it datafies mobility through integrated border management, standards, information systems, and inter-agency platforms. The article contributes to critical security studies by specifying authority redistribution as a mechanism of resilience governance and by showing how contestation is relocated into administrative sites such as indicators, data access, reporting pipelines, and coordination design.

Keywords: resilience, security assistance, security governmentality, authority redistribution, stabilisation, border governance, Nigeria.

Original Research Article

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1. Introduction

Resilience now does a great deal of work in security assistance. It names a promise of recovery after violence, a language of institutional reform, and a way of making chronic insecurity appear administratively manageable. Across conflict stabilisation, border governance, migration management, and capacity-building programmes, resilience is presented as a practical response to

conditions that do not easily lend themselves to decisive settlement. It promises adaptation, coordination, preparedness, and local ownership. In African security assistance settings, that promise has become especially influential because it allows donors, international organisations, and state agencies to speak simultaneously about protection, reform, recovery, and security. The difficulty is that this language often appears politically modest



precisely when it is doing substantial governmental work.

Critical scholarship has already shown that resilience is not a neutral vocabulary of recovery. It can privilege adaptation over structural transformation, normalise permanent crisis, and relocate responsibility onto institutions and populations expected to cope with insecurity rather than contest the conditions that produce it. This article accepts that critique but presses it in a more specific direction. The underdeveloped question is not only whether resilience responsabilises vulnerable actors. It is how resilience reorganises authority inside security assistance architectures. Who gains the standing to define insecurity, select sites of intervention, control information, certify progress, convene institutions, and speak credibly in the name of protection or recovery?

That question matters for critical security studies because externally assisted governance rarely redistributes authority through open constitutional change. It usually works through programmes, templates, reports, coordination meetings, access protocols, monitoring systems, and information infrastructures. Donors, implementing partners, security agencies, and civilian bureaucracies may all remain formally committed to national ownership while practical authority is gradually rearranged through the administrative routines of assistance. Recent work on transnational security governance shows that such arrangements often exceed formal state hierarchies while still shaping who can act, decide, and claim legitimacy (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2011). Work on African security assistance similarly shows how reform and capacity-building travel through ordinary practices of policing, training, coordination, and administrative ordering rather than through exceptional intervention alone (Bachmann, 2014). Resilience is one of the languages through which these arrangements become naturalised as systems improvement rather than the reorganisation of rule.

Nigeria offers a useful setting in which to examine this problem because resilience travels across neighbouring but distinct security fields. In the conflict-affected Northeast, the United Nations

Development Programme's Regional Stabilization Facility organises stabilisation around community territorialisation, government partnership, perception measurement, third-party verification, and narratives of restored state presence. In the border governance field, the Nigeria Immigration Service and the International Organization for Migration frame resilience through integrated border management, technology-driven systems, strategic coordination, and the linkage of national security with migrant protection. These two fields are not the same. One is organised around territorial recovery after insurgent violence; the other around mobility, irregularity, and institutional visibility. Their proximity, however, makes them analytically useful because both translate resilience into routine security governance through externally assisted administrative arrangements.

The comparison is therefore not designed to show that resilience has one uniform effect in Nigeria. It is designed to show how a shared governmental vocabulary produces different authority effects when attached to different objects of governance. Where the object is territorial recovery, resilience works through site selection, access management, sequencing, monitoring, and ownership narratives. Where the object is mobility, resilience works through data systems, classification practices, standards, interoperability, and inter-agency convening. This variation is central to the article's argument. Resilience is portable, but its politics are not mechanically identical across domains.

The article makes three contributions. First, it specifies authority redistribution as a mechanism of resilience governance. This shifts analysis beyond broad claims that resilience depoliticises or responsabilises and asks how authority is practically reallocated. Second, it contributes to critical security studies by showing how mundane administrative instruments, rather than exceptional coercive acts alone, organise who may define insecurity, allocate priorities, and certify legitimate intervention. Third, it contributes to debates on African security governance by showing how security assistance can strengthen state visibility while simultaneously distributing practical authority across donors, implementing partners, security agencies, civilian

institutions, and the administrative systems that connect them.

The article proceeds in four parts. The remainder of the introduction develops the conceptual framework. Section 2 explains the materials and methods. Section 3 presents and discusses the findings from Northeast stabilisation and border governance, followed by a comparative synthesis and the broader implications. Section 4 concludes.

1.1 Resilience as Security Governmentality

This article treats resilience not as a descriptive label for recovery or institutional adaptation, but as a political rationality that organises how insecurity is rendered thinkable and governable. The starting point is the governmentality literature, which has long shown that power frequently operates through dispersed administrative techniques rather than solely through sovereign command or spectacular coercion. Governmentality directs attention to the mundane instruments through which conduct is shaped, populations classified, spaces organised, and institutional capacities normalised. In the security field, this means examining how apparently technical practices such as assessment, coordination, monitoring, and standards-setting help constitute the very problems they claim merely to manage.

Critical security scholarship has been especially attentive to this mundane politics of rule. Bigo's (2002) account of the "governmentality of unease" remains foundational because it demonstrates how administrative and professional security practices expand authority by constructing insecurity as a domain requiring specialised expertise and bureaucratic management. Huysmans's (1998) treatment of security as a "thick signifier" is equally important because it shows how security vocabularies reorganise political space by attaching heterogeneous practices, institutions, and meanings to a common governmental register. These insights are highly relevant to contemporary security assistance, where intervention is increasingly justified not by emergency alone but by the need to improve resilience, coordination, and institutional performance. Resilience thus deserves to be treated not simply as a policy fashion, but as a specific

technology of governance that works through problem definition, legibility, and institutional routinisation.

The resilience literature has already made several important moves. Chandler (2013, 2014) argues that resilience governance responds to complexity by privileging adaptive management over structural transformation, while Joseph (2013, 2016) reads resilience as embedded in neoliberal forms of responsabilisation that shift burdens onto subjects and institutions expected to absorb shocks. Evans and Reid (2014) push the critique further by showing how resilience can become a demand to endure crisis rather than contest its conditions. Duffield's (2007) work on development and security similarly underscores how governance projects organise insecurity as an administrable condition rather than a problem to be politically resolved. Bourbeau's (2013) formulation of "resiliencism" reinforces this point by showing how resilience can operate not simply as a descriptor of social adaptation but as a securitising and ordering frame in its own right. Placed alongside work on fragmented and transnational security governance, these accounts also suggest that resilience should be examined in relation to the wider assemblages through which authority is dispersed beyond formal state institutions while still shaping concrete practices of protection and control (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2011). Taken together, these interventions show that resilience is deeply political. It shapes subjects, normalises uncertainty, and displaces structural critique into managerial adaptation.

Yet an important analytical gap remains. Existing accounts are strongest when showing that resilience depoliticises, responsabilises, or normalises adaptation. They are less specific about how resilience reorganises practical authority within security assistance arrangements. In externally assisted governance settings, the crucial political question is often not only how subjects are responsabilised, but also how authority is redistributed across donors, international organisations, state agencies, and security bureaucracies through routine instruments of programme implementation. To put it differently, resilience does not simply tell actors to adapt. It also

reallocates who may define the problem, who controls the tools of legibility, who convenes coordination, and who can credibly claim to govern in the name of protection, recovery, or national security.

This article addresses that gap by conceptualising resilience as security governmentality with authority effects. The concept of authority effects is used here to capture the practical reallocations of governing standing that occur when resilience is institutionalised through programme routines. Four authority effects are especially important.

The first is decision-rights authority. This concerns shifts in who is able to set priorities, sequence interventions, authorise access, or determine what counts as an actionable governance problem. In security assistance settings, these rights may not map neatly onto formal sovereignty. They are often distributed through funding conditions, implementation infrastructures, and operational gatekeeping.

The second is informational sovereignty. This refers to shifts in who controls data systems, classification categories, reporting pipelines, and access to the information that renders insecurity legible. In datafied security governance, control over information is not ancillary to power. It is one of its central modalities.

The third is convening authority. This concerns shifts in who can assemble relevant actors, define agendas, stabilise priorities, and transform coordination forums into routine sites of governance. Coordination is not analytically neutral. It sorts whose definitions of the problem become institutionally consequential.

The fourth is legitimacy authority. This refers to shifts in who can credibly claim to govern in the name of recovery, protection, resilience, or national ownership. In security assistance, legitimacy often circulates through moralised vocabularies that make intervention appear necessary, responsible, and difficult to contest.

These authority effects are not exhaustive, but they provide a disciplined way of moving beyond generic claims about the politics of resilience. They specify

the mechanisms through which resilience becomes institutionally consequential. The article argues that these effects are typically produced through a transferable repertoire of techniques, especially risk rationalities, audit practices, coordination infrastructures, and systems of measurement. What varies across domains is not whether resilience is political, but how its politics are organised, which actors are empowered, and which forms of contestation are displaced into apparently technical sites of administration.

The article therefore works with a clear conceptual linkage. The primary governing variables are resilience techniques, operationalised as risk rationalities, audit and verification practices, coordination infrastructures, and, in the border field, data systems and standards. The conditioning variable is the object of governance: territorial recovery and local legitimacy in Northeast stabilisation, mobility as risk and vulnerability in border governance. The outcome variables are the authority effects traced across the two sites: shifts in decision-rights, informational sovereignty, convening authority, and legitimacy authority. The theoretical expectation is that the same resilience grammar will travel across both domains, but that the pathway of authority redistribution will vary with the administrative object being rendered governable. The empirical value of the comparison lies in tracing these linkages through observable practices such as site selection, access negotiation, perception measurement, reporting pipelines, data access, interoperability, and coordination forums.

The implication is that authority redistribution should not be treated as an incidental by-product of resilience programming. It is one of the ways resilience becomes governable and governable to others. Once insecurity is organised through the intertwined logics of auditable progress, coordinated intervention, and systems strengthening, authority is drawn toward those actors who can render these logics operational. This is why the article focuses on apparently modest administrative devices rather than headline episodes of coercion. In settings shaped by assistance, much of the consequential politics occurs not in moments of explicit command, but in the quieter calibration of templates, categories, visibility

thresholds, and procedural priorities. These are the sites where resilience acquires institutional durability and where its political sociology becomes legible. The article's theoretical contribution is thus twofold. To theories of resilience, it shows that resilience governance does not only responsabilise or depoliticise; it also redistributes practical authority through mundane administrative devices. To governmentality approaches in security, it shows that the relevant effects are not confined to subject formation or professional unease, but extend to the patterned reallocation of decision capacity, informational control, convening power, and claims to legitimate rule across externally assisted governance assemblages.

Read through this lens, the article speaks directly to concerns central to critical security studies and political sociology, particularly work that treats the international as constituted through practices, rationalities, and forms of ordering rather than as a separate level of politics (Bigo & Walker, 2007). The point is not simply that resilience is politically consequential, but that its consequences are mediated through ordinary institutional forms that make rule appear technical, distributed, and often non-decisional. Security assistance becomes sociologically interesting precisely because authority is rarely monopolised by a single actor. It is assembled across reports, monitoring systems, roadmaps, access protocols, donor requirements, and interagency platforms. A political-sociological approach therefore shifts attention away from whether resilience is normatively good or bad in the abstract and toward the social organisation of governance itself: how administrative routines stabilise authority, how categories and indicators travel across institutional settings, and how contestation is displaced into sites that often escape conventional accounts of security politics. In this sense, resilience governance is best understood as a practical ordering of relations among actors, knowledges, and infrastructures rather than simply as a discourse of adaptation.

This framework generates the article's comparative expectation. Where resilience is attached to territorial recovery and stabilisation, authority redistribution is likely to work through site selection,

access management, sequencing, and ownership narratives. Where resilience is attached to mobility regulation and border governance, authority redistribution is more likely to work through data systems, classification practices, standards, and interagency convening. The comparison that follows tests this expectation within Nigeria's security assistance field.

2. Materials and Methods

The study adopts an interpretive, governmentality-oriented documentary design. This approach is appropriate because the article is concerned less with programme effectiveness in a narrow evaluative sense than with how security problems are made intelligible, administratively actionable, and institutionally legitimate. The empirical strategy is a within-case comparison across two Nigerian security assistance fields: Northeast stabilisation and border governance. They are treated as comparable because both are shaped by external assistance, capacity-building vocabularies, and resilience language, but they differ in the object being governed. In the first field, the object is territorial recovery and local legitimacy after insurgent violence. In the second, the object is mobility as risk, vulnerability, and administrative visibility.

The analysis is based on a bounded documentary corpus rather than interview evidence. This design choice is important because the article's claims must be evaluated against materials that readers can verify. The corpus includes programme reports, official strategy documents, implementing agency briefers, public institutional communications, donor project descriptions, and scholarly work used to situate those materials analytically. The documents are not treated as transparent mirrors of practice. They are read as administrative artefacts through which categories, priorities, performance claims, and authority relationships are codified. This is consistent with international political sociology approaches that study security governance through practices, instruments, and routine forms of ordering rather than through formal mandates alone.

The corpus was selected through three criteria. First, documents had to speak directly to one of the two

empirical fields: Northeast stabilisation or border governance. Second, they had to contain operational or administrative language relevant to resilience techniques, including risk management, monitoring, coordination, data systems, border management, migration governance, or state presence. Third, they had to be sufficiently accessible for verification. Where public access to operational annexes, closed minutes, or internal coordination records is unavailable, the article does not infer their content. It instead limits claims to what can be supported by accessible programme reports, public communications, strategy documents, and adjacent analytical literature.

The coding was abductive. Initial codes were derived from the theoretical framework: risk rationalities, audit and verification practices, coordination infrastructures, data systems, and the four authority effects of decision-rights authority, informational sovereignty, convening authority, and legitimacy authority. These codes were then refined through repeated reading of the corpus. The analysis asked

three linked questions of each document: what problem of insecurity is being made governable; which administrative technique makes that problem visible or actionable; and which actors gain practical standing because they control, convene, verify, classify, or narrate that technique. This coding strategy does not claim statistical representativeness. Its value lies in tracing how authority effects are generated through the ordinary materials of security assistance.

To improve transparency, Table 1 lists the core documentary materials and their analytical use. The table is not presented as an exhaustive inventory of all relevant Nigerian security documents. It records the materials on which the article's substantive claims principally rest. This is important because the argument concerns authority redistribution within public and semi-public administrative architectures, not tactical operational conduct. The analysis therefore avoids claims that would require access to classified military, intelligence, or law-enforcement materials.

Table 1. Documentary corpus and analytical use.

Empirical field	Core materials used	Analytical use in the article
Northeast stabilisation	UNDP Regional Stabilization Facility annual reports (UNDP, 2022, 2023); regional stabilisation strategy (Lake Chad Basin Commission & African Union Commission, 2018); humanitarian critique (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2018).	Traces how stabilisation is territorialised through Joint Action Plan sites, access conditions, monitoring routines, perception data, third-party verification, and claims of government ownership.
Border governance	National Border Management Strategy (Nigeria Immigration Service, 2019); border strategy announcement and programme briefer (IOM, 2019, 2024); strategic collaboration communication (Nigeria Immigration Service, 2025); project page (European Commission, 2025).	Traces how border resilience is organised through integrated border management, data systems, coordination platforms, anti-smuggling priorities, migration governance, and the security-protection vocabulary.

Empirical field	Core materials used	Analytical use in the article
Contextual and interpretive scholarship	Critical security studies, resilience and governmentality scholarship, migration governance studies, border studies, and African security governance literature.	Provides the conceptual vocabulary for reading documents as administrative artefacts and for identifying authority effects rather than treating documents only as policy descriptions.

2.1 Data Availability and Limitations

The corpus is composed of publicly accessible documents and secondary scholarly materials. A working corpus log records document title, authoring organisation, publication date where available, access route, empirical field, and relevance to the analytical categories. Because some border governance materials are public only in summary form, and because operational annexes or interagency minutes are not consistently available, the article does not claim comprehensive access to the full institutional archive of Nigerian border management. This limitation is not incidental; it is part of the empirical condition of studying security governance in fields where public authority, donor programming, and restricted operational practice intersect.

The article therefore differentiates among three levels of claim. Claims about formal policy framing are grounded in official strategy documents, public agency statements, and programme descriptions. Claims about administrative techniques are grounded in visible references to monitoring tools, reporting arrangements, data systems, coordination platforms, and implementation modalities. Claims about authority effects are interpretive inferences drawn from the relationship between those techniques and the institutional standing they confer. This layered approach allows the reader to see where the evidence is direct, where it is inferential, and where the article deliberately refrains from overclaiming.

This evidentiary discipline also clarifies the article's limits. The study does not assess operational effectiveness, does not measure programme outcomes independently, and does not make claims about classified decision-making. Its contribution is

to explain how resilience becomes a governing rationality through accessible administrative artefacts, and how those artefacts redistribute authority in ways that are politically consequential even when they appear technical.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Northeast Stabilisation: Resilience Techniques and Authority Effects

The Northeast stabilisation field offers a useful entry point into the politics of resilience because it shows how a language of recovery, partnership, and adaptive programming can reorganise authority without formally displacing the state. In the RSF Nigeria Window, resilience is operationalised through a stabilisation architecture that links territorially bounded interventions to government partnership and to a monitoring infrastructure designed to make progress visible, comparable, and reportable. What matters analytically is not only that stabilisation is pursued, but that it is pursued through a set of administrative routines that decide where intervention is legitimate, what counts as evidence of recovery, and who may speak credibly in the name of restoration (UNDP, 2023).

Seen through a governmentality lens, the RSF does not simply fund recovery activities. It helps constitute a governable field by territorialising intervention through Joint Action Plan sites, by converting local perceptions into auditable indicators, and by repeatedly framing progress through government ownership and restored trust. Each of these practices has authority effects. They sort which actors can authorise sequencing, which actors can certify improvement, and which actors are

publicly recognised as the bearers of legitimate recovery. The stabilisation site is therefore best understood not as a neutral arena of programme delivery, but as a domain in which resilience techniques redistribute practical authority through access management, monitoring infrastructures, and legitimacy narratives.

3.1.1 Risk and Access Governance

This reading is consistent with humanitarian critiques of Lake Chad stabilisation, which warn that access regimes and securitised sequencing shape which communities become reachable, governable, and visible to assistance actors in the first place (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2018). It also resonates with Andersson's account of how fear and risk produce spatial distinctions between governable and difficult spaces in contemporary interventionary politics (Andersson, 2019).

Risk in Northeast stabilisation is not merely an environmental condition to which programmes must adapt. It is itself a governing medium through which priorities are ordered and access is filtered. RSF reporting makes clear that implementation depends on continuous dialogue over security conditions, access, and the feasibility of activities in specific localities (UNDP, 2023). In practice, this means that stabilisation is not organised solely by formal programme design. It is also organised by the actors able to interpret insecurity, negotiate movement, and determine when and where programme activity is permissible. Authority therefore tends to accumulate around those positioned at the intersection of programme management and security access.

The political significance of this arrangement is that risk assessment becomes a disguised mode of priority-setting. Communities may be formally included within the horizon of stabilisation, yet operational sequencing remains shaped by whether access can be secured, whether movement can be justified, and whether local conditions can be rendered sufficiently governable for intervention. In this sense, resilience does not simply respond to insecurity. It redistributes decision-rights by turning the management of insecurity into a precondition for programme action. This dynamic is visible in the

way accessibility conditions shape programme tempo, the regularity of monitoring, and the likelihood that particular sites can be rendered legible within donor-facing timelines.

This is precisely where a governmentality reading adds value. What appears administratively as prudent risk management also works politically by narrowing the field of legitimate intervention to spaces that can be made legible and operationally manageable. The resulting authority effect is not necessarily visible in formal mandates, but in the practical capacity to authorise sequencing, suspend activity, or redefine implementation priorities under the sign of security prudence.

3.1.2 Audit and Narrative Accountability

A second mechanism of authority redistribution in the stabilisation field lies in audit. The RSF places considerable emphasis on perception surveys, community pulse mechanisms, third-party monitoring, and associated reporting routines that translate complex social dynamics into demonstrable signs of progress (UNDP, 2023). These instruments do more than measure outcomes after the fact. They participate in constructing what recovery is understood to be. Stabilisation becomes legible through indicators of confidence, perceptions of state presence, and narrative evidence of improved relations between institutions and communities. The effect is to privilege those actors who design, administer, interpret, and circulate these metrics.

This matters because audit is inseparable from narrative authority. In stabilisation settings, especially where outcomes are politically contested and temporally uneven, metrics alone rarely suffice. They must be assembled into a credible story of movement from insecurity toward governability. Reporting practices therefore do not simply document progress. They curate it. They determine which forms of change become visible to donors, which setbacks are absorbed into adaptive language, and which forms of local complexity are translated into manageable evidence. The analytical point is direct: audit standardises legibility, while narrative stabilises meaning.

Under these conditions, resilience governance privileges actors who can certify improvement in ways that travel across institutional audiences. The authority effect is therefore not only technical but political. Measurement infrastructures become channels through which some actors can define success, defend programme legitimacy, and structure future resource allocation. Put differently, audit does not merely evaluate stabilisation. It helps govern it by determining what can count as stabilisation in the first place. Administrative competence and interpretive competence therefore converge around the capacity to translate messy local dynamics into evidence of managed progress.

3.1.3 Government Ownership as a Technique of Legitimacy

Within the wider Lake Chad policy architecture, local ownership is repeatedly invoked as a principle of long-term stabilisation and resilience, but the practical content of that ownership remains mediated by programme design, donor conditionality, and security access (Lake Chad Basin Commission & African Union Commission, 2018; Brechenmacher, 2019).

The language of government ownership occupies a central place in the legitimating grammar of Northeast stabilisation. RSF materials repeatedly frame the programme as working through state institutions and as strengthening perceptions of state presence and responsibility (UNDP, 2023). This is politically important because ownership is not a descriptive label but a claim about legitimate rule. To name a programme as government-led is to situate it within a moral and political economy of recovery in which state authority appears restored, responsive, and publicly recognised.

Yet ownership in security assistance is rarely unitary. It can be symbolic, operational, fiscal, or epistemic, and these dimensions do not always coincide. A programme may be narrated as nationally owned while key decision architectures remain shaped by donor reporting requirements, access constraints, and externally certified evidence of success. That tension is analytically central to the politics of resilience. Ownership claims can consolidate state legitimacy

even where practical authority is distributed across a wider assemblage of donors, implementing partners, coordinators, and security gatekeepers. The critical question, then, is not whether government ownership is invoked, but what kind of ownership is being produced and through which administrative routines it becomes credible.

A governmentality approach helps illuminate this dual movement. Resilience stabilisation does not bypass the state. It often works by publicly restoring the state as the visible face of recovery while embedding that restoration within monitoring, coordination, and implementation infrastructures that exceed formal state control. The legitimacy effect is therefore twofold: the state is reauthorised as the symbol of recovery, while other actors gain quieter but consequential authority through the practical organisation of the recovery process. What is produced is not the absence of state authority, but a mediated and carefully staged version of it.

Taken together, the Northeast stabilisation case shows that resilience governs by translating political and security contestation into administrable questions of access, sequencing, verification, and ownership. The key authority pathways are therefore territorially and narratively organised. Decision-rights cluster around those who can negotiate risk and authorise movement. Audit authority clusters around those who control the instruments through which recovery is made measurable and reportable. Legitimacy authority clusters around the ability to narrate intervention as government-led restoration rather than externally managed stabilisation.

The broader implication is that resilience in this field does not eliminate politics. It relocates politics into the mundane sites where intervention is territorialised, progress is certified, and state authority is publicly performed. What is most consequential is not simply which programmes are funded, but which actors can define what counts as a stabilisable site, what counts as evidence of recovery, and whose ownership is recognised as legitimate. Northeast stabilisation thus illustrates a specifically territorial and legitimating pathway of authority redistribution within security assistance.

3.2 Border Governance: Resilience, Integrated Border Management, and Authority Effects

Nigeria's National Border Management Strategy 2019–2023 frames border management as an explicitly interagency, risk-based, and information-driven enterprise, while political economy work on migration governance in Nigeria situates border control within wider coordination platforms, donor agendas, and uneven institutional mandates (Nigeria Immigration Service, 2019; Arhin-Sam, 2019). This institutional architecture is also consistent with scholarship on the contested politics of mobility, which treats bordering as a field of administrative and political struggles over circulation, irregularity, and control (Squire, 2011).

If Northeast stabilisation demonstrates how resilience territorialises recovery, border governance shows how resilience datafies mobility. In this domain, resilience is articulated through professionalisation, systems strengthening, interagency coordination, and technology-driven management. Official accounts by the Nigeria Immigration Service and the International Organization for Migration present integrated border management as both a national security imperative and a capacity-building agenda linked to institutional modernisation, information systems, and coordinated control (IOM, 2019, 2024; NIS, 2025). Border governance is therefore not simply a site of enforcement. It is a site where mobility is rendered governable through administrative visibility.

This matters because border resilience does not operate primarily through one-off coercive acts. It operates through infrastructures that classify, sort, coordinate, and certify. The shift toward data-driven management, interoperable systems, and strategic coordination changes who can define border risk, whose knowledge becomes actionable, and which institutional actors gain standing in the governance field. The central authority effects in this case are informational and convening in form, and they are legitimised through a recurrent coupling of security with humanitarian protection. Border governance thus offers a distinct pathway through which resilience redistributes authority: not through territorial recovery and ownership narratives, but

through data infrastructures, coordination architectures, and the moral vocabulary of protective control.

3.2.1 Informational Sovereignty and the Datafication of Border Risk

The National Border Management Strategy makes clear that improved surveillance, information sharing, interagency collaboration, and risk management are central to the lead agency's renewed institutional approach (Nigeria Immigration Service, 2019). More generally, scholarship on data-driven governance shows how analytics reconfigure what becomes actionable by reorganising the relation between information, visibility, and intervention (Amoore & Piotukh, 2015).

Informational sovereignty is the most consequential authority channel in resilience-oriented border governance because the border is increasingly governed as a problem of visibility. To manage movement as risk, it must first be translated into categories, databases, reporting streams, and operational thresholds. Public descriptions of NIS-IOM collaboration emphasise technology-driven management and institutional strengthening, while IOM programme materials frame border governance in terms of integrated systems, capacity development, and standardised procedures (IOM, 2024; NIS, 2025). These are not merely technical upgrades. They are mechanisms through which some actors acquire enhanced influence over how mobility becomes legible and actionable.

The political issue is therefore not simply whether better data exist, but who controls the terms of datafied visibility. Actors who manage databases, define categories, regulate access permissions, or standardise reporting pipelines exercise a form of authority that exceeds routine administration. They shape what counts as suspicious movement, which vulnerabilities are prioritised, and what kinds of intervention appear justified. In this sense, informational sovereignty is not equivalent to formal state sovereignty. It refers to practical control over the infrastructures through which mobility is known and governed.

A resilience frame intensifies this dynamic by presenting information control as a neutral component of systems strengthening. Yet once governance is reorganised around data quality, interoperability, and institutional visibility, authority tends to migrate toward the actors and units that can certify the integrity of those systems. This is especially apparent where data-sharing practices, interoperability standards, and access conditions become contested administrative issues rather than purely technical matters. The broader analytical point is that border resilience redistributes authority by making informational gatekeeping the condition of legitimate action.

The issue, then, is not technological determinism but administrative positioning. Data systems are not neutral vessels into which coordination naturally flows. They are contested infrastructures whose design, access conditions, and reporting standards help determine who is authorised to know the border and, by extension, who is authorised to govern it. The practical power of border resilience therefore lies as much in the governance of information flows as in any visible enhancement of material control capacity.

3.2.2 Convening Power as an Administrative Technology

This wider governance architecture is also visible in work mapping Nigeria's migration governance field, which identifies border management forums and multi-actor coordination processes as important sites through which NIS and partner organisations organise priorities and distribute administrative standing (Arhin-Sam, 2019).

Integrated border management is routinely framed as a coordination solution. Yet coordination is never politically empty. It creates forums, sets agendas, and stabilises certain definitions of the problem over others. Public accounts of NIS-IOM collaboration describe strategic engagement, joint road-mapping, and shared institutional priorities, while donor project descriptions privilege issues such as anti-smuggling, anti-trafficking, and migration governance reform (European Commission, 2025; NIS, 2025). Through these processes, coordination

becomes a technology of rule: it determines who convenes, who speaks authoritatively, and which border problems are rendered administratively central.

Convening power matters because in fragmented security fields authority often follows the capacity to assemble actors and order priorities rather than the capacity to command unilaterally. Coordination meetings, strategic platforms, and roadmap processes do not simply align existing institutions. They help constitute the field in which those institutions act. They define the relevant categories of risk, identify legitimate partners, and channel resources toward some problem formulations rather than others. In this way, interagency coordination operates as a practical mechanism of agenda-setting authority.

A governmentality perspective is useful here because it treats convening not as a benign managerial exercise but as an administrative form through which governance is normalised. The actors able to structure coordination gain influence even without direct coercive power, because they shape the institutional environment within which other actors must justify action. Border resilience therefore redistributes authority not only through information control, but also through the routinisation of forums that convert coordination into governance. Coordination is therefore not merely a response to fragmentation. It is one of the means by which fragmented governance is made governable and hierarchically intelligible.

3.2.3 The Humanitarian-Security Bargain

A further source of authority in border governance lies in the coupling of national security with humanitarian protection. IOM's announcement of the National Border Management Strategy explicitly links enhanced national security with the protection of migrants' rights (IOM, 2019). This formulation is analytically important because it does not present security and protection as opposing values that must be balanced from the outside. It fuses them into a single legitimating vocabulary through which intensified border management appears both ethically necessary and administratively responsible.

The advantage of this frame is political as much as normative. Protection claims broaden the authorised repertoire of intervention by allowing control practices to travel under the sign of care, rights, and vulnerability management. Walters' notion of the humanitarian border is especially useful here because it highlights how humanitarian reason can become entwined with bordering rather than tempering it from without (Walters, 2011). Pallister-Wilkins makes a related point in showing that humanitarian politics can accompany, legitimise, and even deepen enforcement authority rather than displace it (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015). In the Nigerian context, this means that resilience-oriented border governance can present expanded administrative control as protective, rights-aware, and institutionally progressive.

The legitimacy effect is significant. Once security and protection are discursively coupled, contesting enhanced border management can become more difficult because criticism can be reframed as indifference to vulnerability or disorder. The humanitarian-security bargain therefore does not reduce coercive potential. It moralises and stabilises it. This is one of the central ways in which resilience governance makes administrative expansion appear ethically difficult to oppose.

Seen sociologically, the humanitarian-security bargain does more than broaden the justificatory language of border management. It also helps stabilise cross-institutional cooperation by giving heterogeneous actors a common moral vocabulary. Security agencies, migration managers, donors, and humanitarian interlocutors need not share identical priorities in order to participate in a field organised around the joint defence of order and protection. This does not dissolve contradiction. Rather, it manages contradiction by rendering control and care mutually commensurable. The consequence is an expanded zone of administrative legitimacy in which measures associated with surveillance, categorisation, and restriction can be narrated as necessary to rights protection and responsible governance. That is one reason this bargain is so important to the authority effects of resilience-oriented bordering.

3.2.4 Authority Effects in Border Governance

Taken together, the border governance case shows that resilience redistributes authority by reorganising the conditions under which mobility becomes governable. Border governance authority is not produced simply by adding personnel, equipment, or formal mandates. It is produced through the quieter infrastructures that determine who may define risk, who may classify movement, who may convene relevant actors, and who may speak credibly in the combined language of security and protection.

Informational gatekeeping is therefore central. Data systems become preconditions for legitimacy, resourcing, and operational action. Actors who control classification tools, access rights, and reporting outputs gain structural influence over how movement is interpreted and acted upon (IOM, 2024; NIS, 2025). Convening power is equally important because strategic roadmaps, donor-backed platforms, and interagency coordination forums institutionalise agenda-setting as routine governance (European Commission, 2025; NIS, 2025). Legitimacy production completes the picture by attaching border control to a moralised vocabulary of protection, thereby reducing the visibility of the coercive and exclusionary effects that may accompany it.

The result is a distinctive pathway of authority redistribution. Whereas Northeast stabilisation concentrates authority through territorialisation, sequencing, and ownership narratives, border resilience concentrates authority through informational infrastructures, coordination architectures, and legitimised bureaucratic control. This difference is crucial for the article's broader comparative claim.

3.3 Comparative Synthesis: Resilience Governmentality Across Stabilisation and Border Governance

The within-case comparison demonstrates that resilience travels across Nigerian security assistance not as a fixed doctrine, but as a repertoire of governing techniques whose authority effects vary with the object of governance.

Across both sites, resilience works through a shared toolkit of risk rationalities, audit and verification practices, coordination infrastructures, and claims of institutional strengthening. These common

techniques make insecurity legible, actionable, and reportable. Yet they do not produce identical political effects in each domain.

Table 2. Shared resilience techniques and domain-specific authority pathways.

Domain	Object of governance	Core resilience techniques	Primary authority effects	Main site of contestation
Northeast stabilisation	Territorial recovery and local legitimacy	Site territorialisation; access management; perception metrics; third-party monitoring; ownership narratives	Decision-rights authority; audit authority; legitimacy authority	Which sites are stabilisable, how progress is certified, and whose ownership is recognised
Border governance	Mobility as risk and vulnerability	Integrated border management; data systems; classification categories; interoperability; coordination forums; security-protection framing	Informational sovereignty; convening authority; legitimacy authority	Who controls data visibility, sets coordination agendas, and defines protective control

3.4 Implications: Resilience, Authority, and the Politics of Capacity

The Nigerian comparison clarifies that resilience is a mode of rule that privileges forms of authority by privileging forms of legibility. In the Northeast, stabilisation becomes governable through Joint Action Plan territorialisation and through the translation of insecurity into perception metrics and narrative proof, redistributing authority through legitimacy attribution and reporting pipelines (UNDP, 2023). In border governance, mobility becomes governable through integrated border management, professional standards, and data infrastructures, redistributing authority through informational sovereignty and convening power (IOM, 2024; NIS, 2025; European Commission, 2025).

Two consequences follow. First, resilience

rationalities tend to shift accountability away from politically contestable questions such as whose interests are prioritised and how coercive power is governed, and toward technical questions of delivery, coordination, and measurable progress. This does not remove politics. It relocates politics into the mundane sites of indicator design, data access, and forum governance. Second, resilience enables a moral economy of intervention. In stabilisation, the moral claim is recovery and restored trust. In border governance, the moral claim is protection of vulnerable migrants alongside national security (IOM, 2019). These moral claims can make expanded administrative power appear ethically necessary, thereby stabilising authority arrangements that are difficult to contest.

A further implication is that resilience programmes can consolidate coercive and bureaucratic power while presenting themselves as neutral governance

improvements. In stabilisation, the emphasis on government ownership can consolidate symbolic state legitimacy even when decision rights remain shaped by donor reporting and security access constraints (UNDP, 2023). In border governance, the emphasis on technology and systems strengthening can consolidate informational gatekeeping, with downstream effects on who can access mobility rights and protections (IOM, 2024; NIS, 2025). For critical security scholarship, these dynamics underscore the need to treat resilience not as a value-neutral success metric but as a politics of governance.

For critical security studies, the broader implication is that externally assisted governance should be analysed less through a simple opposition between external intervention and domestic sovereignty and more through the distributed infrastructures that mediate between them. The Nigerian cases show that practical authority can be reallocated without overt institutional rupture, and that such reallocations often travel through instruments conventionally coded as technical or managerial. This matters beyond Nigeria. Similar questions arise wherever resilience, capacity-building, and coordinated reform are used to organise intervention in the name of adaptation and institutional strengthening. The analytic challenge is to identify the mundane mechanisms through which these programmes reorder relations among actors, knowledges, and claims to legitimate rule. Doing so makes it possible to see security assistance not only as policy transfer or external support, but as an ongoing social process in which authority is assembled, obscured, and normalised through administrative practice.

It also shows why seemingly modest disputes over templates, metrics, and data access matter analytically: they are often disputes over who gets to make insecurity knowable, actionable, and politically defensible.

In practical terms, this means that questions of accountability in security assistance cannot be exhausted by asking which actor formally owns a programme or which institution officially leads coordination. They also require attention to where verification is located, who controls administrative

visibility, and which organisations are positioned to certify competent action. A political-sociological analysis is useful precisely because it directs attention to these less dramatic but deeply consequential forms of authority. It shows how the infrastructure of governance itself becomes a terrain of power, and how claims of neutrality, partnership, and systems improvement can coexist with meaningful redistributions of influence inside externally assisted fields of rule.

4. Conclusion

This article has argued that resilience in Nigerian security assistance is best analysed as security governmentality. It governs by rendering insecurity legible and actionable through techniques of risk, audit, and coordination, and it redistributes authority by privileging those who control the instruments through which capacity, vulnerability, and progress are defined. In Northeast stabilisation, the UNDP Regional Stabilization Facility Nigeria Window shows how intervention becomes territorialised through Joint Action Plan site selection and validated through perception measurement and third-party narrative verification. These techniques generate tangible authority effects: they confer decision rights over what counts as stabilisable space and legitimate recovery, and they attribute governmental legitimacy to specific partnership arrangements between international donors and federal and state institutions (UNDP, 2023). In border governance, the National Border Management Strategy horizon and integrated border management programming demonstrate how mobility is governed through professionalisation and data infrastructures, producing authority effects through informational sovereignty, convening power, and the security-protection dyad (IOM, 2019, 2024; NIS, 2025; European Commission, 2025).

The comparative payoff is that resilience travels across security domains not as a single doctrine but as a transferable repertoire of governing techniques whose political effects depend on the administrative form through which insecurity is made legible. The central analytical question is therefore not whether resilience interventions succeed on their own technical terms, but how they reorganise who may

authoritatively govern insecurity, through which mundane instruments of coordination, verification, and information control, and with what consequences for democratic accountability, political contestation, and the distribution of voice within African security governance architectures. Tracing these redistributions requires sustained attention to the everyday sites where authority is practically constituted: indicator design, data access protocols, audit routines, and the architectural choices that shape who may participate in coordination forums and on what terms. It is through these ostensibly technical domains that resilience most consequentially remakes the political possibilities of security assistance.

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