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# IMPACT ANALYSIS OF THE PROLIFERATION OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS ON SECURITY IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF NIGER STATE, 2013-2023

By

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**ABSTRACT:** The proliferation of small arms and light weapons has become a major issue for many countries around the world, including Nigeria. The country has experienced a significant increase in the number of small arms and light weapons proliferated over the past decade, 2013 to 2023, which has continued to fuel insecurity through terrorism, banditry and armed robbery. The availability of these weapons has made it easier for terrorists, bandits and even individuals to carry out attacks and cause chaos especially in Niger state leading to loss of lives, displacement of communities, loss of livelihood, among others. The aim of this research was to identify factors responsible for the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Niger state from 2013 to 2023, and proffer recommendations. Adopting conflict theory, the researcher made use of both qualitative primary and secondary data to discuss the impact of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons on Niger state from 2013 to 2023. Findings from the research revealed a clear correlation between the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and the security situation in two Local Government Areas; Shiroro and Munya of Niger state which have been seriously affected by this menace. The research concluded that leveraging global expertise and resources could strengthen counter-proliferation efforts, while concerted efforts from government, civil society groups and international partners are necessary to mitigate the devastating impacts and foster a more secured Niger State. The research recommended that, government should allocate more resources towards addressing security issues caused by small arms and light weapons, community-based initiatives and empowerment, increased inter-agency collaboration and increased security at the borders especially between Nigeria and Niger.

**KEYWORDS:** Proliferation, Small Arms, Light Weapons, Security, Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

The changing trend of threats to our national security is occasioned by the evolution and development of new factors in the internal and external environment of the Nigeria State. The

security of the Nigerian state is aimed at protecting National integrity of the state and defending the essential values that constitute Nigerian identity. The proliferation of Small Arms

and Light Weapons (SALW) has been given wide spread international focus in the post-cold war era (Baxter, 2008). This is because these weapons have become the primary tools of ethnic and internal conflict in recent times. It is a phenomenon that is destabilizing the peace, development and threatening the National security of sovereign States.

However, in nearly all conflicts and crimes, the diffusion of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) particularly from industrialized countries to developing ones has played a decisive role in escalating and intensifying the various threats to our national security. For example, the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Niger State of Nigeria, and the Nation in general, together with the activities of the Insurgent group of Boko-Haram, and Fulani herders cannot be overlooked in this discourse. Also, the Proliferation of Small Arms and its misuse generate a climate of fear and culture of violence that can last for generations. Insecurity affects decision-making, access to food, water and shelter, as well as mobility and commerce. Thirdly, Small Arms and Light Weapon Proliferation discourages foreign investment and damages the prospects of economic development as its availability promotes violent solution to conflict.

Furthermore, the proliferation of SALWs increases the level of criminal activities in the society ranging from; robberies, assassination, kidnapping, assaults and car hijacking and so on. Readily available and easy to use, Small Arms and Light Weapons have been the primary and the sole tools for violence in almost all parts of the federation of Nigeria. In the hand of irregular troops, bandits, groups, individuals and politician operating with scant respect for International and National Humanitarian Laws. Small Arms and Light Weapons are killers Weapons. Globalization too is becoming an ever-influencing architect of the new international security agenda. Its impact on the evolution of the relations among states is contradictory. It has facilitated the easy transportation of illegal Arms and Light Weapons from porous borders of bordering States like Chad and Niger Republic respectively into Niger State and Nigeria in general.

Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) was first noted on the international stage in the 1990s. Since then, worldwide debates have moved through five stages, some of which overlap: Defining the problem and increasing awareness (mid-1990s); nascent international negotiations (around the turn of the decade); UN multilateral diplomacy in a deadlock (2006); Multilateralism beyond the UN (post-2006); Diversification of issues within the context of global public policy (since 2000).

Furthermore, local fabrication, leftover guns from the civil war, thefts from government armories, smuggling, dishonest government-accredited importers, ethnic militias, insurgents from neighboring countries, Fulani herdsman, and some multinational oil corporations operating in the oil-rich and crisis-plagued Niger Delta are all sources of weapons in circulation in Nigeria. Because of the large number of weapons used in the commission of these crimes, innocent people and property are frequently destroyed (Adejo, 2005).

Following the civil war in Nigeria (1967-1970), and the Nigerian government's failure to implement a comprehensive disarmament and arms destruction programme, this worsened the spread of guns and illicit arms trafficking. SALW was later used in crimes, revolts, sabotage, religious crises, communal conflicts, social agitations, internal insurgency, terrorism, insurgency, riots, militancy, electoral violence, political violence, social interest, ethnic tensions, cross-border smuggling, and black marketing, among other things, in Nigeria. On the whole, this study investigates the implications of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Niger State.

Niger state has been plagued by various security challenges in recent years. The state has experienced in a rise of violent crime, including armed robbery, kidnapping, and banditry. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons has been identifying as the major contributor to these security challenges. The state porous borders and lack of effective border control has made it easy for arms smugglers to bring it SALW from the neighboring countries. Additionally, the state rugged terrain and vast landmass have made it difficult for security agencies to effectively patrol the era and prevent the movement of the SALWs.

However, the availability of the arms in Niger State has led to the rise in armed conflicts, robberies, kidnapping and attacks in many local government areas of the state. Expectantly Munya and Shiroro local government area. The proliferation of these SALWs in the state has had devastating consequences, including the displacement of communities, destruction of property, and loss of lives. The state economy has also been severely impacted, with many businesses forced to close down to the insecurity. The aim of this study is to analyse the impact of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons on the security of the Niger state with a view of proffering recommendations. The study adopted qualitative method through the use of in-depth interview of relevant stakeholders, security agents and community leaders for its primary data; and journals, books and online materials were sought for secondary data.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### **Proliferation**

Proliferation refers to the rapid spread or increase of something, often in an uncontrolled or unwanted manner. It can be weapons proliferation, nuclear proliferation, and chemical proliferation. Proliferation refers to the rapid growth or increase in number of something, often in a way that is uncontrolled or exponential (Kumar et al., 2018). This concept can be applied to various fields, including biology, sociology, and economics. In the context of cell biology, proliferation refers to the process of cell division and growth, which is essential for the development and maintenance of living organisms (Alberts et al., 2002).

In sociology, proliferation refers to the rapid growth or increase in number of social phenomena, such as population growth, urbanization, or the spread of ideas and technologies (Castells, 2012). For example, the proliferation of social media has led to a significant increase in online communication and social interaction, which has transformed the way people connect and interact with each other (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). In economics, proliferation refers to the rapid growth or increase in number of economic activities, such as trade, investment, or innovation. Proliferation is a complex and multifaceted concept that can be applied to various fields and contexts. The rapid growth or increase

in number of something can have significant consequences and implications, both positive and negative. Understanding the mechanisms and drivers of proliferation is essential for developing effective strategies and policies to manage and regulate its impact (Katz, 2013).

#### **Small Arms**

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Convention sees "Small Arms" as those arms used by one person, and which include firearms and other destructive arms or devices, such as exploding bombs, incendiary bombs or gas bombs, grenades, rocket launchers, missiles, missiles systems or landmines; revolvers and pistols with automatic loading, rifles and carbines, machine guns, assault rifles, and light machine guns (Okeke & Orji, 2014). Small arms are defined as weapons designed for personal use by the Best Practice Guidelines for the Implementation of the Nairobi Declaration and Nairobi Protocol on Small Arms and Light Weapons, light machine guns, machine pistols, fully automatic rifles and assault rifles, and semi-automatic rifles (Best Practice Guidelines, (2005).

According to Wezeman (2003), small arms are broadly categorized as those weapons intended for use by an individual; they are weapons designed for personal use. Small arms are those weapons used by one person that are particularly firearms and other destructive devices, such as incendiary bombs, gas bombs, and landmines that include pistols, machine guns, light machine guns and rifles (Gerald and Caleb, 2015). Riviere (2016) sees small arms as anything from pistol to light machine guns, classified as weapons of choice for criminal activities, suicide, and a constant motivator to violence and crimes.

Small arms are revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, submachine guns, assault rifles, light and heavy machine guns, portable anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-tank guns and rocket systems, anti-aircraft missile systems, and mortars with calibres less than 100mm, according to the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) cited in Edeko (2011). Small arms are, broadly speaking, weapons designed for individual use. They include, inter alia, revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns.



### **Light Weapons**

Light weapons are, broadly speaking, weapons designed for use by two or three persons serving as a crew, although some may be carried and used by a single person. They include, inter alia, heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-tank missile and rocket systems, portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems, and mortars of a calibre of less than 100 millimetres (GGE, 1990). Ammunition and explosives include cartridges (rounds) for small arms, shells and missiles for light weapons mobile containers with missiles or shells for single-action anti-aircraft and anti-tank systems, anti-personnel and anti-tank hand grenades, landmines and explosives (UN panel). Light weapons in particular are portable grenade launchers, mobile or mounted portable anti-aircraft cannons, portable anti-aircraft missile launchers, mortars with a caliber of less than 100 millimeters (Okeke & Orji, 2014).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopted conflict theory. Conflict theory, was propounded by Karl Marx (1818-1883), a German philosopher and sociologist, in collaboration with Friedrich Engel (1820-1895) the theory was first presented in Marx book 'Das Kapital' (Capital) in 1867. However, the theory was further developed and refined in subsequent works, including 'The communist Manifesto' 1848 by Engel. Though the theory originated from Karl Marx, it was developed further by other contemporary sociologists like Randall Collins and C. Wright Mills, Conflict Theory encompasses several key elements. It emphasizes "Class Struggle," extending beyond traditional capitalist and working classes to include diverse socio-economic groups (Collins, 2015).

Proponents of the theory posit that societal conflicts stem from inequalities in resource distribution, leading to power struggles among various social groups. It highlights economic disparities and social injustices as fundamental causes of conflict and violence (Collins, 2015). The theory sees Social Change as a catalyst driven by conflicts, as marginalized groups seek to challenge existing structures and achieve fairer resource distribution (Collins, 2015). These

elements collectively illuminate the complex interplay between power, inequality, and societal transformation. The theory also underscores "Economic Inequality," showing how disparities in wealth and power create social tensions and conflicts among marginalized groups (Piketty, 2014).

However, Conflict Theory faces criticisms. Critics argue it is overly deterministic, focusing excessively on economic factors while neglecting other social dynamics. It is also accused of neglecting the importance of social order and stability (Aver, Nnorom & Ilim, 2014), and of overemphasizing conflict to the detriment of potential cooperation and consensus in society. These critiques challenge Conflict Theory's ability to comprehensively understand societal dynamics and address complexities like social stability and cooperative interactions. In the context of SALW proliferation in Nigeria, Conflict Theory explains how socio-economic disparities and political instability drive demand for these weapons. Groups like Boko Haram acquire SALW to assert dominance, secure resources, and perpetuate cycles of violence (Aver, Nnorom, & Ilim, 2014). The theory underscores how unequal resource distribution and social injustice exacerbate SALW proliferation, heightening conflict and instability (Nwolise, 2013).

From the above theoretical perspective, conflict theory is of the view that politicians are regarded as enemy of progress in the society. Democracy in Nigeria has become multidimensional to the extent that the right people are not allowed to take part in the system. This situation makes the control of the menace of light arms and small weapons proliferation, a very difficult task by the appropriate authority. Members of the public cannot understand the complex nature of arms and weapons proliferation as such they do not give the needed vital information to the appropriate authority saddled with the responsibility of controlling the phenomenon. Politicians can muster enough resources not only to bribe the appropriate law enforcement agencies but also to frustrate their investigation aimed at curbing the menace in the society. Similarly, the organized social structure in Nigeria which attaches more importance to wealth acquisition with less attention given to the approved means of acquiring

such wealth by the society provide grounds for increase in electoral violence in the country Nigeria.

However, adopting Conflict Theory, provides precious understandings into social hardships and power dynamics. the effects of proliferation of small arms and light weapons on Nigeria's security, particularly in Niger State, is especially well-suited to Conflict Theory, a sociological framework. This theory suggests that coercion, power and conflict maintain social order, not consensus and cooperation. In the study's context, an explanation has been provided by Conflict Theory regarding how conflicts and insecurity in Niger State have been contributed to, by the proliferation of small arms, and light weapons. This theory explains how power dynamics, economic interests and social inequalities shape the spread of these weapons and it shows the consequent conflict, which has led to poverty, underdevelopment of the state, kidnapping and killing of the innocent citizen in the state.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Jooji, et al. (2022) asserts that the, proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria is a common phenomenon, focuses on it reasons, scope, and preventive approaches of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. It has been discovered that the literature does not make use of the devil theory of imperialism in evaluating the political economics of small arms and light weapons proliferation in Nigeria. According to the findings of this study, foreign and local partners are all implicated in the spread of illicit guns in Nigeria, making it hard for the government to regulate the spread of small arms and light weapons. The study also demonstrates that the battle against the spread of small guns and light weapons in Nigeria is slowing due to the character of the people engaged, as well as the limited capacity of Nigerian governments due to a lack of political will to stem the country's rising insecurity. Finally, this study implies that the spread of small arms and light weapons, as well as insecurity, will continue indefinitely unless arms traffickers and their clients are brought to justice. However, this study does not investigate the implication of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons on security in Niger State.

Adeagbo (2017) in his study on Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation and Insecurity in Nigeria provides an insightful analysis of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) and its impact on insecurity in Nigeria. The author argues that the proliferation of SALWs has contributed significantly to the country's insecurity, fueling conflicts, terrorism, and criminal activities. Adeagbo notes that Nigeria's porous borders, corruption, and lack of effective disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programmes have facilitated the spread of SALWs. The article highlights the devastating effects of SALWs proliferation, including the intensification of Boko Haram's terrorist activities, the escalation of herdsmen attacks, and the rise in armed robbery and kidnapping. He also examines the legal and policy frameworks governing SALWs in Nigeria, pointing out the need for a comprehensive approach to address the issue.

Ibekwe (2018) while discussing the Proliferation of Small arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria: Legal and Policy Framework stated that a thorough examination of the legal and policy frameworks governing the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) in Nigeria was necessary. The author conducts a comprehensive review of existing literature, laws, and policies, highlighting the gaps and challenges in addressing SALWs proliferation. Ibekwe notes that Nigeria's legal framework, including the Firearms Act and the National Security Agencies Act, is inadequate and poorly enforced, allowing SALWs to spread unchecked.

Akinyode's (2020) in his study on Nigeria's militancy, insurgency and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons provides a comprehensive analysis of the complex relationships between these phenomena. The author highlights that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) has been a significant factor in the escalation of violence in Nigeria, particularly in the Niger Delta and Northeast regions. The availability of SALWs has enabled militant groups and insurgents to perpetrate violent acts, including kidnapping, terrorism, and armed robbery. The author also notes that the proliferation of SALWs has been facilitated by corruption, bad governance, and porous borders, which have allowed weapons to

be trafficked into the country. Furthermore, the author highlights that the proliferation of SALWs has contributed to the intensity and longevity of militancy and insurgency in Nigeria, leading to significant human suffering, displacement, and economic loss. The article concluded by emphasizing the need for effective disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programmes, as well as addressing the root causes of violence, to mitigate the proliferation of SALWs and promote peace and security in Nigeria.

Akinwunmi (2018) in his study on National Security and the Menace of Weapon Proliferation in Nigeria gave a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between weapon proliferation and national security in Nigeria. It reveals that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons has significantly contributed to the escalation of violence and insecurity in the country. The study's findings, based on a survey of 1,000 respondents and interviews with security experts, indicate that the widespread availability of weapons has fueled armed robbery, kidnapping, and terrorism, leading to a decline in national security. Akinwunmi's research highlights the need for effective disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs, as well as robust border control and security sector reform to address the menace of weapon proliferation.

### **Historical Overview of Niger State**

Niger state is one of the thirty-six states that make up the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It is located in North-Central Nigeria. Niger state is bounded by the Niger River to the south, Kebbi and Zamfara to the north, Kaduna to the north and northeast, Kogi to the southeast, and Kwara to the south. The Abuja Federal Capital Territory is on Niger state's eastern border, and the Republic of Benin is its western border. Landscape consists mostly of wooded savannas and includes the floodplains of the Kaduna River ([www.infomediang.com](http://www.infomediang.com)).

Niger State has 25 local government areas. In 1991 part of northwestern Kwara state, lying between the Niger River and the Republic of Benin, was added to Niger State. It is made up of several tribes which are mainly the Nupe people in the south, Gwari in the east, Busa in the west, and Kambari (Kambari), Hausa, Fulani, Kamuku, and Dakarki (Dakarawa) in the north there are three

religions in Niger State Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion. Islam is the predominant religion. Most of the inhabitants are engaged in farming. Niger state is the largest state in Nigeria by land areas, and its capital is Minna, currently Niger state population as of 2023 is 27,202,843. ([www.population.gov.ng](http://www.population.gov.ng)). Niger state is home to two of Nigeria's largest hydropower dams; the Kainji dam and Jebba dam.

### **The Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Africa**

It is reported that Africa alone has suffered about 5,994,000 fatalities in the last 50 years due mostly to SALWs (Renner, 2006). Narrowing the estimate to West Africa, it was estimated that 30,000 people have been killed by SALWs in conflict each year since the end of the Cold War. In Africa, the proliferation of small arms is increasing in proportion. These small arms being the remnants of conflicts in Mozambique, Angola, Somalia, Liberia, Sudan, Sierra Leone, as well as licensed weapons being stolen or lost, have played a major role in exacerbating crimes and armed violence in Nigeria. The continent of Africa is a major trans-shipment point for the international trade, as well as a major producer of local arms ([www.state.gov/region/africa](http://www.state.gov/region/africa)).

In Africa, the sources of SALWs proliferation are many and varied of international efforts to curb proliferation tend to concentrate on the manufacture and supply of new weapons, a major pipeline of SALWs remains the stockpiles that were pumped into Africa in the 1970s, 1980s and early 90s by the ex-Soviet Union, the USA and their allies to fan proxy intra state and interstate wars. These leftover weapons have found their way through clandestine networks involving rogue arms brokers, private military companies, shady airline companies and local smugglers to exacerbate on-going conflicts and facilitate the commencement of new ones in the continent (Abdel-Fatau, 2011).

Two factors helped make it easier for these groups to act: the first one is that borders inherited by Africans are badly demarcated; hence, they are easily crossed. These boundaries inherited by African states, were arbitrarily drawn by European imperialists who colonized almost the entire continent (Imobighe, 1989). A tour of the Nigerian borders in September 1984 by Nigerian



Immigration officials in Sokoto revealed that there were over 1,500 illegal entry points along Nigeria's border with Benin and Niger (Imobighe, 2003). During the Meeting of States on Small Arms at the UN Headquarters in New York, between 14 and 18 June, 2010; it was observed that Liberia and its neighbours do not produce arms, but the major entry points of illicit arms and drugs, were more than 170 border points with Guinea, Sierra Leone and the Ivory Coast. Thus, small arms and light weapons are spread as a result of the influx of refugees from especially other neighbouring states. In other words, unregulated movement of people facilitates the circulation of such illegal weapons (Diarra, 2005).

By the way, these arms are precisely small and are circulated easily because they are small arms, easy to buy, easy to use, easy to transport and easy to conceal. Their proliferation exacerbates conflicts, sparks refugee flows, undermines the rule of law and spawns a culture of violence and impunity. From the above point of view, one can confidently say that conflict prevention and resolution is not a question of regulating arms in general, but only a specific category of them (those that are liable to fuel civil wars or acts of banditry) (Chesterman, 2005). Equally, the break-up and deregulation of arms industries in eastern and central Europe have also led to the mushrooming of mini-industries whose aggressive search for new markets in the developing world have made nonsense of existing export regimes. Africa itself boasts of countries that are arms manufacturers South Africa, Zimbabwe, Egypt, Morocco and Nigeria among others, and countries that are dotted with growing small arms cottage industries (Abdel-Fatau, 2011).

### **The Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria**

In most societies, Nigeria inclusive, there are no useful instruments for armed crimes and violence other than small arms. As such, one major effect of SALWs in Nigeria is increase in armed crimes and violence. It has been revealed by numerous scholars that, the availability of small arms leads to the increasing rates of violent crimes and conflict. Majority of those who engaged in armed robbery, banditry and kidnapping are perpetuating the crimes with the small arms (Idehen, 2021). This circumstance does not only pose threat to

human lives but also, affects socio-economic aspect of the communities. In the aftermath of the Civil War, violence largely subsided but other forms of threat which created fear in the communities, such as armed robbery increased to harry the countryside (Ikelegbe, 2014).

The return to civil rule in May 1999 moved Nigeria from the palpable war-front atmosphere of military authoritarian rule, to a fragile democratic setting. The democratic administration birthed various tiers of institutions that are yet to win the full confidence of the people through its functions. Thus, the institutions that are driven primarily by the concerns for the welfare of citizens particularly in the provision of basic necessities of human life ranging from basic income and employment, and access to such social safety, human rights and justice do not possess the capacity to effectively provide these services (Adeyanju 2014).

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons has grave impact on human security. Nigeria has vast agrarian lands that are cultivated especially in rural areas. With the increase in SALWs and various forms of violent crimes, many inhabitants in rural and semi-urban areas have fearfully left their communities and become displaced persons to protect their lives. One of the major effects of this is that their source of livelihood is affected and cannot meet their needs (Idehen, 2021). Nigerian government had in these rural areas, where various forms of human insecurity largely exist, paid little or no attention in improving the conditions of living in areas. As a result of the dysfunctional governmental efforts, there had been increase in communal conflicts, ethno-religious conflicts, and struggle against marginalization, insurgency and the quest for adequate safety in Nigeria. The pursuit of certain strategies has led to the legitimacy of armed groups in Nigeria, that has placed individuals, communities and even the State at the risk of all forms of insecurity. Also, several policies and programmes that the Nigerian government had over the years formulated have directly or indirectly contributed to the proliferation of small arms into the country. These policies that seem to have contributed to the proliferation these weapons include the pursuit of political and economic goals which are perceived

as unjust by ethnic groups, ethnic nationalities, and communities in the country resulting to arm struggle by groups of various ethnicities in Nigeria (Moses & Ngumba, 2017).

Banditry and kidnapping have taken an alarming dimension in Nigeria such that it became a big business through the human and social security threats that it poses to Nigerians. Onuoha, 2013 stated that small arms proliferation had led to an increase in violent crimes that undermine security in Nigeria. He added that violent incidents, such as rape, cultism, armed robbery and kidnapping including all various forms of conflicts in most parts of the country had become prevalent and persistent because of the incessant proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria. Thus, for majority of persons killed or injured in conflict and crime was through the use of small arms in Nigeria. The impact of small arms proliferation on human security in Nigeria is also evident in financial losses induced by conflicts.

#### **Effect of the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons on Security in Nigeria**

The effect of the proliferation of SALWs is felt across the world. It is pertinent to note that, of the 500,000 people killed every year across the world, an estimated 300,000 of them are as a result of small arms. In Africa, an estimated 50 percent of illicit weapons that proliferate are used in internal conflicts, armed robbery and drug trafficking (Jakada, 2005). Availability of small arms outside the formal security structures had contributed greatly in creating continuous cycle of violence and instability in which particularly women and children are brutalized. However, the effect of the proliferation is being felt across the length and breadth of Nigeria given the myriad of security challenges. In the Northern part of Nigeria, the ungovernable spaces have been taken over by insurgents and bandits who daily inflict pain on the hapless civilians.

In the North-Eastern part of Nigeria, Boko-Haram terrorists' group who has been fighting since 2009 to establish an Islamic state, had killed more than 37,000 people, and displaced more than 2.5 million in the Lake Chad region, and rendered nearly 244,000 refugees since May 2011, in their campaign of terror. Hence, they are described as the deadliest terrorists group. Their operations have caused acute food shortages, thereby creating

food insecurity in Nigeria as farmers are either being killed, displaced, or their livelihoods destroyed. Infrastructural facilities on the other hand, as well as businesses have not been spared of the devastating impact of the Boko- Haram insurgency. In the North-Western part of Nigeria, armed bandits have taken over the vast forests killing people in different communities of Kebbi, Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina, Kaduna and Niger state without any cause. In Sokoto state for instance, bandits took over communities and even appointed Judges. Niger State and Kaduna State, millions of people in these states have been exposed to insecurity from activities of bandits (ACAPS, 2020).

Thus, the people have become hopeless as they are daily being killed in their numbers providing a historical background to banditry in the area, it was posited that: Banditry began in 2011 and intensified between 2017 to 2018 to include cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, sexual violence and killings. The discovery of gold mines and the activities of illegal miners competing for control of gold reserves have served to further intensify the existence and activities of armed groups in the North-West, most especially in Zamfara state. By March 2020, more than 21,000 people have been internally displaced. More than 35,000 refugees have crossed communal borders to Maradi in Niger Republic by the beginning of March 2020. These refugees are hosted in Madaou in Tahaoua region, Dan Dadji, Makaou, Garin Kaka and Guidan Roudji (ACAPS, 2020).

Currently, some high ways in the North-West are abandoned by motorists for fear of kidnappers. Most people travelling from Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory to Kaduna prefer to use the train as the road has become a den of merciless kidnappers who use SALWs in their operations, (Susan, 2020). Also, the bandits in this part of the country are so daring that they send advanced notice to communities about their impending attacks. More often than not, these criminals make good their promise, as the security personnel can do little or nothing to secure the people, as they are not spared either. Therefore, the people are grappling with how to secure themselves from incessant attacks by these criminals who carry these heinous acts with impunity. The people are left to rise up to the occasion to defend themselves



as the Nigerian state has failed to protect lives and property (Seth et al, 2017).

Nevertheless, in the North-Central part of Nigeria, the proliferation of SALWs has led to incessant clashes between herders and farmers. The states that are worst hit in this region are Benue, Plateau, part of Taraba, Nasarawa and Southern Kaduna. One has lost count of these clashes as they have become recurring decimal, given the fact that there is hardly any month without an ugly report of wanton destructions of lives, property and livelihoods. It is instructive to note that the North-Central region is the food basket of the nation. Today, this is under a very serious threat as farmers have abandoned their communities to safe havens. Ethnic conflicts also abound in the North-Central region where ethnic militia are formed and armed by different ethnic groups to protect their socio-economic and political interests (Kuna, 2015).

The South-East and the South-West regions are somewhat homogenous with less record of ethnic conflicts. However, these regions are notorious for kidnapping, armed robbery and the unwholesome activities of area boys, Oodua People's Congress (OPC) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the South-East and South-West respectively. In the South-South, otherwise known as Niger Delta region of Nigeria where oil is produced, the region has been an epicenter of violence prior to the Amnesty Programme of 2009 (Ali, 2011).

### **Research Findings and Analysis:**

#### **The proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Niger state**

Over the years, Niger state has been facing significant security challenges due to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, which exacerbates communal conflicts, banditry, and kidnapping in the state. This phenomenon has threatened societal stability, undermining economic development and social cohesion, reducing the social relations between the different communities, reducing trust among the people, and creating high tension in the community especially within these two local government areas, Shiroro and Munya in the state (Moses, 2024, Interview).

The arms and weapons that are commonly used in the state are rifles, pistols, knives, cutlass, AK47

and local guns. They are obtained through the illicit trade network, porous borders, corrupt politicians, and hunters, particularly among the youth and armed groups. However, poverty and unemployment emerged as primary drivers, pushing individuals into criminal activities. Political instability and weak governance facilitate the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons in the state. Bandits and armed groups exploit economic and political vulnerabilities. Ethnic and religious tensions further exacerbate the issues of proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Niger state, (Hassan, 2024, Interview).

The high proliferation of arms and light weapons has hindered law enforcement and security efforts, as security agencies face increase of armed criminality, kidnapping and banditry. Furthermore, inadequate resources, corruption, lack of adequate personnel and effective strategies undermine their effectiveness. These have shaped Niger state's security landscape, creating insecurity and undermining trust in the institutions. To address this challenge there is a need to tackle corruption, strengthen law enforcement, and secure borders through the application of crucial, effective policies, international cooperation, community engagement, youth empowerment, and creation of jobs opportunities. (Mohammed, 2024 Interview).

The proliferation of arms has affected the economy of Niger state, hindering farming and trade in the state. This is affecting the production of food and investment in agriculture. Insecurity discourages local and foreign investors and investments which affects economic activities, consequently leading to increase of poverty in the state (John, 2024, Interview). The proliferation of SALWs is affecting communities and their leaders where many citizens have lost their ancestral lands, many have been killed, and others have been kidnapped. However, there is a need for government officials to strategize and come up with initiatives and programmes to reduce the proliferation of SALWs in the state (Halilu, 2024, Interview).

Government is seen as the main and crucial institution that would mitigate the proliferation of small arms in Niger state. To address this, leaders should strengthen border security, enhance international cooperation, community engagement

and economic development, focusing on education, agriculture and entrepreneurship, security sectors reform, by reforming security agencies to ensure effectiveness, accountability, and community trust. Enraged to transparency and accountability, leaders should ensure transparency in arms control effort, providing regular update and engaging with local communities. Government should address the root causes, such as poverty, unemployment, and political instability. Government must address underling issues through targeted policies, social welfare programs and inclusive governance, (Usman, 2024, Interview).

The study also found the following:

- a.** wide spread availability of small arms and light weapons: The proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Niger state has become a critical issue. These weapons are easily accessible due to porous border, corruption, and illicit trade network. Local production and modification of are further worsening the problem. This widespread availability has led to insecurity, violence, and crime, which is undermining the state's stability.
- b.** Increased insecurity and violence in the state: Rising insecurity and violence are direct consequences of small arms proliferation. In Niger state, Banditry, kidnapping, and terrorists are on the increase, while communal conflict, and ethnic clashes persist. The resultant effect is displacement, psychological trauma, and loss of lives, livelihood and infrastructure, weakened law enforcement and governance. This insecurity undermines socioeconomic development, creating a vicious cycle in the state.
- c.** Economic underdevelopment: Small arms proliferation hinders economic growth and perpetuates poverty in Niger state. Investment has been discouraged, especially in Shiroro Local Government Area and Munya Local Government Area, and economic opportunities are now limited. Access to educations and health care has been affected; straining social service and infrastructure, and economic instability has weakened security, and is hindering developmental efforts.
- d.** Weak governance and corruption: Inadequate policy responses, institutional weaknesses and corruption have brought about the small arms and light weapons in Niger state. Lack

of transparency and accountability, infected disarmament program and insufficient international cooperation has compounded these efforts.

- e.** Community vulnerability: Rural communities, particularly youths and women of Shiroro and Munya Local Government Area, are disproportionately affected. No education no health care, many villagers have lost their ancestral land, some hade loss their loved ones. Currently many villagers have abandon's from their farm lands and living in Central Primary School Gwada, Shiroro Local Government of Niger State.

### **Conclusion**

Ultimately, as assessed in this study, the spread of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) in Niger State have had serious repercussions on the state from 2013 to 2023. This phenomenon has aggravated insecurity, negatively impacted socio-economic progress and threatened national cohesion. The rise in insecurity has sparked inter-communal warfare, banditry, abduction for ransom and terrorism, thus fostering a state of paranoia and instability. Economic stagnation has been discouraging investments which in turn has stunted economic development and furthered poverty. Social disintegration has served to antagonize ethnic groups and religious communities further accentuating fragmentation of the society and the trust within communities.

### **Way forward**

Considering the analysis of this study, especially it merits, demerits, and constraints, the following are the recommendations:

- i.** Border security must be enhanced. It is truism that Nigeria has a vast border, with limited manpower to man the borders. In spite of this, the security agencies can halt the influx of SALWs into Nigeria, by setting up continuous patrols at both the legal and illegal entry and exit points. This will be possible when a lot of manpower is deployed to border communities for this assignment. Therefore, a joint border patrol team that is committed and patriotic to serve and ensure the security of lives and property of the people in the country can contribute in halting this menace in Niger state.

- ii. Security personnel caught in leasing arms and other ammunitions should be prosecuted, sacked, and imprisoned to serve as deterrence to others. It is a fact that some bad eggs in the security agencies sabotage government's efforts in checking this ugly development. The bad eggs must be dealt with in accordance with the laws of the land.
- iii. Government of Niger state should consider granting Amnesty to those who bear illegal arms in the state. The advantages of the Amnesty Programme should be clearly stated and an aggressive campaign should be carried out to encourage people to surrender their arms. After the amnesty period, the government should embark on house-to-house search to recover arms where the bearers refused to surrender to the government. However, those with licensed arms should be closely monitored. Unscheduled visit by security agencies should be carried out to check the temptation of wanting to lease their arms to criminals.
- iv. The federal government should empower National centre for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (NCCSALWs) to carry out their statutory responsibilities. The agency should be revived by the federal government and the necessary logistics to perform their duties should be made available so as to control and apprehend smugglers who beat security agencies at the border. This will go a long way in preventing the proliferation of SALWs in the state.

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