



# THE THREAT AND RISK OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS PROLIFERATION TO THE SECURITY OF THE NIGERIAN STATE

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## ABSTRACT

The devastation inflicted by the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II alerted the world to the threat and risk of humanity being exterminated from the planet's surface by weapons of mass destruction. As a result, numerous organizations, most notably the United Nations, regional groups, and non-state players, have attempted to assure global security. The United Nations formed the International Atomic Energy Agency on July 29, 1957, to combat the spread of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. However, since the conclusion of the Cold War, the world has come to the startling realization that the majority of injuries and deaths documented in internecine wars are caused by Small Arms and Light Weapons rather than weapons of mass devastation. Indeed, current literature demonstrates that, while some research has been conducted on the proliferation of SALWs, nothing has been done on the threat and risk of these weapons' proliferation to Nigerian security. This is the key gap that our study aims to fill. This study employs a qualitative method to data analysis, depends on secondary data sources, and is supported by an argument based on both the realist and liberal theoretical frameworks of analysis. Finally, this article suggests that, while weapons play a key role in exacerbating conflict, resulting in massive human and economic losses, the roots of such conflicts are political, economic, ethnic, and religious imbalances. Lastly, this report discovered that SALWs were never considered strategic to global security or subjected to a systematic traceable transfer process. This was true until the conclusion of the Cold War, when asymmetric conflict in the world's weaker governments threatened to split them apart.

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**KEYWORDS:** proliferation, SALWs, threats, and risk analysis.

## INTRODUCTION

The issue of small guns and light weapons is not new in international discourse.

However, with the triumph of the free market and the establishment of a unipolar political and economic worldview, the arms trade has seen unprecedented global deregulation.

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This deregulation process increased the availability of SALWs in Africa tremendously, making these weapons suddenly affordable to those who had previously been unable to obtain them (Theophilus et al., 2021).

According to a study conducted by the global initiative against transnational organized crime in August 2022, the proliferation of SALWs serves as an accelerant in conflict-affected regions. The influx of weaponry not only fuels the fighting but also helps to fragment and spread conflict, increases the number of criminal groups and their use of violence as a means of market domination, and strengthens armed groups in the face of state intervention. However, illicit trafficking does not occur exclusively in crisis zones.

Given this, the United Nations has expressly stated that the international community has been suffering dangers to human existence, which are sometimes naturally caused and most of the time choreographed by people's actions. However, in recent years, the increased growth of trade and difficulty to manage SALWs in places suffering from political instability and violent wars has proven to be a major impediment to international peace, economic development, humanitarian assistance, and efforts to rehabilitate war-torn communities. The post-Cold War age has revealed new risks to national peace, security, and growth. This dynamism, particularly in Africa and Nigeria, ushers in new patterns in conflicts and security challenges that are not limited to the international and military arenas, but are more internal, protracted, and interconnected (Okafor, 2017).

The growth and trafficking of SALWs is a significant policy challenge for Nigeria, Africa, and the world at large. As a result, by 2001, a multitude of efforts and policies targeted at combating the growth of SALWs had been agreed upon within the framework of the United Nations. Thus, the legally binding guns protocol to the Vienna Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, as well as a political document known as the Programme of Action (POA), were developed to prevent, battle, and eradicate the illicit trade in SALWs. These agreements, which covered a wide range of measures to improve control over small arms transfers, availability, and usage, were no longer primarily supply-side in nature (Theophilus et al., 2021). Today, there is growing worry that monitoring and regulating small arms manufacturing, transfer, brokering, and abuse will

be ineffective unless efforts are taken to identify and address the factors that motivate people to acquire, use, and trade firearms. In West Africa, the Heads of State of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) declared a moratorium on the import, export, and manufacturing of SALWs on October 31, 1998, which became effective on November 1, 1998. The moratorium, which is a political rather than a formal pact, aims to halt the sub region's increasing flow of SALWs. The moratorium will be in effect for three years and can be renewed. The ban was met with obstacles and criticism due to the language barrier in West Africa and a lack of execution.

Recognizing the failure to implement the ECOWAS moratorium, the ECOWAS Heads of State adopted a legally binding and enforceable convention on small arms on June 14, 2006, addressing issues such as effective sub-regional border security mechanisms for monitoring the activities of arms traffickers, smugglers, and cross-border criminality, among others, as well as decisive sanctions on member states that may violate certain provisions of the convention. It would also be interesting to examine how legitimate and illicit arms transfers are separated, requiring exporting countries to bear greater responsibility for the circulation and proliferation of small arms and light weapons in West Africa (Onwuka, 2010). The Nigerian government has taken many efforts to combat the proliferation of SALWs, as evidenced by the formation of the National Commission for the Control of the Proliferation and Unlawful Circulation of Light Weapons (NATCOM) for the Implementation of the ECOWAS Moratorium in July 2006. Similarly, the Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development (PCASD) was launched in March with the support of UNDP (Ndime, 2005).

At the national level, Nigeria continues to use the National Firearms Act of 1959 as the legal framework for SALW possession, production, and use. It was updated in July 2000. Globally, Nigeria signed the United Nations Firearms Protocol of November 13, 2001, which was approved on July 15, 2004.

However, researchers are optimistic that armed violence will reduce worldwide, as the estimate shows that by 2050, the fraction of countries at war will have decreased dramatically, with promising prospects for global peace and security.

According to Hegre et al. (2013), the Uppsala conflict data program (UCDP) emphasizes that nations with high poverty, low educational and youth populations are fertile ground for conflict and that more than half of the world's conflicts in 2005 occurred in such countries (Collier, 2015).

It is regretful, however, that despite regional, continental, and international measures designed to combat SALW proliferation, Nigeria appears prominently on the world map of regions with high SALW circulation in West Africa. The foregoing leaves us with the essential imperative of contextualizing the vulnerabilities and risks of SALW proliferation to Nigerian security, to propose a solution to this agonizing evil.

### Conceptual Clarification

#### Small arms and light weaponry.

According to Theophilus et al. (2023), the Royal Military College of Science (RMCS) Handbook on Weapons and Vehicles defines SALWs as follows:

a. Small arms are, broadly speaking, weapons intended for personal use. They include for example, revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles, and carbines, submachine guns, assault rifles, and light machine guns.

b. Light weapons are often meant for use by a crew of two or three people. However, they can also be carried and operated by a single person. They include, among other things, general purpose or universal machine guns, heavy guns, rifle grenades, under-barrel grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles, man-portable launchers of anti-tank missiles and rocket systems, and mortars with caliber of fewer than 100 millimeters.

c. **Threat:** A threat to a nation is defined as anything that has the potential to damage the country's security. According to Theophilus (2021), "threat changes in time and character as well as in specific." It is normal to examine threats from two perspectives: those arising from local and external sources. Whatever their sources, it is traditional that while designing a successful solution to the SALW conundrum in defense structure, a nation's perspective on the overall danger is the primary concern.

d. **Risk analysis** is the methodical use of available information to assess how frequently specific events may occur and the severity of their consequences. Although more information is available today than in the past, the lack of reliable statistical data on the threats and risks of small

arms and light weapons proliferation poses a significant challenge to public research and discussion on how to address the issue of arms proliferation in conflict zones.

#### Concept of Proliferation

Proliferation is a quick growth in the number or quantity of something. It merely indicates rapid expansion or abundance. When used in reference to armaments, proliferation refers to the general spread of firearms from one country to another. For this study, proliferation is defined as the excessive buildup and unlawful dissemination of weapons that have the potential to destabilize the state.

#### The theoretical foundation

The construction of an acceptable theoretical foundation is an absolute necessity in any directed study, not only because theories have explanatory power but also because such a foundation provides guidance that enhances the overall understanding of the work. As a result, this investigation relied on two theories: Realism and Liberalism.

Realism's thrust is based on two assumptions: first, that states are the only actors in the international system, and second, that the international environment is anarchic. This perception of anarchy stems not from a lack of order or chaos but from the absence of a global administration capable of ensuring state security. As a result, to ensure her security, strengthen her security, and increase her political power, states attempt to safeguard their security through military buildup. This explains why Hans Margenthau (1943), a proponent of realism theory, defines international politics as a fight for power.

Thus, the lack of a world government, as previously said, does not entail the absence of international law; rather, the amount to which states adopt or reject international law is proportional to their willingness to accept the consequences of such acceptance or rejection. Kegley (1994), Waltz (1979), and other realism scholars describe an intellectual movement whose views and beliefs about the international order were anti-liberal. In their analysis, the word anarchy - a threat system in which force remains the ultimate ratio, the "basis of diplomacy and all the contractual obligation, beyond the boundaries of the state"; similarly, Theophilus et al (2021) argue that "the capacity of states to defend themselves and their evident willingness to do so, provides the basic framework within which the

business of intentional negotiations is carried on." This goes a long way towards demonstrating that the epistemic utility of realism in this study demonstrates that, contrary to popular opinion bequeathed from the Cold War era, all countries, developed or developing, are vulnerable to the threat and risk of SALW proliferation. As a result of the preceding research, it is possible to conclude that the production of armaments by industrialized nations to protect their security can only explain why weapons proliferate in developing countries. For example, the GIABA Report of 2013 reveals that major industrialized nations make most so-called SALWs used in recent conflicts. In Afghanistan, for example, the Taliban use Russian and American-made AK-47, RPG 7, USM 72, and automatic rifles. One significant flaw of realism is the notion that states are the only actors in the international system. To this extent, proliferation will occur unequally between nations. While states are important actors in the international system, non-state actors such as terrorist organizations, rogue arms brokers, private military companies, shady airline companies, and local smugglers play a critical role in the proliferation of SALWs across nations, escalating ongoing conflicts and facilitating the initiation of new ones on the continent.

Drawing on the realist viewpoint, it demonstrates that realism holds a negative view of the international system. Given the current patterns of conflict in inter-state interactions, which are characterized by constant struggle, states are viewed as the defining aspect of global reality. As a result, states can readily deploy all the necessary armaments to secure their position in the community of nations. As a result, the risk of conflict, the subsequent demand for SALWs, and other weapons of war in general. Thus, realism may give a required but insufficient explanation for the security dangers posed by proliferation. This inadequacy has compelled this study to focus on liberal theory.

Liberalism is an economic theory that ties events to their plausible causes. It emphasizes that nations should relinquish control over the production and pricing of basic commodities and instead rely on market forces to decide prices. It also pushed for private property ownership rather than state-owned and controlled economic activity. Theophilus et al (2021) argue that exponents of liberalism such as Keohane, Nye, Rosenau, John Locke, among others, have

attributed the threats and causes of SALW proliferation to several factors: first, the stockpiles that were pumped into Africa in the 1970s, 1980s, and only 1990s by the ex-soviet union, the USA, and their allies to fan proxy intra-state and inter-state wars, and second, the break up and deregulation of arms industries in eastern and central Europe. The incapacity of these regimes to contain the new liberal onslaught culminated in violent intra-state confrontations sparked by the large influx of SALWs into Africa.

This explains, however, that the realism school's notion that state actors exacerbate the threat of SALW proliferation is incorrect. The liberal schools, on the other hand, believe that it is the concept of privatization, which is incorporated into the theory of liberalism, that has enabled and encouraged individuals and private military companies to enter into the production and manufacture of SALWs and their related spare parts at prices that were previously unattainable to those who had no chance of obtaining these weapons, to profit. As in other industrialized countries, the military-industrial complex has been privatized in the United States, allowing smaller firms to create weapons and spare parts. Individuals and groups have become exposed to proliferation as a result of the increasing and uncontrolled production and trade of SALWs in recent years, particularly in regions suffering from political instability and violent conflicts. The preceding emphasizes the importance of the liberal school upon which the study is based. For starters, it clarifies the roots of proliferation (privatization of security systems) and points to a solution (states taking complete authority and managing their own security). From this position, the study used liberalism as its theoretical framework for analysis.

#### **Literature review on the sources, routes, and destinations of SALWs in Nigeria**

A new literature review credited to Theophilus et al (2020) and (2021) on the origin, reasons, transit, destination, threat, and risk of SALWs to the security of African states, particularly Nigeria, has been conducted. However, Theophilus et al. (2020) admit that there are rarely any places in West Africa that do not face significant arm-related challenges to peace, security, and development, either continuing or recently resolved.

As Abdel-Fatau (2002) points out, there are numerous elements that contribute to SALW

trafficking and its spread. While international efforts to combat proliferation tend to focus on the development and supply of new weapons, a major source of SALWs remains the stockpiles pumped into Africa in the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s by the ex-Soviet Union, the United States, and their allies to fuel proxy intra-state and inter-state wars. These leftover weapons have found their way through clandestine networks involving rogue arms brothers, private military companies, and shady airline companies, such as Victor Bout, who owns five (5) airlines that flew sixty (60) aircraft and employed three hundred (300) arms dealers who serve as a network provider in bridging the gap in the chain of supply of arms to destination points, and Leonoid Effimovich, a major broker and dealer in arms indicated over the Luxembourg and Hungary ran corrupt arms trades and backed many brokers and merchants of arms traffickers and gangs, exacerbating existing conflicts and sparking new ones across the continent (Banko, 2016).

The fragmentation and liberalization of the arms industries in Eastern and Central Europe have also resulted in the emergence of mini industries in Africa, whose relentless pursuit of new markets in the developing world has rendered existing export regimes obsolete. Africa boasts several arms manufacturers: South Africa, Zimbabwe, Egypt, Morocco, and Nigeria, among others, have thriving SALW cottage industries. This verifies Thomas Imobighe's theory that there are several elements that contribute to Nigeria's status as a willing and functioning receptacle or repository of SALW trafficking in Africa. For starters, the Nigerian State's borders are poorly delineated and hence readily traversed. These boundaries were created arbitrarily by European imperialists who colonized nearly the whole African continent. Nigeria also shares a lengthy land border with the Republic of Niger and Chad in the north, the Republic of Benin in the west, and Cameroon in the east, as well as a large stretch of Atlantic coastline. Each of these frontiers serves as an entry point for systematic weaponry smuggling and trafficking into the country. Along the same lines, the GIABA study of 2013 reaffirmed the idea that Boko Haram obtains guns from Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, all of which share borders with Nigeria in the country's north. Nigeria's extensive borders with Cameroon are notorious as a trafficking hotspot for unlawful SALWs. According to studies, Nigeria's two most notorious arms

trafficking boundaries are Idi-Iroko and Seme in the southwest state of Lagos. One may not be aware of the facts on SALWs in circulation, but one undisputed fact is that the percentage is considerable.

Other reported nations where SALWs and their ammunition are sourced and trafficked include Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, South Africa, Turkey, and Ukraine, as well as Bulgaria, Kosovo, and Serbia. While source nations are frequently mentioned, the movement of SALWs between source and transit countries is not thoroughly recorded. In a paper released by International Alert, Sami Makki et al. (2016) investigates the role of private military firms (PMCs) in the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The paper suggested that the 1990s saw a shift in how wars are fought as the amount of accessible weaponry rose and the types of individuals involved in combat multiplied. Similarly, the expansion of the international arms trade, particularly with more buyers and more supply lines, has created questions about who buys weapons and for what purposes. The continued, if not increasing, presence of mercenaries, as well as the emergence of private companies contracted to provide military and security services ranging from logistical support and training to arms procurement and on-the-ground intervention, are hallmarks of this changing nature of conflict.

Okorie (2017) concurs with the preceding assertion that various factors have contributed to the privatization of security and the outsourcing of military and security functions. The end of the Cold War diminished the necessity for massive standing arms, resulting in the demobilization of tens of thousands of highly trained soldiers across Europe, North America, and a portion of Africa. Some of these soldiers have gone to work for private military and security businesses, or they have become freelance mercenaries. The "Uppsala conflict data programme" agreed with the previous assessment that the necessity for extra-regional supply was further undermined when the Gaddafi regime in Libya crumbled in 2011. The size of Gaddafi's arsenal is still being determined by the United Nations, but all indications are that it was huge and sophisticated. The more complex weapons systems are mostly at risk in the Middle East, while most west African groups lack the skills to make maximum use of cutting-edge technologies (UPP Conflict Data Programme, 2011).

Aligning further, Theophilus et al. (2021) established that, following the radicalization processes and collapse of state structure that characterize the Arab spring, loose weapons were trafficked to leaders of current militant groups in Nigeria, who found fertile enclaves for training in those countries. The Nigerian military's report from the Sambisa forest reaffirmed the previous claims. SALWs were heavily trafficked into Nigeria for use in most insurgencies, including the Boko Haram uprising, armed banditry, and the farmers' headers war, among others.

The experiences of civilians looting state arsenals, whether in Albania in 1977, Uganda in 1979, or Iraq in 2003, demonstrate how easily SALWs may be smuggled, albeit at relatively low prices, to any rebel or criminal group in West Africa. Such as:

- i. Non-state armed organizations in northern Mali, notably the various branches of Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AWIM)
- ii. The secessionist groups in northern Niger, including the Movement of Nigerians for Justice (MNJ) and the Front for the Liberation of Tamoust (FLT)
- iii. Boko-Haram in Nigeria.
- iv. Senegal's Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC)
- v. The "Third Phase Rebels" of the Niger Delta in Nigeria,
- vi. Forces loyal to former Ivorian president Laurent Gbagbo (the young patriots), who are now refugees or hiding out in neighbouring countries, among others, highlight the fact that, empowering these groups could result in long-term civil conflict, as West Africa remains highly unstable, as demonstrated by the seven coups experienced in Africa since August 2020, before the recent Niger coup of July 26, 2023, which has led to the withdrawal of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso from ECOWAS. Others are Burkina Faso (January 24, 2022 and July 2024), Sudan (October 25, 2021), Guinea (September 5, 2021), and Mali (August 18, 2020 and May 24, 2021). These nations, particularly Mali and Niger, are essential in the battle against terrorism and insurgency because of their geographical location and the nature of cross-border security concerns. Their departure from ECOWAS not only weakens the regional security framework, but also makes West African states, particularly Nigeria, more vulnerable to SALW trafficking, as well as spillover of instability and terrorist activities from these neighbouring countries (Africanews, 2023).

Although these issues have arisen and festered as a result of long-term structural factors, as well as a complex global system of production and exchange, the elimination of state-imposed restrictions on the movement of goods and services across borders has exacerbated the threats of SALWS proliferation in West Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. Indeed, a study of available information reveals that, while substantial research has been conducted on the proliferation of SALWs, little has been done to address the threat and risk of these weapons' proliferation to Nigerian national security. This is the key gap that our study aims to fill.

**Research techniques and data collection**

The data utilised in the analysis are based on information gathered from various sources. First, extensive desk research on institutional and official documents from the Nigerian Ministry of Defence, United Nations publications, Federal Office of Statistics, ECOWAS reports, and the University of Calabar library was carried out on the policies of the various tiers of government as they impact on the political and peace processes in general. On the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in particular, gleaned from various sources, both primary and secondary sources. were obtained from elaborate Focus Group Discussions and content analysis involving border guards agencies: Army, Navy, Police, Customs, Immigration, as well as Port Health Service and Nigerian Agricultural Quarantine Service (NAQS), including civil society spokespersons and some leading members of armed groups at the Seme Border post between Nigeria and The Republic of Benin, further illuminated the various perspectives on the government's role in the propagation. The content analysis process entailed investigating, recording, and analysing past events with the goal of discovering generalisations that were significant in understanding the past and present in order to deal with the issues at hand and make necessary predictions and conclusions for the future, where applicable and necessary. The focus group talks addressed some of the problems raised during the desk research and indicated areas for further research on the involvement of state institutions in the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria. Some focus group members also directed the searcher's attention to materials on the internet that they believed were pertinent to the subject.

The rapid movement of SALWs worldwide is becoming increasingly difficult to track, with long-term implications for human security. As a result, SALWs become available in a region for legitimate and legal purposes such as national security, peacekeeping, or law enforcement. Surplus or poorly directed military weapons find buyers in war-torn or post-conflict countries, or they are stolen and fall into the hands of non-state armed organisations or terrorists. Illicit brokers can exploit discrepancies and gaps in national weapons trading legislation. Small arms can pass from state to private ownership several times. As a result, the proliferation and misuse of small guns and light weapons is a global, increasingly complicated, and multifaceted issue that affects people of all faiths. Because of their ease of availability, low cost, and manageability, small arms and light weapons (SALWs) have become the weapons of choice in most conflicts throughout the world today, contributing to increased levels of armed violence even in peaceful areas. These weapons are major factors to the militarization of civic society. Every day, more than 1,000 people are killed by small weapons violence; the victims are civilians, and the consequences extend far beyond their immediate use in conflict (Theophilus et al., 2023). Amplifying the above statement, Koroma (1999) stated that the proliferation of SALWs in Africa has been devastating, particularly in areas where machine guns, rifles, grenades, handguns, and other weapons have murdered and displaced many civilians. These weapons were employed in fatal battles in Sudan, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Somalia. They are routinely recycled from country to country, and ownership is divided between fighters, security forces, and war profiteers. The

proliferation of SALWs has far-reaching consequences and touches on many other issues that governments and societies face. Sometimes these links are so intertwined that it is difficult to determine whether the weapons are the source of the problem or simply a symptom of other uses. However, it has been contested that political instability and security threats in West Africa in general, and Nigeria in particular, are being pushed by the uncontrolled movement of SALWs across the area; this trend represents a serious humanitarian challenge and catastrophe in the region. The availability and ease of acquisition of SALWs are largely responsible for a huge number of civilian casualties in West African civil wars, and in Africa as a whole. Interestingly, the international community, through the United Nations, has specifically stated that arms tracing is a key component of any meaningful collective response to the concerns posed by the unlawful proliferation of SALWs. In addressing SALWs control mechanisms by sub-regional bodies, the West African-sub-regional group emphasises the importance of arms tracing in the ECOWAS treaty on SALWs, indicating support for member states' previous positions on UN arms control procedures. The process gave governments greater responsibility, keeping in mind that the military industrial complexes that make these weapons are housed by states. To counter the threat and risks of proliferation, states must guarantee that weaponry manufactured within their authority are appropriately marked. In line with these agreements, Bah (2004) claimed that the ECOWAS moratorium is one such action aimed at mitigating the threat posed by the spread of SALWs to national security. He went on to explain that ECOWAS, led by Mali, adopted a moratorium on the import, export, and production of SALWs in West Africa following a successful peace agreement with Taureg rebels.

**Types, sources, routes, and destinations for SALW in West Africa**

Country of destination or use	Types of SALW	Likely countries of origin/Suppliers	Means/routes
Niger	AK-47 guns, pistols, short, long and double-barrel guns, Beretta guns, and Kalashnikov rifles	Libya, Chad, Somali, Sudan, Nigeria, Algeria, Burkina Faso, and local manufacturers	Land borders and footpaths
Guinea Bissau	Ak-47 guns, pistols, short, long, and double-barrel guns	Remnants from the independence struggle, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and local manufacturers	Land and sea borders
Cote d'Ivoire	AK-47 guns, pistols, revolvers, assault rifles, short, long, and double-barrel guns	Liberia, Guinea, USA, Britain, Russia, France, China, and local manufacturers	Land and sea borders
Nigeria (Niger Delta, North-East)	Pump-action guns, AK-47 guns, revolvers, self-loading guns, assault rifles, pistols, short, long, and double-barrel guns	Chad, Cameroon, South Africa, Europe, Nigeria Military and police officers, local manufacturers, Great Lakes region, and Russia	Land and sea borders, creeks, and airstrips
Togo	AK-47 guns, local pistols, and long rifles, pistols, short, long, and double-barrel guns	Nigeria, Ghana and local manufacturers	Land borders, footpaths
Ghana	Pistols, AL-47 guns, revolvers, pump-action guns, short, long and double-barrel guns	Remnants of the military era and local manufacturers	
Sierra Leone	AK-47 guns, revolvers, rockets, self-loading	Guinea, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, remnants of the civil war, and local manufacturers	Guinean forest
Liberia	AK-47 guns, revolvers, self-loading pistols, rifles, assault rifles, locally made guns, mortars and hand grenades	Guinea, Burkina Faso, East Europe, Libya, remnants of the civil war, local manufacturers	Land and sea borders
Senegal (Casamance Region)	AK-47 guns, pistols, rockets, short, long, and double-barrel guns	Guinea Bissau, Gambia, Iran and local manufacturers	Land borders, maritime borders, and footpaths
Gambia	AK-47 guns, pistols, rockets, short, long, and double-barrel guns	Local manufacturers, Iran and Senegal	Land and sea borders
Burkina Faso	Ak-47 guns, revolvers, self-loading pistols, rifles, assault rifles, and locally made guns	Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire and local manufacturers	Land borders and footpaths
Guinea	AK-47 guns, revolvers, assault rifles, long and double barrel guns	Local manufacturers, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, and Liberia	Land and sea borders
Cape Verde	AK-47 guns, revolvers, assault rifles, long and double barrel guns	Europe and local manufacturing	Sea borders
Benin	AK-47 guns, revolvers, assault rifles, long and double barrel guns	Nigeria, Togo, South Africa	Land and sea borders
Mali	AK-47 guns, revolvers, assault rifles, long and double barrel guns	Local manufacturers, Niger, Libya, Algeria, and Mauritania	Land borders

Source: Theophilus et al (2021)



### **SITUATING THE THREATS AND RISKS OF SALW PROLIFERATION TO NIGERIA'S SECURITY DILEMMA**

The enormity of the threats and risks posed by illicit small arms and light weapons proliferation explains why the Nigerian State has been subjected to far too many conflicts of varying levels and intensity, with the fault lines of these conflicts being socio-cultural rather than rooted in severe competition for scarce political, social, and economic resources. Ironically, while the fear of conflict is driven locally, the tools of violence remain SALWs, which are sourced internationally. It has been confirmed that, since the return to democratic rule in 1999, the threat of increased availability and easy access to SALWs by non-state actors pursuing their parochial interests at the expense of peace, security, and development has ruined the Nigerian state's cooperative existence. The hazard affects all regions of the country, including the North-East, North-West, North-Central, South-East, South-West, and South-South.

Unfortunately, in all of these threats, the shared traits of these non-state armed actors were their easy access to and indiscriminate use of SALWs. This demonstrates the civil population's vulnerability while also highlighting the unusual nature of the dangers faced by the Nigerian state. It also highlights the reality that states' institutional capacity, particularly civil society organisations, in countering these dangers is limited, allowing non-state actors to readily obtain and exploit SALWs. The failure of public security in Nigeria has prompted residents to engage in various sorts of 'self-help' security measures, ranging from vigilante organisations to community-owned armament stockpiling. Parties to several of these confrontations have become embroiled in a security quandary. The need to obtain more weaponry to ensure personal and community defence from perceived and actual attackers is propelling the domestic arms race.

Thus, breaking the chain of SALW proliferation has remained a significant challenge to the Nigerian state. This condition, in turn, fuels the desire for more guns by both Nigerian state and non-state armed organisations to protect security.

While the government increases its stock through importation and domestic manufacturing through the Nigerian Defence Industry Corporation (DICON), non-state actors support transnational traffickers and blooming uncontrolled local and artisanal arms makers. Today, there is growing worry that limiting and regulating SALW manufacturing, transfer, brokering, and abuse will be ineffective unless efforts are taken to identify and address the conditions that motivate people to acquire and use weapons. The adoption of resolution 60/68 by the UN General Assembly in 2005 was an encouraging step in this direction, as it drew links between development and SALWs, identified the factors that motivate people to acquire weapons, and understood the mechanisms by which the global proportion of gun owners will make SALW reduction efforts more durable and effective.

In addition to the obvious implications of these threats, Okafor (2017) correctly observed that, in an effort to address these security challenges exacerbated by the illegal proliferation of SALWs in the country, Nigeria has implemented a variety of policies and programmes to restore peace and security. Some of these programmes include direct action by relevant government entities, military operations, and the fostering of dialogue among hostile actors. Similarly, organised civil society and international development partners are involved in conflict management and resolution initiatives.

This, however, provided the foundation for the inclusion of arms tracing in international arms control regimes, and the international community emphasised and expressed its importance with the adoption of the UN International Instrument to enable states to identify and trace illicit SALWs in a timely and reliable manner (UN, 2005). Similarly, Article 19 of the 2006 ECOWAS Convention on SALWs, Ammunition, and Other Related Materials confirms this argument. Inasmuch as violent conflicts exist in all geopolitical zones, it is intended that this study would eventually serve as a guide for the government in dealing with various security challenges, particularly those involving Boko-Haram, Fulani-Herdsman, New Niger Delta militants, and IPOB organizations.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis concludes that the end of the Cold War affected the international security situation. The advent of the United States as the world's single superpower, despite the presence of other rival power centers, has led to the liberalization of the economic and security environment, which has obviously had an impact on Africa, particularly Nigeria. According to available literature, small arms and light weapons are the primary contributors to the escalation of a culture of violence and the militarization of civil society, as well as to the rise in armed violence even in peaceful places.

This study therefore proposed as follows: the threats of SALWs proliferation should be tackled both at the level of re-engineering of obsolete policy frameworks and the accelerated practical implementation of modern measures and techniques of warfare on the ground with a view to pro-actively entailing the menace of SALWs, the Nigerian state need to demonstrate commitments not only in policy formulation, endorsement of agreements and codification, but also in practical effort at implementation which is vital so as to carry on the responsibility of providing social and economic security and development for the citizens, urgent steps should be taken by the Nigerian state to review the obsolete firearms Act of 1959 with stringent penalties in order to address the current threats associated with SALWs proliferation, Federal government should adopt a National Arms control strategies to guide the clean-up and prevention of SALWs circulation, and lastly, there is need for concerted and collective efforts among stakeholders at all levels of the society to curtail illicit SALWs proliferation.

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