

National Security and the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria, 2010-2022

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Abstract

This study examined the proliferation of small arms and light weapons as a dimension of the myriad of problems in Nigeria. Nigeria is going through serious cases of insecurity across its territory. This state of insecurity which is mainly orchestrated by the use of small arms has resulted in mayhem, deaths, displacement, and destruction of lives and property in the country. Methodologically, it utilized causal design relying on secondary sources of data collection and documentary evidence which was also analysed qualitatively. Findings have shown that small arms are maximally utilized to perpetrate crimes by various individuals and groups in all areas of the country. The menace has not spared any region ranging from the South-south, South-east, South-west, North-west, North-central and North-east. This study further showed that there is currently intensity of the phenomenon of small arms and light weapons related criminalities in Northeast, Northwest and Southeast. In the Northeast, the activities of Boko Haram are raging. In Northwest, the activities of Fulani militias/invaders have resulted to killings, kidnappings, abductions and displacement of communities. While, in the Southeast, there is Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) militia wing called Eastern Security Network (ESN) and yet to be identified groups called unknown Gunmen who kill and kidnap both security agents and innocent citizens. As such, this study recommends that the issue of effective policing of Nigeria's porous borders should be made a priority and the government should as well ensure adequate welfare and overall wellbeing of security agents.

Keywords: Light weapon, Nigeria, Proliferation, Security and Small Arms

Introduction

The nature of insecurity in Nigeria has heightened since the last decade. It has even become worse recently. The inordinate quest by individuals, groups, communities, militias, cultists as well as some ethnic based terror groups to procure weapons is key to the high level of proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in Nigeria. This period has witnessed the continued activities of militant groups in the Niger Delta, the rise of Boko Haram insurgency in the northeastern part of the country, increased cases of farmers/herders clashes, acts of banditry, kidnappings, the activities of Indigenous People of Biafra and Eastern security Network, etc. The aforementioned activities are actively prosecuted through the utilization of illicit small arms that are mainly proliferated through the porous borders of Nigeria. Nigeria, as stated by Iloani and Sunday (2016) in Adamu, Mat and Taya (2018), has ended up as a preferred destination and centre for small arms in Africa. He went to state further that arms that were illegally smuggled into Nigeria were destined to places where there are violence, ethnic and religious conflicts, insurgent activities, armed crimes, etc. Adamu, et al (2018) posited that even though there are no accurate data on the quantity of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria, reports have shown that out of ten (10) million illicit small arms in West Africa, one to three million are in circulation in Nigeria.

The above assertion is no doubt responsible for the acts of terror that is currently pervading the landscape of Nigeria. Tales of agony, anguish and despair is now commonplace due to the acts insurgency, banditry, Kidnappings, armed robbery, cultism, militancy and violent crimes etc, across Nigeria. All of these are because of the easy flow or circulation of illicit small arms and light weapons. A report by This Day (2021) shows that kidnappings and violent killing perpetrated by bandits have become a recurring decimal with no fewer than 590 lives lost in April 2021 alone. The report also reveals that there were 160 violent attacks in 31 of the 36 states of the federation within the period. It further gave a sectoral detail on the number of deaths as follows: north-west 161 deaths, north-central 149 deaths, north-east 140 deaths, south-east 64 deaths, south-south, 53 deaths while south-west had

33 deaths. All the above reported deaths were of course, caused by persons bearing illicit proliferated small arms (Miller, 2022).

Small arms and light weapons (SALW) are obviously very rampant in Nigeria. It has moved beyond being used by government security agencies, assassins, armed robbers, etc, to become veritable tools for aggression and domination by certain groups within Nigeria. No doubt that small arms have become a serious factor that has enhanced insecurity in Nigeria. Its efficient nature, easy handling with limited training has exacerbated indiscriminate usage. The associated result to this situation is the trails of deaths, displacements, devastation, destructions and as well damages it has caused to the people and the economy of the nation. Alimba (2017) opined that the increase in the firepower of ethnic militias such as OPC, MEND, MASSOB, Armed herdsmen, Boko haram insurgents is (in fact) the resultant effects of excessive availability of arms in the country. In addition, at the macro level, small arms have contributed significantly to the formation of militarized behavior, attitude and world view which have promoted the mentality of resolving differences with guns. These guns, he continued, have become a channel of communication in expressing grievances which seems to have become fashionable in Nigeria.

Though the menace of small arms and light weapons (SALW) is not peculiar to Nigeria, it is in fact a global menace. But its use in recent times in Nigeria has been exacerbated by a plethora of tones from various segments of Nigeria that elicits hate, divisiveness, discontentment, despair, and marginalization (Akaragha, 2021). It is however hoped that there is re-evaluation and re-examination of the issue of small arms and light weapons proliferation and its implication to human security, as well as national security of Nigeria. This is with the view of ensuring, by the government, that its circulation is contained or controlled. In other words, this study examines the role of proliferation of small arms and light weapons play as it affects the security of Nigeria.

The Nature of Small arms and Light Weapons Proliferation in Nigeria

It is undoubtedly obvious that the adverse effect of small arms and light weapons (SALW) proliferation, especially the illicit flow of small arms and light weapons are enormous. The consequences of the use of illegal small arms have been greatly felt by Nigerians. The commission of dangerous and violent crimes which have strong nexus to the

possession of small arms, and as well, other weapons has increased the threat to the security of individuals, communities and the country at large. The most dangerous and serious problem is the use of small arms by criminal groups and gangsters which among other things is associated to a greater incident of violent crimes such as armed robbery, kidnappings, hostage-taking and rape (Adamu, Mat and Taya, 2018).

In discussing the effect of SALW proliferation Malam (2014), views that the supply of illicit small arms stimulates violence instead of dialogue and has informed many undesirable effects. He added that the high level of armed violence hinders development, misuse of public money and imposition of (the mindset of) “might is right”.

It is evident in Nigeria that illegal small arms proliferation is the heart and backbone of the increased militancy in the Niger Delta, insurgency in the North-east, kidnappings for ransom in the northwest, killings in Kaduna, Benue, plateau, Ebonyi, Anambra, Enugu, Imo States among others (Amechere, 2021).

Also, the proliferation of small arms aided and still aids numerous communal, sectarian, ethno-religious, election’s violence, cultism and the general rise of armed ethnic militias and criminal gangs and groups across Nigeria. Nigeria in the past decade had had a great dose of the phenomenon, small arms proliferation. Malam (2014) further notes that Nigeria in the past decade witnessed increased violence and small arms circulation, it proliferation was attributed to the existence and stagnation of electoral injustice, ethnic bigotry and religious intolerance coupled with high level of poverty and unemployment. These key elements are viewed, as he pointed out, “as the basis upon which conflicts are fueled in Nigeria”. It is apt to mention that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons impacts adversely on more than just individuals’ wellbeing; it typically has the potential to challenge the very existence of the state.

In a democratizing polity like Nigeria, where resources tend to be scarce and state capacity is relatively weak, small arms provides ethnic warriors with the means of power in criminal activities, and in the process, severely undermines the rule of law. Consequently, this leads to increasing sense of insecurity as a result of lack of faith in the state’s ability to provide personal protection, Soetan (2017). The above assertion speaks volume of the spate of criminal activities that Nigeria has witnessed in all parts of the country, most of which are

directly aided by easy flow and prevalence of small arms and light weapons that have circulated to the hands of criminals.

Small arms and light weapons proliferation has caused wars and aided a lot civil unrests in West African and in Nigeria in particular. Civil war was fought in Nigeria between 1967- 1970. In Liberia, Sierra Leon, Ivory Coast, Mali and Guinea, wars have been fought that were aided by the easy flow of small arms. These situations caused the increased of displaced people, generated an atmosphere of chaos, fear, brigandage and culture of violence (Wolfe, 2021). SALW proliferation tends to encourage internal conflicts in Nigeria, promotes violence as a way of settling conflicts and widens the scope of criminality in the Nigerian society. With the availability and accessibility of small arms, there is the high probability of the emergence of armed groups and other organized crime syndicate. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons encourages the proliferation of ethnic militias, cultists, kidnappers, assassins, armed robbers, pipeline vandals, insurgents, terrorists and bandits in Nigeria.

Below gave a tabular representation of groups form along ethnic line who lay eay assess to the acquisition of arms.

Table 1: The Various Regional Organizations in Nigeria

S/N	Name of Group	Region	Purpose	Approach
1	IPOB/ MASSOB	East (open to negotiation)	Political Emancipation, marginalization, Biafran.	Demonstration and sensitization
2	MEND, Ijaw Youth Movement, Niger Delta Avengers (NDA)	South (open to negotiation)	Demand for Justice	Destruction of Industrial and oil installations, Kidnapping and confrontations
3	Alaye/	West (open to negotiation)	Political Compensation, Oduduwa Rep., Political Emancipation	Distraction and Demonstration
4	Boko Haram,	North (not open to negotiation)	Undefined, Western	Bombing and sporadic killings, use

Source: Compiled Researcher, 2022

Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation and Insurgency (Terrorism) in Nigeria

Boko Haram insurgency has been active in the northeastern Nigeria since 2010. This is a situation that was made possible by easy flow of illicit small arms and light weapons through the Nigeria's border with Chad, Niger and the Cameroun. According to Gofwan, Ishaya and Ado (2019), they explained that "the proliferation of small arms and light weapons is often one of the major security obstacles 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 of any country".

The Boko Haram insurgency in the northeastern part of Nigeria has succeeded in creating ungoverned spaces where these terrorists reigned supreme with brute force. This is a situation that has resulted to the killings and displacement of many Nigerians and social development of the region. A Morgan report (2021) culled from <https://guardian.ng/news> indicates that 'the primary drivers of (Boko Haram) violence are radical Islamist groups attempt to carve a sphere of influence or an Islamic caliphate. The Boko Haram terrorist group operates within this axis'. Boko Haram and its offshoot, the Islamic State in West African Province (ISWAP) continue to be Nigeria's most serious security threats. Violent events linked to these groups have roughly doubled since 2015, Duerksen (2021). The insurgent groups have continued to mount campaign of terror and raid on cities, town and villages in the northeast. Duerksen (2021) further pointed out that

"At times...fortified garrison towns have themselves become vulnerable to large-scale attacks (of Boko Haram). Caches of arms, ammunition and vehicles are often the target of raids on military installations. Many of these stockpile losses are not tracked, making it more difficult to establish the groups capabilities".

The scenario above repeatedly occurs in the northeastern part of Nigeria and is one major reason that had made the Boko Haram insurgency to persist. This is because each

success on such raids emboldens them. Some security experts and analysts are of the view that the war against Boko Haram insurgency will linger for longer period since there has not been a holistic, concerted and coordinated efforts and political will on the part of the Nigerian government and the military to deal harshly with this menace of Boko Haram in the Northeast of Nigeria.

Small Arms and Light Weapons and Kidnappings/Abductions

Small arms proliferation in Nigeria has enormously fueled cases of armed kidnappings and abductions. Organized criminal gangs have adopted the lucrative illicit acts of kidnappings for ransom, especially in the north-west axis of Nigeria. Although other parts of the country do experience this heinous phenomenon but in the past four years, the northwestern axis of the country has led in chart for this occurrence. It could be seen that the successes of the kidnap and abduction of Chibok school girls in 2014 and those of Dapchi in 2018 in the northeast may have open the floodgate of kidnappings and abductions in the northwest. This on one hand is because, despite denials by governments that ransoms were not paid, the on the ground account of these happenings contradicts governments' position (Miller, 2022).

The activities of these armed bandits and kidnapers in the northwestern axis of Nigeria - although other parts of the country do experience this same heinous phenomenon at intervals - has dealt a dangerous blow on education, food supply, infrastructure development, health services and social development of the area. As schools and farming communities were primarily targeted by bandits. The Zamfara State Government had once estimated that 10,000 bandits are spread between 40 camps in the state (Duerksen, 2021).

As stated above, the kidnapping for ransom is not peculiar or limited to the northwest of Nigeria. In retrospect, kidnapping for ransom was popularized in Nigeria by the Niger Delta militants in early 2000s. In reliving the origin of kidnappings for ransom in Nigeria, Igoh Akaragha was of the view that "the origin of kidnappings could be traced to the activities of the Niger Delta militants. A situation in which was targeted at getting international attention to the neglect and environmental degradation of the Niger Delta region and its people over oil and gas exploration and exploitations. In doing this, white or foreign expatriate staff of the multi-national oil companies was kidnapped (Akaragha,

2021). He further explained that, in most cases, multinational companies prefer to negotiate for the release through the payment of ransom to these militants. This acts later exacerbated this situation by making it a lucrative venture for other militants to indulge in it to make money.

All these they did with the active use of small arms and light weapons (SALW), as well as the use of out-board speed boats which they use to navigate with ease the labyrinths of creeks, swamps, rivers and of course, the sea. Over time, kidnapping crept into the southeastern part of Nigeria and then became a whole Nigeria's experience as small arms trotting gangs, cultists, Fulani militias, etc roams un-hinged across Nigeria, especially in the past decade. Kidnappings and abductions have continued to prevail in the northwest of Nigeria. Abductions of school children in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions have become rampant. The abduction of students of Government Secondary School, Kankara Katsina state, Nuhu Bamali Polytechnic, Zaria, Greenfield University Kaduna, Baptist College Kaduna and 150 Islamiyya pupils in the zone are cases of reference in the recent past (Miller, 2022).

A report in this regard by Nigeria Security Tracker between the months of January to June 2021 on reported cases of kidnappings and abductions shows as follows in the six geopolitical zones.

Table 2: National Security Tracker Survey on Zonal Basis

S/NO	GEOPOLITICAL ZONE	NO. OF KIDNAPP CASES
1	Northwest	1,405
2	North Central	942
3	Northeast	210
4	South South	140
5	Southwest	169
6	Southeast	77
	TOTAL	2.943

Source: NST security incident report January-June 2021

The figures above showed that of the 2,943 kidnappings recorded in six months, 2,557 kidnapped cases are from the northern part of Nigeria. While 386 cases were kidnappings in the southern part.

Furthermore, in the same period the National Security Tracker report showed the level of insecurity in Nigeria as it relates to reported cases of kidnappings. The top twelve (12) states with most kidnap incidents in six months that is January to June 2021 are as under-listed;

Table 3: NST's Twelve Most Recorded States of Kidnapping

S/NO	STATE	NO. OF KIDNAPPED VICTIMS
1	Niger	795
2	Zamfara	523
3	Kaduna	379
4	Katsina	289
5	Borno	115
6	Kebbi	103
7	Oyo	63
8	Delta	55
9	Taraba	55
10	FCT	52
11	Edo	37
12	Imo	33
13	TOTAL	2,599

Source: NST security incident report January-June 2021

The Nigeria security tracker report also showed reported hotbeds of deaths and kidnappings in the same period in Nigeria in top seven (7) states;

Table 4: NST's Seven Hotbed of Deaths and Kidnappings

S/NO	STATE	NO. OF DEATHS	NO. OF KIDNAPPINGS
1	Borno	1137	115
2	Zamfara	862	523
3	Kaduna	715	479
4	Benue	449	9
5	Niger	407	795
6	Ebonyi	201	5
7	Katsina	164	289
	TOTAL	3,935	2,215

Source: NST Security Incident Report January-June 2021

The spate of Kidnappings and abductions for ransom has not shown any sign of abating. The perpetrators see it as a lucrative business which they indulge with the aid of illicit small arms and light weapons.

Small Arms and Niger Delta Militancy/ Illegal Oil Bunkering

The delta of the Niger River has labyrinth of creeks, swamps, streams and rivers that flows in the Atlantic Ocean region known as the Gulf of Guinea. It is endowed with crude oil and gas. After decades of exploration and exploitation, there has been obvious trail of neglect, poverty, unemployment, restiveness, deprivation and marginalization of the various oil bearing, host and transmitting communities in Niger Delta region (Olaniyi, 2017).

Owing to the above, agitations have been rife from across the region against marginalization for there to be even and equitable distribution of funds derived from regions. In sometimes these agitations result to violent acts which involve the use of small arms that includes kidnapping and abduction of foreign nationals/expatriates that works for the multinational oil for companies, the destruction of oil pipelines as well as crude oil theft, etc. Duerksen (2021) opined that:

Groups in the Niger Delta have claimed to be motivated by the actions of multinational oil companies which have polluted and impoverished the region. There is a lineage of anger in the Niger Delta over this situation that has been voiced by likes of KenSaro-Wiwa and the Ogoni people. Many fishers and farmers in the region have had their livelihoods destroyed by contaminated land and water.

The state of affair in the Niger Delta, especially since 1999, has given rise to plethora armed groups and militias. The agitations turned militant and small arms and light weapons are items of choice that were utilized to further the spate of militancy, crude oil theft, illegal oil bunkering and pipeline vandalism in the region.

Groups that have emerged in the region and have remained active the years over with the use of small arms are Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Egbesu Boys, Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), Bakassi Strike Force Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Niger Delta People Vigilante Group (NDPVG), among others.

Abiodun, et al (2018) cites Vanguard report that state that; “the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) has continued to launch attacks on some major oil installations in the oil rich region, using the various arms, IEDS and ammunition in their possession” (Yoneda, 2021).

At the end of attacks on oil facilities in the Niger Delta region, there are always associated consequence such as deaths, destructions of oil facilities and even communities, disruption of social lives and loss of oil revenue to the government.

Small Arms and Light Weapons and Fulani Militia Activities in Nigeria

Nigeria’s internal security has worsened in the past few years due to the rampaging and invading small arms bearing Fulani militias in virtually all parts of the country. A close view of the activities of these militias shows that it has further exacerbated Herders/Farmers clashes, cattle rustlings, kidnappings and abductions for ransom, ethnic tensions leaving trails of deaths, agony, anguish and despair among their victims. The hotbed of the activities of the Fulani militia is the North-west and North-central but there were as well reported cases of their activities in South-west, South-east and South-south regions (Salihu and Ozden, 2020). According to a Morgan (2021) intelligence report accessed via <http://guardian.ng/news>, it states that “the proliferation of small weapons coupled with existing state of corruption, large tracks of ungoverned spaces and mass unemployment has largely been responsible for the rising criminality and violence in Northern Nigeria”. It went further to state that, “while the North central regions have seen clashes between sedentary farmers and nomadic (armed) Fulani herders, the zone is (also) rife with ethnic militias, making it a hotbed for violent ethnic and religious clashes facilitated by small arms” (Miller, 2022).

Cattle rustling, which of course is a component of Fulani militia activities and terrorism in Nigeria have been stated by some analysts that it began in Nigeria with the confiscation of the cattle of fellow Fulani herders, but later metamorphosed into the seizing of humans and the demands for money as ransoms are paid before their release. Abiodun et al (2021) opined that “these rustlers also carry all sorts of small arms and high weapons in weapons in executing the evil machination”.

Small Arms and Light Weapons and Separatist Agitations

The proliferation of illicit small arms to violent non-state actors in Nigeria has exacerbated separatist agitations and violence in Nigeria. This trend has remained unabated since 2010 and has potentially threatened the corporate existence of Nigeria. It is a truism that Nigeria's internal security has been in jeopardy due to plethora of separatist violence. The proliferation of these small arms and light weapons and the new emergent trend in armed violence in Nigeria put to question the efficacy and total commitment of the Nigerian Government in combating the menace, (Osabiyi, 2015 and Abiodun et'al, 2018).

At the fore of this case in Nigeria is the raging Boko Haram violence in the northeast of Nigeria, especially in Borno and Yobe States, The Islamist group have waged campaign of terror in the region to create a caliphate in that part of Nigeria. The growing audacity of Boko Haram sect which were enormously armed are assorted and sophisticated small arms and light weapons has sustained the threat to the internal security and cohesion of Nigeria. As a separatist and terrorist organization, the Boko Haram has indulged since 2010 on kidnappings, abductions, bombings, killings and displacement of Nigerians in the region. The bombing of the UN building on 26th August 2011, the bombing of Nyanya motor park on April 14, 2014, the attack on eagle square on 1st October 2010, the kidnapping and abduction of Chibok and Dapchi School Girls in Borno and Yobe states are all part of the atrocities of the Boko Haram terrorist groups (Uwa and Anthony, 2015). Abiodun, et'al (2018) mentioned that,

“in the last six years, the country has witnessed the vulnerability of terror, criminality and instability. The disheartening phenomena include but not limited to the devastation and ammunition of several towns, villages, churches, mosques, police stations, schools and other public institutions with improvised explosive devices (IED) bombs planted and small arms and light weapons (SALW) by the Boko Haram insurgents in Niger, Borno, Adamawa, Kano, Bauchi, FCT Abuja, Kaduna, Plateau and Yobe States respectively.

Boko Haram, according to some security experts and analysts are expanding their sphere of influence to the northwest. The Islamist group has attempted to claim recent mass kidnappings in the northwest conducted by armed gangs, likely in order to appear more expansive. However, a previously disabled group known as Ansaru (which broke off from Boko Haram in 2012 has been staging a number of sophisticated attacks in the northwest states of Kaduna and Kastina. This group is believed to have mobilized local grievances

experienced by Fulani herders to recruit them under an ideological banner, Duerksen (2021).

On the other horizon of separatist agitations in southern Nigeria which have active commitment to the use of small arms which is part of the activities of the indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) via its militant Eastern Security Network (ESN). This group is majorly domiciled in the southeastern part of Nigeria. Though their activities extend to parts of South-south areas of Port-Harcourt, Ahoada, Elele, Calabar, Ogoja, Asaba, Uyo, Yenagoa, etc, an area they believed will be part of a future nation of Biafra (Duerksen, 2021).

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) which is a break away from the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) have recently been more vicious in its campaign of terror, especially at the birth of its ESN militia wing. Records have shown, according to analysts on TVC News Journalists Hangout, monitored on 19th May 2021, that within first five months of 2021, a total of sixty-three (63) law enforcement/ security officers have been killed by ESN in the southeast and the arms of these fallen security agents were carted away. The ESN operatives adopt a hit and run tactics in their operations, thus, making the people to tag them “unknown gun-men”. Policemen and other security agents became veritable targets of these IPOB/ESN elements with the view for separatist group to gather more firearms that they will utilize to further their missions (Miller, 2022). Other prime targets of the IPOB.ESN elements in the melee of insecurity in the Southeast and Southsouth were the operational offices of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and Police commands and divisional offices in Anambra, Abia, Imo, Enugu, Ebonyi, Rivers and Akwa-Ibom states respectively between Jan – May 2021.

Likewise, the agitation for resource control and a possible Niger Delta Republic has not gone out of the mind of the peoples of the Niger Delta. A situation that was hinged on the unfair treatment and marginalization of the people of the South-south geopolitical zone from the revenues derived from crude oil and gas exploration. This agitation has given rise illicit flow of small arms and light weapons. These arms were utilized as instrument of force by plethora of militant groups in the region to carry out their operations. With availability of small arms, agitations in the Niger Delta had over the years culminated into piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, kidnap and abduction oil company workers, sabotage of oil and gas pipelines, etc. Duerksen (2018) opined in this regard that:

“Groups like the movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) have been difficult to address through security operations alone due to their decentralized and leaderless structures, local support and their tactics of striking quickly and disappearing into the regions riverine labyrinth. Equipped with (small) arms and speed boats and countered by oil companies spending of millions of dollars on private security to protect oil infrastructure, some of these groups have begun venturing out of their swampland hideouts to board international ships in the Gulf of Guinea before retreating to their coastal bases with kidnapped crew members to negotiate ransoms paid from abroad” (Oluwadare, 2014).

There is still high probability for the continuation of these occurrences in Nigeria since effective and thorough policing of illicit of small arms and light weapons (SALW) have not been achieved. Small arms availability in the hands of non-state actors have succeeded in making hitherto peaceful, passive and non-violent agitations to metamorphose to full scale armed violence or conflict between the state and some non-state actors in Nigeria (Adewoyin and David, 2019).

Small Arms and Herders Farmers Conflicts

The utilization of small arms has exacerbated the spate of Herders/Farmers conflicts in Nigeria. Herders-Farmer clashes have however been going on in Nigeria for a very long time, especially between Fulani cattle herders and Hausa farmers in the northern part of Nigeria. But the spate and scope of these conflicts have broadened in the past decade and has remained more deadly and vicious since 2015 and it has made its way actively down to the southern part of Nigeria with intensity. Prior to 2015, some communities in the southern part of Nigeria have however often time had issue with Fulani cattle herders. Communities in Ogoja, Obudu, Obanliku, Yala, Boki and Bekwerra LGAs in Cross River state have had issues with Fulani herders but these were handled with the concerted efforts of the security agencies, community leader of both the host and that of the herders. This scenario does take place in other states of the south. The bearing of illicit proliferated small arms by herders which were in some cases used against farming communities brought about the worsening insecurity that have ravaged some of these farming communities. Abodun et'al (2018) was of the view that

“One of the security threats in the front banner today, remains the recurring crises between cattle herders and farmers. The most recent of such crises were those that occurred in Agatu community in Benue State and that of Nimbo community in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State. In such attacks several lives were lost while property worth millions of Nigeria were also destroyed”.

Due to the above violent cases amongst others, the Federal Government proposed policies of Rural Grazing Area (RUGA), Cattle Colony, Cattle Ranching, re-establishment of grazing routes and inland water-way bill have been viewed with suspicion by states in the south and some in the middle belt as ploys to grab lands for the Fulani herders in areas that they are not indigenous to. This does not betray the Global Index report on Terrorism (2020) that Fulani herders remain the fourth Terrorist Network in the world.

Small Arms and Ethnic/Religion Conflicts in Nigeria

Nigeria has had in her existence considerable high and deadly ethnic and religious induced conflicts that were aided by the proliferation of small arms since her independence in 1960. This occurrence had consumed the lives of many in the country and has left so many communities desolate and economic and social activities disrupted. Since the end of military rule in 1999, clashes in several regions of the country have claimed thousands of lives; Plateau State in (North) central Nigeria has been particularly badly affected. The oil rich Niger Delta remains the scene of recurring violence between members of different ethnic groups competing for political and ethnic power and between security and militia groups, (Jekada 2005 and Aver, Nnorom and Ilim, 2014).

The continued and unrestrained flow, circulation availability of small arms on illicit hands has sustained fends between warring ethnic and religious groups and communities. The Perennial Conflicts between the Tiv and Jukuns, Ife and Modakeke, Umueri and Aguleri, Ukele and Izzi, Umon and Arochukwu, Ijaw and Isekiri, Obudu/Obanliku and Tivs in Benue , Taraba, Osun, Anambra, Cross River, Ebonyi, Abia and Delta States respectively are classic recurring instance of small arms aided ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. Osabiyi (2015) states that“ethno-religious crisis arises as a result of various groups fighting for recognition especially through participation in election and electoral process so as to have access to power and by extension natural resources of their respective countries”

This explanation succinctly captures various reasons that gave rise to occurrence of ethnic and religious problems and violence in Nigeria. It is apt to that our belief system in Nigeria which has in some cases manifested to fundamentalism and extremism, especially between the two dominant religious of Christianity and Islam, oils ethno-religious violence in Nigeria. There is a substantial and enormous level to hate, distrust and mutual suspicion between the adherents of the two religious in the country. And these crises have been witnessed in Jos, Kaduna, Zaria, etc. were conducted with the use of small arms.

Small Arms and Communal Conflicts

The increasing availability of small arms in many parts of Nigeria have reinforced the occurrence of communal conflicts. Communal conflicts that do occur in some case owing to dispute over land and boundaries of communities have in the past decades shown the potential to consume lives of many Nigerians. Land and boundary disputes is perennial in many corners of Nigeria, regrettably the aggravating impact it has caused in some cases and areas does have connection with the use of small arms in its prosecution (Ayuba and Okafor, 2015).

Arms buildup exacerbates violence and hostility between and among communities in Nigeria. The struggle by people to possess what they considered to be rightfully theirs, especially, land, stream, plantain, pond, etc has been a major factor that brings about communal conflicts and once these conflicts start, it does have high probability of reoccurrence due to the desire for reprisal. The livelihood of these communities `inhabitants are being destroyed.

In many states of Nigeria, there is a high record of communal clashes which whenever they occur, there are always human cost and other losses in the aftermath. For instance, in Cross River State alone in the past decade, intrastate communal conflicts were commonplace. The cases in Cross River State were most times hinged on the right to the ownership farmlands and plantations. There are other motivating factors that cause communal clashes, but many of the ones recorded in Cross River State especially in the past few years had land dispute as the issue of contention. Communal clashes in the state such as those of Usumutom and Ediba communities in Abi Local Government Area, Erei community in Biase Local Government Area, Onyadama and Nko communities in Obubra and Yakkur

Local Government Areas are classic examples. These clashes over lands usually result to high human casualties due to the use small arms in their prosecution, especially local fabricated small arms (Abiodun, 2018).

Violent communal conflicts have bedeviled the country and have been a serious source of concern to the internal security of Nigeria. Communal conflicts are sometimes caused by the desire of the communities to increase and maximize the economic activities in the frontiers area, especially in the form of exploitation of forest resources that lies in between the contending communal forces (Adeola, n.d).

Communal conflicts could take place in different forms depending on the nature of events that led to its occurrence. It could be intra-communal, that is, tussle over land or other issues of economic and cultural importance within a particular community. It can as well be inter-communal clash, that is, clashes between two or more communities contending over and laying claim to a particular issue of importance. Communal clashes do happen at the inter-state level and this one is always due to poor delineation of state boundaries. A situation which community living at the frontiers of various states had to contend at various times on the exact location that is boundary. Some communal clashes that are prominent in Nigeria are Tiv/Jukun clashes, Ife-Modakeke, Umueri-Aguleri clashes (Eze, 2019).

Small Arms and Armed Robbery

Armed robbery is one of Nigeria's security problems that is aided by the availability and accessibility of small arms. Abiodun et al (2018) opine that "another security threat that is plaguing the country is armed banditry using all small arms and light weapons". He adds that "incidences of armed robbery have become a daily routine in many parts of the country. Apart from public institutions such as banks that are their major targets, major highways across the country are not spared as commuters are routinely attacked and dispossessed of their valuables". The ugly picture of armed robbery as presented by Abiodun et al (2018) is the reality that many Nigerians are going through as the result of proliferation of small arms in Nigeria. Many have lost their lives, money and other valuables to the menace of armed robbery across the country. Njoroge (2006) cited by Adamu, Mat

and Taya (2018) argue that “the widespread of small arms has increased the level of armed crimes in both rural and urban areas that include armed robbery, ...”

Armed robberies on the nation`s highways have been particularly worrisome. It has been a phenomenon that had persistently remained a security threat in Nigeria. It is apt to state that the menace of armed robberies in Nigeria had had devastating impact on Nigerians and the economy.

Small Arms and Cross-Border Smugglings

Nigeria is very vulnerable to the activities of smugglers due to her apparent porous border`s smuggler had to utilize these porous land and sea borders to bring in their goods to enable them to evade, capture and seizures, especially, when the items are considered contraband or ordinarily do not want to pay duty for the import. In doing this smuggling business, smugglers do contend with customs officers with the utilization of small arms.

Cross-borders smugglings have been anathema to the economic development of Nigeria. Needed revenue for social and infrastructural development of the country is lost to the activities these criminals. In August 2019, the federal government announced the closure of Nigeria`s land borders to check activities of smugglers and gun runners, and allowed local production of agricultural produce to thrive,

(<https://www.daily.trust.com/ng/howweaponsproliferationfuelsinsecurityinnigeria.html>).

The “border drill” as the exercise was called by security agencies that participated in it did not produce the desired impacts against smugglings in Nigeria as these notorious, sometimes, small arms bearing smugglers had to find new routes that were hitherto not in use to bring in their contraband into Nigeria (Bolarinwa, et al., 2019).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study focused on explaining the extent at which the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) has caused deterioration of security in Nigeria since 2010. Although in the bid to dwell on this period of Nigeria`s worsening security problems, emphasis was to study security problems that took place prior to the targeted period of this work. This was aimed at making the analysis on the topic, small arms and light weapons proliferation in Nigeria and the impact on national security.

The dangers posed by proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria have shown to be huge. There is hardly any day in the country that incidents that connect to the use of small arms and light weapons do not take place in Nigeria. While some of these incidents are widely reported, some are under reported. It is commonplace in Nigeria in this period for reports of insurgency, terrorism, kidnappings, militancy, banditry, pipeline vandalism and oil theft and illegal bunkering, illegal gold mining, ethnic and religious conflicts, Fulani herders militia activities, communal land and boundary disputes, etc to hit the various news outlet. These crimes and occurrences happen with the aid and utilization of small arms and light weapons.

To this end, the study recommends that the issues of mass unemployment, marginalization, ethnic and religious chauvinism, bad government, poverty, political exclusion, corruption, uneven distribution of state revenue, absence of a true federal structure, prevailing culture of hate, etc should be adequately treated with the view to create an atmosphere that all Nigerians will see that they do have stake in the country. And thus, prefers to safeguard the country instead trying to destroy it with the use of small arms and light weapons (SALW).

It is interestingly imperative to emphasize that unemployment and inequalities needs to be tacked with the view to solve the problem of insecurity in Nigeria as they are major recipes for violence and chaos. This is because when a sizeable proportion of the populace are left un-catered for by the state welfare and socio-political system, they will have no option than to resort struggles and violence, criminalities and other forms of desperation to survive and assert themselves. There is however the need by governments at all levels, most especially the Federal government to provide far-reaching economic empowerment programme and safety net for the generality of the rural, the aged, the unemployed and of course the vulnerable and perceived marginalized.

There should be a properly coordinated sustained and integrated policy by the Federal Government to curb and contain the easy flow of illicit small arms and light weapons in Nigeria. By way of ensuring effective and comprehensive offensive measures on criminals and violent activities of non-state actors who thrives in the business of bearing illicit small arms to dispense terror to Nigerians. There is the need for the Federal Government to mend the internal rift among members of the military on one hand to enable

and enhance effective tactical, intelligence, operational and strategic coordination of the battle against insecurity in Nigeria. On the other hand, between the military and the Nigerian Police, events have shown that due to lack of trust and dearth of camaraderie, the military, especially the Army and Navy, seldom like being in same security operation with the operatives of the Nigerian Police. This is born out of perceived feelings that the Police are sell-outs that could hardly keep confidential information meant for security operations' planning due to pecuniary motives. Alternatively, the military are comfortable to participate in internal security operation with agency like the State Security Service (SSS). It is apt to state and re-emphasize that this rift between the military and the Police need to be mended because of its adverse impact on fight against insecurity as the Police are meant to be at the core of the battle against insecurity in Nigeria.

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