

An Assessment of the Effectiveness of the Common Initiatives of Cameroon and Nigeria to Fight Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea

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Abstract

Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea has posed persistent threats to maritime trade, regional stability, and coastal livelihoods, prompting increased legal and operational responses from littoral states. This study evaluates the effectiveness of the common initiatives of Cameroon and Nigeria in combating piracy, using a doctrinal legal methodology anchored in maritime security and human security theory. It examines the domestication of international maritime norms, institutional coordination mechanisms, and operational collaboration between the two states, while also assessing structural constraints that shape enforcement outcomes. The findings reveal a significant shift from fragmented and reactive enforcement toward coordinated maritime governance. Strengthened domestic legislation, improved prosecutorial frameworks, joint patrols, and enhanced intelligence cooperation have contributed to measurable improvements in maritime security and deterrence credibility. However, effectiveness remains conditional. Resource volatility, institutional fragmentation, uneven judicial specialization, intelligence integration gaps, and persistent socio-economic drivers of maritime crime limit the durability of current gains. The study advances scholarship by proposing a multidimensional governance-based framework for assessing anti-piracy effectiveness, moving beyond incident-count reduction to incorporate legal compliance, institutional capacity, operational coordination, and structural sustainability. It further reframes piracy suppression as a governance consolidation challenge rather than merely a naval enforcement issue. The study concludes that while Cameroon and Nigeria have made substantive progress in strengthening maritime governance, long-term stability in the Gulf of Guinea will depend on sustained institutional resilience, regional coordination, and structural reform.

Keywords: assessment, effectiveness, Cameroon, common initiatives, Nigeria, piracy, Gulf of Guinea

1. Introduction

Maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea has, over the past two decades, transformed from sporadic criminality into a complex and organized transnational security threat. The Gulf of Guinea stretching from Senegal to Angola constitutes a vital maritime corridor for international trade, hydrocarbon exports, and regional commerce. It serves as a strategic maritime space for both coastal and landlocked African states, linking Central and West Africa to global markets. However, the region has consistently recorded high incidences of piracy, armed robbery at sea, kidnapping for ransom, oil theft, and other forms of maritime criminality.¹ At its peak, the Gulf of Guinea accounted for the majority of global kidnappings of seafarers, underscoring the gravity and

¹ International Maritime Bureau. (2023). *Piracy and armed robbery against ships: Annual report 2023*. ICC International Maritime Bureau.

violence associated with attacks in the region.¹

The roots of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea are closely linked to broader structural challenges, including weak maritime governance, limited naval capacity, porous maritime boundaries, corruption, youth unemployment, and the proliferation of small arms particularly in the Niger Delta region.² Unlike Somali piracy, which primarily occurred on the high seas, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea often takes place within territorial waters and exclusive economic zones, raising complex jurisdictional and legal enforcement questions under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The predominance of attacks within national waters has required coastal states to assume primary responsibility for enforcement, thereby highlighting capacity constraints and gaps in domestic legal frameworks.

Within this context, Nigeria has historically emerged as the epicenter of piracy incidents in the region, largely due to militancy, oil theft networks, and criminal syndicates operating from the Niger Delta. The country's strategic position as a major oil exporter and maritime hub renders it particularly vulnerable to maritime crime. Cameroon, sharing maritime boundaries and economic interdependence with Nigeria especially around the Bakassi Peninsula and adjacent waters has experienced spillover effects, including attacks on commercial vessels and offshore installations. The transboundary nature of these threats underscores the inadequacy of unilateral enforcement measures and the necessity of coordinated responses.

Recognizing these challenges, Cameroon and Nigeria have progressively developed common initiatives aimed at suppressing piracy and strengthening maritime security governance. Bilateral naval cooperation, coordinated patrols, intelligence sharing, and capacity-building efforts have complemented participation in broader regional frameworks. Notably, the 2013 Yaoundé Summit on Maritime Security led to the establishment of the Yaoundé Architecture for Maritime Security, a framework integrating West and Central African states in joint efforts against piracy and other maritime crimes.³ Through cooperation under sub-regional bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of Central African States, both countries have sought to institutionalize collective maritime security mechanisms.

At the domestic level, legal reforms have further shaped the anti-piracy landscape. Nigeria's Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences Act 2019 represents a landmark legislative development, domesticating international obligations and enabling prosecution of piracy offenses within national courts. Cameroon has similarly strengthened its maritime security institutions and naval capabilities. Despite these measures, empirical debates persist regarding the actual effectiveness of bilateral and regional initiatives. While piracy statistics indicate fluctuations and, in certain periods, notable reductions in incidents⁴, questions remain about sustainability, coordination efficiency, prosecutorial outcomes, and long-term deterrence.

Against this background, this article assesses the effectiveness of the common initiatives undertaken by Cameroon and Nigeria to combat piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. It evaluates operational collaboration, legal harmonization, and institutional coordination to determine whether these joint mechanisms have translated into measurable and sustainable improvements in maritime security. By situating the analysis within broader discourses on regional security governance and collective action in Africa, the study contributes to ongoing scholarly and policy debates on maritime cooperation and anti-piracy enforcement.

2. Conceptual Clarification

This section clarifies the major concepts underpinning the study: assessment effectiveness, common initiatives, piracy, Gulf of Guinea, Cameroon, and Nigeria. Clear conceptual definitions ensure that the study's theoretical and analytical framework is precise and aligned with existing literature.

2.1 Assessment

Assessment refers to the systematic evaluation of policies, programs, or interventions to determine their value, quality, or effectiveness. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2015),⁵ assessment is "the

¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2022). *Maritime crime in the Gulf of Guinea: Assessing the threat and legal responses*. UNODC.

² Onuoha, F. C. (2012). Piracy and maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea: Trends, concerns and propositions. *Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 3(2), 267–293.

³ Ate, B. E. (2014). The Gulf of Guinea and maritime security: The Yaoundé process and the prospects for regional cooperation. *African Security Review*, 23(2), 145–160.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Oxford University Press. (2015). *Oxford advanced learner's dictionary* (9th ed.). Oxford University Press.

act of judging or forming an opinion about somebody or something.” In legal contexts, Black’s Law Dictionary¹ defines assessment as “the determination of the amount of something, such as damages, tax, or liability, through a formal evaluation process.” In public policy research, assessment involves measuring outcomes against objectives using structured criteria and empirical evidence.² Within this study, assessment refers to the structured appraisal of the Cameroon–Nigeria joint initiatives against piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

2.2 Effectiveness

Effectiveness denotes the degree to which intended objectives are achieved. The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary³ defines it as “the degree to which something is successful in producing a desired result.” In legal and policy terms, it refers to the capacity of an institution, law, or intervention to produce its intended outcomes.⁴ Drucker⁵ differentiates effectiveness from efficiency, emphasizing that effectiveness is about “doing the right things.” In the present study, effectiveness concerns the extent to which Cameroon–Nigeria joint initiatives have successfully reduced piracy incidents and strengthened maritime security governance.

2.3 Gulf of Guinea

The Gulf of Guinea refers to the strategic maritime zone along the western coast of Africa. While the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2015) defines it as part of the Atlantic Ocean off Africa, scholarly sources highlight its importance for international shipping, offshore oil production, and regional trade.⁶ It is also a hotspot of maritime insecurity, where weak governance, piracy, and transnational criminal networks converge. In this study, the Gulf of Guinea is the geographical and operational environment within which Cameroon and Nigeria’s anti-piracy initiatives are implemented.

2.4 Cameroon

Cameroon is a Central African coastal state bordering the Gulf of Guinea. Legally, it is a sovereign state exercising jurisdiction over its territorial waters and exclusive economic zone under international law.⁷ Cameroon participates in regional maritime security frameworks such as the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Yaoundé Architecture for Maritime Security.⁸ Its strategic location along shared maritime boundaries with Nigeria, especially near the Bakassi Peninsula, makes it a key actor in bilateral and regional anti-piracy cooperation.⁹ In this study, Cameroon refers to its state institutions, naval capabilities, and legal frameworks engaged in maritime security.

2.5 Nigeria

Nigeria is a West African coastal state on the Gulf of Guinea. Nigeria has historically been the epicenter of piracy incidents in the region, particularly in the Niger Delta.¹⁰ The country exercises sovereign authority over its maritime zones and has implemented significant domestic legislation, including the *Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences Act 2019*, which domesticates international piracy obligations.¹¹ Nigeria also plays a leadership role in producing a desired result.

2.6 Common Initiatives

Common initiatives refer to coordinated plans or actions undertaken jointly by two or more actors to address shared problems. In the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2015), *common* denotes “shared by two or more

¹ Garner, B. A. (Ed.). (2019). *Black’s law dictionary* (11th ed.). Thomson Reuters.

² Vedung, E. (1997). *Public policy and program evaluation*. Transaction Publishers.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Drucker, P. F. (2007). *The effective executive* (Revised ed.). Harper Collins.

⁶ Ate, B. E. (2014). The Gulf of Guinea and maritime security: The Yaoundé process and the prospects for regional cooperation. *African Security Review*, 23(2), 145–160.

⁷ United Nations. (1982). *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ International Crisis Group. (2019). *Stopping piracy in the Gulf of Guinea*. International Crisis Group.

¹⁰ Onuoha, F. C. (2012). Piracy and maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea: Trends, concerns and propositions. *Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 3(2), 267–293.

¹¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2022). *Maritime crime in the Gulf of Guinea: Assessing the threat and legal responses*. UNODC.

people or groups,” and *initiative* is “a new plan or action intended to solve a problem or improve a situation.”¹ In international relations, joint initiatives represent coordinated actions by states to address transnational threats.² In this study, common initiatives comprise bilateral naval patrols, intelligence sharing, legal harmonization, and participation in regional maritime security frameworks undertaken jointly by Cameroon and Nigeria.

2.7 Piracy

Piracy is a central security and legal concept in this study. The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2015) defines piracy as “the crime of attacking ships at sea in order to steal from them.” Black’s Law Dictionary³ defines piracy as “robbery or forcible depredation on the high seas, committed without lawful authority and done with intent to steal.” Article 101 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982) further clarifies piracy as illegal acts of violence, detention, or depredation committed for private ends on the high seas. In the Gulf of Guinea context, piracy often overlaps with armed robbery at sea and kidnapping for ransom.⁴ Thus, piracy in this study encompasses both classical legal definitions and operational realities, as reflected in regional maritime security frameworks such as ECOWAS and the Yaoundé Architecture. In this study, Nigeria is analyzed as a principal maritime security actor whose legal, operational, and policy initiatives shape regional anti-piracy outcomes.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to assess the effectiveness of the common initiatives of Cameroon and Nigeria in combating piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. A qualitative approach was adopted because it allows for an in-depth understanding of legal frameworks, institutional coordination, and stakeholder perceptions, which cannot be captured fully through quantitative measures.⁵ Specifically, a descriptive-qualitative design was used to provide a detailed account of the anti-piracy initiatives and to evaluate their effectiveness from the perspectives of key actors and documented evidence.

The study focused on the Gulf of Guinea, particularly the territorial waters and exclusive economic zones under the jurisdiction of Cameroon and Nigeria. This region is of strategic importance due to its dense shipping lanes, offshore oil exploration, and high incidences of piracy.⁶ Key areas of interest included Nigeria’s Niger Delta maritime zones, Cameroon’s coastal waters near the Bakassi Peninsula, and adjacent commercial shipping routes. These locations were chosen because they represent the operational theaters of bilateral naval patrols and other collaborative initiatives.

The population for the study consisted of maritime security experts, naval officers, policymakers, legal practitioners, and academics specializing in maritime law and security. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants with direct knowledge and experience of anti-piracy initiatives, ensuring that data were collected from individuals with the most relevant expertise.⁷ In addition to interviews, document sources were purposively selected to include legal instruments such as Nigeria’s *Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences Act 2019* and Cameroon’s naval regulations, policy documents from the Yaoundé Architecture and ECCAS/ECOWAS frameworks, and reports from the UNODC and IMB. These documents provided critical secondary data to triangulate the findings from interviews.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to share their perspectives on the operational effectiveness of joint naval patrols, coordination between Cameroon and Nigeria, legal and institutional mechanisms for prosecuting piracy, and perceived successes and challenges of the initiatives. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews enabled the exploration of emerging issues while maintaining focus on the research objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Document analysis complemented interviews by providing official evidence on legal frameworks, operational reports, and policy measures, which was essential for triangulating and validating the findings.⁸

¹ *Ibid.*

² Keohane, R. O. (1984). *After hegemony: Cooperation and discord in the world political economy*. Princeton University Press.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.

⁶ Onuoha, F. C. (2012). Piracy and maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea: Trends, concerns and propositions. *Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 3(2), 267–293.

⁷ Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

⁸ Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27–40.

Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes related to operational collaboration, legal enforcement, institutional coordination, challenges, and recommendations for policy improvement. The process involved repeated reading of transcripts and documents, coding significant statements, and synthesizing these codes into broader themes. This approach facilitated a systematic interpretation of qualitative data and provided insights into the effectiveness of bilateral anti-piracy initiatives.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants provided informed consent prior to interviews, and their confidentiality and anonymity were assured. Data were securely stored and used solely for research purposes. The study also obtained ethical clearance from the relevant institutional review board to ensure compliance with standard research ethics. Limitations of the study include restricted access to classified naval operations and sensitive security documents, as well as the potential for bias in participant responses due to political or institutional considerations. These limitations were mitigated by triangulating interview data with multiple document sources and cross-referencing findings with publicly available official records.

4. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Maritime Security Theory and Human Security Theory, which together provide a multidimensional framework for assessing the effectiveness of the common initiatives of Cameroon and Nigeria in combating piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. While Maritime Security Theory emphasizes state responsibility for securing maritime domains, Human Security Theory prioritizes the protection of individuals and communities affected by insecurity. Their combined application enables a structured evaluation of both institutional performance and human impact.

4.1 Maritime Security Theory

Maritime Security Theory draws its intellectual foundation from classical naval strategic thought, particularly Alfred Thayer Mahan's *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* (1890), which underscored the centrality of sea control to national power and economic prosperity.¹ Contemporary maritime scholarship, notably Geoffrey Till (2009), broadened this perspective by conceptualizing maritime security as encompassing not only naval defense but also maritime governance, law enforcement, economic protection, and international cooperation.

In its modern articulation, maritime security includes the safeguarding of shipping lanes, offshore energy infrastructure, fisheries, and coastal communities from threats such as piracy and armed robbery at sea.² The normative legal foundation of maritime security governance is grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982), which provides the international legal definition of piracy and allocates enforcement jurisdiction among states.³ At the regional level, cooperative mechanisms such as the Yaoundé Code of Conduct institutionalize information sharing, joint patrols, and coordinated maritime enforcement in West and Central Africa.

5. Legal Framework

The international legal framework provides the foundational norms that define piracy, allocate enforcement jurisdiction, establish state obligations, and promote international cooperation against maritime crime. For coastal states such as Cameroon and Nigeria, which face persistent threats from piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea, robust incorporation and implementation of international legal instruments is indispensable for a legally coherent and operationally effective maritime security strategy.

At its core, the international legal regime for combating piracy is grounded in the principle that piracy constitutes a threat to international peace and security requiring collective action. This framework encompasses treaty law, Security Council mandates, and international standards developed by specialized agencies such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO). Together, these instruments define piracy, set out enforcement jurisdiction, and obligate states to cooperate in suppression efforts.

5.1 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), 1982

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is the cornerstone of contemporary maritime law and the principal instrument for defining and regulating piracy. Often characterized as the "constitution for the oceans," UNCLOS establishes legal norms governing navigation, jurisdictional zones, and the suppression of piracy⁴ the placement of devices likely to destroy or damage vessels.⁵

¹ Mahan, A. T. (1890). *The influence of sea power upon history, 1660–1783*. Little, Brown and Company.

² Till, G. (2009). *Seapower: A guide for the twenty-first century* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

³ United Nations Development Program. (1994). *Human development report 1994: New dimensions of human security*. Oxford University Press.

⁴ International Maritime Organization. (1988). *Convention for the suppression of unlawful acts against the safety of maritime navigation*.

Under UNCLOS, piracy is defined and regulated as follows:

- ✓ Article 100 imposes a general obligation on all states to “cooperate to the fullest possible extent in the repression of piracy on the high seas.”¹ This reflects the collective interest of states in suppressing acts that threaten international maritime order.
- ✓ Article 101 defines piracy as illegal acts of violence or detention committed for private ends against another ship on the high seas or outside the jurisdiction of any state.²
- ✓ Article 105 confers universal jurisdiction, permitting any state to seize pirate ships and arrest offenders regardless of nationality or place of seizure (United Nations, 1982, art. 105). Articles 107–108 limit seizure authority to warships or clearly marked government vessels acting under appropriate authority.³

UNCLOS’s definition of piracy is widely recognized as reflecting customary international law, and its universal jurisdiction clause has been affirmed by international courts and scholars (Treves, 2009; Mensah, 1999). However, UNCLOS’s focus on high seas acts means that violent acts occurring within a coastal state’s territorial waters often fall outside its strict definition, necessitating complementary instruments.

5.2 United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea

United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions, while not formally part of treaty law, carry significant legal and political weight under the UN Charter and serve to reinforce international legal obligations relating to maritime security.

The Security Council has expressly addressed piracy in the Gulf of Guinea through a series of resolutions that exhort states to adopt comprehensive legal and cooperative responses:

- UNSC Resolution 2018 (2011) condemned acts of piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea, urged affected states to develop comprehensive maritime security strategies, and called on external partners to provide capacity-building support.⁴
- UNSC Resolution 2039 (2012) reiterated the need for domestic criminalization of piracy, enhanced regional cooperation, and improved information sharing among regional states.⁵
- UNSC Resolution 2634 (2022) welcomed progress made by coastal states in strengthening maritime security, encouraged continued implementation of cooperative frameworks such as the Yaoundé Architecture, and emphasized legal and operational capacity building.⁶

Although Security Council resolutions do not themselves create treaty obligations, they reinforce existing international law and provide political legitimacy for domestic and regional efforts to address piracy and maritime crime. In the context of the Gulf of Guinea, these resolutions have catalyzed both legislative reform and cooperative arrangements among coastal states.

5.3 International Maritime Organization (IMO) Standard and Guideline

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) plays a critical supporting role in the development of international maritime security norms and has issued a range of non-binding instruments and resolutions complementing treaty law. These include recommendations for national maritime security legislation, guidelines on information sharing, and capacity-building strategies targeted at piracy-affected regions.

For instance, IMO Assembly Resolution A.32(22) urged member states to strengthen legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms to address maritime insecurity and enhance cooperation in implementation of international instruments against maritime crime.⁷ IMO’s guidance has informed the development of domestic anti-piracy laws in many states, including those in the Gulf of Guinea. Article 6 requires states to establish jurisdiction where the offence is committed against a ship flying the state’s flag, within its territory, or by its national.⁸ Article 10 codifies the principle of *aut dedere aut judicare* (“extradite or prosecute”), which obligates

⁵ *Ibid.*

¹ United Nations. (1982). *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*.

² Article 101 of the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea, 1982.

³ Article 107 and 108 of the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea, 1982.

⁴ United Nations Security Council. (2011). Resolution 2018 (2011).

⁵ United Nations Security Council. (2012). Resolution 2039 (2012).

⁶ United Nations Security Council. (2022). Resolution 2634 (2022).

⁷ International Maritime Organization. (2021). IMO Assembly Resolution A.32(22).

⁸ Article 6 of the International Maritime Organization. (1988).

states to either prosecute or extradite offenders found within their territory.¹

Unlike UNCLOS, the SUA Convention explicitly covers offences whether committed on the high seas or within territorial waters, thereby empowering coastal states to prosecute maritime crimes that would otherwise evade UNCLOS's narrow piracy definition. Its combination of criminalization, jurisdictional reach, and prosecutorial obligation has been influential in shaping domestic maritime security laws worldwide.²

5.4 *Convention on the High Seas, 1958*

Although largely superseded by UNCLOS, the Convention on the High Seas (1958) contributed foundational principles to modern maritime law, including the freedom of the high seas and jurisdictional bases for the repression of piracy. Its provisions influenced the drafting of UNCLOS and remain relevant as part of the customary law background against which contemporary piracy law is interpreted.³

The international legal framework for combating piracy is robust, multifaceted, and grounded in treaty obligations, Security Council mandates, and global standards. UNCLOS provides the primary legal definition and enforcement jurisdiction for piracy, while the SUA Convention extends prosecutorial reach to acts within territorial waters. Security Council resolutions and IMO guidance further reinforce state obligations to criminalize piracy and engage in cooperative enforcement. For Cameroon and Nigeria whose efforts to repress piracy in the Gulf of Guinea are shaped by the transnational nature of maritime crime effective implementation of these international instruments is indispensable. Alignment with these norms underpins domestic legislation, regional cooperation mechanisms, and bilateral enforcement initiatives.

6. Regional Legal Framework

The regional legal framework governing maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea represents a structured attempt to operationalize international anti-piracy norms within a geographically specific and institutionally complex maritime environment. While international law particularly UNCLOS and the SUA Convention establishes foundational obligations to repress piracy, the effectiveness of those obligations depends significantly on regional mechanisms capable of translating abstract duties into coordinated enforcement practice.⁴

In the Gulf of Guinea context, piracy and armed robbery at sea frequently occur within territorial waters and exclusive economic zones (EEZs), often exploiting jurisdictional fragmentation and uneven enforcement capacity.⁵ Regional legal architecture therefore performs a bridging function: it harmonizes legal norms, institutionalizes cooperation, and reduces enforcement asymmetries between coastal states. For Cameroon and Nigeria, whose maritime zones are contiguous and strategically interconnected, regional frameworks are central to sustained and effective anti-piracy initiatives.

The principal regional instruments shaping this architecture include the Yaoundé Code of Conduct (2013), sub-regional strategies under ECOWAS and ECCAS, continental frameworks of the African Union, and coordinating mechanisms such as the Gulf of Guinea Commission.

6.1 *Yaounde Code of Conduct, 2013*

The *Code of Conduct Concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery against Ships, and Other Illicit Maritime Activity in West and Central Africa* (Yaoundé Code of Conduct) constitutes the normative and institutional cornerstone of regional maritime security cooperation in West and Central Africa.⁶

Although formally categorized as a non-binding instrument, the Code reflects what scholars describe as “soft law institutionalization,” wherein political commitment is reinforced through operational structures and routinized cooperation.⁷ Its legal and operational significance lies in three core dimensions:

(a) Regionalization of the Duty to Cooperate

Article 3 of the Code mirrors Article 100 of UNCLOS by committing signatories to cooperate to the fullest

¹ Article 10 of the International Maritime Organization. (1988).

² Mensah, T. A. (1999). *The international law of the sea*. Oxford University Press.

³ United Nations. (1958). *Convention on the High Seas*.

⁴ Treves, T. (2009). Piracy, law of the sea, and use of force. *European Journal of International Law*, 20(2), 399–414.

⁵ Onuoha, F. C. (2013). Piracy and maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. *African Security Review*, 22(4), 267–27.

⁶ ECCAS, ECOWAS, & Gulf of Guinea Commission. (2013). *Code of conduct concerning the repression of piracy, armed robbery against ships, and illicit maritime activity in West and Central Africa*.

⁷ Bueger, C., & Edmunds, T. (2017). Beyond seablindness: A new agenda for maritime security studies. *International Affairs*, 93(6), 1293–1311.

extent in repressing piracy and armed robbery at sea. By embedding this obligation within a geographically defined framework, the Code transforms a universal duty into a regionally actionable mandate.¹

(b) Legal Harmonization

Articles 4–6 encourage participating states to criminalize piracy and related offences consistent with international law and to ensure effective investigation and prosecution mechanisms. Harmonization of definitions and penalties is critical in avoiding jurisdictional vacuums and safe havens a recurrent challenge in the Gulf of Guinea.²

(c) Institutional Architecture

Perhaps the most innovative feature of the Yaoundé Code is its creation of the *Yaoundé Architecture for Maritime Security (YAMS)*, comprising:

- The Inter-Regional Coordination Centre (ICC) in Yaoundé;
- Regional Maritime Security Centres for West and Central Africa;
- Zonal maritime coordination center;
- National maritime operations centres.

This multi-tiered structure institutionalizes maritime domain awareness, intelligence sharing, and coordinated operational responses. Bueger (2015) characterizes this architecture as a significant example of regional maritime governance innovation, emphasizing its capacity to embed cooperation beyond episodic naval patrols. Similarly, Vreÿ(2016) argues that the Yaoundé framework represents a shift from reactive crisis management toward structured maritime governance.

For Cameroon and Nigeria, participation in the Yaoundé Architecture provides a structured legal-operational platform through which joint patrols, coordinated surveillance, and intelligence exchange can be institutionalized rather than improvised.

6.2 ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy (EIMS)

The ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy (EIMS) situates maritime security within the broader framework of regional economic integration and collective security.³ Unlike the Yaoundé Code, which is inter-regional, EIMS operates within West Africa and emphasizes governance-based security reform.

The Strategy promotes:

- Harmonization of maritime crime legislation across member states;
- Development of maritime domain awareness infrastructure;
- Integration of naval and civilian maritime agencies;
- Capacity building in prosecution and judicial processes.

The governance-oriented design of EIMS reflects contemporary understandings of maritime security as a multidimensional construct encompassing law enforcement, economic stability, and regulatory oversight.⁴ By embedding maritime security within regional economic development frameworks, ECOWAS recognizes that piracy undermines trade flows, energy exports, and maritime commerce thereby threatening collective prosperity.⁵

For Nigeria, as a dominant maritime actor within ECOWAS, the EIMS framework reinforces legislative reforms and supports coordination with neighboring states, including Cameroon under broader inter-regional mechanisms.

6.3 ECCAS Maritime Security Framework

The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) developed maritime security coordination mechanisms prior to the Yaoundé process, emphasizing joint patrols, integrated command structures, and legal

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

³ ECOWAS Commission. (2014). *Integrated maritime strategy (EIMS)*.

⁴ Bueger, C., & Edmunds, T. (2017). Beyond seablandness: A new agenda for maritime security studies. *International Affairs*, 93(6), 1293–1311.

⁵ Murphy, M. N. (2009). *Small boats, weak states, dirty money: Piracy and maritime terrorism in the modern world*. Columbia University Press.

convergence among Central African coastal states. ECCAS initiatives sought to address chronic enforcement weaknesses and fragmented jurisdiction in Central African waters.¹ Their integration into the Yaoundé Architecture reflects a layered model of regionalism one in which sub-regional security communities are nested within a broader inter-regional framework. Such institutional layering enhances resilience and normative coherence.

For Cameroon, ECCAS mechanisms provide complementary operational support and reinforce harmonization with Central African maritime governance structures.

6.4 Gulf of Guinea Commission (CGC)

The Gulf of Guinea Commission serves primarily as a diplomatic and policy coordination platform rather than a binding legislative authority. However, regional governance scholarship emphasizes that policy coordination forums contribute significantly to normative convergence and trust-building among states.² Through dialogue facilitation and policy alignment, the GGC strengthens the political foundations of maritime cooperation. Its influence reinforces regional commitment to legal harmonization and cooperative enforcement critical elements in combating piracy effectively.

6.5 African Union 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy

The African Union's 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy³ provides a continental normative framework linking maritime security to sustainable development, blue economy governance, and institutional reform.⁴

The Strategy conceptualizes piracy as part of broader transnational organized crime networks and calls for:

- ✓ Integration of international maritime conventions into domestic law;
- ✓ Strengthening of judicial and enforcement institutions;
- ✓ Inter-regional cooperation mechanisms;
- ✓ Long-term maritime governance reform.

By situating anti-piracy efforts within structural governance reform, the 2050 AIM Strategy aligns security enforcement with developmental objectives an approach consistent with contemporary maritime security theory.⁵

For Cameroon and Nigeria, the effectiveness of bilateral anti-piracy initiatives is inseparable from the vitality of this regional legal architecture. The regional framework does not merely supplement international law; it operationalizes and contextualizes it within the Gulf of Guinea's unique security landscape.

7. National Legal Framework

The national legal framework is the decisive arena in which anti-piracy commitments move from diplomatic aspirations to enforceable reality. International conventions and regional codes impose obligations, but it is domestic constitutional design, legislative incorporation, and judicial enforcement that determine whether piracy is effectively criminalized, prosecuted, and punished. In Cameroon and Nigeria, national law defines jurisdictional reach, prescribes penalties, regulates naval and law-enforcement authority, and structures cooperation with neighboring states. The strength, coherence, and implementation of these domestic legal systems ultimately determine whether regional and international maritime security framework translate into tangible suppression of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

7.1 Cameroon Legal Framework

Cameroon, strategically situated along the Gulf of Guinea, boasts an expansive coastline that presents both economic opportunities and security challenges. As the country seeks to harness its maritime potential, ensuring the safety and security of its territorial waters, ports, and adjacent infrastructure has become paramount⁶. The threat landscape is complex, with piracy, armed robbery, and maritime terrorism compromising regional stability, while illegal fishing, pollution, and smuggling exacerbate environmental degradation and economic losses. In

¹ VreÿF. (2016). Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea: Issues and responses. *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, 12(1), 70–89.

² *Ibid.*

³ African Union. (2012). *2050 Africa's integrated maritime strategy (2050 AIM Strategy)*.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Bueger, C. (2015). What is maritime security? *Marine Policy*, 53, 159–164.

⁶ In response, Cameroon has established a comprehensive national legal framework, comprising laws, decrees, and regulations that align with international conventions and best practices. This framework, underpinned by the Port and Maritime Code, the Maritime Navigation and Safety Law, and the Fight against Piracy and Maritime Robbery Law, empowers institutions like the National Maritime Authority, the Port Authority of Douala, and the Cameroon Navy to safeguard national interests.

response, Cameroon has established a comprehensive national legal framework, comprising laws, decrees, and regulations that align with international conventions and best practices. This framework, underpinned by the Port and Maritime Code, the Maritime Navigation and Safety Law, and the Fight against Piracy and Maritime Robbery Law, empowers institutions like the National Maritime Authority, the Port Authority of Douala, and the Cameroon Navy to safeguard national interests. However, effective implementation remains a challenge, necessitating enhanced regional cooperation, capacity building, and investment in maritime infrastructure and technology to combat the evolving threats and ensure the secure exploitation of Cameroon's vast maritime resources.¹ This paragraph sets the context of Cameroon's maritime environment and security challenges; highlights key threats like: piracy, terrorism, illegal fishing, pollution, and smuggling; introduces the national legal framework: Laws, decrees, and regulations identifies responsible institutions: National Maritime Authority, Port Authority, and Cameroon Navy.

7.1.1 Law No. 95/011 of 27 December 1995: Port and Maritime Code

Cameroon's Port and Maritime Code, Law No. 95/011 of 27 December 1995, stands as a seminal legislation in the country's quest for maritime security and economic development. Enacted in the wake of escalating maritime threats and regional instability, this comprehensive law harmonizes national and international standards to safeguard Cameroon's strategic coastline, bustling ports, and thriving maritime industry. By establishing a robust framework for maritime safety, security, and law enforcement, the Code addresses the complex interplay between economic interests, national sovereignty, and regional cooperation. Through its provisions, Cameroon demonstrates adherence to global maritime conventions and best practices, bolstering efforts to prevent piracy, armed robbery, and maritime terrorism, while fostering a secure environment for international trade, investment, and cooperation.

For the purposes of this Code, maritime security means the protection of persons, ships, goods and ports against acts of violence, piracy and other unlawful acts.²

Article 32 provides that:

"Ship owners, operators and masters shall implement security measures to prevent unlawful acts against their ships, crew, passengers and cargo."³ Security protocols for ports, ships and cargo shall include: access control measures, surveillance systems, alarm systems, security personnel, emergency response plans.⁴ Security personnel shall: be trained and certified, wear uniforms and badges, carry identification, be empowered to inspect ships and cargo.⁵

Article 35 provides that:

"Access to ports and ships shall be restricted to authorized persons, who shall: Possess valid identification, undergo security screening, comply with security protocols."⁶ Piracy, armed robbery and maritime terrorism are prohibited and unauthorized boarding, theft or damage to ships or cargo is punishable. Maritime authorities may inspect ships and cargo to ensure compliance.⁷ Ships and persons may be detained for security breaches. Cameroon shall cooperate with neighboring countries and international organizations to combat maritime insecurity.⁸

Law No. 95/011 of 27 December 1995, Cameroon's Port and Maritime Code, stands as a landmark legislation, harmonizing national and international maritime standards. This comprehensive framework ensures the safety, security, and efficiency of Cameroon's maritime industry, fostering economic growth, regional cooperation, and global trade. In conclusion, Law No. 95/011 demonstrates Cameroon's commitment to a secure, efficient, and environmentally conscious maritime industry, contributing to the country's economic development and global maritime community.

7.1.2 Law No. 2001/021 of 21 December 2001: Maritime Navigation and Safety

¹ By Cameroon putting up these laws, one can say undoubtedly that it is her commitment in ensuring that these laws are not only documented but enforced accordingly.

² Article 31 Law No. 95/011 of 27 December 1995: Port and Maritime Code.

³ Article 32 Law No. 95/011 of 27 December 1995: Port and Maritime Code.

⁴ Article 33 Law No. 95/011 of 27 December 1995: Port and Maritime Code.

⁵ Article 34 Law No. 95/011 of 27 December 1995: Port and Maritime Code.

⁶ Article 35 Law No. 95/011 of 27 December 1995: Port and Maritime Code.

⁷ Article 51 Law No. 95/011 of 27 December 1995: Port and Maritime Code.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Law No. 2021/021 of 21 December 2021, Cameroon's Maritime Navigation and Safety Act, marks a significant milestone in the country's quest for enhanced maritime security and safety within the Gulf of Guinea. This landmark legislation harmonizes national and international standards, addressing the complex interplay between maritime navigation, safety, and security. The Gulf of Guinea, a critical maritime hub, faces persistent threats from piracy, armed robbery, and maritime terrorism. Law No. 2021/021 strengthens Cameroon's maritime security framework, bolstering regional cooperation and international collaboration to combat these threats.

Key aspects of the law include:

- 1) Enhanced navigation standards and safety protocols
- 2) Strengthened vessel inspection and certification
- 3) Improved emergency response and search and rescue operations
- 4) Increased penalties for maritime security breaches
- 5) Alignment with International Maritime Organization (IMO) conventions

By enforcing these provisions, Cameroon demonstrates its commitment to safeguarding national interests, regional stability, and global maritime trade. Effective implementation of Law No. 2021/021 will mitigate maritime security risks, ensure safer navigation, and promote economic growth within the Gulf of Guinea.

7.1.3 Law No. 2011/012 of 6 May 2011: Fight Against Piracy and Maritime Robbery

Cameroon's Law No. 2011/012 of May 6, 2011, represents a paradigmatic shift in the country's quest to fortify maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea, a region beset by the scourge of piracy and maritime robbery. This landmark legislation constitutes a robust response to the burgeoning threats to regional stability, global trade, and economic development. By criminalizing piracy, maritime robbery, and related offenses, the law establishes a comprehensive framework for prevention, suppression, and prosecution. Key provisions include the definition of piracy and maritime robbery, penalties for offenders, and measures for cooperation with neighboring states and international organizations. Notably, the law mandates the creation of a National Commission for the Fight against Piracy and Maritime Robbery, responsible for coordinating national efforts, sharing intelligence, and collaborating with regional and international partners. Furthermore, Law No. 2011/012 harmonizes Cameroon's legislation with international instruments, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation (SUA). By enacting this law, Cameroon reaffirms its commitment to safeguarding maritime security, protecting seafarers, and ensuring the uninterrupted flow of goods and services through the Gulf of Guinea, a vital artery of global commerce. This legislative milestone underscores Cameroon's proactive stance in addressing the complex security challenges confronting the region and demonstrates its resolve to collaborate with regional and international stakeholders in combating maritime insecurity. The Gulf of Guinea has been plagued by piracy and maritime robbery, threatening regional stability and global trade. Cameroon's Law No. 2011/012 represents a significant response to these challenges. This article examines the law's provisions, analyzing its definitions, offenses, penalties, investigation and prosecution mechanisms, international cooperation, and institutional framework.

Based on offenses and penalties, articles 3 and 4¹ outline piracy and maritime robbery offenses, including:

- Attack or hijacking of ships
- Theft or damage to cargo or property
- Violence or intimidation against crew or passengers

Penalties range from 5-20 years' imprisonment and XAF 5-50 million fines, with confiscation of assets (Article 5). These penalties align with regional and international standards. Articles 6-8 establish investigative powers, procedures for arrest, detention, and prosecution, and cooperation between law enforcement agencies and judicial authorities. These provisions ensure effective investigation and prosecution of piracy and maritime robbery cases.² Based on international cooperation, articles 9-11 mandate cooperation with neighboring states and international organizations, including:

- Extradition and mutual legal assistance, and
- Information sharing and intelligence gathering.

This cooperation is crucial for regional maritime security. Articles 12-14 establish the National Commission, responsible for:

¹ Article 3 and 4 of Law No. 2011/012 of 6 May 2011: Fight against Piracy and Maritime Robbery.

² Article 6-8 of Law No. 2011/012 of 6 May 2011: Fight against Piracy and Maritime Robbery.

- Coordinating national efforts
- Sharing intelligence
- Collaborating with regional and international partners

The Commission's composition and structure are outlined, ensuring effective coordination.

Cameroon's Law No. 2011/012 represents a significant step towards combating piracy and maritime robbery in the Gulf of Guinea. Its provisions align with regional and international frameworks, ensuring effective investigation, prosecution, and cooperation.

7.2 Nigeria Legal Framework

According to Babatunde & Abdulsalam, there are two categories of Maritime domestic laws. The first category includes the 1991 constitution of Nigeria as amended, the admiralty jurisdiction Act, and the admiralty jurisdictional procedure rules of 2011. For example, section 252(1) of the federal republic of Nigeria Constitution grant the federal high court exclusive jurisdiction over maritime related matters. While the second categories of laws deal with the immediate application and proactive measures require for better maritime security within the Nigeria waters. These comprises the Nigerian Maritime administration and safety agency (NIMASA)Act, The Merchant Shipping Act (MSA), The coastal and inland shipping (Cabotage) Act, and the National inland water way Authority Act (NIWA) This institution has the power and authority to enforce maritime law.

7.2.1 The SPOMO Act 2019

This Act was enacted by the Nigerian President in 2019 in an effort to combat piracy, armed robbery at sea, and other threats to maritime security (NIMASA, 2019). The Act is a tool designed to domesticate the 1988 Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation (SUA), as well as its protocols, and the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Furthermore, the Act's provisions apply to ships, aircraft, and other maritime vessels, as well as fixed and floating platforms; therefore, they apply to everyone aboard any of the aforementioned facilities, whether in Nigerian territorial waters or internal waters, international waters, or the territory of other nations signatories to the applicable international maritime security agreements. Moreover, prior to the passage of the SPOMO Act into law, prosecuting those suspected of maritime piracy in Nigeria was difficult because there was no explicit municipal legislation restricting the act, and prosecution of piracy was impossible due to the concept of "no punishment without law."

The prosecution of individuals alleged of engaging in maritime piracy was difficult in Nigeria prior to the implementation of the legislation, because there was no national law that specifically specified the offence of piracy.¹ According to section 36 (12) of Nigeria's 1999 constitution as amended a person may not be convicted of a crime unless the crime in question is specifically established by the existing law.² And despite the fact that the SUA convention of 1988 and its protocol have been in force since the beginning of the Merchant Shipping Act (MSA) 2007 as stated in section 216 (h) of that law; maritime stakeholders were unsure if that was sufficient in meeting the requirements of the constitution to domesticate the convention. ³This matter is resolved by the provision of section 3 of the SPOMO Act which defines "Piracy" as any of the following:

- (a) "Illegal act of violence, act of detention or any act of depredation, committed for private ends by crew or any passenger of a private ship or private aircraft and directed,
- (i) In international waters against another ship or aircraft or against a person or property on board the ship or aircraft, or
 - (ii) Against a ship, aircraft, person or a property in a place outside the jurisdiction of any state;
- (b) Act of voluntary participation in the operation of a ship or an aircraft with knowledge of facts making it a pirate ship or aircraft; and
- (c) Act of inciting or of intentionally facilitating an act described in subparagraph (a) or (b) of this section" (SPOMO Act, 2019).⁴

Notably, the aforementioned definition aligns with the concept of universal jurisdiction as stated in Article 101 of UNCLOS. This provision gives states the power to lawfully detain and prosecute individuals, ships, or aircraft suspected of engaging in piracy, irrespective of whether the pirate or the targeted vessel is under a foreign flag or

¹ Enebeli, V., & Njoku, D. (2021). A critical appraisal of the anti-piracy law of Nigeria. *Journal of law, policy and globalization*, 113, 17.

² Section 36(12) of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria.

³ Section 216 of the 2007 Merchant Shipping Act of Nigeria.

⁴ Section 3 of the SPOMO Act of 2019.

crew, in accordance with their domestic laws. The definition also includes violent acts perpetrated in the exclusive economic zone of Nigeria against fixed and floating platforms, aircraft and other property besides ships.¹

The SPOMO Act 2019, which addresses maritime piracy and related maritime offences, is a significant measure in safeguarding the nation's coastal areas and waters. The enactment of the SPOMO Act in 2019 in Nigeria, is key in determining the role of maritime enforcement agencies in combating piracy in Nigeria. It shed more light on issues that facilitate the antipiracy actions in maritime enforcement agencies in Nigeria.

7.2.2 Nigeria Anti-Piracy Law of 2019

Nigeria has realized the implication of maritime piracy and its implication on human, economic political and social cost, and haven recognize the weaknesses of the international regulations and their inadequateness, decided to introduce domestic laws, to cater for piracy within its waters and international waters, for example, a law was initiated by the presidency called the suppression of piracy and other maritime offences bill 2019 and sent to the national assembly for passage. This bill was passed by the national assembly and the president Assent the bill on June 24, 2019. The Nigeria anti-piracy law provided the following as part of its effort to suppress maritime piracy in its shore. The bill has the following features:

- ❖ It adopted the UNCLOS 1982 and the SUA1988 Convention and its protocol. It is stated in the opening statement of the bill that Nigerian is a party to UNCLOS and SUA Convention and that the bill still recognizes and affirms their essence and the Nigeria's commitment to promoting them.
- ❖ The law fulfills the international requirement for standalone regulations on piracy.
- ❖ The law provides a distinct definition of piracy and other maritime sea offences which are in line with the UNCLOS submission.
- ❖ The punishment upon conviction for the maritime crimes which includes taking to court foe the jail of several years for fine or both.
- ❖ Return of assets of the owner of violated maritime properties or forfeiture or proceeds of maritime crimes to the Nigerian government.
- ❖ Establishment of piracy and maritime offences fund with special source of funding which will be a channel in the implementation of the bill.
- ❖ The exclusive power of jurisdiction for sea piracy is given to the federal high court.
- ❖ The bill also empowers the courts to seize vessels or aircrafts used for maritime crimes in Nigeria and international waters.²

7.2.3 Code of Military Justice

Law number 2017/012 of 12 July 2017 Lays down the code of military justice.³ By the tenor of section 8 of the Code, Section 8 states that the military tribunal shall have exclusive jurisdiction to hear and determine.

- (a) Military offence and war crimes.
- (b) Crimes against humanity and crimes of Genocide.
- (c) Offence relating to act of terrorism and the security of the state.
- (d) Offences of piracy and unlawful acts against the safety of maritime navigation and platforms.⁴

Chapter 3 lays down the criminal investigation of the military justice. Section 11 states that offences referred to section 8 (d) shall be investigated and recorded in a report drown up by civil or military criminal investigation offices. In all cases, criminal investigation office shall conduct their investigations in accordance with the rules set out in the criminal procedure code.⁵

Piracy arm robbery at the Gulf of Guinea and other maritime offences, the increasing rise in piracy in the Gulf of Guinea has become alarming. Until recently, the concern about piracy has been the Gulf of Eden operated by Somalia pirates; however, piracy has witnessed a drastic shift to the Gulf of Guinea. Armed robbery against ships

¹ Enebeli V., & Njoku. (2021). Acritical appraisal of anti-piracy law of Nigeria. *Journal of law, policy and globalization*, 113, 47–62.

² Siraja Zamfara Ibrahim. (2019). Strength and witnesses of the legal strategies to combat piracy in the Nigeria. *World maritime university*, 41–42.

³ Law number 2017/012 of 12 July 2017.

⁴ Section 8 of the Code of military justice 2017.

⁵ Section 11 of the Code of military justice 2017.

and cargo theft has also risen uncontrollably within Nigerian territorial and internal waters. These activities pose a serious threat to national, regional and global security and economy.

As part of curbing the problem of piracy, armed robbery against ships and other Maritime offences, the President assented to the piracy bill, sponsored by NIMASA titled; The Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences Act herein after know as (SUPMOA) 2019. The Act gives effect to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982, the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation (SUA) 1988 and its Protocols.

Purpose of the Act is that the SUPMOA 2019 seeks to prevent and suppress piracy, armed robbery and other unlawful act against a ship, aircraft and other maritime craft, howsoever propelled, including fixed or floating platform. The act applies to any person on board a ship or aircraft navigating in, on or above the territorial and internal waters of Nigeria or on above international waters; or fixed or floating platform in, on or above the territorial and internal waters of Nigeria or on or above international waters. It also includes circumstances where the offender or alleged offender is found outside Nigeria but is in the territory of a State who is a party to other International Maritime Conventions. Section 3 of the SUPMOA 2019 provides the definition of piracy and practically adopted the definition provided under Article 101 of United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982.¹

With regard to the Prosecution, one aspect of the act that is commendable is the fact that it empowered NIMASA to prosecute offences under SUPMOA albeit with the consent of the Attorney General. Section 5 (1) provides that the Attorney General; any law officer so designated by the Attorney General; or the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) with the Attorney General's consent are empowered to prosecute offences under SUPMOA.²

8. Effectiveness of the Common Initiatives of Cameroon and Nigeria in Combating Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea

Effectiveness in maritime security governance must be evaluated through a multidimensional analytical lens. It is not reducible to incident statistics alone. Rather, it requires assessment of norm internalization, institutional capacity, enforcement credibility, inter-state coordination, deterrence signaling, and structural resilience.³ Within this framework, the cooperative architecture between Cameroon and Nigeria represents a transitional model of regional maritime security consolidation in a historically fragile maritime space.

8.1 Norm Internalization and Legal Consolidation

At the national level, effectiveness begins with the domestication of international norms. Legal transplantation without enforcement capacity produces symbolic compliance; internalization produces behavioral change (Treves, 2009).

Nigeria's *Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences Act* (2019) is doctrinally significant because it bridges the gap between Article 101 of UNCLOS and enforceable domestic criminal jurisdiction. By codifying piracy, armed robbery at sea, and ancillary offences such as conspiracy and facilitation, the Act transforms abstract treaty obligations into prosecutable crimes. Crucially, it establishes jurisdictional competence and penalties severe enough to generate deterrent signaling.

Cameroon's 2016 Penal Code reform similarly embeds piracy within its domestic criminal law architecture. Article 45 of its Constitution, which grants supremacy to ratified treaties, further strengthens the normative penetration of international maritime law into domestic adjudication. From a compliance theory perspective, these reforms signal a shift from passive treaty adherence to active enforcement commitment. The successful prosecution of piracy cases in Nigeria under the 2019 Act represents not merely legal activity but the operationalization of international criminalization norms a key indicator of regime effectiveness.⁴

8.2 Institutional Capacity and Maritime Domain Awareness

Normative clarity is ineffective without institutional capacity. Maritime security governance depends upon surveillance infrastructure, asset deployment, command coordination, and rapid interdiction capability.⁵

¹ Section 3 of SUPMOA 2019.

² Section 5(1) of SUPMOA.

³ Bueger, C. (2015). What is maritime security? *Marine Policy*, 53, 159–164.

⁴ Guilfoyle, D. (2013). *Shipping interdiction and the law of the sea*. Cambridge University Press.

⁵ Bueger, C., & Edmunds, T. (2017). Beyond seablindness: A new agenda for maritime security studies. *International Affairs*, 93(6), 1293–1311.

Nigeria's Deep Blue Project introduced an integrated maritime security architecture combining aerial surveillance, special mission vessels, and centralized command structures. This model reflects an evolution from reactive naval patrols to intelligence-driven maritime domain awareness a shift consistent with contemporary maritime security doctrine.

Cameroon's enhancement of naval patrols and participation in zonal coordination mechanisms similarly contributes to reducing ungoverned maritime spaces. The strategic importance of contiguous waters between both states makes coordinated surveillance essential. Fragmented enforcement historically enabled piracy networks to exploit jurisdictional seams.¹ Institutional synchronization mitigates this vulnerability.

Empirically, the decline in reported kidnapping incidents in the Gulf of Guinea after 2021 corresponds with intensified naval presence and coordination.² While correlation does not prove causation, consolidation is widely regarded as a primary explanatory variable in piracy suppression literature.³

8.3 Enforcement Credibility and Deterrence Signaling

Deterrence theory emphasizes that the certainty of punishment often outweighs severity.⁴ Historically, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea persisted partly due to arrest-and-release practices and weak prosecutorial follow-through. The successful conviction of piracy offenders under Nigeria's 2019 statute alters this dynamic. Enforcement credibility transforms maritime security from symbolic presence to punitive capability. This strengthens both general deterrence (discouraging potential offenders) and specific deterrence (incapacitating convicted perpetrators).

Moreover, visible prosecution enhances reputational signaling. States that demonstrate enforcement competence reinforce investor confidence, reduce insurance premiums, and strengthen perceptions of maritime governance reliability.

8.4 Regional Security Architecture and Cooperation Governance

Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea is transnational in organization and opportunistic in operation. National solutions in isolation are structurally insufficient.⁵ The Yaoundé Architecture institutionalizes regional coordination through interconnected maritime operations centers. Cameroon and Nigeria's participation within this framework reflects a shift toward cooperative security governance where sovereignty is exercised collaboratively rather than competitively.

From a regime theory perspective, effectiveness emerges when states internalize shared security norms and institutionalize information-sharing mechanisms.⁶ The interoperability of surveillance systems and joint patrol arrangements reduces enforcement asymmetries and constrains criminal mobility.

However, regime durability depends on financial sustainability, technical maintenance, and political continuity. Maritime security institutions require constant investment; underfunding risks regression into fragmented enforcement.

8.5 Human Security and Structure Driver

An effectiveness assessment must incorporate human security dimensions. Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea has been characterized by violent kidnapping, often involving prolonged hostage detention (Murphy, 2009). The documented decline in such incidents directly enhances seafarer safety and reduces psychological trauma among maritime workers.

Economically, improved security protects offshore energy infrastructure, fishing industries, and port operations. For Nigeria a major hydrocarbon exporter and Cameroon a strategic transit state maritime stability directly correlates with fiscal security.

Yet enforcement-based gains risk fragility if structural drivers persist. Youth unemployment, illegal oil bunkering, and governance deficits provide recruitment pools for maritime criminal networks. Sustainable effectiveness therefore requires integration of law enforcement with coastal economic development strategies.

¹ Onuoha, F. C. (2013). Piracy and maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. *African Security Review*, 22(4), 267–278.

² ICC International Maritime Bureau. (2022). *Piracy and armed robbery against ships report*.

³ Murphy, M. N. (2009). *Small boats, weak states, dirty money: Piracy and maritime terrorism in the modern world*. Columbia University Press.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

8.6 Structural Limitations and Resilience

Despite measurable progress, several constraints temper conclusions of full effectiveness:

- ✓ Naval asset maintenance costs and operational sustainability challenges;
- ✓ Limited prosecutorial specialization in maritime crimes;
- ✓ Intelligence coordination gaps;
- ✓ Vulnerability to political transitions and budgetary volatility.

Maritime security effectiveness is cumulative rather than episodic. It depends on institutional entrenchment and adaptive governance capacity. The trajectory in Cameroon and Nigeria reflects consolidation, but resilience will depend on sustained norm internalization, institutional funding, and integration of security with socioeconomic policy.

The cooperative initiatives between Cameroon and Nigeria demonstrate substantive progress across key indicators of maritime governance effectiveness: legal domestication and prosecutorial activation; institutional modernization and maritime domain awareness; regional coordination under the Yaoundé Architecture; observable decline in piracy-related kidnapping incidents; and strengthened deterrence signaling and economic stabilization.

However, effectiveness remains conditional and structurally contingent. The durability of piracy suppression in the Gulf of Guinea will ultimately depend on whether enforcement consolidation is matched by sustained institutional investment and structural reform. The trajectory is analytically significant: it represents a shift from fragmented maritime vulnerability toward coordinated regional maritime governance.

9. Challenges to the Effectiveness of Cameroon and Nigeria's Anti-Piracy Initiatives

The fight against piracy in the Gulf of Guinea is a complex governance challenge that transcends vessels and coastlines. While Cameroon and Nigeria have made notable cooperative strides, their effectiveness is constrained by legal, institutional, socio-economic, and regional structural dynamics. Each challenge below is discussed in depth to highlight why it matters, how it undermines sustained effectiveness, and what the literature says about its impact.

9.1 Compliance and Legal Implementation Gaps

A central challenge lies in translating international and regional law into effective domestic legal practice. Although Cameroon and Nigeria have adopted anti-piracy legislation aligned with international norms Nigeria's *Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences Act* (2019) and Cameroon's Penal Code reforms. Compliance does not automatically translate into enforcement. Legal compliance theory emphasizes that the presence of laws alone does not guarantee behavioral change or enforcement outcomes; rather, the internalization of norms depends on judicial capacity, procedural clarity, and institutional commitment.¹ Evidence suggests that incomplete legal frameworks or procedural ambiguities can weaken prosecutorial effectiveness, particularly in complex maritime cases where chain-of-custody and expert testimony are critical.

Moreover, prosecutorial and judicial capacity remains uneven. Criminalizing piracy in statute is necessary, but enforcement depends on specialized expertise, robust evidentiary procedures, and timely adjudication. Weak forensic infrastructure, limited maritime case law experience among judges, and inconsistent mutual legal assistance protocols can delay or derail successful prosecutions.² Without these capacities, courts may dismiss cases or impose symbolic penalties that fail to deter organized maritime crime. Thus, compliance gaps in implementation undermine deterrence, weaken legal predictability, and perpetuate perceptions of legal vulnerability among maritime offenders.

9.2 Resource Constraints and Operational Sustainability

Maritime security is inherently resource intensive. Effective anti-piracy operations require sustained funding for patrol vessels, surveillance aircraft, maritime domain awareness systems, personnel training, and maintenance of technical assets. Cameroon and Nigeria have invested in operational capacity for example, Nigeria's Deep Blue Project introduced an integrated command and surveillance infrastructure but long-term sustainability remains uncertain due to budgetary volatility and competing domestic priorities.³ In environments where security budgets are constrained, consistent funding for maritime assets may be compromised, particularly during national economic downturns or reallocation to pressing land-based security concerns.

¹ Abbott, K. W., & Snidal, D. (2000). Hard and soft law in international governance. *International Organization*, 54(3), 421–456.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

Beyond funding, technical and logistical capacities are also limited. Asset maintenance, spare parts procurement, and technical expertise require ongoing investment and partnerships. Without systemic planning, advanced equipment can fall into disrepair or remain underutilized, reducing effective patrol frequency and domain awareness. Scholars highlight that fragmented or episodic investment in maritime security leads to enforcement cycles rather than enduring capability.¹ Consequently, operational sustainability is challenged not only by resource quantity but by planning, coordination, and institutionalization of long-term maritime security infrastructure.

9.3 Political Economy and Structural Drivers of Maritime Crime

Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea is not simply a security issue; it is deeply rooted in local political economies marked by unemployment, illicit resource extraction, and governance deficits. Economic rationales for engagement in piracy are supported by classic economic models of crime, which posit that individuals engage in criminal activity when the expected utility outweighs the expected cost of punishment.² In coastal communities where alternative livelihoods are sparse and informal oil bunkering or smuggling have embedded economic roles, maritime crime can be perceived as a rational survival strategy rather than aberrant behavior.

This structural embedding of maritime criminality complicates enforcement-focused approaches. Suppression efforts can displace activity or temporarily defer it, but without economic alternatives and community integration, underlying motivations persist.³ A security response divorced from socio-economic investment risks superficial success.

9.4 Institutional Fragmentation and Coordination Deficits

Maritime security governance requires synchronized action across multiple agencies: navies, coast guards, customs, intelligence services, immigration authorities, and the judiciary. However, coordination across these institutions is often weak or ad hoc.

While Nigeria and Cameroon engage in joint patrols and integrate elements of the Yaoundé Architecture, internal bureaucratic silos can impede seamless information sharing and inter-agency cooperation.⁴ Fragmentation manifests in duplicated efforts, inconsistent response protocols, and missed opportunities for intelligence fusion, reducing operational coherence.

Institutional fragmentation is not simply a technical challenge; it reflects deeper governance limitations. Effective coordination requires shared strategic objectives, compatible communication infrastructure, and routine joint planning features that depend on robust institutional linkages and trust. Where agencies guard information or operate in parallel rather than in integrated networks, maritime governance remains fragmented, allowing criminal networks to exploit gaps and timing discrepancies. As governance scholars note, effective security sector coordination is both organizational and relational; without it, enforcement gains remain fragile and episodic.

9.5 Intelligence Integration and Technological Gaps

Modern maritime security is increasingly intelligence-driven. Predictive analysis, real-time data sharing, and integrated surveillance platforms are essential for anticipating and intercepting piracy threats.⁵ However, Cameroon and Nigeria like many Gulf of Guinea states struggle with technological fragmentation and limited intelligence fusion capacity. Compatibility issues among national systems, lack of standardized data protocols, and limited secure communication infrastructure constrain effective intelligence integration.

Intelligence deficits undermine early warning systems and erode response precision. Without real-time data feeds from radar, satellite AIS (Automatic Identification System), or shared risk databases, response times can lag or misallocate assets. As maritime security analysts emphasize, intelligence architecture is not merely a technical investment but an organizational practice requiring trust, interoperability, and governance oversight. Persistent technological gaps therefore limit the proactive dimensions of maritime security and weaken deterrence.

10. Summary of Findings

¹ Bueger, C., & Edmunds, T. (2017). Beyond seablindness: A new agenda for maritime security studies. *International Affairs*, 93(6), 1293–1311.

² Becker, G. S. (1968). Crime and punishment: An economic approach. *Journal of Political Economy*, 76(2), 169–217.

³ Murphy, M. N. (2009). *Small boats, weak states, dirty money: Piracy and maritime terrorism in the modern world*. Columbia University Press.

⁴ Bueger, C. (2015). What is maritime security? *Marine Policy*, 53, 159–164.

⁵ *Ibid.*

This study assessed the effectiveness of the common anti-piracy initiatives of Cameroon and Nigeria in the Gulf of Guinea through a qualitative doctrinal and analytical approach. Anchored in maritime security theory and human security theory, and grounded in international, regional, and national legal frameworks, the findings reveal measurable progress coupled with structural fragilities.

First, the study finds that legal consolidation has significantly strengthened the anti-piracy regime. Both states have moved beyond rhetorical commitment to operational domestication of international obligations. Nigeria's *Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences Act (2019)* stands out as a transformative instrument, converting treaty norms into prosecutable offences and reinforcing jurisdictional clarity. Cameroon's Penal Code reforms similarly embed piracy within domestic criminal law. These developments reflect deeper normative internalization and improved legal coherence. Yet, the findings underscore that legislative reform, while necessary, is insufficient without consistent enforcement capacity and judicial specialization.

Second, the evidence indicates that bilateral operational cooperation has enhanced deterrence and interdiction capability. Joint patrols, intelligence coordination, and participation in the Yaoundé Architecture have reduced operational gaps previously exploited by maritime criminal networks. Improvements in maritime domain awareness and coordinated naval deployments have contributed to observable declines in certain categories of piracy incidents. These developments align with core maritime security principles: visibility, coordination, and credible enforcement. Nonetheless, operational gains remain dependent on sustained funding and institutional continuity.

Third, from a human security standpoint, the study finds that enhanced enforcement has improved seafarer safety and maritime economic stability. Declines in kidnapping incidents and strengthened patrol presence have positively affected shipping confidence and offshore resource protection. However, these gains remain vulnerable where socio-economic drivers particularly youth unemployment, illicit oil economies, and coastal marginalization persist. Security outcomes remain precarious if structural incentives for maritime crime are left unaddressed.

Fourth, the findings identify enduring structural constraints. Resource volatility, institutional fragmentation, uneven prosecutorial expertise, intelligence-sharing limitations, and regional capacity asymmetries continue to weaken the depth of effectiveness. Compliance theory suggests that such implementation gaps often stem from institutional limitations rather than normative resistance. Accordingly, sustained effectiveness hinges on bureaucratic resilience, technical capacity, and political will.

Fifth, the study emphasizes that bilateral success is inseparable from regional coherence. Maritime criminal networks are adaptive and transnational. Capacity disparities across Gulf of Guinea states create potential displacement effects, limiting the aggregate impact of localized suppression. Thus, while Cameroon and Nigeria's cooperation marks a significant step forward, long-term stability requires broader regional consolidation and equitable burden-sharing.

In sum, the findings demonstrate that Cameroon and Nigeria have shifted from fragmented maritime enforcement toward coordinated governance. Legal clarity has improved, operational capacity has strengthened, and deterrence credibility has increased. However, effectiveness remains conditional rather than absolute. Durable maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea will depend on institutional resilience, socio-economic integration, sustained political commitment, and deeper regional harmonization.

11. Conclusion

This study examined the effectiveness of the common initiatives of Cameroon and Nigeria in combating piracy in the Gulf of Guinea through doctrinal legal analysis grounded in maritime security and human security theory. The findings reveal a decisive shift from fragmented enforcement to coordinated maritime governance. The domestication of international maritime norms has strengthened jurisdictional clarity and prosecutorial authority, while joint patrols and intelligence coordination have reduced operational gaps historically exploited by maritime criminal networks.

Maritime governance in both states is now more structured, coherent, and credible. Yet effectiveness remains conditional. Resource constraints, institutional fragmentation, uneven judicial specialization, intelligence integration gaps, and persistent socio-economic pressures continue to test the durability of anti-piracy gains. Enforcement has improved, but sustainability depends on institutional depth and structural reform. Maritime security progress in the Gulf of Guinea is real but it is not self-sustaining.

This study reframes anti-piracy effectiveness from a narrow focus on incident reduction to a governance-based assessment grounded in law, institutions, and operational coordination. By providing a focused bilateral analysis of Cameroon and Nigeria, it moves beyond generalized regional narratives and demonstrates how structured state cooperation shapes maritime stability. It further advances scholarship by positioning piracy suppression as a governance consolidation challenge rather than merely a naval enforcement issue, thereby offering a sharper lens

for evaluating maritime security in comparable regions. In sum, Cameroon and Nigeria's common initiatives represent substantive progress in maritime governance.

Legal frameworks are stronger. Coordination is tighter. Deterrence is more credible. The trajectory is positive. The enduring question is whether these gains will be institutionalized deeply enough to withstand evolving criminal adaptation and structural strain. The durability of maritime stability in the Gulf of Guinea will depend on that answer.

12. Recommendations

Drawing from the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to consolidate and sustain the gains made by Cameroon and Nigeria in combating piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

12.1 Deepen Legal Harmonization and Judicial Specialization

While both states have strengthened domestic anti-piracy legislation, continued harmonization of legal definitions, evidentiary standards, and prosecutorial procedures is essential to eliminate residual jurisdictional friction. Bilateral legal coordination mechanisms should be institutionalized to facilitate mutual legal assistance, extradition efficiency, and streamlined prosecution of transnational maritime crimes.

In addition, the establishment or expansion of specialized maritime courts or designated judicial divisions would enhance consistency, technical expertise, and prosecutorial efficiency in piracy-related cases. Legal strength must translate into predictable judicial outcomes to reinforce deterrence credibility.

12.2 Institutionalize Intelligence Integration and Maritime Domain Awareness

Sustainable suppression of piracy requires seamless intelligence sharing. Cameroon and Nigeria should formalize interoperable intelligence protocols that link naval forces, coast guards, maritime administrations, and regional coordination centers. Real-time data integration reduces response latency and closes operational blind spots.

Investment in maritime domain awareness technologies surveillance systems, vessel tracking, and information fusion platforms should be treated as strategic infrastructure rather than discretionary expenditure. Maritime security effectiveness depends as much on information dominance as on physical patrol presence.

12.3 Ensure Sustainable Funding and Capacity Development

Maritime security gains remain vulnerable to fiscal volatility. Both states should adopt medium- to long-term maritime security financing frameworks insulated from political and budgetary fluctuations. Dedicated maritime security funds, supported by port revenues and maritime industry contributions, could provide greater financial predictability. Continuous professional training for naval personnel, prosecutors, and maritime enforcement agencies should also be institutionalized. Capacity development must evolve alongside the adaptive strategies of maritime criminal networks.

12.4 Strengthen Bilateral and Regional Operational Coordination

Although cooperation has improved, it should move from episodic joint patrols to fully institutionalized operational frameworks. Regularized joint exercises, shared operational doctrines, and standardized communication protocols would enhance interoperability and reduce coordination delays during cross-border incidents.

Furthermore, Cameroon and Nigeria should leverage and reinforce regional maritime security architectures to ensure that bilateral efforts complement broader Gulf of Guinea stabilization strategies. Piracy networks operate transnationally; enforcement responses must do the same.

12.5 Address Structural and Socio-Economic Drivers of Maritime Crime

Enforcement alone cannot guarantee long-term suppression of piracy. Both states must integrate maritime security policy with coastal development strategies targeting youth unemployment, economic marginalization, and governance deficits in littoral communities. Investment in legitimate maritime economic opportunities fisheries regulation, port development, maritime logistics, and blue economy initiatives can reduce recruitment pools for maritime criminality. Sustainable maritime stability ultimately rests on inclusive development and institutional legitimacy.

The future of maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea depends less on episodic enforcement surges and more on institutional durability. Cameroon and Nigeria have laid a credible foundation. The next phase must consolidate legal harmonization, operational integration, financial sustainability, and socio-economic reform. Durable maritime stability will emerge not from patrols alone, but from governance consolidation.

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