

## **Illegal Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria: Context and Factors**

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### **Abstract**

The illegal proliferation of small arms constitutes a major source of destruction to lives and properties and exacerbates ethnic and religious tensions leading to full-fledge conflicts. However, by employing failed state theory as theoretical framework, a failed state is one that has shattered social and political structures. It is characterized by social, political and economic failure. It is the collapse of state institutions, especially the police and judiciary with resulting paralysis of governance, a breakdown of law and order, and general banditry and chaos. Common characteristics of a failing state is when a central government is so weak or ineffective that it has little practical control over much of its territory, non-provision of public utilities or services, widespread corruption and criminality; refugees and involuntary movement of populations, and sharp economic decline. Using

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the above theory, the research found that, many factors are responsible for the illegal proliferation of SALW in Nigeria, but the prominent include porosity of Nigerian borders, arms traffickers exploit this situation to smuggle SALW into the country. wide spread insecurity in the country which Nigerians and cooperate organizations have lost confidence in the state and its security agencies to guarantee security hence, individuals, groups and cooperate bodies have to provide security for themselves through various means. These private securities and vigilantes are armed sometimes with illegal weapons. Arming of private security is part of the motivational force for the proliferation of small arms in Nigeria. However, corruption creates breeding grounds for the proliferation of small arms and light weapons among the civilian population. Finally, under-equipment of the national security agencies. Criminals and dissidents are often better equipped than the security agencies thereby making the security agencies incapable of repelling their attacks and unable to defend the public from criminals.

**Keywords: Small Arms, Light Weapons, Border Porosity, Proliferation, Nigeria.**



## Introduction

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is one of the major security challenges facing Nigeria, Africa and the world in general. The trafficking and wide availability of these weapons fuel communal conflict, political instability and pose a threat, not only to security, but also to socio- economic and sustainable development. The widespread proliferation of small arms is contributing to alarming levels of armed conflict, crime, and insurgency. It is reported that of the 640 million small arms circulating in the world, it is estimated that 100 million are found in Africa (Nte;2011:1). However, Africa alone has suffered about 5,994,000 fatalities in the last 50 years due mostly to SALW (Renner, 2006). Narrowing the estimate to Nigeria, the former Nigerian Head of State and Chairman National Peace Committee, General Abdulsalami Abubakar (retd), on a report raised an alarm over an illegal proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria. The former leader also said an estimated six million arms currently circulate illegally across the country. He lamented that the proliferation of weapons has heightened insecurity in the country and led to over 80,000 deaths and closed to three million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), (Blueprint Newspaper, April 7, 2021).

The SALW in circulation in Nigeria come from both internal and external sources. Internal sources include local fabrication, the residue of guns that were used during the Nigeria Civil War (1967-1970), and arms theft from government armories. External sources include smuggling from neighboring countries, the activities of dishonest government-accredited importers, returnees from international peacekeeping operations, insurgents and dissidents from neighboring



countries. Locally produced small arms, or craft weapons, are widely available in Nigeria. They are inexpensive and easy to acquire compared to more expensive and sophisticated models of factory-made small arms, which must be imported or bought through the black market. Most dimensional to the problem is local manufacture, as a large number of illicit guns are produced in Nigeria by gunsmiths and sold to persons without license. The Presidential Committee on Small Arms and Light Weapons, (PRESCOM) revealed that about 60 per cent of the illegal arms in the South-East zone are produced locally. Locally produced small arms include mainly revolvers and shotguns. Craft weapons are used for hunting, community policing, and self-defense. As such, hunters, cattle herders, businessmen, politicians, elites, and vigilante groups are among those purchasing such weapons. There is a number of well-known craft production markets in Nigeria, including Katsina, Kaduna, and Calabar. One primary center for craft production is Awka in Anambra state. The spillover from the Nigerian civil war was another source of SALW movement in the Nigeria. At the end of the war the Nigerian government undertook the program of "Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Reconstruction". However, this program was not accompanied by any comprehensive disarmament exercise thereby leaving a lot of illegal arms in circulation. Another source of the arms in circulation are the result of steadily increasing smuggling activities through the nation's borders. The Nigerian Immigration Services (NIS) stated that gun running has become the second most lucrative organized crime in the country, surpassed only by the multi-million dollar trade in hard drugs (Obasi, 2001). Furthermore, Nigeria has lengthy and porous borders, a



number of airports, and numerous ports along the southern coast, smuggling and cross-border trade are difficult to detect and monitor. Limited staff, vehicles, and resources make the job of customs officials, the police, and the navy all the more difficult. While many are certain that SALW are coming into the country, as evidenced by the presence of foreign-made weapons in circulation, the exact entrance routes of these weapons are less clear. A number of transit countries are often mentioned. These include the neighboring countries of Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, as well as Gabon and Guinea-Bissau (Ikelegbe, 2005; Ojudu, 2007).

### **Conceptual Definitions**

For the purpose of this research study certain key concepts need to be defined and conceptualized, as follow:

(i) **Illegal Proliferation:** Refers to mobility of objects from one place to another, from one country to another, carried out illegally or in violation of the set rules and regulations.

(ii) **Small Arms:** As according to Smith and Haslam (1982), small arms are weapons which are generally man-portable and fire flat trajectory profile. Small Arms are simply weapons created for and used by one person, which include rifles, pistols, assault rifles, machine guns, ammunition, light machine guns.

(iii) **Light Weapons:** Light Weapons are weapons purposely designed for the use of two or more persons working as a crew, though they may be used by



a single person. Light Weapons include heavy machine gun, portable grenade launchers, mortars with less than 100 millimeters.

## **Methodology**

The method adopted in the course of this research is content analysis using mainly secondary data. The secondary data include existing literature on the topic such as books, journals, conference papers and newspapers and other related documents.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This research adopted the failed system theory. According to Abiodun(2018), a failed state is a state that has failed in her responsibilities often used to describe a state of a sovereign government. According to Anyanwu (2005) in Abiodun (2018), a failed state is one that has shattered social and political structures. It is characterized by social, political and economic failure. According to Abiodun (2018), common characteristics of a failed state is when a government is so weak or ineffective that it has little practical control over much of its territory, non-provision of public utilities or services, widespread corruption and criminality; refugees and involuntary movement of populations, and sharp economic decline (ibid). For Patrick (1999) the term failed state is often used to describe a state perceived as having failed at some of basic conditions and responsibilities of a sovereign government. A failed state is one that has shattered social and



political structures. It is characterized by social, political and economic failure. Common characteristics of a failing state is according to Patrick is when a central government is so weak or ineffective that it has little practical control over much of its territory, non-provision of public utilities or services, widespread corruption and criminality; refugees and involuntary movement of populations, and sharp economic decline. Clarke, (2015) notes that failing states are invariably the product of a collapse of the power structures providing political supports for law and order, a process generally triggered and accompanied by anarchic forms of internal violence. It is the collapse of state institutions, especially the police and judiciary with resulting paralysis of governance, a breakdown of law and order, and general banditry and chaos. Anyanwu (2005) in Abiodun (2018) explains that failing states are invariably the product of a collapse of the power structures providing political supports for law and order, a process generally triggered and accompanied by anarchic forms of internal violence. A failed state is composed of feeble and flawed institutions. Often, the executive barely functions, while the legislature, judiciary, bureaucracy, and armed forces have lost their capacity and professional independence. A failed state suffers from crumbling infrastructures, faltering utility supplies and educational and health facilities, and deteriorating basic human-development indicators, such as infant mortality and literacy rates. Failed states create an environment of flourishing corruption and negative growth rates, where honest economic activity cannot flourish. The dynamics leading to and compounding state failure are many and varied, including civil war, ethnic violence or genocide, and predatory government and



bureaucratic behaviour. State failure comes in degrees and is often a function of both the collapse of state institutions and societal collapse. A strong state provides core guarantees to its citizens and others under its jurisdiction in the three interrelated realms of security, economics, and politics. A failed state cannot maintain a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence and minimize internal conflict. It cannot formulate or implement public policies to effectively build infrastructure and deliver services or effective and equitable economic policies. In addition, it cannot provide for the representation and political empowerment of its citizens or protect civil liberties and fundamental human rights. Thus, state failure manifests itself when a state can no longer deliver physical security, a productive economic environment, and a stable political system for its people. The total collapse of the state marks the final, extreme phase of state failure, and very few states can be described as completely failed or collapsed. It is the collapse of state institutions, especially the police and judiciary with resulting paralysis of governance, a breakdown of law and order, and general banditry and chaos. Not only are the functions of government suspended, but its assets are destroyed or looted; and experienced officials are killed or flee the country. It is as a result of these failed states that make people to take laws into their hands, and start committing various crimes, which make it possible for the movement of small arms and light weapons across the Nigerian borders. Consequently, to preserve transnational security, International Organization's intervention is required to cope with the menace of the proliferations and the armed conflicts.





## **A Brief Overview of an Illegal Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria**

Small arms, guns and other weapons were introduced by the Europeans prior to colonialism during the illegitimate slave trade between them and African states. Subsequently, guns and other arms, ammunition and weapons were used by Europeans to realize their imperial ambitions when they used force to suppress Africa's resistance to European incursion, conquest and colonialism. The gunboat diplomacy was popularly employed by the British to compel African chiefs to enter into various treaties with them (Edwards, 2005). There was establishment of West African Frontier Force (WAFF) used by the British Government then, which was used to execute the British-Anglo War of (1901-1902), and other forms of resistance in Nigeria, West Africa, and Africa as a whole. The role of Royal Niger Company (RNC) later United African Company (UAC) backed by British Government in using force to suppress dissenting communities is imperative (Chuma-Okoro, 2011). These arms or guns possibly found their ways into the hands of Africans during the period of colonialism subsequently used in traditional hunting in the rural communities (Ibid). In no time, guns and gun powder became symbols of strength and power, and were later transformed into ceremonial weapons displayed during funerals, burials, ceremonies and customary festivals among the natives. They also became symbols of individual and ethnic grandeurs, and for deterring aggressors and invaders. Today, guns are no longer just ornaments of prestige, or just for hunting, safari and expedition. Guns have transformed in terms of functionality, lethality, sophistication, ubiquity and mo-



tive of ownership. They have become more weapons of criminality and instruments of the underworld (Chuma- Okoro, op.cit). Ostensibly, the 1959 Firearms Act was enacted to check the increasingly rate of arms proliferation in Nigeria towards independence. The failure of the Nigerian government to execute a comprehensive disarmament and arms destruction programme after the civil war (1967-1970) exacerbated the proliferation of guns and illicit arms trafficking. Nigeria later became a destination of SALW used in crimes, revolts, sabotage, religious crisis, communal conflicts, social agitations, internal insurrection, terrorism, insurgency, riots, militancy, electoral violence, political violence, social interest, ethnic tensions, cross-border smuggling, black marketeering, among others. Out of an estimated 640 million SALW in circulation world-wide, 100 million are estimated to be Africa, about 30 million in sub-Saharan Africa and 8 million in West Africa alone and Over 70% of about eight to 10 million illegal weapons in West Africa are in Nigeria (Osman, 2010:155).

A long history of the militarization of society has also contributed to the problem of SALW in Nigeria. The military has ruled for the majority of the period following independence from Britain in 1960. (John, Mohammed, Pinto, and Nkanta, 2007). Although Nigeria's problem with SALWs is not new, its increasing availability in the last decade has helped stoke a wave of insurgencies, ethno-religious conflicts, cross-border banditry, kidnapping, armed robbery and other violent crimes. Arms build-up has fueled violence in different parts of Nigeria, especially communal clashes and ethno-religious conflicts. Between 1999 and April 2010, Nigeria recorded at least 187 ethno-religious conflicts, leading to the



death of several thousands of people. These weapons helped to prolong conflicts, induced huge internal population displacement, undermined social peace and devastated the economic livelihoods of individuals and communities. (Anza, 2010.p26).

As a result of recurrent violent conflicts, Nigeria is faced with the Herculean task of responding to a fluctuating but always sizeable number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Between 2000 and 2002, for instance, an estimated 1,713,306 persons were displaced by ethno-religious conflicts and, by June 2010, some 1.6 million Nigerians are estimated to have been internally displaced. (IDP News Alert, 2010). The January 2010 crisis in Jos displaced over 40 000 persons. Situations of internal displacement undermine human security at individual and community levels. IDPs are usually vulnerable to violent crimes like robbery and rape, and are prone to contracting contagious diseases, due to poor sanitary conditions at the resettlement centers. The impact of Nigeria's SALWs problem on human security is also evident in financial losses induced by conflicts. About 10 major ethno-religious conflicts between 1999 and 2004 cost the Nigerian government over 400 million (US\$2.86 million). (Xinhua, 2004).

Beyond the cost to government, individuals lose property and family members. The loss of property compounds the problem of poverty and deprivation of the affected population. Through the death of family members, arms induced conflicts lead to a deep fracturing of kinship and family structures, many children have been left without parents, husbands without wives, and vice versa. When a family unit is dismantled, children suffer and their future wellbeing is often



bleak, as they are denied good parental care. Many end up as social miscreants who contribute to violent crimes. Thus, for every person killed or injured in conflict and crime involving the use of SALWs, there are many more who must cope with the psychological, physical and economic effects that endure in the aftermath. In this context, women and children are invariably the hardest hit. In recent times, SALWs proliferation has led to an increase in violent crimes that undermine human security, such as rape, cultism, armed robbery and kidnapping, in most parts of the country.

### **Factors Responsible for an Illegal Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria**

Various factors account for an illegal proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria, these factors can be categorized into two: The first factors pertain to those qualities of SALW per se that make them attractive for use in areas experiencing tension or armed conflict. Secondly, there are also other reasons why SALW are in such a high demand in the country. These could be qualified as structural problems which exist due to porosity of Nigerian borders, wide spread insecurity, multi-ethnic nature of the country, radicalization and violent extremism, corruption, globalization and under-equipment of the national security agencies among other factors.

As opposed to heavy conventional weapons like battle tanks, armored vehicles, artillery, warships, combat aircraft and helicopters, several characteristics make



SALW very attractive to paramilitary and irregular forces and even untrained civilians. These characteristics includes:

### **1. Simplicity and durability**

Due to their relative simple nature, SALW are quite easy to use even by people who have had very little or no military training. This explains their use by untrained combatants and even child soldiers as it was the case in many armed conflicts in Nigeria and neighboring African countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone etc. In addition, they require little maintenance and logistical support and can remain operational for very long periods of time. The long lifespan of SALW makes them a constant threat to the society in which they are especially if they are present in large numbers (UNDP, 2002:12). The AK-47, the undisputed number one SALW worldwide can stay operational for 20 to 40 years (Kollicoat, 2006:6). And that with relatively little or no maintenance depending on the conditions to which it is exposed. Even in cases where they begin to malfunction due to age and wear, the old and malfunctioning components can be replaced by new ones or spare parts taken from other weapons.

### **2. Low costs and wide availability**

Due to the fact that the production of SALW does not necessarily involve sophisticated or hi-tech capacity and also because they are produced for military, police and civilian usage, there are a lot of producers and suppliers all over the



world. This makes them cheap to procure especially as much of them are being recycled from conflict to conflict. A brand new AK-47, much coveted for its fire-power and simplicity, can be purchased from a Russian factory at 240 US Dollars depending on the derivative (type) and the amount bought. In certain parts Africa, where supplies are plentiful, it can be bought for 30 USD (Controlarms, 2006:4). In some places in Angola it could be bought between 13 to 20 USD (SAS 2003, p. 271) and in 2001, according to the UN, it could be procured for as little as six US Dollars or traded for a chicken or a sack of grain (AR, 2001:1) The availability and cheapness of SALW in SSA is further enhanced by the fact that 12 African countries have joined the ranks of producers though on a much lower scale. They include; Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Namibia, Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Sudan, Tanzania, Guinea and Ethiopia (Bourne, 2007:60).

### **3. Portability and easiness to conceal**

As their definitions demonstrate, SALW can be moved from one place to another by a single person or by a light vehicle. They can thus be smuggled quite easily from one place to another. In the Great Lakes region, SALW shipments are sometimes disguised as non-lethal cargo or as humanitarian supplies and are often discovered only after the trafficker fails to bribe police and customs officers or when a plane crashes and reveals the hidden nature of its cargo (Boutwell and Klare, 1999:34). Small arms are sometimes imported into Nigeria hidden in clothing, vehicles or kitchen utensils (Ayissi and Sall, 2005:56)



#### **4. Lethality**

Though many SALW are quite simplistic in nature, their lethality has increased making it possible for a single combatant to constitute a big threat to an entire society. Today's assault rifles and other automatic weapons can fire up to several hundred rounds a minute. An AK- 47 assault rifle can release 600 rounds per minute as long as the trigger remains pressed down and when being operated in automatic mode. Its maximum range lies between 800 to 1000 meters, but its accuracy is guaranteed when used by a trained marksman with the range of 400 to 600 meters (Controlarms, 2006:3).

#### **5. Usability by military, police and civilians**

Due to their very nature, SALW unlike heavy conventional weapons are designed to suit police or military forces as well as civilian use. Depending on the rigor of firearms laws and control mechanisms in any given country, citizens can be in possession of anything ranging from hunting guns, simple pistols and shotguns to fully automatic weapons.

#### **Other factors affecting the proliferation and use of SALW in Nigeria**

The factors discussed above pertain to those qualities of SALW per se that make them attractive for use in areas experiencing tension or armed conflict in Nigeria and Africa in general. There are also other reasons why they are in such a high demand in the country. These could be qualified as structural problems



which exist due porosity of Nigerian borders, wide spread insecurity, multi-ethnic nature of the country, radicalization and violent extremism, corruption, globalization and under-equipment of the national security agencies among other factors.

These show the complexity of the SALW problem and suggest that strict measures and efforts is necessary to overcome it.

**1.Porosity of Nigerian Borders:** One of the fundamental factors responsible for the illicit influx of SALW into Nigeria is the porosity of national borders of the Nigeria. Nigeria has 770 km of shared land border with the Republic of Benin to the west, about 1500 km with Niger to the north, 1700 km with Cameroon to the east, 90 km with the Republic of Chad to the north-east and 850 km maritime border on the Atlantic Ocean. Out-stretched these tally up to 4910 km of borders which have to be controlled. Ayissi and Sall (2005:55) argue that it will be very hard to find any country in the world capable of effectively controlling such extensive borders. Arms traffickers exploit this situation to smuggle SALW into the country. As disclosed by Comptroller General of the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), Mr. David Parradang, disclosed that there are over 1,400 illegal border routes which have grave security implications for the country. He further asserts that even though the country had only 84 approved land border control posts designated in the 1980s after the Maitatsine riots, there are more than 1,400 illegal borders in the country. The number of illegal routes is 100 times





more than the number of approved routes. In Adamawa State, there are about 5 control posts but with 80 illegal routes in the state through which people come into the country. In Ogun State, there are 83 illegal routes and this goes round the country. (Nigerian Bulletin, 24 April, 2014). As in the word of Nte (2011), there is a direct link between the acquisition of weapons like SALW and poor control of borders. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is often one of the major security challenges currently facing Nigeria, Africa and indeed the world in general. The trafficking and wide availability of these weapons fuel communal conflict, political instability and pose a threat, not only to security, but also to sustainable development. The widespread proliferation of small arms is contributing to alarming levels of armed crime, and militancy (Nte, 2011). For example, former US Ambassador to Nigeria, John Campbell said the Islamic terror group is said to be able to purchase small arms and occasionally some larger weaponry in nearby conflict zones, "probably Libya, probably Chad. These arms are believed to be acquired through "shady, black market" arrangements across barely marked borders, as the official put it. The porosity of the Nigerian borders was also said to be encouraging the proliferation of the country with illegal arms, according to Michael Leiter, a former director of the National Counter Terrorism Center and now an NBC News analyst. Noteworthy is the implications this misfortune about border control may pose to national security of Nigeria, as the borders are less managed weapons particularly Small Arms and Light Weapons are easily imported in to Nigeria across the borders. This trend causes a lot of hardships to Nigerians when the weapons were used to murder, rob, and even commit onslaught on the humanity.



**2. Demand and Supply Factors:** The proliferation of small arms is a correlation of two major and mutually supportive factors the demand for small arms as the motivating factors and the supply or sources. The demand for or need to possess small arms in Nigeria is motivated by a combination of factors such as, activities of the military or security agencies, multiplicity of conflicts and personal security arrangements. As concluded by the United Nations Panel on Small Arms, while not by themselves causing the conflicts in which they are used, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons affects the intensity and duration of violence and encourages militancy rather than a peaceful resolution of unsettled differences. Perhaps most grievously, we see a vicious circle in which insecurity leads to a higher demand for weapons, which itself breed still greater insecurity, and so on. This statement is a good summary of the problems posed by SALW in conflict situations, and how its proliferation leads to the “vicious circle” of insecurity which was described (UNGA,1997).

**3. Activities of the Law Enforcement Agencies:** The role of security agencies involves use of arms and ammunition. Thus, a large proportion of legally acquired SALW are part of their requirements. Their increasing demand for Arms and Ammunition to enable them successfully confront the equally increasing number of armed criminals has aggravated the proliferation of arms in the country. Furthermore, the culture of impunity that continues to undermine the rule of law was planted during the military era. This has Contributed to the in efficiency of the provisions regulating small arms in Nigeria. The same goes



for corruption and failed governance, a conundrum which has not only undermined the rule of law but also created the discontent and animosity fueling the conflicts inundating the country, thus, increasing the demand for small arms in Nigeria (Jakeda, 2005).

**4. Widespread Insecurity:** The failure of the Nigeria government to guarantee human security and freedom from fear has transformed security from a public service, to a private service which individuals and groups have to provide for themselves. The government's inability to prosecute persons arrested in respect of the various religious and ethnics crises fans violence and its continuity. Many Nigerians and cooperate organizations have lost confidence in the state and its security agencies to guarantee security hence, individuals, groups and cooperate bodies have to provide security for themselves through various means. These private securities and vigilantes are armed sometimes with illegal weapons. Arming of private security is part of the motivational force for the proliferation of small arms in Nigeria. The problems of armed violence and proliferation of SALW are worsened by the inability of the police to reduce violent crime, ensure law and order and provide adequate security to the populace. None of the security agent currently possesses the training, resources or personnel to perform their duties effectively due to lengthy and porous nature of Nigerian borders (Hazen and Horner, 2007).

**5. Economic factors:** The worsened economic situation of most African countries in the past 20 years has further eroded their capacity to address press-



ing developmental challenges such as poverty, unemployment and poor infrastructure. A 2016 World Bank African Poverty Report confirms that poverty levels among Africans are higher than in the 1990s (World Bank, 2016). When provided, employment opportunities and infrastructure are mainly concentrated in urban centers or constituencies that are loyal to ruling political parties, thus fuelling or compounding inequality. As such, many deprived or excluded groups express grievances through the use of illicit arms against the state. The widespread poverty and limited economic opportunities in Nigeria's northeast region were exploited by Boko Haram to recruit and radicalize poor, uneducated and vulnerable young people ( Tella, 2015). For instance, one of the group's recruitment strategies involved the provision of cash loans to potential recruits (Isaac, 2016). The high rate of unemployment which pervades the Nigerian society provides ready candidates for crisis and crimes. For example, some unemployed former combatants with marketable skill and limited employment prospect, consider weapons as a means to survive through violent crimes like armed robbery. In actual fact, unemployment and poverty bring along restiveness which in turn transforms and breeds grievances and conflict. Such conflicts, may often times lead to the demand for the acquisition of weapons (Wulf H, quoted in Vigo).

**6. Political Factors:** The crude nature of Nigerian politics is one key factor driving the process of SALWs proliferation. Politics in Nigeria – especially electoral politics – is defined and approached by politicians as a do-or-die affair, or warfare. The stake in Nigerian politics is incredibly high, making politicians des-



perate in the struggle to win elective positions. As a result, many of them recruit 'specialists of violence' – cultists, gangs and thugs – to attain and retain political power (Onuaha, 2012:53). Electoral violence takes the form of employment of force by political parties or supporters to intimidate opponents and mobilize support. There have been reported cases of politically motivated assassinations and other killings in Nigeria since the inception of democracy in 1999. For instance, in 2003 it became evident that the goals of political violence were shifting from traditional instruments – matches, clubs and knives – to small arms, such as locally fabricated and imported pistols, and a range of assault rifles. Among gangs (composed for the most part of unemployed youth) are used by politicians for both offensive and defensive purposes. In one of Nigeria's 36 States (Cross River State), the police recovered 54 guns in 2002, 16 in the possession of politicians and another eight from politically motivated murders. In Edo State, a gubernatorial aspirant (Lucky Imaseun) was arrested in possession of arms. In Bayelsa State, eleven people were killed in a shootout by politicians contesting councillorship elections. In Ondo State police confirmed that a politician was stockpiling light weapons and, in search of his residence, found 13 single-barrel guns. The Nigerian security forces are active in trying to uncover the source of illegal sales in the country. In August 2003 the police arrested the son of a prominent senator, whom the police believed to have been behind the importation of sophisticated arms used by armed robbers and feuding ethnic groups. The police themselves are frequently involved in what is called 'gunpowder politics'. In 2003 a governor encouraged the production of pistols by a gang for his political campaign.



When a police unit uncovered the factory and the individuals involved told the police about their patron, the detainees were ordered to be executed. The officers responsible for this were then arrested and themselves committed to trial for murder in a case that is constantly being postponed. In the 2003 elections political agents visited a number of university and college campuses in a number of states and recruited youth support for politicians, handing out freshly made weapons. They were paid to work around the town, brandishing these weapons and telling people they would be watching which way they voted.

**7. Under-Equipment of Security Agencies:** The Nigeria security agencies suffer from lack of equipment, corruption and other inherent and extraneous handicaps. Criminals and dissidents are often better equipped than the security agencies thereby making the security agencies incapable of repelling their attacks and unable to defend the public from criminals. The Niger Delta militant have sacked Agip oil location with military presence in 2002. They were disarmed and up till date unable to recover the arms. Several locations in Northeast were also sacked by terrorists. The worst heat was the Boko Haram Terrorists sacking of military location with large arms. A case study of Goza in August 2014 and Bama in September 2014 among others. These large seizures of arms were never recovered from the Boko Haram Terrorists and some of the arms were used to attack more military locations in the country. Also used to capture many other towns and villages in the Northeast.



**8. Cultural Practices:** In Nigeria, still cultural practices are found in some areas where weapons are used for traditional rites and ceremonies. While the Fulani and certain other communities carry swords, sticks and arrows, the communities of traditional hunters in the South-West and East carry cutlasses and short guns. The cultural attachment to weapons has encouraged the proliferation of locally produced SALW and firearms. It may be difficult for the security personnel to combat this sort of proliferation, but the government could enact laws prohibiting the indiscriminate use of fire arms for the traditional ceremonies.

**9. Ethno-religious Factors:** Since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in May 1999, over 100,000 persons have reportedly been killed in over 50 ethno-religious crises. The ethno-religious heterogeneity in Nigeria has been one of the prominent source of violent conflicts during which SALW are widely used. According to Vigo, government has not taken measures to curb these occurrences. Cases that readily come to mind include the Zangon-Kataf Crisis (1993), the Tiv-Jukun (2000), Jos Crisis (2002) and Kaduna Crisis (2002). Similarly, despite the fact that Nigeria is a secular State, sectarian conflicts which date back to Maitasine Riot of 1980 in Kano still continue. The recent religious factor is the prohibition of Western Education by Boko Haram Terrorists. They use this to lure most of the followers using arms to terrorize people of the Northeast. These ethno-religious crises encourage the acquisition of small arms and light weapons among the various ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria.



## **10. The Prevalence of Inter-Ethnic Conflicts and Criminality:**

The possession small arms and use of these arms in Nigeria has also been attributed to the prevalence of organized armed conflicts and the increasing culture of violence which has become a defining character of the socio-political scene since 1999. Except for self-defense and other lawful purposes, the possession of illicit fire arms usually follows a premeditation of mayhem, violence or criminal act. The correlation between crime and conflict on one hand and the demand for arms on the other has caused the multiplicity of conflicts and criminality in Nigeria and thereby increase the demand for illicit proliferation of SALW by civilians and non-state actors.

**11. Corruption:** The vicious cycle of low salaries and corruption creates breeding grounds for the proliferation of small arms and light weapons among the civilian population. Customs officers are bribed by weapons dealers, while soldiers, police officers and security forces are known to have sold government weapons to criminals (Ayissi and Sall, 2005:68).

**12. Environmental Factors:** Natural resources The control, access and distribution of natural resources has triggered, sustained or exacerbated conflicts in many villages and towns in Nigeria. Illicit arms have contributed to the escalation and deadliness of such conflicts in recent years. This includes conflicts over hydrocarbons, mineral deposits or grazing land. For example, illicit arms are





a key factor in the militancy and insecurity in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Similarly, illicit arms have increased the spate of violent clashes and casualties between herders and farmers in north central south west and south eastern Nigeria. and 34,000 displacements in Pibor in January 2012.

**13. Radicalization and Violent Extremism:** The growth and activities of religious groups that espouse radical extremist ideologies have contributed to the spread and use of illicit arms in Africa. The existence and possession of SALW by violent extremist groups have negatively impacted security in West, Horn and North Africa. The open display of SALW is a requisite element in the identity of violent extremist groups, and extremist groups appear deadlier as their access to and quantity of SALW increases. For instance, radical Tuareg militias and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in northern Mali have initiated and sustained armed insurgencies because of their access to and use of SALW. Islamist militancy has garnered the most attention as a consequence of the violent attacks of Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Al-Shabaab and other similar groups operating across Africa.<sup>41</sup> Based on UNDP estimates, 24,771 people were killed and 5,507 wounded between 2011 and 2015, with most of the fatalities recorded in Nigeria and Somalia.<sup>42</sup> The porous border and swathes of 'ungoverned spaces' in the Sahel and West Africa are exploited for the illicit transfer of arms to extremist groups.



**14. Globalization:** The forces of globalization bring with it opportunities and challenges, the elimination of state enforced restrictions on exchanges across borders and the increasingly integrated and complex global system of production and exchange that has emerge as a result further complicate the challenge of containing SALWs proliferation. The idea of globalization and its advocate for free market forces with minimum economic barriers and open trade for world development provides ground for illicit trade in arms by minimizing custom regulations and border control, trafficking of small arms becomes easier. Malhotra, (2011), stressed that, a miniscule percent of container ships have cargo checks, therefore making the arms movement smooth. Faking documents bribing officials and concealing arms as humanitarian aids are common practices. Malhotra (2011) identified globalization factors that facilitate proliferation of illicit trade in arms:

(a) Political and economic integration are coupled with lesser restrictions in migration and human movement. This helps the arms dealers to fortify their present business connections and tap new ones. Dealers migrate to various regions, motivated by business expansion or reduced operational risks.

(b) Banking reforms and capital mobility have aided the black market to spread its trade internationally, utilizing every angle of the well linked financial market. This also gives rise to offshore markets and tax shelters. An illustration of banking innovation is E-money. Banks have introduced cards bearing microchips, which are able to store large sums of money. These cards are portable outside conventional channels or can be easily bartered among individuals.



(c) The linkage of banks with the internet has posed a new challenge in combating illegitimate activities in the financial sector. E-banking has digitized money making it prone to criminality. Even though, it has numerous benefits for the world at large, it is misused for money laundering, credit card scams and check-kiting. Adding to this, economic integration among regions blesses arm brokers with more opportunities to shelter their money, by investing in different stock exchanges. Numerous other illegal practices are a by-product of a deregulated financial sector, but money laundering is at the apex. Money Laundering or 'cleansing of money' is an unlawful practice of concealing the point of origin, identity or destination of the funds, when performing a particular financial transaction. The criminals maneuver money across borders gaining from banks in countries with lax anti-laundering policies.

(d) Profound expansion of commercial airline and freight industry (making transport cheaper and easier) are instrumental in increased penetration of arms in conflict zones. Global merger of airline companies, supply chains, shipping firms make it tough to supervise unlawful practices in air and water.

(e) The growth of global communication in the past two decades has been unfathomable. This has enhanced the ability of arms dealers to communicate internationally through the web at a cheap rate.

**15. Colonial and Imperial Factors:** Small arms, guns and other weapons were introduced by the Europeans prior to colonialism during the



illegitimate slave trade between them and African states. Subsequently, guns and other arms, ammunition and weapons were used by Europeans to realize their imperial ambitions when they used force to suppress Africa's resistance to European incursion, conquest and colonialism. The gunboat diplomacy was popularly employed by the British to compel African chiefs to enter into various treaties with them (Edwards, 2005). There was establishment of West African Frontier Force (WAFF) used by the British Government then, which was used to execute the British-Anglo War of (1901-1902), and other forms of resistance in Nigeria, West Africa, and Africa as a whole. The role of Royal Niger Company (RNC) later United African Company (UAC) backed by British Government in using force to suppress dissenting communities is imperative (Chuma-Okoro, 2011). These arms or guns possibly found their ways into the hands of Africans during the period of colonialism subsequently used in traditional hunting in the rural communities (Ibid). In no time, guns and gun powder became symbols of strength and power, and were later transformed into ceremonial weapons displayed during funerals, burials, ceremonies and customary festivals among the natives. They also became symbols of individual and ethnic grandeurs, and for deterring aggressors and invaders. Today, guns are no longer just ornaments of prestige, or just for hunting, safari and expedition. Guns have transformed in terms of functionality, lethality, sophistication, ubiquity and motive of ownership. They have become more weapons of criminality and instruments of the underworld (Chuma- Okoro, op.cit). Ostensibly, the 1959 Firearms Act was enacted to check the increasingly rate of arms proliferation in Nigeria towards inde-



pendence. The failure of the Nigerian government to execute a comprehensive disarmament and arms destruction programme after the civil war (1967-1970) exacerbated the proliferation of guns and illicit arms trafficking. Nigeria later became a destination of SALW used in crimes, revolts, sabotage, religious crisis, communal conflicts, social agitations, internal insurrection, terrorism, insurgency, riots, militancy, electoral violence, political violence, social interest, ethnic tensions, cross-border smuggling, black marketeering, among others. Out of an estimated 640 million SALW in circulation world-wide, 100 million are estimated to be Africa, about 30 million in sub-Saharan Africa and 8 million in West Africa alone and Over 70% of about eight to 10 million illegal weapons in West Africa are in Nigeria (Osman, 2010:155).

## **Conclusion**

Reading from the above, it has been stated that, Various factors account for an illegal proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria, these factors can be categorized into two: The first factors pertain to those qualities of SALW per se that make them attractive for use in areas experiencing tension or armed conflict. Secondly, there are also other reasons why SALW are in such a high demand in the country. These could be qualified as structural problems which exist due to porosity of Nigerian borders, wide spread insecurity, multi-ethnic nature of the country, radicalization and violent extremism, corruption, globalization and under-equipment of the national security agencies among other factors.



Finally, it is arguable that illegal proliferation of SALW is never an insuperable or insurmountable phenomenon as it can be overcome by adopting certain measures such as strengthening the border control, gun recovery, providing adequate equipment required by the national security agencies, and providing employment opportunities to the teeming unemployed youths among others.



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