



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW,
GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNICATION
(IJLGC)
www.ijlgc.com



BORDERLINE TRADE: UNRAVELING SMUGGLING DYNAMICS IN RANTAU PANJANG, KELANTAN

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Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 18.04.2024

Revised date: 13.05.2024

Accepted date: 15.06.2024

Published date: 30.06.2024

To cite this document:

Redhuan, N. N., Rahman, Z. Y. A., Abidin, N. Z. Z., & Sirat, N. I. M. (2024). Borderline Trade: Unraveling Smuggling Dynamics In Rantau Panjang, Kelantan. *International Journal of Law, Government and Communication*, 9 (36), 420-429.

DOI: 10.35631/IJLGC.936032

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Abstract:

Malaysia, bordering Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore and Brunei are exposed to illicit trading. This paper explores the phenomenon of smuggling activities within the border area of Rantau Panjang, Kelantan. Utilizing a convenience sampling method, data was gathered from five neighboring villages near the border of Rantau Panjang and Sungai Golok. The analysis focused on the factors contributing to smuggling activities and found an interesting result. The study highlights the complex interplay of socio-economic and regulatory factors that underpin the prevalence of smuggling in the region. By addressing these multifaceted challenges, policymakers and stakeholders can work towards devising comprehensive strategies to mitigate the adverse impacts of smuggling and promote regional security and prosperity. Overall, the study underscores the importance of a holistic approach to tackling smuggling activities in the border area of Rantau Panjang, Kelantan.

Keywords:

Smuggling Activities, Border Area, Challenges, Neighboring Villages, Regional Security

Introduction

Smuggling entails the underground transportation of items or individuals, violating established laws and regulations (Akmam & Yuslan, 2019). Its pervasive presence globally has exerted significant impacts on economies, social dynamics, and national stability in recent years (Gek Hsia & Saat, 2020). In many developing nations, including Malaysia, the primary commodities subject to smuggling are imports and exports (Gek Hsia & Saat, 2020). Malaysia, due to its strategic geographical location and crucial smuggling corridors, grapples with rampant smuggling activities (Dahari et al., 2019; Nik Mohd Zainordin et al., 2019; Abdul Halim et al., 2019; Khemakunasai, 2014). Particularly, states bordering Thailand, such as Perlis, Kedah, Hulu Perak, and Kelantan, serve as hotspots for smuggling operations. The Malaysian-Thai smuggling syndicate has witnessed recent expansions, with various goods being trafficked across borders, including petrol, cooking oil, rice, cigarettes, small arms, and drugs, driven by high market demands (Abdul Halim et al., 2019). The Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs (KPDNHEP) substantiates this surge in demand, citing the limited availability of Malaysian-regulated items in major Thai markets as a key factor (Noor, 2020). Despite legislative efforts such as the Control of Supplies Act 1961 aimed at regulating goods flow and empowering authorities to curb illicit activities, smuggling persists.

Malaysia's National Security Council (NSC) has detected 130 illegal jetties alongside Rantau Panjang – Sg Golok. In addition, statistics from KPDNHEP reveal that the Control of Supplies Act 1961 has been invoked 427 times in cases of smuggling controlled subsidized goods at national border gates, resulting in seizures valued at RM69.74 million (KPDNHEP, 2022). Law enforcement agencies along the Kelantan-Thailand border, including the police, marine police, General Operations Force (GOF), and Malaysian Border Security Agency (Aksem), intercepted illicit goods worth approximately RM78 million in 2021 alone (Abdullah, 2022). The issue of subsidized commodities smuggling also extends to other ASEAN nations such as Thailand, Indonesia, Brunei, and Singapore. Efforts to combat smuggling activities along the Malaysia-Thailand border have included enhanced enforcement measures, particularly between Rantau Panjang, Kelantan, and its Thai counterparts. Collaboration with military, police, and other enforcement agencies has been emphasized by the Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs (KPDNHEP) as part of a concerted effort to address this persistent challenge. This study explores the smuggling activities in Rantau Panjang Kelantan intending to investigate the key drivers fueling such activities. Several objectives highlighted for the study are.

1. To investigate the level of smuggling activities in Rantau Panjang, Kelantan.
2. To explore the relationship between smuggling activities with location, prices, demand and enforcement in Rantau Panjang, Kelantan.
3. To discover the most influential factor that contributes to smuggling activities in Rantau Panjang, Kelantan.

Literature Review

Smuggling traces its roots back to the reign of Edward I in the late 13th century, prompted by the imposition of a Customs levy on wool shipments, a highly sought-after commodity in Europe. Initially, duties were modest, but as the Hundred Years War unfolded in the 14th century, levies surged to fund military endeavors (Dominguez, 1975). This historical backdrop illustrates how smuggling has long been entwined with economic and geopolitical dynamics. The repercussions of smuggling on the economy are multifaceted. Notably, it can lead to diminished tax revenues for the government, thus impacting GDP and income distribution.

Smuggling, defined by Merriman (2003) as the illicit importation of goods into a country, circumventing taxes and border regulations, persists as a contemporary challenge.

Malaysia, like many nations, grapples with recurrent smuggling activities, particularly in border regions. Andreas (2003) highlights diverse smuggling ventures involving humans, drugs, food, animals, oil, and various commodities, with some entities deriving primary income from such illicit trade, often more profitable than legal enterprises. Wet food and clothing dominate smuggled goods into Malaysia, while products like soap, cooking oil, clothing, sugar, and diapers flow into Thailand, driven by cost differentials and demand dynamics (Amir, et al., 2010). Efforts to curb smuggling along the Malaysia-Thailand border have seen the establishment of 16 PGA control posts (Harun, 2016), bolstered by increased personnel deployment and intelligence gathering. Datuk Abdul Rahim Jaafar emphasizes the need for legislative revisions to counter smuggling activities effectively. Additionally, collaborative measures between Malaysia and Thailand, such as the formation of the Border Regiment and Border Police in 2008, underscore the cross-border nature of the challenge (Rahim et al., 2015).

However, the issue is compounded by the influx of illegal immigrants into Malaysia through porous borders, exacerbating security concerns. Conversely, Thai security forces, preoccupied with combating separatist movements, may allocate fewer resources to counter smuggling (Rahim et al., 2015). Addressing these complex challenges demands multifaceted strategies and regional cooperation to safeguard national interests and foster economic integrity. The fight against smuggling is waged on legal and policy fronts, with governments and international organizations implementing measures to curb illicit trade. Peter Andreas's "Border Games" (2009) offers critical insights into the challenges of policing border regions and the unintended consequences of enforcement efforts. Legal scholars examine the complexities of international law and cooperation in combating transnational crimes, underscoring the need for coordinated responses to smuggling activities.

Malaysia has established several laws and regulations to combat smuggling activities, focusing on human trafficking, smuggling immigrants, smuggling of goods, and other related activities. For instance, Malaysia's Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act 2007 was gazetted in 2007 and, at that time, focused exclusively on trafficking in persons. The amendments to the Act came into effect in November 2010. The amended Act, now called the Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Migrant Smuggling Act, introduced new offences related to 'migrant smuggling'. This expanded legal framework signifies Malaysia's commitment to addressing the multifaceted challenges of smuggling activities within its borders.

Factors Contributed to Smuggling Activities

The study offers four factors contributing to smuggling activity: location, prices, demand and enforcement. The concept of location plays a crucial role in understanding smuggling dynamics, particularly in regions like Southeast Asia, characterized by extensive maritime and land borders that pose significant challenges for monitoring and securing. Malaysia, strategically positioned within key waterways such as the Malacca Straits, Gulf of Thailand, Andaman Sea, South China Sea, and Sulu Sea, serves as a hub for various smuggling activities, including the trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons. Scholarly research by Shelley (2014) underscores the intrinsic link between smuggling operations and geographical features. Geographical factors not only facilitate smuggling but also shape the efforts to combat such illicit activities. For instance, the presence of approximately 130 illegal bases for smuggling

operations near the border of Rantau Panjang and Sg Golok highlights the interplay between geography and smuggling operations. Sungai Golok in Thailand, with its natural barrier characterized by a long, narrow, and shallow feature, serves as a significant geographical determinant. This terrain, coupled with the conducive environment of Rantau Panjang, fosters smuggling activities, particularly through river-based communication routes.

The unique geographical characteristics of the region create conditions conducive to smuggling operations, perpetuating unauthorized border crossings. If these geographical features remain, smuggling activities are likely to persist, underscoring the complex interplay between geography, illicit trade, and law enforcement efforts. Understanding these dynamics is imperative for devising effective strategies to address smuggling challenges in such regions.

The second factor is price, which plays an important role in smuggling activities, exerting a significant influence on consumer behavior and market dynamics. Defined as the monetary value assigned to a good, service, or resource during a transaction, the price can be determined by monopolistic sellers, price makers, or the market itself in cases where companies act as price takers. Consumers weigh the cost of a product against its perceived benefits, making purchasing decisions based on affordability and value (Kotler, 1972). The allure of lower prices drives demand for smuggled goods, as highlighted by Rejab and Zain (2006) in their study on illegal cigarette consumption. Smugglers capitalize on this preference by offering competitively priced goods, effectively capturing market share. Consequently, there exists a symbiotic relationship between smuggling operations and low prices. However, the proliferation of smuggled goods at discounted rates poses challenges for governments and legitimate businesses. There are also adverse impacts of smuggling on market dynamics, wherein the availability of cheap contraband diminishes demand for legally priced goods, leading to revenue losses for governments and businesses alike. Despite potential financial ramifications, consumers are incentivized to prioritize cost savings over concerns about revenue depletion (Kotler, 1972).

Demand plays a pivotal role in the perpetuation of smuggling activities, driven by consumers' desires for goods or services. Defined as the consumer's inclination or willingness to purchase a specific product or service, demand for smuggled items thrives in environments where illicit goods are readily available at lower prices through black market channels (Sneh Lata, 2017). The affordability and accessibility of illicit items on the black market often attract consumers who seek cheaper alternatives to legally available products. As highlighted by Parry et al. (2011), goods become objects of demand when consumers recognize their utility and are willing to engage in transactions to acquire them. In the context of smuggling, the allure of discounted prices and the ease of access through illicit channels contribute to sustained demand for smuggled commodities.

Furthermore, the illicit nature of smuggled goods does not necessarily diminish consumer demand. Instead, the perception of exclusivity or the allure of forbidden goods may further enhance their appeal to certain segments of consumers. Thus, even when products are unlawfully transported across borders, there remains a steady demand for smuggled commodities, perpetuating the cycle of illicit trade. In essence, understanding the dynamics of demand is crucial for comprehending the resilience of smuggling activities. Efforts to combat smuggling must address not only supply-side factors but also consumer behaviors and market dynamics that sustain demand for illicit goods. By addressing the underlying drivers of

demand, policymakers and enforcement agencies can work towards disrupting illicit trade networks and mitigating the adverse impacts of smuggling on economies, societies, and security.

Enforcement, as elucidated by Kokhan (2019), constitutes a critical aspect of governance, encompassing a spectrum of legal requirements, permits, and regulatory actions aimed at managing and regulating societal behaviors. In the context of smuggling, effective enforcement mechanisms are indispensable for deterring illicit trade activities and upholding the rule of law. However, a pervasive lack of enforcement among authorities has been identified as a significant contributing factor to the proliferation of smuggling operations (Abdul Halim et al., 2019; Nik Mohd Zainordin et al., 2019; Hussein et al., 2013; Amirullah et al., 2017). Weak enforcement measures, compounded by deficiencies in the legal system, staff shortages, and inefficient monitoring systems, pose formidable challenges in curbing smuggling activities (Abdul Halim et al., 2019). The absence of stringent border control measures and oversight from authorities creates opportunities for smugglers to exploit vulnerabilities and evade detection, further exacerbating illicit trade (Hussein et al., 2013).

Moreover, the existence of numerous clandestine routes, colloquially referred to as "rat routes," further complicates enforcement efforts by providing covert pathways for smugglers to circumvent official checkpoints and evade detection (Amirullah et al., 2017). The lack of effective border control measures allows smuggling activities to thrive, perpetuating a cycle of illicit trade and undermining the integrity of regulatory frameworks. Addressing the challenge of smuggling necessitates a comprehensive approach that prioritizes bolstering enforcement capacities, strengthening legal frameworks, enhancing border surveillance, and investing in personnel training and resources. By fortifying enforcement mechanisms and closing loopholes exploited by smugglers, authorities can mitigate the adverse impacts of illicit trade on economies, societies, and security, fostering a more secure and prosperous future for affected regions.

Methodology

Convenience sampling, despite its simplicity and practicality, is a widely utilized approach by researchers due to its accessibility and availability. In this method, researchers select samples based on ease of access rather than randomization. In this study, researchers employed convenience sampling to gather data from 250 respondents. Utilizing SPSS tools, the collected data was analyzed. The study identified four key factors contributing to smuggling activities: location, cost, consumer demand for illegal goods, and lack of enforcement. To explore the relationships between these factors and smuggling activities, Pearson Correlation analysis was conducted. This statistical method assesses the strength and direction of associations between variables.

Additionally, multiple regression analysis was employed to determine the most significant contributing factor to smuggling activity. This analytical technique allows researchers to examine the combined effects of multiple independent variables on a single dependent variable, providing insights into which factors have the greatest impact on the phenomenon under study. By employing both Pearson Correlation and multiple regression analysis, the study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the various factors influencing smuggling activities. This rigorous analytical approach enhances the validity and reliability of the study findings, contributing valuable insights to the existing body of research on illicit trade.

*Determinant of Sample Size***Table 1: Determinant of Sample Size**

No	Name of villages	Population	Sample size	Percentage %
1	Kampung Rantau Panjang	532	30	12
2	Kampung Gual To' Deh	668	35	14
3	Kampung Gual Periuk	359	25	10
4	Kampung Lubuk Setol	1000	60	24
5	Kampung Gual Sitok	1775	100	40
	Total	4334	250	40

Five villages near the border of Rantau Panjang and Sungai Golok were chosen for the study. These villages were selected based on their proximity to the border and the prevalence of small-time businesses among the residents. The researchers deemed this area suitable for the inquiry due to the likelihood of respondents having firsthand experience with smuggling activities and related issues.

Findings

Findings for this study have provided four prominent results, as shown in the tables below. The authors focused on reliability testing to indicate that all the factors selected are reliable for smuggling activity.

Table 2: Reliability Result

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha Value	Results
Smuggling Activity	0.715	Reliable
Location	0.794	Reliable
Prices	0.793	Reliable
Demand for Smuggled Goods	0.728	Reliable
Enforcement	0.772	Reliable

Table 3: Level of Smuggling Activity

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Smuggling Activity	250	4.46	0.58
Location	250	4.44	0.45
Prices	250	4.66	0.53
Demand for Smuggled Goods	250	4.57	0.49
Enforcement	250	4.64	0.45

Table 4: Result for Pearson Correlation

Relationship	R-value	P-value	Decision
Location → Smuggling Activity	0.479	P<0.01	Ha1 is supported
Prices → Smuggling Activity	0.552	P<0.01	Ha1 is supported
Demand for Smuggled Goods → Smuggling Activity	0.332	P<0.01	Ha1 is supported
Enforcement → Smuggling Activity	0.440	P<0.01	Ha1 is supported

Table 5: Summary of Regression Analysis

Variable	B-value	T-value	P-value
Smuggling Activity	0.100	0.968	<0.01
Location	0.541	0.551	<0.01
Prices	-0.72	0.572	<0.01
Demand for Smuggled Goods	-0.008	0.933	<0.01

The findings based on the selected villages near the border of Rantau Panjang and Sungai Golok indicate a high level of smuggling activities in the study area. Analysis of the data suggests that four key variables; location, prices, consumer demand, and enforcement, have significant contributions to the prevalence of smuggling activities in Rantau Panjang, Kelantan. Overall, the four variables underscore the complex socio-economic and regulatory factors contributing to the prevalence of smuggling activities in Rantau Panjang, Kelantan. Addressing this issue requires comprehensive strategies that target not only enforcement measures but also address underlying economic disparities and consumer behaviors driving demand for smuggled goods.

Discussion

The study's primary aim is to assess the extent of smuggling activities along the Malaysian border in Rantau Panjang, Kelantan. Findings reveal a prevalent high degree of smuggling in the area, driven by economic incentives and deeply ingrained socio-cultural factors.

1. Location: The proximity of the selected villages to the border of Rantau Panjang and Sungai Golok likely facilitates smuggling activities. The geographical position of these villages makes them convenient hubs for illicit trade and transportation of smuggled goods across borders.
2. Prices: The affordability of smuggled goods compared to legally available alternatives incentivizes consumers to engage in illicit transactions. Lower prices of smuggled goods make them attractive to consumers, contributing to the perpetuation of smuggling activities.
3. Consumer Demand: High consumer demand for illegal goods, such as cigarettes or contraband items, fuels the smuggling trade. The willingness of consumers to purchase smuggled goods despite their illicit nature sustains the demand-side dynamics of smuggling activities.
4. Enforcement: a need for a holistic approach to curb smuggling.

Residents of Rantau Panjang acknowledge the persistence of smuggling activities, attributing their continuation to the lucrative income they generate. Locals readily engage in smuggling operations, loading goods at illegal bases and transporting them to designated destinations under the guidance of a leader known as "tauke," earning up to RM200 per day to support their daily expenses. These smuggling practices, passed down through generations, present significant challenges for enforcement efforts (Tajul Ariffin, et al., 2011).

The proximity of the Malaysia-Thailand border, separated only by the narrow Sungai Golok, coupled with shared kinship ties with Malay Thais, fosters an environment conducive to smuggling. The settlement of locals along the riverbank further complicates monitoring and raiding efforts by authorities, as acknowledged by the Director of the Royal Malaysian Customs Department of Kelantan (Syaherah, 2023). Economic factors, particularly low prices

of smuggled goods, fuel demand despite concerns about inferior quality. Consumers' preference for smuggled cigarettes, attributed to their affordability, underscores the role of pricing in driving illicit trade (Rejab & Zain, 2006). Economic hardships and uncertainty amplify the allure of cheap smuggled goods, perpetuating demand despite enforcement measures.

Efforts to combat smuggling face numerous challenges, including staffing shortages. Enforcement officers grapple with limited resources and the reluctance of communities to cease smuggling activities, hindering effective intervention (Amirullah et al., 2017). Despite government initiatives to curb smuggling, the persistence of economic incentives and entrenched cultural practices pose formidable obstacles. Addressing smuggling necessitates holistic approaches that address underlying economic disparities, strengthen enforcement capabilities, and foster community engagement to deter illicit activities effectively.

Understandably, enforcement officers may face difficulties in curbing smuggling activities, especially when other factors such as socioeconomic conditions and regulatory challenges are more prominent. Despite working tirelessly around the clock, they may encounter obstacles that impede their efforts to effectively combat smuggling. One major challenge enforcement officers may face is the sheer scale and complexity of smuggling networks operating in the region. Smuggling operations often involve sophisticated networks with extensive resources and connections, making them difficult to dismantle through traditional law enforcement measures alone. Additionally, corruption and collusion with smugglers or local officials can undermine enforcement efforts. If enforcement officers are not adequately supported or if there are loopholes in the regulatory framework, smugglers may exploit these weaknesses to continue their illegal activities with impunity.

Furthermore, the socio-economic dynamics in the area may contribute to the resilience of smuggling activities. As mentioned earlier, poverty, lack of employment opportunities, and disparities in wealth can drive individuals to engage in smuggling as a means of survival. Addressing these underlying socio-economic issues requires long-term strategies that go beyond traditional law enforcement measures. Given these challenges, enforcement officers must collaborate closely with other stakeholders, including government agencies, community leaders, and international partners, to develop comprehensive strategies that address the root causes of smuggling while also implementing effective enforcement measures. This may involve initiatives such as enhancing border security, improving intelligence gathering and sharing, implementing stricter penalties for smuggling offences, and providing alternative livelihood options for communities affected by smuggling activities. Ultimately, while enforcement officers play a critical role in combating smuggling, a coordinated and multi-faceted approach involving various stakeholders is essential to effectively curb smuggling activities in the border area of Rantau Panjang, Kelantan.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study has achieved its objective of highlighting the issue and exploring the key drivers contributing to this activity. In addition, the study sheds light on the pervasive issues of smuggling activities in the selected area of Rantau Panjang, Kelantan. Through the examination of key variables of location, prices, consumer demand, and enforcement, it becomes evident that smuggling thrives in environments characterized by proximity to borders, economic disparities, and regulatory challenges. The findings underscore the complex

relationship between socioeconomic factors and regulatory loopholes that perpetuate illicit trade. Addressing smuggling requires a variety of approaches that go beyond traditional enforcement measures. Efforts should focus on strengthening border controls, enhancing regulatory oversight, and addressing underlying economic drivers of demand for smuggled goods. Additionally, community engagement and awareness campaigns can play a crucial role in reducing the social acceptance of smuggling activities. Ultimately, combating smuggling necessitates collaborative efforts from government agencies, law enforcement, local communities, and international partners. By implementing comprehensive strategies that target both the supply and demand sides of smuggling, we can work towards mitigating its detrimental impacts on economies, societies, and security in the region. As we move forward, it is imperative to prioritize effective policy interventions and resource allocation to effectively tackle the challenges posed by smuggling and foster a more secure and prosperous future for the region.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to acknowledge and extend special gratitude to Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Kedah and Global Academic Excellence (M) Sdn. Bhd., editor and reviewer for approving the publication of this article.

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