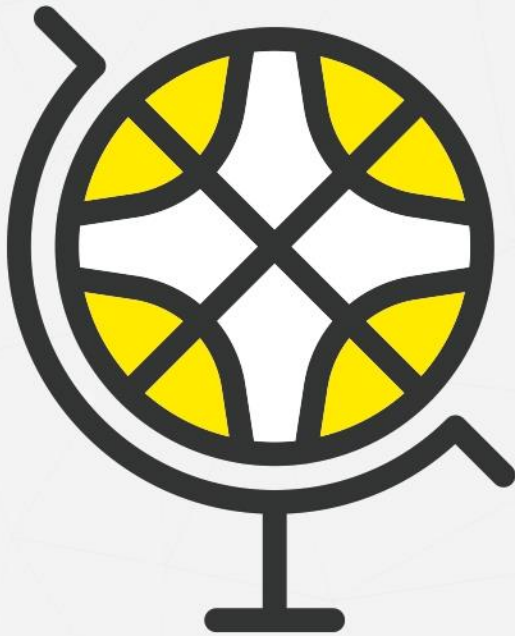


ISSN: 2995-2753



Academos Journal

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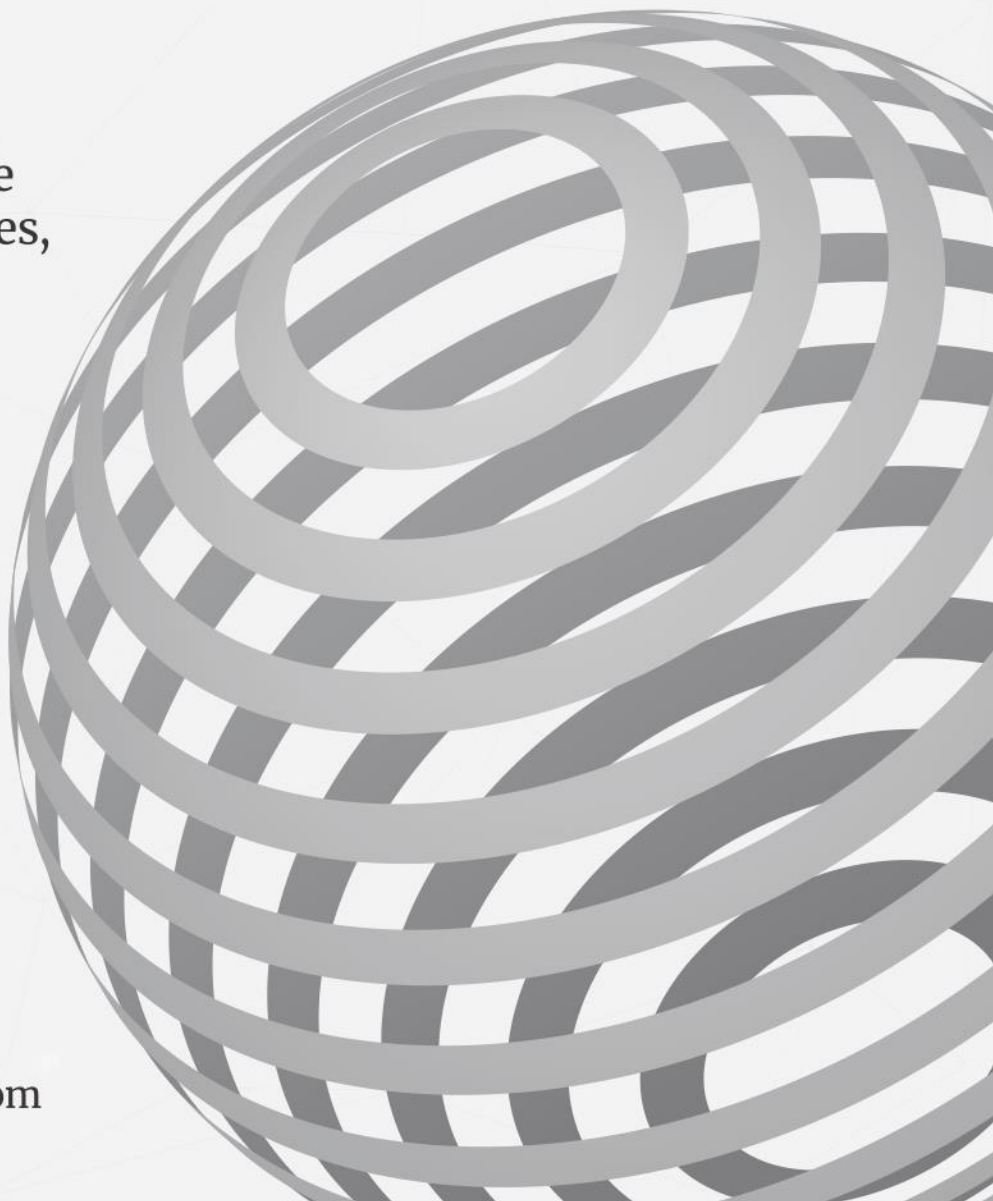
Volume 2
Issue 1
2026

Published by:



**RISTE
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www.academosjournal.com
editor@academosjournal.com





ACADEMOS JOURNAL

**Vol. 2, No. 1
2026**

ISSN 2955-2753 (Online)

www.academosjournal.com

IMPRESSUM

Academos Journal
Volume 2, Number 1, July 2026.

Editor in chief:

Dr.sc. Cvetanka RISTOVA MAGLOVSKA
North Macedonia

Publisher:

Academy "Riste Stefanov" – Skopje

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Logo and Cover Design: Martin Bibovski

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I extend my sincere appreciation to the authors, reviewers, and members of the Editorial Board for their professionalism, dedication, and valuable contributions to this issue. Their continued commitment plays a vital role in maintaining the scholarly quality, integrity, and international development of *Academos Journal*.

Editor-in-Chief

Assoc. Prof. Dr.sc. Cvetanka Ristova Maglovska

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Original scientific paper

Received: 4.5.2026.

Revised: 7.7.2026.

Accepted: 18.7.2026.

UDC: 502:338.48-053.6(497.7)

doi: <https://doi.org/10.65921/445kwj29>

The Impact of Environmental Sustainability on Travel Decisions Among the Younger Population in North Macedonia

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Abstract: This study investigates the impact of environmental sustainability on the travel decisions and consumer behavior of the younger population (aged 18 to 35) within the developing tourism market of North Macedonia. Driven by the need to understand how climate awareness translates into actual travel preferences, the research fills a distinct gap in South-Eastern European sustainable tourism literature. Utilizing a quantitative survey design with a sample of 200 respondents, data were gathered through a structured online questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale. Empirical analysis was executed using statistical methods including Pearson correlation, One-Way ANOVA, and Linear Regression. The results demonstrate a high level of environmental awareness among young consumers, with a strong and statistically significant positive correlation between personal eco-beliefs and destination choice ($r = 0.54$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, inferential testing revealed that 66% of respondents are willing to pay a higher premium for certified eco-friendly accommodations. ANOVA findings confirmed significant generational differences, highlighting that the youngest subgroup (aged 18-25) exhibits the highest sensitivity toward sustainability. This paper contributes to the literature by integrating the Theory of Planned Behaviour to map pro-environmental travel choices. Practically, the findings offer destination managers, hospitality practitioners, and policymakers actionable insights to design tailored green policies, improve local micro-infrastructure, and leverage digital green platforms to capture the expanding Generation Z and Millennial market segments.

Keywords: sustainability, environmental awareness, consumer behaviour, young travellers, Generation Z.

Introduction and Literature Review

Environmental sustainability has evolved from a progressive market niche into an essential paradigm shaping the global tourism and hospitality industry in 2026. Over the past decade, climate change and ecosystem degradation have forced a major re-evaluation of tourism growth strategies. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, consumer segments have undergone an ethical transformation, realigning their purchasing patterns with personal environmental values. As noted by Smith and Jones (2022), modern tourists do not merely seek leisure and physical comfort; they actively pursue an ethical alignment between their travel consumption and their environmental worldview. While extensive sustainable tourism research focuses on mature Western economies, a substantial research gap exists regarding how environmental considerations dictate choices in developing transitioning economies, specifically within South-Eastern Europe and North Macedonia. Understanding the young consumer segment consisting of Millennials (Generation Y) and Generation Z, defined operationally in this study as individuals aged 18 to 35 is critical, as they represent the future economic core of travel spending. Younger demographics demonstrate a heightened receptivity to pro-environmental behaviors, which manifests in their transport selection, accommodation preferences, and structural interactions with destinations.



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To systematically analyze these dynamics, this research applies the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) and the Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) theory (Stern et al., 1999) as conceptual frameworks. TPB posits that an individual's behavioral intentions are driven by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In a sustainable tourism context, a positive attitude toward environmental conservation directly feeds the intention to engage in responsible travel consumption. VBN theory complements this by suggesting that personal values activate moral obligations (norms), leading to pro-environmental outcomes. Despite high stated environmental awareness, literature frequently reports an "attitude-behaviour gap," where structural constraints like price, convenience, and insufficient infrastructure prevent consumers from translating eco-friendly beliefs into concrete purchasing decisions (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002).

Sustainable tourism necessitates a balanced model that meets current stakeholder needs without jeopardizing future socio-ecological capacities (World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2023). Previous empirical works show that young tourists possess a deeper systemic understanding of environmental issues and are uniquely willing to support eco-certified hospitality operations (Gretzel et al., 2020). Moreover, structural attributes of a location ranging from waste management programs to green spaces strongly dictate destination competitiveness among eco-conscious travellers (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). In North Macedonia, regional assessments highlight substantial untapped potential for green development; for instance, the Gevgelija region contains rich natural and geo-thermal assets suitable for non-mass alternative tourism forms (Angelkova & Kitanov, 2021). Historically, the restructuring of specific tourism forms along border regions has been identified as a strategic tool for economic and spatial revitalization (Angelkova, 2012). However, executing this transition requires contemporary updates that bridge digitalization and environmental management. Modern hospitality systems must simultaneously deploy technological innovations and green operational metrics to secure market relevance, as digital tools and certification criteria increasingly dictate consumer tracking and choice (Angelkova & Maglovska, 2025).

Digitalization plays a pivotal role in bridging information gaps for the young consumer. Mobile applications, online eco-aggregators, and specialized platforms allow travelers to transparently assess the carbon footprint and operational sustainability of providers (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Systems such as EcoBnb and Green Key act as vital informational channels, allowing young travellers to evaluate peer recommendations, cross-reference environmental performance indicators, and avoid greenwashed practices.

When choosing accommodation and transit, eco-conscious young travellers display unique behavioral modifications. They actively seek alternative lodging formats such as eco-hostels, certified eco-hotels, private homestays integrating recycling, and designated eco-camping zones. True sustainable accommodation requires robust baseline indicators, including renewable energy frameworks, active waste reduction, local procurement streams, and internationally recognized third-party eco-labels. Regarding transit, this segment tends to mitigate carbon emissions by reducing relying on commercial aviation and private cars, favoring public transit networks, rail systems, and active micro-mobility (walking, cycling, and electric scooters) within destination hubs.

Based on the theoretical frameworks and the reviewed literature, this study formulates the following testable hypotheses:

H1: There is a statistically significant positive correlation between the environmental awareness of young travellers and their destination choice.

H2: Young travellers level of environmental education is a significant predictor of their willingness to select and pay a premium for eco-certified accommodations.

H3: There are statistically significant differences in sustainability-driven travel attitudes across different age subgroups within the younger population.

The central aim of this research is to evaluate the direct impact of environmental sustainability on travel choices among the young population in North Macedonia, specifically identifying the motivational variables, behavioral intentions, and infrastructural barriers that shape their tourist profile.

Methodology

This study utilizes a deductive, quantitative research design to test the formulated hypotheses and evaluate the variables driving green travel decisions. Primary data collection was conducted via a structured online questionnaire distributed electronically across North Macedonia between January and March 2026. The target population was defined as residents of North Macedonia aged 18 to 35, capturing the core cohorts of Generation Z and younger Millennials. A non-probability convenience and snowball sampling method was implemented, yielding a final valid sample of $N = 200$ respondents.

The survey instrument comprised 20 closed-ended questions divided logically into four thematic sections: (1) Demographic Profiles, (2) Travel Habits and Transport Preferences, (3) Environmental Awareness and Perceptions, and (4) Travel Decisions and Economic Willingness-to-Pay (WTP). Behavioral and attitudinal metrics were captured utilizing a standard 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree / Lowest Importance) to 5 (Strongly Agree / Highest Importance), alongside several categorical and dichotomous choice questions.

Prior to widespread distribution, a pilot test with 15 respondents was conducted to ensure structural and linguistic clarity. Internal consistency and reliability of the Likert-scale blocks were verified using Cronbach's alpha, which generated a coefficient of 0.82, exceeding the accepted academic threshold of 0.70. Statistical data processing was executed using inferential statistical packages. The analytical matrix included descriptive frequency tracking, Pearson bivariate correlation (r) to evaluate linear relationships between awareness and choices (H1), Multiple Linear Regression to measure predictive values of eco-education (H2), and One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with Tukey's post-hoc tests to verify variance across distinct age cohorts (H3).

Results

The demographic distribution of the sampled population ($N = 200$) indicates a balanced representation across gender and age segments. Females accounted for 56% ($n = 112$) of the sample, while males represented 44% ($n = 88$). Age distribution was categorized into three

reflective cohorts: 18-24 years (46%, n = 92), 25-34 years (38%, n = 76), and a minor segment of respondents who had just transitioned past the primary youth boundary, classified as 35+ (16%, n = 32), as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of the Sample

Category	Subcategory	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	88	44.0%
	Female	112	56.0%
Age Cohort	18-24	92	46.0%
	25-34	76	38.0%
	35+	32	16%
Total		200	100.0%

Source: Author analysis

To address H1, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between general environmental awareness scores and sustainable destination choice metrics. The results reveal a strong, statistically significant positive linear relationship between the two variables ($r = 0.54$, $p < 0.01$, $N = 200$). This empirical result supports H1, demonstrating that as a young traveler's internal environmental awareness increases, their explicit choice architecture shifts toward sustainable destination formats.

To test H2 and assess the economic dimension of green tourism consumer choices, respondents were queried on their economic choices regarding eco-certified accommodation providers. The descriptive data shows that a significant majority, 66.0% (n = 132) of the young travelers, explicitly stated they were willing to pay a premium price for accommodations demonstrating verified green practices and eco-labels. Conversely, 34.0% (n = 68) rejected price premiums due to budgetary constraints (Table 2).

Table 2: Willingness to Pay a Premium for Eco-Certified Accommodation

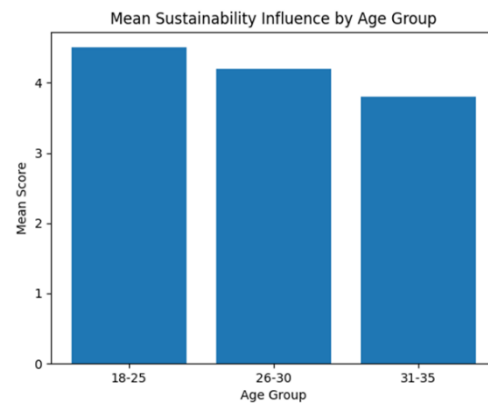
Response Option	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Willing to pay a higher price	132	66.0%
Not willing to pay a higher price	68	34.0%
Total	200	100.0%

Source: Author analysis

To determine if the level of environmental education acts as a valid predictor for selecting eco-accommodations, a simple linear regression was performed. The model specified Environmental Education as the independent variable and Eco-Accommodation Choice as the dependent variable. The regression model was statistically significant ($F(1, 198) = 24.35$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.11$), with environmental education accounting for 11% of the total variance in accommodation choice. The standardized coefficient was highly significant ($\hat{\beta}^2 = 0.33$, $t = 4.93$, $p < 0.001$), validating H2 and confirming that formal and informal eco-education drives green hospitality consumption.

To examine structural variations in attitudes among different age subgroups (H3), a One-Way ANOVA was executed. The dependent variable was the Mean Sustainability Influence Score (calculated across the environmental values items), tested against the three age brackets. The ANOVA model revealed statistically significant differences between the groups ($F(2, 197) = 14.82$, $p < 0.001$, $\hat{\beta} \cdot \hat{\beta}^2 = 0.13$).

Graph 1: Mean Sustainability Influence Score by Age Group



Source: Author analysis

HSD post-hoc test indicated that the youngest age group (18-24 years, $M = 4.50$, $SD = 0.42$) exhibited a significantly higher sustainability concern score compared to both the 25-34 group ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.51$, $p < 0.05$) and the 35+ group ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.63$, $p < 0.001$). This confirms H3, indicating that sustainability concern is highly concentrated within the youngest Generation Z.

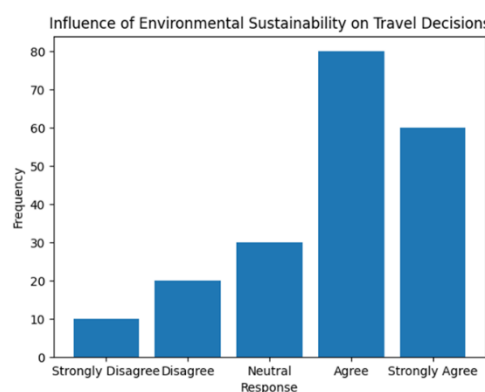
Table 3 evaluates the specific underlying motivational factors directing destination selection on a 1-5 scale. "Nature conservation" emerged as the dominant motivational driver ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 0.45$), closely followed by the desire for authentic "Local food" experiences ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.52$). "Low cost," while relevant, achieved a substantially lower relative importance threshold ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 0.88$).

Table 3: Analysis of Motivations for Destination Choice

Motive	Mean Value (1-5)	Standard Deviation
Nature conservation	4.62	0.45
Local food	4.30	0.52
Low cost	3.15	0.88

Source: Author analysis

Graph 2: Distribution of Responses on Overall Sustainability Influence



Source: Author analysis

The visual data in Graph 2 confirms the skew towards positive alignment, with 140 out of 200 respondents selecting either "Agree" (n = 80) or "Strongly Agree" (n = 60) when assessing whether environmental sustainability directly governs their overall travel decision architecture.

Discussion

The empirical findings generated from this sample offer critical insights into the eco-tourist profile of young consumers in North Macedonia. The verification of H1 ($r = 0.54$) proves that environmental awareness is not merely abstract sentiment but actively shapes travel planning. This aligns with the baseline assumptions of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, where strong pro-environmental attitudes foster clear behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 1991). The results match the findings of Miller (2020), who demonstrated that structured environmental education serves as a key predictive baseline for long-term sustainable choices. The young consumer segment in North Macedonia is shifting away from passive tourism consumption toward an active, value-driven framework where natural heritage preservation is closely linked to service provider ethics (Brown, 2021).

However, interpreting these findings requires addressing the "attitude-behaviour gap" common in sustainable tourism research (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). While 66% of respondents report a willingness to pay higher premiums for eco-certified operations (Table 2), actual purchasing behavior may be constrained by market realities. Self-reported survey instruments are susceptible to social desirability bias, where participants overstate their ethical commitments to align with socio-environmental norms. In North Macedonia, this gap is widened by severe macro-economic and infrastructural constraints. While young travelers express an ideological preference for green alternatives, the domestic market lacks widespread, affordable eco-certified accommodation options and structured eco-labels, often turning price into a deciding barrier for budget-constrained youth.

Furthermore, the confirmation of H3 via ANOVA highlights a sharp generational divide. The youngest bracket (18-24 years) demonstrated the most intensive sensitivity to green mandates ($M = 4.50$). This demographic group has grown up amid global climate justice movements, and their consumption patterns reflect a deeper internalization of ecological limits than older Millennials (Brown, 2021). Therefore, a uniform marketing approach targeting "youth" is structurally flawed; destination management organizations (DMOs) must isolate Generation Z from older Millennials to properly align their digital marketing and green communication strategies.

Barriers and Challenges

Accelerating sustainable tourism in North Macedonia faces several systemic challenges. The primary obstacle is limited green infrastructure (Radio MOF, 2026). Outside major urban centers, public transport links are inefficient, regional recycling systems are rare, and integrated pedestrian or bicycle lanes are almost non-existent. These structural deficits restrict travelers' ability to act on their green intentions, forcing reliance on carbon-intensive transit.

Secondly, cost remains a critical limiting factor. Sustainable accommodation options and organic local supply chains frequently command price premiums that conflict with the lower disposable income of Macedonian youth. Finally, a significant information deficit persists.

Many regional hospitality operators engage in sustainable activities (such as local sourcing or water reduction) but fail to secure eco-labels or digitally communicate these practices, making it difficult for eco-conscious consumers to discover them.

Conclusion and Future Research Directions

This study confirms that environmental sustainability is an important factor shaping travel decisions among the younger population in North Macedonia. The analysis confirms that younger travellers, particularly Generation Z, are increasingly seeking to minimize their ecological footprint by selecting eco-certified lodgings, demanding natural heritage conservation, and turning to digital green platforms. Consequently, green management is no longer an optional promotional niche; it is a baseline requirement for long-term market competitiveness (Angelkova & Maglovska, 2025).

To capitalize on these trends, policymakers and private operators must implement targeted interventions:

1. Infrastructure: Municipalities should invest in regional green micro-mobility, synchronized public transit links, and accessible waste-separation networks.
2. Certification and Standards: Hospitality managers must pursue credible third-party eco-labels (e.g., Green Key) and actively promote these credentials digitally to attract young consumers (Buhalis & Law, 2008).
3. Local Integration: Tourism strategies should prioritize low-impact, slow-travel frameworks that emphasize local culinary assets and disperse tourism revenue outside mass hubs, supporting regional economic development (Angelkova, 2012; Republika, 2026).
4. Education and Digital Tools: Developing localized green travel applications can bridge information deficits, providing immediate data on regional carbon footprints and verified eco-accommodations.

This study has several limitations. First, the sample size (N = 200) and reliance on convenience sampling restricts universal generalization across the entire youth demographic of North Macedonia. Second, the study utilizes self-reported survey data, which may capture ideal intentions rather than actual booking behaviors. Future research should utilize longitudinal designs to track actual spending patterns and measure real-world choices rather than stated intentions. Additionally, cross-cultural studies comparing youth demographics across Western and Eastern Balkan nations could provide valuable insights into how macroeconomic variance impacts green consumer behavior.

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Language as a Key Factor for Communication in Global Entrepreneurship

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Abstract: In the contemporary business environment, effective communication has become a fundamental prerequisite for successful participation in global entrepreneurship. Language plays a central role in facilitating communication, enabling the exchange of information, the development of trust, and the establishment of sustainable business relationships among partners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Although the importance of language in international business has been widely acknowledged, existing studies often examine linguistic and cultural dimensions separately, leaving limited conceptual integration of their combined influence on business communication.

This paper provides a conceptual review of the existing literature to examine the role of language as a key determinant of effective communication in global entrepreneurship. Using descriptive, analytical, and comparative approaches, the study synthesizes previous theoretical and empirical contributions concerning language, business communication, and the challenges associated with linguistic and cultural diversity in international business environments.

The review demonstrates that language proficiency and intercultural communication competence are mutually reinforcing factors that contribute to more effective collaboration, stronger business relationships, and improved organizational performance in global markets. Furthermore, the paper highlights the importance of developing communication strategies that help organizations overcome linguistic and cultural barriers in international business interactions.

By integrating findings from the existing literature, this study contributes to a broader conceptual understanding of the relationship between language and communication in global entrepreneurship and identifies directions for future research on effective communication in increasingly internationalized business environments.

Keywords: language, communication, global entrepreneurship, business communication, international business.

Introduction

In the contemporary business environment, effective communication has become a fundamental prerequisite for successful participation in global entrepreneurship. The increasing internationalization of markets and the growing interconnectedness of economies require entrepreneurs and organizations to communicate efficiently across linguistic and cultural boundaries. In this context, language serves not only as a medium for exchanging information but also as a strategic resource that facilitates trust-building, knowledge sharing,



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negotiation, and long-term business cooperation. As noted by Erica Darics (2022), language and communication constitute essential components of the entrepreneurial skill set required for operating in global business environments.

Previous research has consistently emphasized the importance of communication competencies for entrepreneurial success. Studies have shown that entrepreneurs must develop communication skills that enable adaptation to rapidly changing business environments, support decision-making, and strengthen cooperation with international partners (Magdincheva Shopova et al., 2024). Likewise, intercultural communication competence has been recognized as an important factor for reducing misunderstandings arising from linguistic and cultural diversity. Other studies have highlighted the growing importance of language use in shaping entrepreneurial discourse and reflecting emerging trends in entrepreneurship (Roundy & Asllani, 2019).

Although the relationship between language, communication, and international business has been widely acknowledged, the existing literature largely examines these concepts separately. Many studies focus either on language proficiency, intercultural communication, or entrepreneurial performance without providing an integrated conceptual perspective on how language functions as a strategic resource for effective communication in global entrepreneurship. Furthermore, relatively limited attention has been devoted to synthesizing the existing theoretical knowledge on the interaction between linguistic competence, intercultural communication, and entrepreneurial collaboration in international business settings. This represents an important gap in the literature that justifies a comprehensive conceptual review.

Within this broader context, phraseological competence represents one dimension of effective language use. Appropriate use of accepted business expressions and phraseological units contributes to clarity, precision, and mutual understanding in international communication. However, phraseology should not be viewed as an isolated linguistic phenomenon but as part of the broader communicative competence that enables entrepreneurs to interact successfully with business partners from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Kuzmanovska, 2022; Kuzmanovska et al., 2021).

Accordingly, this paper addresses the following research question: How does the existing literature explain the role of language as a determinant of effective communication in global entrepreneurship, and what conceptual relationships exist between language competence, intercultural communication, and entrepreneurial success?

To answer this question, the paper provides a critical review and synthesis of the relevant literature on language, business communication, intercultural communication, and global entrepreneurship. Rather than presenting original empirical evidence, the study integrates previous theoretical and empirical findings in order to identify the main conceptual relationships, highlight unresolved issues, and develop a more comprehensive understanding of language as a strategic resource in international entrepreneurial activities.

The principal contribution of this paper lies in bringing together previously fragmented

research on language and communication within a unified conceptual framework. By identifying common themes, theoretical relationships, and areas requiring further investigation, the study extends current understanding of the role of language in global entrepreneurship and provides directions for future research.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The next section reviews the relevant theoretical literature on language and communication in global entrepreneurship. This is followed by a discussion of the conceptual relationships identified in the literature, after which the paper concludes by summarizing the principal insights, outlining theoretical implications, and suggesting avenues for future research.

Materials and methods

The established hypotheses, as well as the defined research objective, determine the methods applied within the research section of the paper. In order to examine the importance of language as a factor in communication in global entrepreneurship, as well as to confirm the proposed hypotheses, several scientific research methods have been applied.

In the process of preparing the paper, the following methods were used: the descriptive method, the method of analysis, and the comparative method. Through the application of the descriptive method, the role of language in business communication is presented, as well as its importance in the modern business environment. The analysis of relevant scientific and professional literature in the field of communication and language in global entrepreneurship is carried out using the method of analysis. The comparison of different approaches and practices in international business communication is conducted through the application of the comparative method.

The findings obtained from the research conducted are synthesized using the method of synthesis, through which general conclusions are drawn regarding the importance of language as a key factor in communication in global entrepreneurship.

Results

The reviewed literature consistently identifies language and communication as fundamental components of successful entrepreneurial activity in the global business environment. Rather than presenting original empirical findings, this section synthesizes evidence reported in previous theoretical and empirical studies on the role of language in global entrepreneurship.

Across the reviewed studies, language is recognized as a key mechanism for facilitating effective information exchange, building trust, and developing long-term business relationships among companies operating in different linguistic and cultural environments. Beyond its informational function, language is widely described as a strategic resource that supports international cooperation and organizational competitiveness.

The literature further suggests that communication competence, including appropriate language use and phraseological competence, contributes to more effective business interactions in international markets. Previous studies emphasize that entrepreneurs with strong communication skills are generally better prepared to establish and maintain international

partnerships, negotiate successfully, and manage complex communication processes in multicultural business settings. However, recent research also indicates that further investigation is needed to understand how entrepreneurs communicate their activities to different stakeholder groups and how such communication influences entrepreneurial outcomes (Marić et al., 2023).

Another recurring theme in the literature concerns the importance of intercultural communication competence. Numerous studies argue that successful international business cooperation depends not only on language proficiency but also on entrepreneurs' ability to adapt their communication strategies to different cultural contexts. Such adaptation contributes to reducing communication barriers, improving mutual understanding, and strengthening cooperation among international business partners.

The reviewed studies also emphasize that communication competencies should be considered together with other entrepreneurial capabilities, including strategic thinking, innovation, entrepreneurial education, and active listening. These complementary competencies collectively support entrepreneurs in recognizing business opportunities, developing effective strategies, and managing increasingly complex international business environments (Johnstone et al., 2018).

Overall, the literature demonstrates broad agreement regarding the benefits of effective communication in global entrepreneurship. These benefits include improved information exchange, stronger interpersonal trust, enhanced coordination of business activities, more effective decision-making, reduced misunderstandings, greater organizational efficiency, and improved international collaboration. Nevertheless, the reviewed studies also suggest that entrepreneurial success cannot be explained solely by language competence, as organizational performance is influenced by multiple interacting factors, including organizational characteristics, managerial capabilities, international experience, and the external business environment.

Based on the synthesis of the reviewed literature, the principal benefits of effective communication in global entrepreneurship can be summarized as follows:

- clear, accurate, and timely exchange of information;
- improved understanding among international business partners;
- more efficient coordination of business activities and decision-making;
- reduced misunderstandings and communication conflicts;
- stronger mutual trust and long-term business relationships;
- improved organizational efficiency and productivity;
- better coordination among employees and business teams;
- more effective management of business processes;
- promotion of teamwork, innovation, and organizational learning;
- facilitation of international business networking and partnership development;
- greater understanding of cultural differences and business practices;
- more effective negotiations through language proficiency and intercultural communication competence.

The benefits of effective communication in global entrepreneurship are presented in Table 1.

Figure 1: The benefits of effective communication in global entrepreneurship

No.	Benefits of Effective Communication in Global Entrepreneurship	Description	Impact on Global Entrepreneurship
1	Clear and timely exchange of information	Better understanding between business partners	Enables faster decision-making, reduces uncertainty, and supports effective cooperation in international business environments
2	Reduction of misunderstandings and conflicts	Reduced misinterpretation and misunderstandings	Minimizes business disputes, improves cooperation between global partners, and strengthens international relationships
3	Increase in mutual trust	Creation of stable and long-term business relationships	Builds credibility and confidence among international entrepreneurs, leading to sustainable partnerships and market expansion
4	Improvement of organizational efficiency	Increased productivity	Enhances the ability of global enterprises to optimize resources, reduce costs, and improve overall performance
5	Better execution of business processes	Improved coordination among employees	Supports smoother international operations, better workflow management, and effective collaboration across borders
6	More efficient task management	Better allocation of business activities	Improves the distribution of responsibilities, increases employee effectiveness, and facilitates the management of global teams
7	Development of a positive organizational culture	Encouragement of teamwork and innovation	Creates an inclusive global work environment that promotes creativity, knowledge sharing, and entrepreneurial growth
8	Development of international partnerships	Facilitated communication with entrepreneurs from different countries	Expands global networks, creates new business opportunities, and strengthens international market presence
9	Better understanding of cultural differences	Easier understanding of different business practices, cultures, and expectations of foreign partners	Improves intercultural cooperation, reduces cultural barriers, and increases success in international business activities
10	More successful negotiations	Developed communication and intercultural skills	Enhances the ability of global entrepreneurs to achieve beneficial agreements and maintain successful international collaborations

Source: Author's own research

Discussions

The literature reviewed in this study consistently identifies language and communication as strategic resources in global entrepreneurship. Previous research suggests that effective communication facilitates information exchange, supports trust-building, and strengthens collaboration among business partners operating in culturally and linguistically diverse

environments. These observations reinforce the view that language competence represents an important component of entrepreneurial capability in international business.

At the same time, the reviewed literature indicates that communication competence should not be considered an isolated determinant of entrepreneurial success. Although many studies associate language proficiency and intercultural communication with improved international cooperation, entrepreneurial performance is also influenced by a range of complementary factors, including entrepreneurial education, international experience, firm size, organizational culture, innovation capacity, leadership, and access to strategic resources. Considering these alternative explanations provides a more comprehensive understanding of entrepreneurial success and highlights the multidimensional nature of international business performance.

Another important insight emerging from the literature concerns the role of intercultural communication competence. Most studies agree that entrepreneurs who are able to adapt their communication style to different cultural contexts are better positioned to reduce misunderstandings and establish sustainable international partnerships. However, the literature also reveals that relatively few studies integrate language competence, intercultural communication, and entrepreneurial performance within a single conceptual framework. This review contributes by synthesizing these interconnected perspectives and demonstrating how they collectively shape effective communication in global entrepreneurship.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the existing literature by integrating previously fragmented discussions on language, communication, and entrepreneurship into a coherent conceptual framework. Rather than examining these concepts separately, the review highlights their interdependence and identifies areas where further theoretical development is needed.

The review also has practical implications. The synthesized evidence suggests that entrepreneurs operating in international markets may benefit from strengthening foreign language proficiency, intercultural communication competence, negotiation skills, and active listening. Furthermore, universities, entrepreneurship support organizations, and policymakers may consider incorporating communication and intercultural competence more explicitly into entrepreneurship education and professional development programs.

This study has several limitations. As a conceptual literature review, it does not present original empirical evidence, and its conclusions are based exclusively on the synthesis of previously published studies. The findings are therefore dependent on the scope of the selected literature and the theoretical perspectives represented in those studies. Consequently, the conclusions should be interpreted as conceptual insights rather than empirical verification of causal relationships.

Future research could build upon this review by conducting empirical investigations that examine the relationship between language competence, intercultural communication, and entrepreneurial performance across different countries, industries, and organizational settings. Comparative and longitudinal studies may further clarify how communication competencies influence entrepreneurial success under varying international business conditions.

In conclusion, the reviewed literature consistently suggests that language and communication play an important role in facilitating international entrepreneurial activities. Rather than providing empirical confirmation, this study synthesizes existing theoretical and empirical knowledge to demonstrate that language competence and intercultural communication are widely recognized as important resources for improving business communication and supporting international cooperation. By integrating findings from previous studies, the review advances the conceptual understanding of communication in global entrepreneurship while identifying important directions for future research.

Conclusions

Language and communication play a fundamental role in the functioning and development of entrepreneurial companies in a globalized business environment. Effective communication is an essential prerequisite for successfully establishing and maintaining business relationships, especially in conditions where companies cooperate with partners from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

The improvement of business communication, more efficient exchange of information, and more successful management of international business processes depend on the language and communication competencies possessed by entrepreneurs. Additionally, the development of intercultural communication skills enables the overcoming of linguistic and cultural barriers, which is an important factor in building trust, developing stable business partnerships, and enhancing international business cooperation.

Effective communication has a significant impact on organizational efficiency, productivity, and the competitiveness of companies in the global market. Timely exchange of information contributes to better coordination of business activities, more efficient decision-making, and more successful management of complex communication processes characteristic of the international business environment.

Despite the important insights derived from this research, further scientific analyses are needed to more thoroughly examine the relationship between communication competencies and company success in international business. In modern working conditions, the development of global entrepreneurship also depends on the establishment of digital communication and the use of digital communication technologies.

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Review paper

UDC: 35.07:33.021.8]:341.171.071.51(497.7:4-672EY)

Received: 11.6.2026.

Revised: 21.7.2026.

Accepted: 21.7.2026.

doi: <https://doi.org/10.65921/t1cqpm30>

Public Administration Reform, Administrative Capacity and European Integration: Macedonian case

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Abstract: The European integration process of the Republic of North Macedonia is a long-term and complex process of institutional, legal and administrative transformation aimed at harmonizing with the standards and values of the European Union. Within this process, the reform of the public administration is imposed as one of the key prerequisites for the successful implementation of the obligations arising from the accession process.

The paper analyzes the role of the public administration reform as a significant factor in the process of Macedonian European integration, with special emphasis on administrative capacity, professionalization, depoliticization, transparency and digital transformation of institutions.

The research is based on an analysis of relevant scientific literature, reports of the European Commission and OECD/SIGMA, as well as a comparative analysis of the key reform processes related to the fulfillment of the criteria for membership in the European Union. The results indicate that progress in the European integration process is closely related to the quality and effectiveness of the implemented administrative reforms. Although significant changes in the normative framework and institutional development have been realized in the past period, challenges related to politicization, institutional coordination and consistent implementation of reforms still represent limiting factors.

The paper concludes that public administration reform is not just a formal requirement in the process of accession to the European Union, but an essential prerequisite for building efficient, professional and accountable institutions capable of implementing European policies and standards.

Keywords: public administration reform, European integration, Macedonia, EU.

Introduction

The European integration process has been one of the most important strategic priorities of the Republic of North Macedonia since its independence. As a candidate country for membership in the European Union (EU), North Macedonia is engaged in a long-term process of political, legal, economic and institutional transformation aimed at aligning itself with European standards and values. In academic literature, European integration is often examined through the concept of Europeanization, which refers to the impact of the EU on the transformation of national institutions, public policies and administrative systems (Dimitrova, 2005; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmayer, 2005).

In this context, public administration reform is considered a key prerequisite for successful integration, as the EU has consistently stressed the importance of a professional, efficient, transparent and politically neutral administration capable of implementing the *acquis communautaire* and ensuring the sustainability of reforms (European Commission, 2025;



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OECD/SIGMA, 2021).

Administrative capacity is a central element of institutional readiness for EU membership. It reflects the ability of public institutions to formulate and implement policies, coordinate reforms and deliver quality public services. Consequently, administrative reform has become one of the most important dimensions of the accession process in candidate countries.

Despite significant progress over the last two decades, public administration reform in North Macedonia continues to face challenges related to politicization, institutional coordination, human resource management and digital transformation. These challenges are regularly highlighted in the assessments of the European Commission and OECD/SIGMA and remain closely linked to the country's progress in the EU accession process. This study examines public administration reform as a prerequisite for European integration, with a particular focus on administrative capacity, professionalization, depoliticization, transparency and digital transformation.

Drawing on relevant academic literature, European Commission reports, and OECD/SIGMA assessments, the article analyzes the relationship between administrative reforms and North Macedonia's progress towards membership in the European Union.

Research Hypotheses

The study is guided by the following hypotheses:

Main hypothesis:

“The process of Macedonian European integration is closely correlated with the dynamics and quality of reforms in public and state administration, with the intensity and effectiveness of the implemented administrative reforms significantly affecting progress in the European integration process.”

Auxiliary hypotheses:

H1. Political will and institutional capacity directly affect the level of implementation of reforms in public and state administration.

H2. The efficiency of Macedonian diplomacy in shaping and conducting relations between our country and the European Union significantly affects the process of progress in European integration.

H3. Public administration reform represents a continuous process of reorganization of institutions in the public sector and improvement of their administrative capacity, and at the same time one of the key priorities and an important prerequisite in the process of Macedonian European integration.

H4. The proactive approach of Macedonian diplomacy, in synergy with the implemented administrative reforms, represent significant factors for the country's progress in the European integration process.

H5. The depoliticization of public administration, through the efficient provision of quality services, will significantly strengthen the trust of citizens and the business community in institutions.

H6. Digital and social transformation of the administration directly depends on increasing the use of modern electronic tools.

Materials and methods

This study applies a qualitative research approach to examine the relationship between public administration reform and European integration in North Macedonia.

The analysis is grounded in the concepts of Europeanization, administrative capacity and EU conditionality and covers the period from 1991 to 2025.

The research is based on secondary sources, including European Commission progress reports, OECD/SIGMA assessments, national strategic documents, legal acts and relevant academic literature. Qualitative content analysis was used to identify major reform trends, implementation challenges and their relationship with the EU accession process.

The analytical framework focuses on key indicators of administrative capacity, including professionalization, transparency, accountability, efficiency and digitalization.

Findings from different institutional sources were comparatively assessed and interpreted in relation to the study hypotheses in order to evaluate the contribution of public administration reforms to North Macedonia's European integration process.

Research framework and hypothesis testing

The study adopts a hypothesis-driven analytical framework based on the concepts of Europeanization, EU conditionality and administrative capacity. The main and auxiliary hypotheses were evaluated through qualitative content analysis of European Commission reports, OECD/SIGMA assessments and relevant secondary sources.

Empirical findings were compared across institutional documents and interpreted in relation to the proposed hypotheses, allowing their confirmation, partial confirmation or rejection.

Results

The results of the analysis show that the public administration reform in North Macedonia has developed in several clearly demarcated phases, which directly correspond to the process of European integration.

The first phase (1991–2001) is characterized by institutional constitution and establishment of basic administrative capacities. During this period, reforms have been limited and mainly aimed at creating a functional state structure after independence. The European Union in this context defines administration as a key prerequisite for stability and democratic consolidation (European Commission, 2001).

The second phase begins with the signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (2001), which represents a turning point in the process of Europeanization. According to the European Commission, this phase marks the beginning of a structured administrative reform aimed at approximation to the *acquis communautaire* (European Commission, 2004).

The third phase (2005–2016) is characterized by institutional expansion and the introduction of a legal framework for the professionalization of public administration. During this period, merit systems, training systems and administrative procedures for human resource management are being established. However, European Commission reports indicate limited implementation consistency, especially in terms of depoliticization of the administration.

The fourth phase (2017–2025) represents a period of intensified reform, digitalization and an attempt at institutional modernization.

The Public Administration Reform Strategy 2023–2030 sets digital transformation as a central pillar of administrative development, with an emphasis on transparency, accountability and interoperability (Ministry of Information Society and Administration, 2023).

Empirical findings indicate that despite the existence of a relatively developed normative framework, implementation remains uneven and influenced by political and institutional factors. The analysis shows that the professionalization of public administration is one of the most significant, but also the most problematic aspects of the reforms.

The introduction of the Law on Administrative Servants (2014) and the Law on Public Sector Employees represents a formal step towards establishing a merit system. However, the European Commission continuously indicates that political influence on employment remains a significant challenge (European Commission, 2023).

In addition, data from OECD/SIGMA reports show that institutional capacity for human resource management remains moderate, with significant differences between central and local institutions (SIGMA/OECD, 2021). Training and professional development of administrative staff have a positive effect on administrative efficiency, but their impact is limited by the lack of a systemic link to career progression. These results indicate that professionalization is more formally established than intrinsically internalized in institutional practice. The introduction of electronic services, digital platforms and electronic communication systems significantly increases administrative efficiency. Of particular importance is the development of the e-invoice system, which is identified as a key instrument for improving fiscal transparency and reducing the shadow economy (World Bank, 2021).

The European Commission, in its 2024 report, notes “visible progress in the digitalization of public services”, but at the same time emphasizes that interoperability between institutions remains limited (European Commission, 2024).

These findings indicate that digital transformation is the most consistently implemented reform segment, but is not yet fully integrated at all administrative levels.

The analysis of the European Commission reports shows a consistent assessment pattern in the period 2023–2025. A “moderate level of readiness” is identified in the area of public administration, indicating the existence of a stable normative framework, but limited implementation effectiveness (European Commission, 2024).

Discussions

The results indicate the existence of a consistent gap between the normative framework and the practical implementation of public administration reforms. Although North Macedonia has a developed legal and strategic framework, especially after the adoption of the Law on Administrative Servants and the Public Administration Reform Strategy 2023–2030, implementation remains uneven.

This phenomenon is in line with the findings of the European Commission (2024), which state “limited implementation consistency” and continued weaknesses in the depoliticization of the

administration. Theoretically, this can be explained through the concept of implementation gap, characteristic of countries in the process of Europeanization where formal compliance is not accompanied by institutional transformation (Olsen, 2002).

The analysis shows that public administration reforms are strongly conditioned by the mechanism of European conditionality. The European Union sets clear criteria in terms of the rule of law, administrative capacity and professionalization, which directly influence the reform agenda (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005).

However, findings suggest that conditionality is more effective in generating formal legal changes than in ensuring substantive institutional transformation. This is particularly evident in the area of depoliticization, where political influence on administrative processes remains a structural problem. Empirical data show that the dynamics of reforms are closely linked to political cycles. Periods of intensified reform correspond to political stability and an increased European perspective, while periods of stagnation are associated with internal political crises and external blockades. This finding confirms the thesis that the public administration in North Macedonia does not function as a fully autonomous system, but as a politically determined structure. Similar conclusions are also observed in the literature on post-socialist administrations in the Western Balkans (Meyer-Sahling, 2009).

Although the results show significant progress in the legal framework for professionalization, especially through the introduction of a merit system and training systems, their practical implementation remains limited. OECD/SIGMA (2021) indicates that human resource management is still influenced by political factors and that career development is not fully performance-based. This suggests that professionalization is largely formally institutionalized, but not fully internalized in the administrative culture. Compared to other reform areas, digital transformation shows the highest degree of implementation consistency. The introduction of electronic services and digital systems contributes to increased efficiency and transparency. However, limited interoperability between institutions and uneven technical readiness indicate that digitalization does not yet constitute a fully integrated administrative ecosystem (World Bank, 2021; European Commission, 2024).

The results show a strong correlation between administrative capacity and progress in European integration. However, this correlation is mediated by political and institutional factors, which reduces its predictive power.

The main hypothesis, which posits a strong correlation between the pace and quality of public administration reforms and the progress of European integration, is largely confirmed. Evidence shows that improvements in administrative capacity, institutional restructuring and governance reforms are positively associated with progress in EU accession processes. However, the relationship is not linear, as implementation gaps and institutional constraints continue to moderate the overall results (World Bank, 2023; European Commission, 2024).

Regarding H1, which links political will and institutional capacity to the level of reform implementation, the findings strongly support its validity. Evidence from the European Commission's progress reports and SIGMA assessments show that administrative reforms are significantly shaped by political commitment and institutional readiness, which jointly determine the consistency and efficiency of implementation across institutions

(SIGMA/OECD, 2021; European Commission, 2023).

Regarding H2, which refers to the role of Macedonian diplomacy in the EU integration process, it is partially supported. Although diplomatic engagement contributes to maintaining the accession dialogue and international positioning, the findings show that its effectiveness is limited in the absence of a parallel capacity for domestic administrative reform (Ilievski and Taleski, 2009; Mojsovska, 2021).

Regarding H3, which conceptualizes public administration reform as a continuous process of institutional reorganization and capacity building, it is fully confirmed. The evidence clearly show that reform is not a discrete intervention, but an ongoing process aimed at strengthening administrative structures and ensuring compliance with EU standards (Caiden, 2019; OECD/SIGMA, 2019).

Regarding H4, which highlights the synergy between proactive diplomacy and administrative reform, it is also supported. The findings suggest that progress in European integration is most evident when external diplomatic efforts are effectively aligned with internal administrative reforms (Dimitrova, 2005; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005).

Regarding H5, related to depoliticization and service quality, it is partially confirmed. Although improvements in service delivery and administrative professionalism are evident, persistent political influence continues to limit institutional autonomy and limit public trust (Bliznakovski, 2020; Transparency International, 2024).

Regarding H6, which refers to the digital and social transformation of public administration, it is confirmed to a significant extent. The analysis shows clear progress in digitalization and the expansion of e-government services; however, the overall effectiveness of these reforms remains dependent on institutional interoperability and administrative readiness (Lawson & Danks, 2017; European Commission eGovernment Benchmark, 2024).

Overall, the hypothesis testing framework shows that although all hypotheses are supported to varying degrees, the most influential explanatory factors remain administrative capacity, political influence and quality of implementation. These findings confirm that European integration in North Macedonia is a conditional and multidimensional process shaped by the interaction between structural reforms and political-administrative dynamics (Meyer-Sahling, 2009; Neshkova & Kostadinova, 2012).

Conclusions

The research analyzed the reform of public and state administration in the Republic of North Macedonia and its role in the European integration process, with a special focus on the connection with the efficiency of Macedonian diplomacy. The results indicate that administrative reforms represent an essential structural prerequisite for a credible integration process, with their effectiveness directly conditioning the dynamics of approximation to the European Union. The empirical analysis confirms a consistent correlation between the degree of administrative reform and progress in the European integration process. Although the normative and strategic framework is largely aligned with European standards, the implementation gap remains a key limiting factor, especially in the areas of depoliticization, institutional coordination and sustainability of reform processes (European Commission, 2024;

OECD/SIGMA, 2023).

The findings also show that the most significant progress has been achieved in the domain of digitalization and technical modernization of the administration, while reforms related to human resources and professionalization are characterized by uneven and partial implementation. In this context, sectoral examples, such as tax administration, indicate limited but visible Europeanization, with results depending on the degree of institutional coherence.

Overall, the research confirms that the European integration of the Republic of North Macedonia is not exclusively a technical process of harmonization with the *acquis communautaire*, but a complex political-institutional process. Its success depends on the degree of professionalization, depoliticization and administrative efficiency, as well as on the ability of the state to ensure continuous and strategically coherent diplomatic activity in conditions of changing regional and geopolitical dynamics (Schimmelfennig, 2021).

In order to further advance the reform and integration process, the following are recommended: stable and long-term political support for the reforms; complete depoliticization of the public administration; strengthening institutional and administrative capacity; consistent application of the merit system; accelerated and interoperable digital transformation; establishing a system for continuous evaluation of results; as well as consistent alignment with European policies and standards.

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Review Paper

UDC: 343.6:355.45(662.6)“2010/2025”

doi: <https://doi.org/10.65921/9g0pvf65>

Received: 9.7.2026.

Revised: 17.7.2026.

Accepted: 21.7.2026.

The Paradox of Force: A Qualitative Analysis of Armed Banditry and its Implications for Nigeria's National Security (2010–2025)

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Abstract: This study evaluates the compounding problem of armed banditry and its systemic implications for Nigeria's national security architecture from 2010 to 2025. Adopting a qualitative methodological approach, the study relies on the critical interrogation of primary policy documents, legislative frameworks, institutional statements, and reputable secondary academic and conflict databases, including the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), and the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). The analytical framework is grounded in a robust integration of Human Security Theory and Failed State Theory, exploring the structural interlock between socio-economic marginalization and the erosion of the state's monopoly on the legitimate tools of coercion. The qualitative findings indicate that chronic structural deprivations—characterized by localized poverty, youth underemployment, and systemic educational deficits—act as primary recruitment catalysts for criminal enterprises. Concurrently, institutional weaknesses, porous border networks across the Sahelian axis, and corrupted security intelligence pipelines have transformed rural cattle rustling into a highly sophisticated, transnational kidnapping-for-ransom economy. The study highlights a critical national security paradox: despite a 220 percent expansion in defense budgetary allocations over the evaluated timeline, civilian fatalities and internal displacement patterns have accelerated significantly, indicating deep-seated operational leakages, fragmented strategic coordination, and a critical neglect of non-kinetic intervention pathways. The paper concludes that purely force-driven, kinetic military initiatives yield only unsustainable, ephemeral security gains. Consequently, it recommends an integrated, structural paradigm shift prioritizing community-centric policing frameworks, cross-border intelligence synchronicity, targeted socio-economic inclusion policies, and the rehabilitation of ungoverned spaces as the only viable pathways toward a resilient national peace.

Keywords: armed banditry, national security paradox, human security, failed state theory, kinetic deficit, and sahelian border porosity.

Introduction

Over the past two decades, Nigeria's sovereign architecture has faced an escalating barrage of internal security threats that fundamentally challenge its institutional stability and internal cohesion. Among the galaxy of violent non-state actors—spanning violent religious insurgencies in the North-East to resource-driven militancy in the Niger Delta—the systemic rise of armed banditry in the North-Western and North-Central geopolitical zones has emerged as an incredibly malignant and destabilizing phenomenon (Akinola, 2020). What originally manifested as localized, low-intensity friction over grazing tracks and seasonal cattle rustling has rapidly metamorphosed into an expansive, highly professionalized criminal ecosystem. Today, this menace is characterized by mass abductions of civilians, the systematic imposition of illicit farming taxes, transnational weapon syndication, and the violent capture of rural communities (Hassan, 2022). According to data from the Global Terrorism Index (2023), this evolving domestic landscape of violence has consistently placed Nigeria among the nations most structurally impacted by violent crime and non-state conflict, with armed banditry



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accounting for a disproportionately large share of civilian fatalities and domestic displacement.

Geographically centered across states such as Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto, Kebbi, and Niger, the crisis has successfully weaponized the expansive, unpoliced forest reserves of the region, transforming them into operational redoubts. Vast, densely covered territories such as the Kamuku, Kuyanbana, and Rugu forests have effectively been captured by decentralized bandit networks to serve as staging grounds for coordinated predatory raids against vulnerable rural populations (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). Interrogating this trajectory reveals a multi-layered matrix of structural catalysts: acute youth unemployment, generational poverty, deeply entrenched institutional corruption, the uncontrolled proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) originating from the wider destabilized Sahelian belt, and a profound administrative absence of formal governance mechanics within borderland regions (Ezeani, 2023). This severe lack of a viable state presence has not only crippled localized agrarian and pastoral economies but has triggered a deep humanitarian crisis, compelling hundreds of thousands of smallholder farmers to abandon their arable fields, which in turn severely compromises the sub-regional food security infrastructure of West Africa.

The implications of this cascading criminality for the security posture of the Nigerian state are deeply structural. Beyond the immediately visible human tragedies and local economic disruptions, the continuous operational success of these armed groups compromises the internal sovereignty and institutional legitimacy of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It exposes a critical disconnect within the national security architecture and directly erodes the fundamental social contract that binds the citizenry to the sovereign state. Crucially, data from the Budget Office of the Federation (2025) and fiscal analytical organizations like BudgIT (2025) reveal a striking structural paradox: while the national defense budgetary allocation expanded from approximately ₦299.1 billion in 2010 to an unprecedented ₦3.1 trillion by 2025, the real security metrics on the ground—civilian safety, territorial insulation, and deterrence capacity—have steadily deteriorated. This operational divergence clearly indicates that the traditional, purely kinetic tools of state force are suffering from diminishing returns, failing to engage with the complex underlying socioeconomic and institutional conditions that fuel this armed rural insurgency.

This persistent, structural escalation of armed banditry—unabated by decades of aggressive military counter-offensives and multi-billion Naira defense allocations—constitutes the foundational problem that this study addresses. The central dilemma rests on why state-led kinetic interventions, such as Operation Hadarin Daji and Operation Puff Adder, have yielded only transient, localized pauses in violence before giving way to more lethal resurgences, allowing kidnapping-for-ransom to solidify into a self-sustaining, multi-billion Naira shadow economy (Rufai, 2023). To untangle this complexity, this study pursues several explicit, interconnected qualitative objectives: to comprehensively examine the deep-seated socioeconomic and governance drivers that catalyze bandit recruitment; to critically evaluate the cascading structural impacts of this criminality on the internal sovereignty and stability of the state; and to rigorously assess the institutional and strategic limitations undercutting the sustainability of state interventions. In doing so, this study addresses three fundamental research questions: What are the core structural and institutional factors driving the continuous evolution of armed banditry in Nigeria? How does the persistence of this rural insurgency fundamentally redefine and compromise the national security architecture? And why have the state's kinetic and non-kinetic policy responses failed to achieve sustainable peace? Methodologically, this paper rejects quantitative reductions, adopting a purely qualitative

descriptive research design. It relies entirely on the systematic interrogation, triangulation, and thematic content analysis of official primary policy briefs, legislative enactments, military operational statements, and authoritative institutional datasets extracted from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED, 2024), the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2025), and international security repositories like the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI, 2025). By adopting this integrated qualitative design, the study explicitly addresses a critical gap in contemporary security literature: the tendency of existing research to analyze the causes, structural impacts, and tactical policy responses as separate, isolated phenomena. By synthesizing Human Security Theory and Failed State Theory into a single, cohesive analytical lens, this paper fills this literature gap, offering a holistic analysis that unmaskes armed banditry not as a simple localized law enforcement challenge, but as an advanced manifestation of structural governance fragility and deep human security deficits.

2.1 Conceptual Literature

Achieving an analytically rigorous understanding of this security crisis requires a clear conceptual unpacking of its two central theoretical pillars: 'Armed Banditry' and 'National Security'. In classic sociological literature, banditry was often conceptualized through the lens of Eric Hobsbawm's 'social banditry'—a form of primitive agrarian protest where individuals operating outside conventional law were viewed by local populations as champions against structural oppression. However, contemporary scholars argue that the modern manifestation of armed banditry in Nigeria has completely decoupled from any social or redistributive impulses, evolving into a highly predatory, commercialized criminal enterprise. Okoli and Ugwu (2019) conceptualize modern armed banditry as the organized use of sophisticated, military-grade weapons by non-state actors to perpetrate extreme violence, dispossession, and terror against civilian populations and state assets, purely for economic or territorial self-aggrandizement. They emphasize that the contemporary Nigerian variant has assumed a highly destructive communal dimension, where entire rural ecosystems are targeted for systemic resource extraction. Similarly, Hassan (2021) defines it as a form of highly organized rural predation that systematically exploits governance vacuums, weak administrative state presences, and highly porous international borders. Furthermore, Ibrahim (2023) advances the concept by defining banditry as 'criminal entrepreneurship,' a process characterized by the absolute commodification of violence, the deliberate establishment of alternative local power matrices in unpoliced zones, and the cultivation of clandestine networks containing local collaborators, corrupt security officials, weapons illicit traffickers, and elite political patrons. Synthesizing these scholarly perspectives, this study conceptualizes armed banditry as a highly organized, heavily armed system of non-state predation that exploits structural governance failures to enforce alternative territorial and economic control through the deliberate commodification of violence.

Parallel to this, the conceptualization of 'National Security' has undergone a profound epistemological evolution. For centuries, the traditional realist paradigm confined national security to a narrow, state-centric, and militaristic framework, focusing exclusively on safeguarding a state's borders, territorial integrity, and sovereign independence from external military aggression. However, contemporary security scholarship has decisively broken away from this narrow view, recognizing that internal vulnerabilities are often more destabilizing than external threats. Eze (2020) defines modern national security as a multi-layered condition wherein a sovereign state actively guarantees the physical safety, human rights, and socio-economic well-being of its citizenry by insulating them from both internal insurgencies and

structural societal failures through the rule of law. Olagunju (2021) furthers this by asserting that genuine national security is deeply tied to the maintenance of institutional justice and social equity; any state that secures its borders but leaves its populations structurally marginalized is inherently insecure. Usman (2023) establishes national security as a dynamic, multidimensional process requiring societal resilience, economic stability, and the active preservation of democratic legitimacy. Therefore, within the analytical boundaries of this study, national security is conceptualized not merely as the expansion of military hardware or defense deployments, but as the comprehensive capacity of the state to maintain internal peace, preserve institutional legitimacy, and insulate its citizenry from systemic violence and socio-economic deprivation through the functional administration of justice.

2.2 Theoretical Review

To construct a comprehensive qualitative interpretation of the evolution, survival, and impact of armed banditry on Nigeria's security framework, this study constructs a dual-theoretical scaffolding using Human Security Theory and Failed State Theory. This integrated theoretical lens allows the paper to bridge the micro-level socio-economic drivers of individual vulnerability with the macro-level structural decay of state institutions, offering a balanced analysis of the crisis.

2.3 The Concept of National Security

The concept of national security is presented as broader than military defense alone. Contemporary scholars emphasize that national security includes protecting citizens' lives, ensuring justice, promoting economic well-being, and maintaining effective institutions. Therefore, true national security depends on both state capacity and human welfare rather than military strength alone.

The Human Security Theory

The study adopts Human Security Theory and Failed State Theory as its analytical framework. Human Security Theory explains that poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation, weak education, and social exclusion create conditions that encourage vulnerable individuals to join criminal groups. It argues that lasting security cannot be achieved through military force alone but also requires addressing human needs and development.

The State Failed Theory

Failed State Theory explains how weak institutions, corruption, poor governance, ineffective law enforcement, and limited state presence create ungoverned spaces where armed bandits operate freely, these institutional weaknesses enable criminal groups to challenge state authority and establish alternative systems of control.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design to examine the evolution of armed banditry and its implications for Nigeria's national security between 2010 and 2025. The research relied exclusively on secondary data drawn from government policy documents, the Constitution, National Security Strategy, military reports, and publications from reputable institutions such as ACLED, GTI, NBS, UNDP, UNODC, SIPRI, BudgIT, and peer-reviewed academic literature.

Data were collected through a systematic documentary review, with relevant sources

purposively selected based on their credibility, relevance, and publication within the study period. The data were analyzed using thematic content analysis, which identified and interpreted recurring themes related to the drivers of armed banditry, governance and institutional weaknesses, security responses, and their implications for national security. The study was guided by Human Security Theory and Failed State Theory, providing a framework for understanding how socio-economic deprivation and institutional fragility contribute to the persistence of armed banditry. To ensure the credibility of the findings, documentary triangulation was employed by cross-checking evidence from multiple authoritative sources. Since the study relied solely on publicly available documents, no human participants were involved, and ethical standards were maintained through proper citation and accurate interpretation of all sources. Overall, the qualitative documentary approach was considered appropriate for providing a comprehensive understanding of the structural causes, security implications, and limitations of Nigeria's counter-banditry strategies.

3.0 Discussion and Analysis

Interrogating the historical trajectory of armed banditry from 2010 to 2025 reveals a complex phenomenon driven by deep structural factors, substantial national security impacts, and inconsistent, short-sighted state policy responses. By analyzing institutional reports and academic accounts through a qualitative lens, this section unpacks the socio-economic and institutional dynamics that have allowed rural criminality to transform into a sophisticated threat to national stability.

3.1 Socio-Economic Catalysts of Rural Insurgency and Predation

A qualitative analysis of historical socio-economic data across Nigeria over the evaluated fifteen-year period reveals a clear alignment between rising structural deprivation and the growth of violent criminal enterprises. As detailed in Table 4.1, multi-dimensional poverty rates have remained persistently high, fluctuating from 53.5 percent in 2010 to a staggering 62.5 percent in 2016, and hovering around 54.0 percent by 2024. This chronic poverty has been compounded by severe spikes in national unemployment figures, which rose from a baseline of 6.4 percent in 2010 to over 23.1 percent by 2019. Crucially, in the rural expanses of the North-West and North-Central zones, these national averages translate into even higher localized rates of economic exclusion, with youth unemployment and underemployment reaching critical levels (Olaosebikan, 2020).

To illustrate these macro-level structural dynamics, Table 4.1 aggregates key socio-economic indicators alongside general trends in banditry incidents over the 2010–2025 timeline, highlighting the challenging environment within which this security crisis has escalated.

Year	Poverty Rate (%)	Unemployment Rate (%)	Literacy Level (%)	Reported Bandit Attacks
2010	53.5%	6.4%	68.1%	420
2013	55.0%	7.9%	69.2%	750
2016	62.5%	10.4%	58.2%	1,120
2019	40.1%	23.1%	62.8%	1,890
2024	54.0%	5.0%	64.5%	2,610

Source: Structural synthesis compiled from World Bank, ILO, UNESCO, and domestic data aggregations (2025).

Interrogating this data qualitatively, rather than relying strictly on statistical models, uncovers

the human vulnerabilities that drive this crisis. The sharp decline in localized literacy levels, which dipped as low as 58.2 percent during periods of intense rural disruption, points to a broken educational infrastructure. In line with Human Security Theory, when large numbers of young people are left without formal education, structural employment options, or secure agricultural livelihoods, they become highly vulnerable to recruitment by criminal networks. Modern bandit syndicates exploit this vulnerability by operating as alternative economic providers, offering steady financial returns through kidnapping-for-ransom that far exceed any legitimate local income streams (Okoli & Nwankwo, 2023). This economic reality shows that the continuous expansion of armed banditry is deeply tied to broader systemic failures, operating as a direct reflection of long-standing socioeconomic exclusion and deep human security deficits.

3.2 Institutional Fragility, Ungoverned Spaces, and Border Porosity

From an institutional perspective, the survival and expansion of armed banditry point directly to structural weaknesses within the state's administrative framework. A central element of this vulnerability is the existence of expansive 'ungoverned spaces'—large geographic areas, particularly dense forest reserves and remote border communities, where formal state administration, law enforcement, and public services are almost entirely absent. As Failed State Theory indicates, when a government fails to maintain a permanent administrative presence across its entire territory, it creates authority vacuums that are quickly claimed by non-state armed groups (Rotberg, 2003). In these areas, bandit networks have established sophisticated alternative structures, taking control of artisanal mining sites and forcing rural farming communities to pay informal taxes just to access their lands (Isah & Garba, 2022).

This institutional breakdown is further aggravated by the high level of porosity along Nigeria's international borders, particularly across the wider Sahelian region. Weak border controls enable transnational criminal networks to easily traffic military-grade small arms and light weapons from destabilized zones in Libya, Mali, and Niger directly into northern Nigeria (UNOWAS, 2023). This steady influx of illegal weaponry has significantly upgraded the tactical capabilities of bandit groups, shifting their operations from simple rural theft to highly coordinated, heavy-weapon assaults on secure state positions, civilian highways, and educational institutions. Furthermore, qualitative evidence reveals that deep-seated corruption within defense procurement pipelines, a lack of operational accountability, and poor intelligence coordination among state agencies have systematically weakened counter-banditry efforts. This combination of open borders, unpoliced interior spaces, and institutional weaknesses has allowed banditry to grow from a localized law-and-order challenge into a deeply entrenched, transnational criminal network.

3.3 The National Security Paradox: Fatalities, Displacement, and Defense Budgets

The historical trajectory of this security crisis reveals a stark institutional paradox: a massive expansion in state defense expenditure has been accompanied by a steady deterioration in actual internal security. As detailed in Table 4.2, the national defense budget grew from ₦299.1 billion in 2010 to an unprecedented ₦3.1 trillion by 2025, representing a massive shifting of national resources toward kinetic military responses. Yet, during this exact same fifteen-year timeline, conflict-related civilian fatalities rose from 10,350 in 2010 to approximately 15,000 by 2025. Concurrently, the population of internally displaced persons (IDPs) grew from 300,000 to over 2.3 million, creating a severe, long-term humanitarian crisis.

To analyze these contrasting trends, Table 4.2 outlines the trajectory of national security indicators against the steady growth of defense spending over the study period.

Year	Fatalities	Displaced Persons (IDPs)	Defense Expenditure (₦ Billion)
2010	10,350	300,000	299.1
2014	22,873	802,148	368.8
2018	9,250	2,216,000	506.3
2021	10,578	2,147,000	1,783.0
2025	15,000	2,300,000	3,100.0

Source: Integrated conflict data compiled from ACLED, IDMC, SIPRI, and Budget Office Records (2025).

This clear divergence between financial input and security output highlights deep structural inefficiencies within Nigeria's national security architecture. Viewed through Failed State Theory, this pattern shows that simply increasing defense funding cannot compensate for deeper institutional flaws, such as fragmented strategic coordination, weak operational transparency, and a lack of real accountability within defense procurement systems (Nwagwu, 2022). Furthermore, from a human security perspective, the rapid growth of the IDP population reveals a severe failure by the state to protect its citizens from physical displacement and economic ruin. The continuous displacement of rural communities destroys local agricultural networks, drives long-term food insecurity, and deepens public distrust in state institutions, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of instability and social fragmentation.

3.4 Evaluation of State Interventions: Kinetic Deficits vs. Non-Kinetic Alternatives

An evaluation of the various state interventions implemented between 2017 and 2025 reveals a consistent reliance on short-term, reactive measures rather than sustained, preventive strategies. Large-scale military operations, including Operation Hadarin Daji, Operation Thunder Strike, and Operation Puff Adder, routinely achieved immediate, short-term successes by dismantling visible bandit camps and neutralizing prominent gang leaders. However, historical patterns show that these tactical gains were rarely sustained; within twelve to twenty-four months, bandit groups routinely adapted, shifted their operational bases to alternative unpoliced forests, and launched renewed waves of violence (Lawal & Ahmed, 2021). This cycle was clearly visible in 2020, when the shifting of military personnel to enforce COVID-19 travel restrictions created temporary security gaps that bandit networks quickly exploited to launch a sharp resurgence in attacks.

Similarly, regional political attempts to resolve the crisis through local peace dialogues, amnesties, and financial settlements often backfired. While these non-kinetic negotiations sometimes produced short-term drops in violence, they ultimately treated the symptoms rather than the root causes, accidentally legitimizing criminal syndicates and providing them with financial capital that was frequently reinvested into purchasing more advanced weaponry (International Crisis Group, 2023). In contrast, the targeted expansion of regulated community-based security initiatives and community-policing frameworks from 2023 onward delivered more consistent, sustainable security improvements. By drawing on local intelligence networks and fostering better collaboration between rural communities and formal state forces, these initiatives proved more effective at preventing raids. This experience demonstrates that sustainable stability can only be achieved by moving away from purely force-driven, kinetic actions and adopting a balanced strategy that integrates local community participation with comprehensive institutional reform.

4.1 Conclusion

The comprehensive qualitative analysis of armed banditry in Nigeria from 2010 to 2025 demonstrates that the persistent security crisis cannot be understood or resolved as a simple outbreak of lawlessness. Instead, as illuminated by the integration of Human Security Theory and Failed State Theory, the menace is a deeply structural crisis born from the intersection of long-standing socioeconomic deprivation and localized institutional fragility. The evidence shows that chronic poverty, high youth unemployment, and low literacy rates provide a steady stream of recruits for criminal syndicates, while the lack of a functional state presence in vast rural spaces allows these networks to operate with profound impunity. The stark divergence between rapidly growing national defense budgets and deteriorating security outcomes confirms that a purely kinetic, force-driven strategy is incapable of delivering long-term peace. Ultimately, the survival of this sophisticated criminal economy represents a profound challenge to the social contract and internal sovereignty of the state, demonstrating that lasting national stability cannot be achieved without a fundamental shift toward human-centric governance and structural institutional reform.

4.2 Recommendations

1. **Implementation of Integrated Socio-Economic Empowerment Programs:** The Federal and State governments must shift from a purely military approach to a human-centric development strategy. This requires launching targeted economic development initiatives within vulnerable rural communities across the North-West and North-Central zones. These programs should focus on reviving local agricultural networks, creating viable jobs for youth, and rebuilding public education infrastructures to systematically disrupt the recruitment pipelines used by bandit syndicates.
2. **Comprehensive Security Sector and Defense Budget Reforms:** The national security architecture requires a deep structural overhaul to improve operational transparency, strengthen institutional accountability, and eliminate corruption within defense procurement pipelines. Rather than simply increasing budgetary allocations, state policy must focus on building joint intelligence-sharing platforms, establishing modern border monitoring systems, and training specialized units capable of maintaining a permanent, professional presence in rural spaces.
3. **Institutionalization of Regulated Community Policing Frameworks:** To eliminate authority vacuums in remote regions, the government should formalize and strictly regulate community-based security initiatives. This involves integrating local vigilante groups into formal national security networks, providing them with clear legal mandates, proper human rights training, and strict accountability guidelines. By centering local knowledge and rebuilding trust between rural communities and state forces, this approach offers a sustainable model for preventing criminal raids and securing ungoverned spaces.

Author's Acknowledgement

With due respect, I express profound gratitude to Almighty Allah for His guidance, wisdom, strength, and protection throughout the conception, research, and completion of this study. I, also sincerely appreciates the academic support and intellectual environment provided by the School of Postgraduate Studies, Institute of Governance and Development Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, which greatly contributed to the successful completion of this research. Special appreciation is extended to all lecturers, supervisors, mentors, and colleagues whose constructive comments, scholarly guidance, and encouragement enhanced the quality of this

work.

I also acknowledge the invaluable contributions of researchers and institutions whose publications, reports, and datasets—including ACLED, the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), SIPRI, UNDP, UNOWAS, BudgIT, and other referenced sources—provided the empirical and documentary foundation for this study.

Finally, I'm deeply grateful to my family, friends, and well-wishers for their unwavering prayers, patience, encouragement, and moral support throughout the research process. Any errors, omissions, or interpretations contained in this paper remain solely the responsibility of the author.

4.3 Conflict of Interest

I declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research. The study was conducted independently, and the author has no financial, personal, professional, or institutional relationships that could have influenced the design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, or presentation of the findings. The opinions and conclusions expressed in this paper are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of any institution or government agency.

4.4 Funding Statement

This research received no specific grant or financial support from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors. All stages of the research, including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and manuscript preparation, were undertaken independently by the author.

4.5 Ethical Statement

This study adopted a qualitative documentary research design based entirely on publicly available secondary sources, including government reports, policy documents, institutional publications, and peer-reviewed academic literature. No human participants, interviews, surveys, or experimental procedures were involved. Consequently, formal ethical approval and informed consent were not required. The study adhered to accepted principles of academic integrity through accurate citation, proper acknowledgment of all sources, and objective reporting of findings.

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ISSN 2955-2753



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