

**SMALL ARMS PROLIFERATION AND THE SURGE OF CRIMINALITY IN NIGERIA:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL SECURITY**

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) in Nigeria and their deepening impact on rising criminality and national security challenges. By tracing the issue from Africa's colonial and post-colonial conflicts through to contemporary times, the study highlights Nigeria's systemic vulnerabilities, including porous borders, institutional weaknesses, corruption, and inadequate security infrastructure, which facilitate the illicit flow and local production of SALWs. These factors perpetuate cycles of violence, including terrorism, banditry, and communal clashes, which destabilise both local communities and the broader nation. The study also underscores the transnational nature of arms trafficking in the West African region, emphasising how weak national governance intersects with complex regional security dynamics, thereby complicating unilateral efforts to stem the flow of illicit weapons. Ultimately, the paper advocates for comprehensive approaches that strengthen national institutions, promote good governance and enhance regional cooperation to address both the root causes and consequences of arms proliferation. Without such coordinated and sustained action, Nigeria's security, political stability, and economic development remain seriously jeopardised, with significant repercussions for peace and security across West Africa.

**Keywords:** Small Arms, Light Weapons, Proliferation, National Security, Cold War, Crime.

**Introduction**

The end of the World Wars brought relative global peace, as there has been no record of an international war since 1945. However, while leaders and nations, shaped by the experience of two world wars, focused on restricting the sale and transfer of large conventional weapons, the proliferation

of small arms was tragically overlooked. This raises the research problem concerning the origin of contemporary Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) proliferation. Many scholars, including Hirschi and Gottfredson's *Age and the Explanation of Crime*, Annan in *We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century*,<sup>1</sup> and Yacubu's *Combating the Proliferation of Small and Light Weapons in West Africa: Handbook for the Training of Armed and Security Forces*,<sup>2</sup> have focused on the transfer of conventional weapons such as tanks, heavy artillery, aircraft, warships, and missiles between 1945 and 1990. They also traced the global origins of SALWs. It is important to emphasise that, since World War II, peace has been essentially understood as the absence of war, with international security equated to the absence of military threats. Peace meant that weapons were silent, and the lack of armed confrontations implied peace.

The United Nations' unanimous introduction and adoption of a new concept - human security - brought a broader view of security, one that encompasses protection from non-military dangers. This new perspective emerged in the 1990s, following the end of the Cold War and the rivalry between capitalist and communist states. It became clear that the real threat no longer came from major wars between national armies but rather from localised conflicts confined to a single country or region, most often internal wars or crises within states. On January 31, 1992, the Security Council, meeting at the level of heads of state and government, defined international peace and security as "not the result of the absence of war and military conflicts alone. Other, non-military threats originate in the instability

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<sup>1</sup> Travis Hirschi and Michael Gottfredson, "Age and the Explanation of Crime." *American Journal of Sociology*, 1989: 552-584.

<sup>2</sup> J.G. Yacubu, "Cooperation among Armed Forces and Security Forces in Combating the Proliferation of Small Arms." *Combating the Proliferation of Small and Light Weapons in West Africa: Handbook for the Training of Armed and Security Forces*. Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2005, pp.55-69.

prevailing in the economic, social, humanitarian and ecological fields”.<sup>3</sup> This definition implies that human security broadens the focus from the state alone to include the safety of individuals and groups within a state.

The end of the Cold War generated worldwide optimism for international peace and security, as attention shifted from superpower proxy wars in developing countries to socio-economic development as a viable goal. However, contemporary realities have disastrously shattered these expectations. Instead of enhanced security, internal conflicts accompanied by unprecedented civilian casualties and widespread human rights violations have escalated rapidly. While the causes of these conflicts are diverse, the diffusion of small arms, particularly from industrialised nations to the developing world or produced locally, has played a decisive role in their escalation, intensification, and resolution.

Globalization has emerged as a powerful driver of the new international security agenda, with contradictory effects: on one hand, it accelerates productive forces, scientific and technological progress, and fosters communication among states and peoples; on the other, it facilitates the easy transportation of illegal arms across borders, posing serious threats to both international and national security. In the context of globalisation, liberalisation, which theoretically prioritises the right to life, liberty, and property, and neoliberal institutionalism, which holds that sustainable international cooperation can reduce conflict, states have increasingly lost control over security and markets. This is reflected in the rise of informal economies, black markets, and the inability of states to stem the flow of illicit arms, especially given porous borders in regions like Africa.

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<sup>3</sup> Alioune Sall, “Human Security and International Order.” *Combating the Proliferation of Small and Light Weapons in West Africa: Handbook for the Training of Armed and Security Forces* Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2005, pp. 17-18.

Globalisation has undeniably fuelled the continuous trafficking of SALWs. Access to such arms has become a matter of choice rather than necessity. Illicit arms transfer is not confined to any one country, and weapons flow freely across national borders. Small arms, once restricted to security and armed forces, are now widely available to criminals, terrorists, and ethnic militias worldwide. Countries grappling with major societal and economic problems are particularly vulnerable to the challenges posed by the influx, as increased crime, violence, and corruption obstruct national development and well-being. Violence linked to the proliferation and widespread use of SALWs poses a severe challenge to human rights globally. Since the Cold War's end, the availability of existing small arms combined with illicit trade has exacerbated intra-state conflicts.

Since independence, Africa has witnessed an alarming rise in armed conflicts and crises within its states, with contemporary wars primarily intra-state in nature. Whether driven by political, religious, economic, or ethnic factors, these conflicts have had devastating consequences across the continent. Several African countries have experienced state implosion, marked by mass massacres, economic collapse, and the breakdown of state institutions. Conflicts in Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Chad, Sudan, Somalia, Angola, Central African Republic, and Côte d'Ivoire illustrate this pattern.<sup>4</sup> Background studies indicate that the proliferation of SALWs has not only triggered and prolonged these conflicts but has also complicated their management and resolution. Consequently, SALWs' proliferation has become a significant driver of violence, crime, and terrorism in Africa, emerging as a major security and developmental challenge, particularly over the past two decades, which is the scope of this study.

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<sup>4</sup> Djibril Ndime, "Cooperation Between States to Combat the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons." *Combating the Proliferation of Small and Light Weapons in West Africa: Handbook for the Training of Armed and Security Forces*. Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2005, p. 77.

The persistence of SALW proliferation in Nigeria is deeply rooted in the dynamics explained by State fragility theory and regional security complex theory (RSCT). State fragility theory emphasises how weak governance structures, institutional corruption, and ineffective security apparatuses undermine a state's capacity to maintain law and order, particularly along its borders.<sup>5</sup> Nigeria's porous borders and compromised security forces exemplify this fragility, enabling the illicit flow of arms that fuels criminal activities such as banditry, terrorism, and insurgency. The inability of the Nigerian state to enforce control over its territory creates a security vacuum where non-state actors and armed groups thrive, further destabilising the internal political order and heightening insecurity.<sup>6</sup>

RSCT complements this perspective by situating Nigeria's insecurity within a broader regional context, highlighting the interdependence of security among West African states. RSCT explains how security threats, such as the circulation of SALW, cross borders and create a complex web of interactions among neighbouring countries, necessitating collective regional responses.<sup>7</sup> The insecurity caused by arms proliferation in one country affects others, leading to regional instability and escalating conflicts that no single state can address alone. This theory underscores the importance of regional organisations like ECOWAS in facilitating cooperation for disarmament, arms control, and conflict resolution. Together, these theories illuminate how the structural weaknesses of Nigeria's state institutions and the interconnected nature of regional security challenges reinforce each other, making effective management of SALW proliferation a complex but critical task.

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<sup>5</sup> Robert I. Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*. Brookings Institution Press, 2003, p.15.

<sup>6</sup> William Zartman, *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995, p. 50.

<sup>7</sup> Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver. *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*. Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 53.

Given this context, this paper poses critical questions: What are the effects of the proliferation of SALWs on peace and security in Nigeria? How has this proliferation contributed to criminality in Nigeria? What challenges confront governments in Nigeria, sub-Saharan Africa, and the United Nations in combating the proliferation of SALWs? It is important to acknowledge that studies on security, SALWs proliferation, and criminality often exhibit inherent biases. To mitigate this, this study consulted a broad range of sources, including publications from the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research and ECOWAS, ensuring the authenticity of materials used. The complex problem of SALWs can be understood through three interrelated aspects: the strong connection between SALWs and internal conflict; the linkage between SALWs and crime; and the relationship between SALWs and hindered economic, social, and political development. This paper will analyse these areas, focusing particularly on the nexus between SALWs proliferation, crime, and national security challenges in Nigeria.

### **Understanding Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation**

Small arms are a category of light weapons that include firearms such as automatic weapons, submachine guns up to 20mm calibre, rifles, carbines, handguns, and hand-placed landmines. They represent the primary tools of violence for criminals and non-state actors operating both nationally and transnationally. Light weapons, by contrast, are conventional munitions that can be carried by an individual combatant or transported by light vehicles, including grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, and mortars. Globally, small arms have been described as the "real weapons of mass destruction" of contemporary times due to their widespread availability and devastating impact on human security. Since the Cold War, the proliferation of SALWs has escalated dramatically. The Cold War's licensed production and technology transfers contributed to a global diffusion of weapons manufacturing, leading to surplus arms flooding international markets. This proliferation was further

fuelled by efforts from states to domestically produce arms, often in secret, fostering a multiplicity of producers and creating opportunities for illicit transfers.

Non-state actors, including insurgents and armed groups, have increasingly accessed these weapons either independently or through allied supporters. The illicit arms trade, motivated by profit, disregards the consequences of weapon use, often fuelling conflicts, crime, terrorism, and instability, particularly in Africa, where many states have experienced severe destabilisation due to SALW influxes. A significant proportion of the global small arms trade operates in secrecy. This opacity facilitates diversion from legal to illegal markets, fuelling corruption and black-market activities.<sup>8</sup> Since the 1990s, easy access to small arms has sustained numerous internal conflicts, especially across African countries such as Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Sudan, exacerbating violence and hampering peace and development. Though scholarly attention to small arms proliferation has grown, much of the literature remains theoretical or descriptive, often focusing on isolated case studies or aggregated statistics. Many analyses frame SALW proliferation as a critical curse to international security, occasionally linking the issue to debates over defence budgets and military expenditures. The post-Cold War period is widely recognised as the era when small arms proliferation accelerated dramatically.

Small arms, despite their relatively low cost and limited destructive range, amplify tensions in conflict zones, increase casualty rates, and contribute to widespread insecurity.<sup>9</sup> Their portability, ease of use, and low maintenance requirements make them accessible even to illiterate individuals and

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<sup>8</sup> Philip Alpers and Twyford Connor. "Small Arms in the Pacific." Occasional Paper No. 8. Geneva: Small Arms Survey. March 2003, p. 98.

<sup>9</sup> C. Ero and A. Ndinga-Muvumba. "Small Arms, Light Weapons." In A. Adebajo & I. Rashid (eds.), *West Africa's Security Challenges: Building Peace in a Troubled Region*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004, p. 223.

minors, thus fuelling modern violence globally. Annually, small arms are responsible for over half a million deaths worldwide, including approximately 300,000 in armed conflicts and 200,000 in suicides and homicides.<sup>10</sup> Current estimates indicate there are roughly 650 million small arms in circulation worldwide, with about 8 million new firearms and 14 billion rounds of ammunition produced annually by over 1,200 manufacturers in 90+ countries. The United States and the European Union account for approximately 75% of this production.<sup>11</sup> Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan underscored the lethal impact of small arms, stating the death toll exceeds that of all other weapon systems combined, dwarfing even the casualties caused by atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The complexity of the international arms trade has increased, involving a diverse array of suppliers and recipients, from private militias to sovereign states. The porous and fragmented nature of arms control mechanisms undermines efforts to implement effective national and international policies aimed at disarmament. Since the early 2000s, international focus on small arms has grown, though the political will to address the underlying causes of internal conflicts remains weak. The tendency to treat small arms proliferation as a standalone problem neglects the root socio-political and economic causes of violence, impeding long-term solutions. Small arms availability also significantly undermines post-conflict peace-building. Their presence prolongs hostilities, increases human and material losses, discourages negotiated settlements, and obstructs humanitarian and peacekeeping interventions. The dominance of SALW in internal conflicts results from their affordability, concealability, and operational simplicity, making them preferred tools for non-state actors lacking substantial resources.

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<sup>10</sup> Alexandra Boivin, "Complicity and beyond: International law and the transfer of small arms and light weapons." *International Review of the Red Cross*. Volume 87 Number 859 September 2005, p. 468.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Jackson, Nicholas Marsh, Taylor Owen and Anne Thurin, "Who Takes the Bullet? The Impact of Small Arms Violence." *Understanding the Issues*, 3. Oslo: Norwegian Church Aid, 2005, p. 52.



In the contemporary security framework, particularly under the United Nations' concept of Human Security, the threat posed by small arms and light weapons surpasses traditional concerns over territorial sovereignty and state-to-state warfare. While large-scale interstate wars have declined, the destabilising effects of SALW on populations and societies remain critical challenges to peace, development, and security worldwide.

### **Understanding Crime and Criminality in Nigeria**

The term “crime” does not have a simple or universally accepted definition in modern criminal law. However, a crime can generally be defined as an act that is reprehensible and illegal, for which an individual can be punished by a constituted authority; it is a grave offence, especially against morality.<sup>12</sup> In other words, crime is an unlawful act punishable by the state or other authority. Crime is more than just an aberration or violation of cultural norms; it is the breach of legally established provisions. The word “crime” often carries a thrilling but threatening connotation, as it poses risks to security and social order.

The causes and consequences of crime are closely tied to the rule of law and public perceptions of safety. Generally, crime denotes acts considered morally wrong or ethically unacceptable. Katz defines crime as actions harmful not only to individuals but also to the broader community, society, or state.<sup>13</sup> Crime today ranges from violent and sexual offences to organised and corporate crimes, including those perpetrated by state actors. These include theft, robbery, fraud, corruption, assault, rape, murder, and many other illegal acts. Crime inherently violates established law and often infringes

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<sup>12</sup> Safal Ghimire and Bishnu Raj Upreti, “The post-conflict Trojan horse: Upsurge of urban crime as a challenge to state building.” *The Remake of a State. South Asia Regional Coordination Office of the Swiss National Centre for Competence in Research*, 2010, p. 212.

<sup>13</sup> Jack Katz, *Seductions of Crime: Moral and Sensual Attractions in Doing Evil*. New York: Basic Books, 1988, p. 91

on the interests of others. It can be understood as a deliberate breach of legal norms undertaken to achieve personal objectives.<sup>14</sup>

Criminality is the state or quality of engaging in criminal acts. It also describes a certain behavioural profile associated with the most concerning types of crime in society. Hirschi et al. define criminality as a strategic style of behaviour characterised by self-centeredness, indifference to the suffering and needs of others, and low self-control.<sup>15</sup> Gottfredson and Hirschi similarly note that criminality appeals particularly to impulsive individuals, offering immediate gratification through relatively simple yet risky strategies.<sup>16</sup> While criminal acts often inflict pain, suffering, or death upon victims, they yield few lasting benefits to offenders. Worldwide, crime and criminality have evolved in complexity, demanding nuanced responses that balance ethical considerations with practical strategies. Effective crime prevention and justice require advanced methods for gathering and analysing data, combining technology and traditional intelligence.<sup>17</sup>

Africa, particularly Nigeria and South Africa, continues to face persistently high levels of both violent and non-violent crime. In South Africa, violent crime remains a severe national concern: between 2022–2023, the country recorded 27,494 murders - approximately 75 per day - amounting to a homicide rate of about 45 per 100,000, the highest in two decades.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, in Nigeria, the National Bureau of Statistics reported an estimated 2.24 million kidnapping incidents between May

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<sup>14</sup> Safal Ghimire and Bishnu Raj Upreti, “The post-conflict Trojan horse: Upsurge of urban crime as a challenge to state building.” p. 212.

<sup>15</sup> Hirschi and Gottfredson, “Age and the Explanation of Crime.” p. 73.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi, “Age and the Explanation of Crime”. *American Journal of Sociology*. 89, 1983: 552-584.

<sup>17</sup> A.L. Lasisi and O.O. Olapeju, “Analysis of Urban Crime in Abeokuta City, Nigeria.” *International Journal of Social and Policy Issues* Vol. 13 No. 1&2, 2006, p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Associated Press. “As Police Lose the War on Crime in South Africa, Private Security Companies Step In.” *AP News*, 7 Jan. 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/1ae2684872212284033cad127fe88b4b>.

2023 and April 2024, with households paying approximately ₦2.23 trillion in ransom, an average of ₦2.67 million per incident.<sup>19</sup> These staggering statistics underscore the ongoing crisis of violent crime and insecurity in Africa. These figures starkly underline the ongoing crisis of violent crime and insecurity across Africa today. A key factor driving crime in Nigeria and West Africa is the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. These arms intensify conflicts and criminal activities, fuelling violence and insecurity. Hull et al. argue that the increasing availability of lethal weapons leads to greater destruction and drives an arms race among competing militias.<sup>20</sup>

From the 1970s onward, Nigeria has experienced a significant increase in violent crime, facilitated by widespread access to illegal arms. Armed robbery, kidnapping, sea piracy, cultism, militancy, and terrorism, especially Boko Haram's insurgency, have destabilised the country and threatened national security. The easy availability of small arms perpetuates a cycle of violence and insecurity that is difficult to break. Unlike in the past, armed robbers now operate both day and night, targeting residences, businesses, banks, churches, and public spaces across all regions of Nigeria. Socioeconomic factors such as youth unemployment, corruption, and social disintegration further exacerbate crime rates. In the Niger Delta, illegal oil bunkering combined with arms proliferation has entrenched violence and criminality, creating a protracted conflict zone. Boko Haram's insurgency is driven by extremist ideologies at odds with mainstream Nigerian Islam, complicating efforts to resolve the crisis.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> "Kidnapping Incidence Estimated at 2.2m Cases – NBS." *NAM News Network*, 18 Dec. 2024, <https://www.nannews.ng/2024/12/18/kidnapping-incidence-estimated-at-2-2m-cases-nbs/>.

<sup>20</sup> R. Hull, J. Evans and S. Davis, "Money Laundering and Nigeria." In *Niger Delta Peace and Security Strategy Working Papers*, Port Harcourt: International Centre for Reconciliation, 2006, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Eke C. Chinwokwu, "Trend and Pattern of Violent Crimes in Nigeria: An Analysis of the Boko Haram Terrorist Outrage." *Journal of Culture, Society and Development*, Vol 3, 2014, p. 9.

Crime becomes a national concern when it is chronic and systematic, threatening societal well-being. Nigeria faces this reality, with armed robbery and violent crime causing widespread fear and loss. Criminality is part of human society, but its expression follows patterns linked to social and economic development. Less developed societies often experience higher rates of violent crime, including politically motivated killings, ethnic and religious clashes, and armed robbery. Recently, Nigeria has also confronted sophisticated criminal forms such as cybercrime, human trafficking, money laundering, banditry, and violent secessionist movements. Addressing Nigeria's crime and criminality challenges requires comprehensive strategies, including governance reforms, control of illegal arms, enhanced law enforcement capacity, socio-economic development, and technological integration in crime prevention. Without sustained efforts, crime will continue to undermine Nigeria's security, development, and social cohesion.

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

The prevalence of small arms and light weapons cannot be left off the map while we analyse the crimes taking place, especially after Nigeria's Civil War of 1967-1970 and the end of the Cold War. Even though there is a strict provision of punishment for illegal possession and use of arms and ammunition, arms-related crimes are spiralling, especially since 1990, up to contemporary times. It has become a serious concern that, daily, the issue of crime and criminal activities is reported on the various media platforms available to us. It is obvious that the provision for licensing and renewal of arms is very strict in the Act, but weak in implementation. Organised as well as corporate criminals are using small arms as they are easily available. Moreover, the border is open, and any kind of transaction is possible along the borderlands. This has resulted in a broad use of both locally produced firearms and those illegally acquired, even in gang fights within major urban cities in Nigeria. Foreign weapons are generally imported second-hand and include AK-47, pump-action shotguns, and pistols, among others.

Nigeria is a vast country covering 923,768 square kilometres, with more than 36,450 kilometres of land and maritime borders. Nigeria's borders are too extensive to be effectively policed by the Nigerian security forces. The country's maritime borders cannot be effectively covered by the Nigerian Navy. Similarly, Nigeria's security and armed forces cannot effectively control the extensive land borders. In Borno state, for example, owing to the porous nature of the border with Cameroon, the border may be crossed at any point by various means of transport during the dry season, thus rendering all the government's efforts to curb the activities of illegal aliens, bandits and smugglers ineffective.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to the porous nature of Nigeria's borders, the heterogeneous nature of the border communities is another source of crime and criminality in Nigeria. The famous 1884-1885 Berlin Conference, which led to the partitioning of Africa by the then colonial powers, were not fully aware of villages, communities, tribes and even ethnic groups living along the arbitrary boundaries.<sup>23</sup> The result was the apportionment of tribes and ethnic groups to different countries, so that today it is difficult in some border areas in Africa to ascertain who is a citizen or an alien. These trans-border communities are usually composed of kinsmen who owe allegiance to each other, sometimes at the expense of their governments. They intermarry and co-exist peacefully across state borders, and it is commonplace to come across members of the same family living on either side of a border. This recurring case has hampered effective community policing. The locals know how to evade security checks easily and are usually reluctant to volunteer as informants to the armed forces and security

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<sup>22</sup> P.Y. Adejo, "Crime and the Cross-Border Movement of Weapons: The Case of Nigeria." *Combating the Proliferation of Small and Light Weapons in West Africa: Handbook for the Training of Armed and Security Forces*. Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2005, pp. 93-94.

<sup>23</sup> Godspower A. Uduigwomen, "The Idere-Ito Agitation over Limestone Site: A Study of Resource Competition and Intra-Ethnic Relations in Cross River State." *Sophia: An African Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 18, No. 2, April 2018, p. 166

forces, especially on cross-border trafficking. In fact, for these communities, such trafficking is simply an honest means of earning a living.<sup>24</sup> This has resulted in trans-border crime and has fuelled conflicts and crises in Africa.

Naturally, traffickers make use of these porous borders to smuggle into Nigeria such different and dangerous products as drugs and arms. The growth in trafficking can be attributed to a shortage of personnel and contemporary technology to checkmate trans-border movements. The smuggling of arms and ammunition into Nigeria has reached alarming levels. Sometimes these arms imported into the country are concealed in clothing, vehicles and even foodstuffs. Citing instances, it was observed that:

During the first week of August 1999, Nigeria Customs intercepted six nationals of a West African country in a canoe in Lagos with 75,000 rounds of ammunition and bags containing rifles. Recent hauls by the customs service included 10,000 magazines in Ikeja (31 December 2001), as well as almost equally large hauls in Seme Border Station (February 2002) and at Tabido/Budo in Kwara State (March 2002). The Nigerian police also intercepted traffickers in Alabata, near Abeokuta, seizing 26,500 cartridges hidden in 106 boxes. The port of Warri in the Niger Delta is also regarded as a centre for arms smuggling and illegal trading. The traffickers operate from ships lying at anchor on the high seas, using faster small boats for transfers. These figures represent only a tiny sample of the total numbers of arms and ammunition which enter Nigeria and circulate illegally.<sup>25</sup>

The above quotation illustrates the alarming number of illegal arms and ammunition smuggled into the country, which proffers an understanding of the recurring and transformative nature of crime and criminality in Nigeria.

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<sup>24</sup> P.Y. Adejo, "Crime and the Cross-Border Movement of Weapons: The Case of Nigeria." p. 94.

<sup>25</sup> J.G. Yacubu, "Cooperation among Armed Forces and Security Forces in Combating the Proliferation of Small Arms." pp. 56-57.

Criminals in Nigeria also obtain small arms using theft. It was analysed that between 1998 and 2000, 196 weapons were registered as lost by the Nigeria Police Force. In Owerri, the customs service's armoury was burgled and a substantial quantity of arms was carried away by unknown persons. Arms belonging to the military have also been registered as stolen or lost. Aside from theft, there are reports of several attempts by civilians to obtain military arms and ammunition. Some reports refer to corrupt officials involved in these criminal activities.<sup>26</sup> It is no longer news that anything is possible in Nigeria. Corruption has eaten deep into the fibre of this country and has become a major trigger of Nigeria's stalled development as well as problems. Regarding the local production of arms in Nigeria, it was observed that in recent years, those engaged in producing local weapons have made large profits from their very lucrative trade in traditional weapons.

The black market for firearms in Nigeria remains active, with varying prices depending on the type and origin of the weapon. Craft-produced firearms, such as locally made shotguns, are generally less expensive. For example, a single-barrel shotgun can cost between NGN 14,000 and NGN 25,000, while a double-barrel shotgun ranges from NGN 30,000 to NGN 120,000. In contrast, industrially produced firearms, including pistols and assault rifles, are more expensive. A Beretta-type pistol can be priced between NGN 90,000 and NGN 120,000, whereas an AK-47-type assault rifle may cost between NGN 350,000 and NGN 450,000.<sup>27</sup> Bearing in mind the enormous profits recorded in arms trafficking, one may expect it to continue to be attractive. The profits incurred from the sales of arms are enormous, and the effects on society can no longer be overemphasised.

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<sup>26</sup> J.G. Yacubu, "Cooperation among Armed Forces and Security Forces in Combating the Proliferation of Small Arms." p. 57.

<sup>27</sup> Yode Akintunde, "Handmade and Deadly." *Briefing Paper*. Scribd, 9 Sept. 2020, [https://www.scribd.com/document/475370794/SAS-BP-Nigeria-craft-weapons?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.scribd.com/document/475370794/SAS-BP-Nigeria-craft-weapons?utm_source=chatgpt.com), Accessed 07/06/2025.

Elections in Nigeria are usually never peaceful. We cannot argue with the fact that literally all the states in Nigeria suffer from violence during political transitions. From Party primaries up to general elections, violence has always been the case. Those perpetrating this violence usually use small arms and light weapons given to them by politicians or organised groups. Similarly, Nigeria has also had a history of the use of armed forces to rig elections, disorganise the process and scare citizens from exercising their fundamental human rights and franchise. In explaining the source of the small arms' flow to the Niger Delta, the common position has pointed to politicians who have issued them to hired thugs to eliminate or maim perceived or real opponents. While there is an element of truth in this, given the high stakes and inordinate quest for political power among the political class and the spate of high-profile assassinations associated with elections, especially in 2003, the fact that the volatility of the Niger Delta crisis pre-dates the present democratic dispensation warrants other explanations.<sup>28</sup>

In the last decade, the rate of robbery with the use of sophisticated arms has become commonplace in Nigeria. Armed robbery is an important subject that has been studied widely by scholars, especially criminologists, across the globe. It involves the use of different levels of force and an array of different weapons to steal from individuals or corporate institutions.<sup>29</sup> Apart from organised robbery, where very sophisticated weapons are used, other common instruments used in Nigeria are locally made guns and knives/and machetes. Armed robbery attacks are usually directed at banks, shops, petrol stations, churches, domestic houses and highways or motorways. Armed robbers use weapon(s) to threaten, force and deprive a person or persons of the right to private, public or corporate

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<sup>28</sup> Abdel-Fatau Musah and Niobe Thamson, eds. *Over a Barrel: Light Weapons and Human Rights in the Commonwealth*. India: Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, November 1999, p. 12.

<sup>29</sup> O. Mimiko, *The Global Village. Selected Topics on International Economic Relations*. Akure: Olaniyan Publishing Company, 1997, p. 74.



belongings.<sup>30</sup> Recorded cases of armed robbery in Nigeria can be connected to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and as a result of the porosity of borders, especially in the West African Sub-region. With the ever-increasing population of Nigeria, the ability of the security forces to provide the needed security and the ultimate safety of lives and properties in most states and cities has become a major source of concern for the Nigerian government. In most states and cities of Nigeria today, criminal activities and violence have assumed dangerous tendencies as they threaten lives and property, the national sense of well-being and reduce the life expectancy rate. The fear of armed robbers, kidnappers, terrorists, Fulani herdsmen, Biafra agitators and bandits, which has made citizens live in perpetual fear, has resulted in the displacement of persons (IDPs) and has caused serious mayhem in the country.

As of 2025, Nigeria's police-to-citizen ratio remains critically low, estimated at approximately one policeman to 4,800 Nigerians, compared to about one officer to 400 persons in many developed countries. This chronic understaffing is exacerbated by the frequent deployment of officers to VIP protection duties, which further diminishes the manpower available to address widespread criminality. Coupled with inadequate internal security infrastructure and limited resources, the Nigerian Police Force continues to face significant operational constraints, rendering it vulnerable and often ineffective in curbing crime.<sup>31</sup> Urban crime in Nigeria also bears a strong demographic dimension. The increasing youth population, especially within urban poor communities, has expanded the pool of vulnerable young people who may be recruited into criminal gangs and networks. Young men aged 15 to 25 remain disproportionately involved as both perpetrators and victims of urban violence. This

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<sup>30</sup> Frank Perri, *et al.* "Evil Twins: The Crime-Terror Nexus". *Forensic Examiner*, 2009, p. 16.

<sup>31</sup> Lasisi and O.O. Olapeju, "Analysis of Urban Crime in Abeokuta City, Nigeria." p. 14.

demographic group is particularly susceptible to exploitation, criminal activity, and victimisation, highlighting a persistent social challenge that hampers effective crime control efforts.<sup>32</sup>

The rise in the crime wave in Nigeria fuels demand for small arms and light weapons. In response to the determination of the police to combat offences involving weapons more effectively, criminals acquire ever more sophisticated weapons. Consequently, the rise in crime leads to an increase in demand for increasingly powerful weapons, which the Nigerian Government usually fail to provide, thereby giving criminals the upper hand. When crimes go unpunished, citizens look elsewhere for their protection: private security teams, militias and unlawful acquisition of weapons. These further compound the problem and ensure the continuous and widespread proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

Due to the easy availability of small arms, there has been an upsurge of crimes, including armed robberies, car-jacking and armed cattle rustling in many communities. Small arms have become the weapons of choice for the traditional pastoral activities or intercommunal conflicts.<sup>33</sup> In Benue State, violent conflicts between the Tiv community and Fulani nomads continue to be a significant security challenge. These clashes, often marked by intense fighting and bloodshed, primarily arise from disputes over grazing land, a resource deeply valued for pasturing, settlement, and livelihood. The competition for land remains a critical driver of communal violence, exacerbated by broader issues such as population growth, climate change impacts on grazing patterns, and weak conflict resolution

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<sup>32</sup> Lasisi and O.O. Olapeju, "Analysis of Urban Crime in Abeokuta City, Nigeria." pp. 14-15.

<sup>33</sup> Elli Kytomaki and Valerie Yankey-Wayne, *Five Years of Implementing the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons: Regional Analysis of National Reports*. Geneva: United Nations Institute of Disarmament Research, 2006, p. 46.

mechanisms in the region. The conflict has led to the displacement of people from their homes and the loss of family ties.<sup>34</sup>

Some of the most dramatic changes are occurring in traditional pastoral communities in Africa. This concerns inter-clan feuds over a dwindling resource base – cattle, water sources and vegetation – and subsequent renewal of territorial land. Small arms and light weapons have become the weapons of choice for the traditional pastoral activities or intercommunal disputes over resources, for example, cattle rustling. The effects have made confrontations more deadly.<sup>35</sup> These accounts, coupled with contemporary cases of herdsmen and aborigine crises across the country, the armament of herdsmen has caused serious human casualties, displacements and ethnic conflicts. The widespread movement of herdsmen armed with small arms and light weapons remains a major security concern, severely undermining Nigeria's unity and safety. Incidents involving armed herdsmen and their destructive activities have become increasingly frequent and destabilising across the country. Additionally, banditry, especially rampant in Northern Nigeria, has compounded the challenges posed by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The kidnapping of school children and university students, including high-profile cases like the Chibok Girls abduction by Boko Haram, continues to haunt Nigeria's security landscape. Consequently, Nigeria remains plagued by a complex array of security threats driven largely by the unchecked spread of small arms and light weapons, which severely constrain efforts to restore peace and order.

The government is no better. Apart from serving as a cover to perpetrate gross human rights abuses, it has also been a source of small arms. It is common knowledge that in the wake of the

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<sup>34</sup> Ignatius Madu and Chinero Nneka Ayogu, "Geography and Conflicts." *Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria: A Reader*, Miriam Ikejiani-Clark (ed). Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2009, p. 422.

<sup>35</sup> Kytomaki and Valerie Yankey-Wayne, *Five Years of Implementing the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons: Regional Analysis of National Reports*. p. 28.

escalation of violence in the Niger Delta during Obasanjo's regime, oil companies not only armed private security personnel to render security services, they also "reached an agreement with the government to import weapons for Nigerian troops".<sup>36</sup> This report provides a progression in the discourse on small arms and light weapons' proliferation in Nigeria. It can be alleged that criminal elements in the nation and some in the government (at all levels) as well, are culprits in this criminal act. From the foregoing, it is obvious that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, as well as the accompanied crime and criminality, pose a serious threat to National and human security.

### **Challenges for National Security**

National security embodies the sovereignty of the state, the inviolability of its territorial boundaries, and the right to individual and collective self-defence against internal and external threats. The state is secure only when the people organised under it share a consciousness of belonging to a common sovereign political community, enjoy equal political freedoms, human rights, and economic opportunities, and when the state itself can maintain independence in its development and foreign policy. When national security is said to be threatened, it indicates a rise in crime waves, crises, and violent conflicts that endanger the lives of citizens and the safety of national property. National security does not refer to the defence and survival of the state. There is danger when individuals view national security and similar emerging issues from this parochial angle. Perhaps, the greatest danger is the tendency to equate national security with the security of the state. The state is not synonymous with the nation. The state in a parasitic capitalist country like Nigeria is an instrument for the preservation of the capitalist socio-economic order, which protects the interests of the privileged class vis-à-vis the masses, thereby generating insecurity.<sup>37</sup> National security, therefore, is the safekeeping of the nation

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<sup>36</sup> Musah and Niobe Thamson, eds. *Over a Barrel: Light Weapons and Human Rights in the Commonwealth*. p. 13.

<sup>37</sup> T.A. Imobighe, *Nigerian Defence and Security Issues and Options for Policy*. Jos: National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, 1987.

as a whole. It is the protection of the nation and its people from attack, internal and external, by maintaining the armed and security forces and adequately guarding the state.

The excessive and uncontrolled accumulation of small arms has led to the emergence of groups of armed individuals operating across and beyond state borders: rebel movements, private militias, terrorists, drug traffickers, arms dealers, and so on. In some cases, the proliferation of armed groups undermines the authority of the state and its ability to guarantee the safety of its citizens. Everyday experience in West Africa shows that the proliferation of small arms is a catalyst for crises and armed violence and helps to destabilize governments and states, in particular as a result of the activities of subversive movements, guerrilla campaigns, terrorism, drug trafficking, civil wars and other attacks on fundamental rights and human dignity. Consequently, it has become vital for all West African states to curb the proliferation of small arms.<sup>38</sup> To combat the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, the heads of state and government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) declared a moratorium on the importation, exportation and manufacture of small arms and light weapons on 31<sup>st</sup> October, 1998.<sup>39</sup>

In enforcing the West African moratorium on small arms, the armed forces and security forces remain the key agents of halting the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. It must be stated at this juncture that the moratorium declared by ECOWAS has not been effective due to the present realities on the ground. The present kidnapping, banditry, terrorism and other criminal activities, especially in Nigeria and other cases in West Africa, suggest the unviability of this movement. Arms and ammunition continue to move freely across borders, and crime rates are skyrocketing, so the

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<sup>38</sup> Yacubu, "Cooperation among Armed Forces and Security Forces in Combating the Proliferation of Small Arms." p. 55.

<sup>39</sup> Yacubu, "Cooperation among Armed Forces and Security Forces in Combating the Proliferation of Small Arms." p. 55.

security and armed forces in Nigeria remain overwhelmed. This then leads to a position that the eclipse of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria and West Africa remains a ‘noble dream’. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons has continuously resulted in crime and criminal activities in Nigeria, which has continually threatened national security because citizens, security and armed personnel, and even the government, have, in one way or the other, had a fair share of the resultant effects.

### **Arms Control: Changing the Status Quo Or Supporting It?**

Based on the foregoing, it is expedient to appraise the efforts of the Nigerian State and the Regional body (ECOWAS) on disarmament and arms control. It was noted earlier that in Nigeria, criminal elements and some individuals in government have been culprits in the proliferation of small arms, light weapons, and criminality. From banditry to terrorism, kidnapping, armed robbery, and violence during political transitional periods, among others, these issues have inspired new thinking about whether the Nigerian government supports the recurring proliferation of small arms and light weapons and its resultant insecurity or is now exhibiting decisive actions to mitigate it, thereby ensuring the safety of lives and the adequate provision of national security.

The United Nations Member States convened in New York from 26th June to 7th July 2006 for the first conference to review progress made in the implementation of the Program of Action (PoA) to prevent, combat, and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects, which had been adopted in 2001. However, it was observed that there were difficulties in obtaining comprehensive information and in accurately “measuring” the actual impact of small arms and light weapons, leading some to question the value of the current concrete implementation efforts. As a global framework agreement on small arms, the PoA was designed not simply as an implementation mechanism in itself, but also as a stimulus for developing national, regional, and global activities addressing small arms and light weapons in various issue areas. The emergence of various regional

and subregional instruments to tackle the small arms problem can be seen as a positive development in this regard.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, a subsequent appraisal of this regional effort remains vital to understanding the present security realities in Africa.

The proliferation of light weapons occupies a prominent place in African conflicts, largely due to their advantages: they are cheap, easy to transport and conceal, simple to maintain, and easy to handle. Looking back to the 1970s, the outbreak or conclusion of wars in Africa, whether wars of conquest (such as in the Spanish Sahara or Saguiet-el-Hamra), wars of national liberation (Portuguese Guinea, 1958–1973), or internal conflicts (like the Nigerian Civil War, 1967–1970), can be seen as foundational to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons across the continent. It must be noted that disarmament often does not follow the end of these conflicts, and as a result, many combatants continued to carry arms. The ethnic upheavals, challenges to state sovereignty, and power struggles in the aftermath of these conventional conflicts created endemic crisis zones where destabilised state apparatuses were no longer able to maintain effective control over borders.<sup>41</sup> Porous borders facilitate the movement of criminals and the circulation of arms across African frontiers. Such movements are further complicated by collusion between population groups in border regions, as this study has shown.

The miserable living conditions of the security forces and military personnel in the border regions are also a major factor in the development of cross-border crime. This situation not only generates corruption but also encourages the agents themselves to commit a crime.

Security agents can be observed hiring out their arms to criminals to enable them to engage in lawbreaking in neighbouring countries. The booty is usually then shared out

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<sup>40</sup> Kytomaki and Yankey-Wayne, *Five Years of Implementing the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons: Regional Analysis of National Reports*. pp. 7-8.

<sup>41</sup> Hamedine Fall, “Border Controls and Cross-Border Crime in West Africa.” *Combating the Proliferation of Small and Light Weapons in West Africa: Handbook for the Training of Armed and Security Forces*. Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2005, p. 86.

between the criminal and the owner of the weapon in clearly defined proportions. The criminals operate in villages and individual homes using information furnished to them by their accomplices in the security forces and military. In the event of problems, these cross-border criminals generally receive cover and protection from a police accomplice. Unfortunately, many of the states in the sub-region are incapable of paying wages to their security personnel and are apparently unable to punish these lawless activities. What is more serious is that some of the higher-ranking members of the military or state hierarchy can increasingly be seen to be participating in these crimes.<sup>42</sup>

The above quotation is self-explanatory, as situations have not improved in contemporary times. To a certain degree, law enforcement institutions like the police are seriously overwhelmed in their capacity to fight these scourges. What is worrisome, however, is that the police, which are meant to be the antidote to criminality, appear to be getting overwhelmed by the phenomenon. The criminals appear to be ahead of the police, such that the latter now only react to the commission of crimes and usually after the offenders might have departed the scene. What is even more worrisome is that, rather than evoke confidence and hope in the public, the appearance of our policemen often conjures in the public a sad and depressing feeling of fear and mistrust.

Economically, most of the countries in the subregion have faced economic crises for several years. This difficulty entails that security personnel are either not paid or underpaid, thereby making the borders continually porous and vulnerable to arms traffickers and criminals. West African border control is poor and inadequate, in particular because of the lack of technical infrastructure and human resources. The dilapidation of border control points is compounded by the dispiritedness of the security services personnel. West African borders are also tortuous. The nature of most terrain has a considerable influence on the effectiveness of border patrols. West African borders are extremely long,

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<sup>42</sup> Hamedine Fall, "Border Controls and Cross-Border Crime in West Africa." pp. 86-87.



and as a result, border surveillance is costly.<sup>43</sup> Cross-border crime is certainly one of the major threats today to peace, stability and regional integration in West Africa. In a situation in which criminals attack a particular state and find shelter or protection with its neighbour, it makes it a herculean task to imagine a peaceful and cooperative union.

Given the engagement of the military in keeping order, which is exceptional, both the armed forces and the security forces need appropriate training in order to cope better with the challenges they face. Modern techniques, small arms collection methods, tracking drugs and cross-border crimes, maintenance of weapons stockpiles, disarmament and reintegration of ex-combatants into civilian life, cross-border cooperation between security forces and local communities, methods of spreading the cultures of peace and methods and techniques for maintaining arms registers,<sup>44</sup> are therefore the panacea for mitigating the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

Cooperation between civilians and the security forces in efforts to combat the proliferation of small arms and light weapons typifies interaction between citizens and institutions lawfully responsible for security in keeping with the rules and regulations laid down by the state. The ultimate aim of this cooperation is durable peace and security, and development for all.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, success in combating this proliferation requires cooperation among states, whether it be bilateral or multilateral. Exchange of information, joint surveillance of borders and judicial assistance are the best collaborative approaches in curbing this proliferation. Cooperation can help stop criminality within borders.

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<sup>43</sup> Hamedine Fall, "Border Controls and Cross-Border Crime in West Africa." p. 87.

<sup>44</sup> Sunday Ochoche, "Cooperation Between Civilians and the Security Forces in Efforts to Combat the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons." *Combating the Proliferation of Small and Light Weapons in West Africa: Handbook for the Training of Armed and Security Forces*. Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2005, p. 74.

<sup>45</sup> Sunday Ochoche, "Cooperation Between Civilians and the Security Forces in Efforts to Combat the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons." pp. 73-74.

Exchanges of information may occur officially between one state and another or through Interpol. Cooperation in border surveillance may extend as far as the organisation of joint actions such as patrols.<sup>46</sup> Border controls and the fight against cross-border crime demand very considerable human, material and financial resources beyond the capacity of individual West African states. Interstate cooperation is, therefore, very necessary for combating this scourge effectively and efficiently.

Judicial cooperation is a question of gathering testimony or statements, collecting legal documents, and making detained persons or other persons available to the judicial authorities of a state to provide testimony. A good level of judicial cooperation prevails at the borders, where the security forces help one another in combating crime, including trafficking in light weapons. Here, too, in addition to the exchange of information, offenders in one country are often arrested and handed over to the forces in another country without special formalities. In this area, the personal relations established between the different authorities in charge of security matters on the border sometimes play a major role, making written rules of secondary importance.<sup>47</sup> Weapon collection and destruction are also very crucial in changing the status quo. They play a critical role in small arms control as a means to remove illicit and surplus weapons from circulation. The destruction of surplus stocks is reported to be a major issue, especially in Africa, where national reports contain several references to future needs of assistance in these efforts.

The persistent inability of the Nigerian state to effectively control the circulation of small arms and light weapons reflects deep structural weaknesses within its institutions. Factors such as corruption, inadequate policing, and the failure to secure extensive and porous borders have severely

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<sup>46</sup> Djibril Ndime, "Cooperation Between States to Combat the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons." p. 81.

<sup>47</sup> Djibril Ndime, "Cooperation Between States to Combat the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons." p. 82.

compromised the state's capacity to guarantee the safety and security of its citizens. This institutional fragility creates an enabling environment for illicit arms trafficking and the proliferation of violence, which in turn undermines political stability and development. The entrenchment of violent criminal networks and armed groups further exacerbates insecurity, demonstrating that without robust state structures and governance reforms, efforts to curb the spread of illegal weapons will remain largely ineffective.

Furthermore, the insecurity associated with the proliferation of arms in Nigeria is inseparable from regional dynamics in West Africa. The cross-border movement of weapons, people, and illicit activities highlights the interconnectedness of security challenges in the region. Porous borders and the complicity or collusion of groups operating across national boundaries make unilateral efforts insufficient. The biggest challenge for arms control in the region has been addressing the problem within the nexus of security, humanitarian and development dimensions of post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building. Furthermore, the region has yet to adequately build its legal and administrative capacity to address the menace of small arms transfers through theft from government arsenals and the transfer of arms between subnational groups, armed deserters and demobilised soldiers and criminals.<sup>48</sup>

The problems posed by the illicit trade and proliferation of small arms are complex and multidimensional and cannot effectively be tackled without strong political will at the national level, combined with international cooperation and assistance. Developing partnerships and enhancing regional action, with the support of international organisations, are crucial in guaranteeing a continuous and fruitful process.<sup>49</sup> The government holds a critical responsibility in monitoring and controlling the

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<sup>48</sup> Kytomaki and Yankey-Wayne, *Five Years of Implementing the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons: Regional Analysis of National Reports*. p. 21.

<sup>49</sup> Kytomaki and Yankey-Wayne, *Five Years of Implementing the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons: Regional Analysis of National Reports*. p. 17.

proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Today, this responsibility is more pressing than ever, as the widespread circulation of illegal weapons continues to undermine government credibility and fuels rising crime rates and insecurity. The failure to effectively curb this phenomenon not only weakens state authority but also erodes public trust. Additionally, the government's role in regulating the issuance of permits for weapon ownership remains crucial. In a society where citizens feel genuinely protected by the state, there would be little demand for personal arms for self-defence.<sup>50</sup> In the current West African context, particularly in Nigeria, the government should move beyond maintaining the status quo and adopt comprehensive, proactive strategies. This includes implementing holistic disarmament policies supported by economic development initiatives that create jobs and foster a conducive environment for local businesses. Equally important is the careful management and reintegration of ex-criminals, convicts, terrorists, bandits, kidnappers, and former combatants into society to prevent recidivism and promote social stability. Addressing the herdsmen crisis also demands practical solutions, such as establishing ranches and designating grazing reserves from government land to reduce conflicts. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons must be actively managed now to safeguard present and future security, protect communities, and restore trust in state institutions.

Regional cooperation and coordinated security strategies are therefore essential to effectively manage arms trafficking and its destabilising effects. Strengthening national institutions alongside robust regional partnerships presents the most viable path toward mitigating the threats posed by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, ensuring both national and regional stability.

## Conclusion

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<sup>50</sup> Yacubu, "Cooperation among Armed Forces and Security Forces in Combating the Proliferation of Small Arms." P. 69.

Although armed conflicts in Africa have generally declined since their peak in the late 20th century, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons remains a persistent threat to stability, particularly in fragile and post-conflict regions. Security continues to be volatile, with risks of renewed violence fuelled by unresolved tensions and underlying socio-political grievances. Much of the weaponry circulating in West Africa today still originates from the civil wars of the 1970s and the geopolitical shifts following the end of the Cold War in the 1990s. This legacy proliferation is exacerbated by long, porous, and often unmanned borders, allowing arms and criminals to move with relative ease.

This destabilising environment has compelled some sub-Saharan states to seek and receive international assistance, including from the United Nations and regional bodies such as ECOWAS. The security landscape today is further complicated by the rise of armed robbery, insurgency, banditry, militancy, terrorism, and transnational crimes like drug trafficking. As states struggle to maintain control over their security apparatus and protect citizens, the demand for weapons among civilians seeking self-defence continues to grow, worsening an already fragile security situation.

To effectively address these recurring security challenges, it is essential that the Nigerian government, in collaboration with ECOWAS and other regional stakeholders, develop and implement comprehensive policy frameworks. These should focus on reducing tensions through inclusive political dialogue, economic justice, job creation, and social reintegration of former combatants. Strengthening border security, enhancing regional cooperation, and fostering community-based security initiatives will also be critical in achieving sustainable national and regional security.

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