

## Arms Proliferation and Democratization in Nigeria

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### Abstract

In recent past, violent communal, religious and political conflicts have become a regular feature and/or reoccurring decimal of our social life. These conflicts result from different value system, aggressive competition for economic resources and unhealthy competition for political power. There is hardly a year in Nigeria without major violent conflict. Conflict in this respect, especially in northern part of the country has varied in scope, intensity and nature, and has taken immeasurable toll on human lives, leaving many dead, maimed and numerous others displaced, as a result of the involvement of small arms illegally acquired. To this end, this study seeks to decipher if the increase in the proliferation of these arms illegally acquired resulted from the inability of the state to address the basic needs of the masses and to determine if the circulation of small arms and light weapons during the 2011 general elections actually undermined the turnout of voters. The study adopted the theory of post-colonial state as the framework of analysis. This theoretical framework is aimed at giving a clue for the occurrence and persistence of the problem. Ex-Post Factor is adopted as the research design; observation is adopted as the method of data collection, and qualitative descriptive method as the method of data analysis. The major findings are that the increase in the illegal possession of arms may be attributed to the state's inability to address the basic needs of the masses; and that the circulation of the small arms and light weapons during the 2011 general elections actually undermined political participation during this period. The major recommendations are that the Nigerian state should be reconstituted in such a way as to be proactive in dealing with the issue of small arms and light weapons (WALW) that heightens the proliferation of these SALW and also to strengthen the law enforcement agencies in order to enable them check the procurement of SALW that worsen security situations in Nigeria.

**Key Words:** Arms Proliferation, Democratization, Small Arms, and Light Weapons.

### Introduction

The growth and availability of small arms and light weapons has triggered several security challenges for the Nigerian government. This issue is said to have created an atmosphere of fear among Nigerian citizens and even the government itself. It is also clear that this issue of arms proliferation to some extent has undermined the participation of citizens in electoral activities. Armed group hired by politicians have now developed their own economic bases thereby freeing themselves from political patrons. This has led some group to engage in political process themselves. Armed violence is about access to resources, whether through committing crimes, playing on communal tensions, stealing oil, or winning elections.

The growing availability of small arms has been a major factor in the increase in the number of conflicts and hindering smoother rebuilding and development after a conflict has ended. Ojudu,(2007) estimated, for example, that there are around half a billion military small arms around the world; some 300,000 to half a million people around the world are killed by them each year; they are the major causes of civilian casualties in modern conflicts. It has been estimated that there are now about 500 million small arms weapon in circulation in the world, one for every twelve people. Thus in Nigeria, there have been several cases of civil unrest often backed up with arms. Most of the uprising has resulted to deaths in some parts of the country; in a situation whereby private individuals are in possession of arms and use same to perpetuate armed conflicts and other forms of civil unrest in the society.

In Nigeria, politics is militarized and voting is used as an electoral tool, leading to the inculcation of a culture of violence in the society. Armed groups are not a new phenomenon. However, today's armed group are better armed, better trained and increasingly sophisticated in their actions than some of the law enforcement officers. Armed groups hired by politicians have now developed and have begun to use these arms for their selfish interests (Bah, 2004).

A major manifestation of threat in most political activities in the country is the use of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). Although Nigeria's problem with small arms and light weapons is not new, its increasing availability in the last decade has helped stoke a wave of insurgencies, ethno-religious conflicts, cross-border banditry, kidnapping, armed robbery and other violent crimes. Arms build-up has fuelled and led to violence in different parts of the country- especially religious crises and ethno- religious conflicts. Thus, Nigeria now features prominently in the three-spot continuum of transnational organized trafficking of small and light weapons in West Africa (Olori, 2004). The Nigeria's origin, transit route and destination of weapons in circulation, come from local fabrication, guns used during the civil war, thefts from government armouries, smuggling, dishonest government-accredited importers, ethnic militias, political thugs, insurgents from neighbouring countries and some multinational oil corporations. Light weapons aforementioned are portable arms

designed to be used by several people working together and these weapons include heavy machine guns among others.

Over the years, the Nigerian government has faced several challenges in tackling the problems of small arms proliferation and armed violence. Some of these challenges are self-imposed and reinforced through greed-based behaviour. Others are as a result of poor institutional capacity to address widespread of crime in the country. The Nigerian borders have been described as porous, allowing illicit arms trafficking resulting to proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The source of proliferation of small arms and light weapons is a well linked local manufacturing. Even the legal acquisition of small arms and light weapons for various security agencies by the Nigerian government eventually and illegally finds their way to militia groups (Ikelegbe,2005). Apart from the sponsors of these armed violent thugs, members of the society may equally take up arms when they feel that the government has failed to address their basic needs to enable them enjoy the benefits and dividends of democracy.

The sponsor and use of small arms and light weapons as spearheaded by members of Nigerian political class has indeed brought about the possession and circulation of these small and light weapons where these trained thugs use these weapons for the wrong ends especially in armed robbery and to create terror and fear in the country (Ojudu, 2007). These politicians use these thugs, to aid themselves in high-jacking ballot boxes and to some extent manipulate election results in their favour, if possible. This unscrupulous and unconstitutional act of the members of the Nigeria political class may bring about the unwillingness of the members of the state to get involved in political activities of the country, basically during elections and may also undermine the active participation of the citizens in general elections in the country, thereby aiding apathy. Albeit, this study seeks to answer the following questions: Is increase in the possession of illegal arms a fallout of the inability of the state to address the basic needs of the masses? Did the circulation of small and light weapons during the general elections undermine the turnout of the voters in Nigeria? Furthermore, the study has the objectives of ascertaining if the possession of illegal firearms is fallout of the inability of the state to address the basic needs of the masses; and to assessing whether the circulation of small and light weapons during the general elections undermine the turnout of voters in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework of Analysis**

This treatise is aimed at examining the role of policy makers and/or the state in checking light weapons in Nigeria, the theory of post-colonial state will be adopted as the framework of analysis. This theory was developed by Karl Marx in his contribution to the analysis of the inherent characteristics, contradictions and dynamics of post-colonial peripheral capitalist and developing states.

**Major Tenets of the Theory:** The theory contends that the state is an independent force and a neutral observer that caters for the common interest of the community. The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the whole affairs of the bourgeoisie, or constant preservation, protection of the dominant class; the domination and exploitation of others, and the appropriation of the labour of others through force or other means. Also, the theory depicts the picture of how a typical African state tries to replicate the concepts of African states (Marx, and Engels 1977).

**Application of the Theory:** Colonialism defined the character of post-colonial state, in the sense that in their quest to secure and perpetuate their economic interests, the colonizers discouraged the rise of a strong bourgeoisie instead and planted stooges. Having a very weak economic base, these stooges resorted to using the state for primitive capital accumulation thus becoming a ready instrument for class formation and domination. In the words of Ake, (1998) colonial rule left most of the African states a legacy with of intense and lawless political competition amidst an ideological void and a rising tide of the expectation of a better life. The political environment at independence was profoundly hostile to development. Hence the struggle for power was so absorbing than anything else, including development, was relegated to the background (Olutuah, 2007). As those elites outside the corridors of power sought to pull together credible force to challenge those in power as well as to limit to a significant extent their own exposure to harassment and abuse, those in power were obsessed with the consolidation of power and crushing any form of opposition. In a highly statist post-colonial polity, they did not even have option of channelling their ambition into economic success, which was primarily a matter of state patronage. Political power was everything else; it was not only the access to wealth but also the guarantor of general well being.

**METHODS:** The study adopted the following research methods: Ex Post Factor (after the fact) as its research design; Content analysis as its analytical technique; Secondary source as its data collection base; Qualitative descriptive method as its method of analysis. Hence, all data collected were qualitatively synthesized thoroughly to ensure coherence and objectivity.

## **The Genesis of Arms Trade and Trafficking in Nigeria**

Given the difficulty in legally owning a gun, the majority of small arms in Nigeria are believed to be held illegally. Their illegality makes it difficult to track flows and possession. Weapons transit into the country across land borders and via sea ports. Sources of small arms include arms dealers, serving and retired military and police officers, returning peacekeepers, armed groups across borders, and other individuals (Ikelegbe, 2005). These weapons transit into the country and into the hands of armed groups, national dealers, political and community leaders, and individuals. Craft production provides a domestic source of small arms. Demand is the key to understanding the trade: as long as insecurity persists, and economic and political opportunities for gain exist through the use of force, demand for small arms will continue.

## **History of Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapon (SALW) in Nigeria**

Perhaps, gun possession by civilians in Nigeria is not new and predates colonialism. Guns were introduced by the Europeans prior to colonialism during legitimate and illegitimate (slave) trade between them and Africans. Subsequently, guns and other arms, ammunition and weapons were used by Europeans to realize their imperial ambitions when they used force to suppress Africa's resistance to European incursion, conquest and colonialism (Adejo, 2005).

The Gunboat Diplomacy was popularly employed by the British to compel African chiefs to enter into various treaties with them. There was establishment of West African Frontier Force (WAFF) used by the British to execute the British-Afro War of (1901-1902), and other forms of resistance in Nigeria, West Africa, and indeed Africa. The role of Royal Niger Company (RNC) later United African Company (UAC) backed by British Government in using force to suppress dissenting communities is imperative (Chuma-Okoro, 2011). These arms or guns possibly found their way to the hands of Africans during the period of colonialism subsequently used in traditions and hunting in the rural community. In no time, guns and gun powder became symbols of strength and power, and were later transformed into ceremonial weapons displayed during funerals, burials, ceremonies and customary festivals among the natives. They also became symbols of individual and ethnic grandeur, and for deterring aggressors and invaders. Today, guns are no longer just ornaments of prestige, or just for hunting, safari and expedition. Guns have transformed in terms of functionality, lethality, sophistication, ubiquity and motive of ownership. They have become more weapons of criminality and instruments of the underworld (Chuma-Okoro, 2011).

Ostensibly, the 1959 Firearms Act was enacted to check the increasingly rate of proliferation in Nigeria towards independence. The failure of the Nigerian government to execute a comprehensive disarmament and arms destruction programme after the civil war (1967-1970) exacerbated the proliferation of guns and illicit arms trafficking. As at 2002, the number of SALW in Nigeria was estimated by various reports and studies, at between 1 and 3million including arms in lawful possession of members of armed forces, the police and those (majorly) in the hands of civilians. The 80% of SALW in civilian possession were illegally acquired because of the strict regulations (Ojudu, 2007).

## **Entry Points and Transit Routes of SALW**

Since Nigeria has lengthy and porous borders, a number of airports, and numerous ports along the southern coast, smuggling and cross-border trade are difficult to detect and monitor. Limited staff, vehicles, and resources make the job of customs officials, the police, and the navy all the more difficult. While many are certain that small arms are coming into the country, as evidenced by the presence of foreign-made weapons in circulation, the exact entrance routes of these weapons are less clear. A number of transit countries are often mentioned. These include the neighbouring countries of Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, as well as Gabon and Guinea-Bissau (Ikelegbe, 2005, p. 228; Ojudu, 2007). Other reported sources include Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, South Africa, Turkey, and Ukraine, as well as Bulgaria, Kosovo, and Serbia. While source countries are often named, the flows of small arms from source and transit countries are not well documented. The police have impounded a large quantity of arms and ammunition smuggled through neighbouring countries, with many coming from the Tudu arms market in Ghana and making their way to Nigeria through Togo and Benin (Olori, 2004). This suggests that there are important entry points for small arms into Nigeria.

Reportedly, the three most notorious arms smuggling frontiers in Nigeria are in the south-west (Idi-Iroko in Ogun state and Seme in Lagos state), in the south (the port city of Warri in Delta state), and in the north-east at the border with Niger and Cameroon (Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe states) (Agboton-Johnson, Ebo, and Mazal, 2004, p. 21). Warri has been referred to as the 'hub of the gun trade' in the Niger Delta (Ojudu, 2007; Peel, 2005, p. 2), and its location in the Delta, as well as the demand for small arms in that area of the country, make this a logical place for the reception of shipments. However, relatively little concrete evidence of small arms transfers is available, making it difficult to assess trafficking routes, transit countries, and sources. A number of towns are known for the availability of weapons, including Asaba, Benin City, Warri, Aba, Onitsha, Enugu, Owerri, Awka, and Port Harcourt (Small Arms Survey, 2007). Arms that come into the country through the southern ports may be distributed in this southern region, or they move further north to primary distribution points, and then on to secondary distribution points.

Some of these weapons will move farther north, but the north appears to have additional sources of small arms through the borders with Niger and Chad in the North-East. Entry points here include Maigatari, Nguru, and Mallam Falori (Adejo, 2005, p. 93).

### **Sources of Illegal Small Arms**

Sources of illegal small arms and light weapons include purchases from international and national arms dealers, sales and rentals by serving and retired security personnel, sales by returning peacekeepers, sales of recycled weapons from decommissioning exercises, oil-for-arms exchanges in the Delta region, and purchases of locally produced craft weapons (Small Arms Survey, 2007). Illegal weapons are also obtained through thefts from dealers, armouries, and residences; seizures from security officials during robberies; and in clashes with other armed groups (Small Arms Survey, 2007 p. 16). National weapons dealers remain quiet on the sources of their weapons.

While a few international dealers have been named during interviews in the country, there is little information about these dealers or their operations. Both armed groups and dealers have been quiet on their operations. While this is not unusual for the illegal trade, some have specifically refused to share these details, show their weapons, or allow the recording of serial numbers of weapons, explaining that they do not want to threaten the future supply of arms by divulging their sources.

Despite the difficulty in obtaining details of transfers, there do appear to be different sourcing methods. Weapons entering the south, especially in the Niger Delta area, appear to be acquired through more direct means, such as cash payments or bartering oil for arms between armed groups and offshore ships. Weapons entering through border areas and the south-east take a more indirect route to both dealers and buyers, often passing through primary and secondary distribution points (Adejo, 2005).

While international arms dealers remain a primary source of weapons, the scale of imports and sales remains unclear. Some persons interviewed in Nigeria reported hearing of purchases of NGN 7 million (USD 56,000) or even NGN 20 million (USD 160,000), when translated into weapons, these amounts are roughly equivalent to 40 and 100 weapons, respectively, based on a price of USD 1,500 per weapon, which was the average price for an AK-47 in late 2006. Even at lower prices, the amounts imported would still number in the low hundreds. This does not limit the significance of their importation or the destructive effect of their use, but it does raise questions about the level of arms possession that exists in the country, and whether the often claimed high figures in circulation have been exaggerated (Ebo, 2006).

Illegal sales by serving and retired security personnel pose a major concern with regard to the proliferation of small arms. This problem was publicly acknowledged by President Obasanjo in December 2002 when he stated that the majority of small arms and light weapons circulating in Nigeria were either sold or rented out by, or stolen from, the country's security agencies' (Ginifer and Ismail, 2005, pp. 6-7). Security officials have lost a number of weapons through theft. While a common occurrence, the numbers lost in this way appear to be relatively small (Bah, 2004, p. 4). Security officials have provided weapons to ethnic militias in their home areas, with one customs official claiming the donation of 16 G3 rifles as his contribution to the Niger Delta cause (Ebo, 2006, pp. 11, 25).

A survey of armed group members conducted in Bayelsa state revealed that the majority of respondents received assistance from the police (30.4 per cent), the mobile police (14.7 per cent), and the military (24.5 per cent) in obtaining small arms (Isumonah, Tantua, and James, 2006, p. 74). There is also some evidence of the diversion, or recycling, of weapons from decommissioning exercises into the illegal trade (SON, 2006, p. 8). In addition to providing access to small arms, serving and retired service personnel have also provided training to militants (AAPW, 2006). The armed groups in the Delta have displayed 'superior strategies and tactics using better training and organization' (Von Kemedi, 2006, p. 3). The use of military trainers would explain how militants in the Delta have developed more organized and sophisticated tactics over the past years. Nigerian peacekeepers have also been identified as a source of black market weapons. Nigerian soldiers have served in a number of peacekeeping missions in Africa, including Sierra Leone and Liberia, among others. This has provided Nigerian soldiers with access to small arms. Soldiers returning from peacekeeping missions have sold small arms on the Nigerian black market, providing 'a ready source of assault weapons' for the Nigerian population. Although perhaps not a significant source of weapons in terms of numbers, this has been recognized as a source of small arms, especially for inter-communal conflicts (Bah, 2004, pp. 45).

There is fear that a larger percentage of the SALW in circulation in Nigeria are illicit or illegal. Some of these illicit SALW were used in armed violence such as ethnic-religious conflicts, communal clashes, sectarian violence, cultism, political violence, electoral violence, vigilantism, militancy and criminality. Between November 2006 and February 2007, 212 cases of violent crime were reported, 189 of these were carried out with firearms, 34 with other tools and two involved bombs (Chuma-Okoro, 2011). Harzen and Horner (2007) have noted that given the difficulty in legally owning a gun which makes it difficult to track flows and possession. SALW are imported into Nigeria across land and sea borders.



### **The Circulation of Small and Light Weapons and the Elections in Nigeria**

Elections make a fundamental contribution to democratic governance given the inevitable phenomenon that democratic government must be conducted through representatives. Elections therefore enable voters to select leaders and to hold them accountable for their performance in office. Accountability can be undermined when elected leaders do not care about re-election or when a political party or coalition is so dominant that there is effectively no choice for voters among alternative candidates, parties or policies (Akintunde, 1967). Notwithstanding this, the fact of periodic elections helps to solve the problem of succession in leadership and thus contributes to the continuation of democracy.

For instance, on the eve of the 2011 elections, many Nigerians were torn between guarded optimism and sheer pessimism. On the one hand, INEC had made headway on electoral and logistical reforms. 52 political parties, including the ruling PDP, had signed the political code of conduct for the elections; and INEC had barred all political officeholders at all levels of government from monitoring or serving as party agents, unless they resigned their appointments. Voters were also encouraged by INEC's assurance that fraudulent results would be cancelled at the polling booths.

The April elections were imperfect, but they marked a welcome break from previous polls. INEC's integrity, its open-door policy that enabled several domestic election monitoring and civil society groups to play a key role in the electoral process, and its courage in postponing the 2<sup>nd</sup>, April National Assembly elections to 9<sup>th</sup>, April rather than risk failure were crucial. Others who made important contributions were the NYSC members who worked as INEC's ad hoc officials; eminent Nigerians, mainly senior academics, who served as returning officers; and a determined electorate prepared every step of the way to defend their votes and protect the integrity of the system. Institutional support from the police, army and other security agencies as well as from domestic and international observers was equally invaluable.

### **The use of Armed Thugs during the Election**

Without doubt, Nigerian politics has since independence, been characterized by thuggery and violence. Little wonder, politics is conceived as a dirty game and exclusive right of thugs and hooligans in Nigeria. Consequently, Nigeria politics manifest in acrimony, assault, assassination, intimidation, harassment, maiming and killing. This trend is not a phenomenon of decency; thuggery, brutality and violence. Political behaviour has been with us for the past four decades. Immediately after independence, the politicians, in an attempt to capture, exercise, and retain power within their regional settings involved themselves in various acts that were politically immature unwise and disastrous. They adopted a style that was antithetical to democratic tenet and of good governance. They recruited, trained and empowered thugs to harass, intimidate and victimize perceived political opponents and opposing views against their political ambition. This culture of thuggery has not only imbibed and sustained as part of the country's political behaviour since independence to the present moment, it has been one of the potent causes of the low participation of both men and women in politics. Obviously, there are lots of organizational and logistical problems that occurred during the election. These problems were in form of malfeasance (illegal or dishonest activity by people who are public officials) that should work painstakingly to promote the interest of the state but they failed in their duty where the top politicians were even using them to some extent for thuggery (Dahl, 1989).

### **Security and Turnout**

Polling days were marred by a long list of electoral malpractices. Malfeasance was recorded during the entire period, with the governorship election the worst affected. This is hardly surprising. State governors are very powerful in Nigeria, controlling immense resources for patronage; intra- and inter-party competition for the post is often volatile and turbulent. According to an estimate, about 40 people were killed and over 160 arrested during the National Assembly election on 9<sup>th</sup>, April. In Delta state alone, eighteen people were arrested including a police corporal and a member of the NYSC- Other incidents, which in some cases turned violent, included; Ballot Snatching. Incidents were reported during the National Assembly election in Delta Central senatorial district, notably the Orogun axis. A similar incident in the Sapele axis reportedly led to several deaths in Warri. In the same state, during gubernatorial polls, fake INEC materials were seized in Ubulu uku. About 26 people, including the aide-de-camp of a governor in the North-Central zone, were held for alleged possession of thumb-printed ballot papers and for attempting to snatch electoral materials. In Kebbi state, ballot boxes were reportedly snatched during the presidential poll in Baguda and Wasagu, while over ten people were arrested for snatching and destroying election materials belonging to Ido Osi LGA of Ekiti state. Five men were arrested in Niger state during the governorship election for attempted ballot box snatching (Odey, 2007). All these violent acts were aided by arms.

The most significant arrest was of the PDP House of Representatives candidate for Nnewi North/Nnewi South/Ekwusigo Federal Constituency and an accomplice, for a range of offences, including ballot box snatching, impersonation, multiple voting and canvassing for votes for candidates at polling centres on Election Day. Both men were also accused of seizing and tearing ballot papers at a polling centre where the candidate was failing.

### **Intimidation**

Voter intimidation may not have been in the headlines, but former Information Minister Dora Akunyili (APGA), who lost a high-profile re-run for the Anambra Central senatorial district to former Anambra state governor Chris Ngige, said it was why she did not congratulate her opponent. Akunyili, who had also lost the initial election that was dogged by claims of bribery and harassment of the returning officer, said the contest was fraught with violence and fear.

### **Misconduct by INEC Officials and Politicians**

INEC's tough stance on fraud did not rub off on all of its own officials and some politicians. A senior official with the National Population Commission (NPC) in Ondo state, who served as INEC ad hoc supervisor, was arrested on 9<sup>th</sup>, April for illegal possession of election materials. In Ibokun, Osun state, about 50 thumb-printed ballot papers were found on a member of the NYSC serving as a presiding officer. In Bayelsa state, three INEC ad hoc staff was arrested for diverting election materials. A man who claimed to be an INEC official, but could not name his assigned unit, was arrested in Odo Otin LGA of Osun state with about five booklets of ballot papers.

### **Insecurity and Disenchantment of Masses in the Electoral Process**

Political violence or electoral violence has continued to threaten the democratic experiment in Nigeria. This has done incalculable damage to Nigeria's democracy having stifled many democratic experiments in Nigeria. Electoral violence has now taken another dimension fiercer than before because associating with the present electoral violence is political assassination. Akintunde, while referring to Kalu Ezera pointed out that Nigerian leaders were determined to make democracy work in their country (Akintunde, 1967:1). However, the history of elections in Nigeria has consistently taken along with it element of violence because a cursory look at the First Republic till date has depicted that these elections were not all that free from rancour and acrimony and even to the extent of threatening opponents. In this subject, the factors responsible for this insecurity, electoral violence and arms circulations in Nigerian elections are addressed, thus:

**Unnecessary Political Ambition:** Unlike before, Nigerians have become highly politicised. In fact, the demand to participate in politics keeps on increasing in geometrical progression while the absorbing capacity of these participants increases in arithmetic progression. This leads to a very high competition among the participants who are prone to take the most extreme measure in order to win and maintain political power.

**Ethnic Politics:** This has become highly pronounced in Nigerian politics. The colonialists who ruled us in the past poisoned the minds of Nigerians against Nigerian. Thus in 1951 election in Kano, the colonial administration tried hard to frustrate Northern allies of Southerners opposed to the candidates of the emirs. Similarly, after the election that brought Goodluck Jonathan in, some disgruntled elements rose up in the North chanting 'Ba muso' meaning they do not like the president because he is not from the north and ignited the post- election violence of 2011. In 2015, just as the Niger Delta threatens war if Jonathan fail, same way the North threaten.

**Unemployment:** Unemployment also contributes immensely to electoral violence. Many of these people who are jobless enter politics with the intents and purposes of causing confusion.

### **Discussions: Government Response to Arms Circulation in Nigeria**

The Government of Nigeria faces numerous challenges in tackling the problems of small arms proliferation and armed violence. Some of these challenges are self-imposed and reinforced through greed-based behaviour, while others are as a result of poor institutional capacity and the complexities of addressing widespread crime and the general situation in the Niger Delta. Nigeria has national firearms legislation that is comprehensive and restrictive, but poorly enforced. The country has signed on to a number of regional and international legal instruments aimed at reducing small arms proliferation, but national committees designated to implementing these measures have been poorly resourced and ineffective. Arms continue to flow into the country, raising questions of whether there is lack of commitment or lack of capacity to tackle the problem (Bah, 2004).

In Niger-Delta, the government has adopted a 'carrot and stick' approach to managing the violence there. This approach has not yet yielded positive progress in terms of violence reduction. Instead, many on the ground claim that the militaristic nature of the approach has exacerbated tensions and led to an increase in small arms proliferation and a hardening of the positions of armed groups. The government has yet to engage fully in a broader security sector reform initiative. Reform attempts over the past eight years have progressed in fits and starts, some underlying factors still impede this target, and they are as follow:

### **Politics as a Hindrance**

One of the major impediments to managing small arms proliferation and armed violence is the tendency of politicians to utilise this violence to their own ends, coupled with the financial capacity of politicians to foment violence or buy political victory. There have been numerous allegations since 2003 elections of political leaders creating and arming groups of young men as tools of electoral intimidation. Similar allegation arose in the lead-up to the 2007 general elections. The strength, level of equipment, and skills demonstrated by armed groups has increased speculation that these groups must have some form of high-level support (Ikelegbe, 2005, p. 224, citing Abia, 2003), and that they could not have established themselves without help from 'high-ranking' politicians who use them for self-interest gains. Those who should be instrumental in pushing for action to limit the use of armed groups by politicians are therefore the same politicians who benefit from their use. One important source of funding for standing politicians to pay for armed groups is the so called 'security vote'. This is a nebulous allocation in each state and local government budget. The allocation is allegedly intended for 'the purpose of maintaining peace and security in the local government area' (HRW, 2007 pp. 32). Even though this allocation is often one of the largest single allocations in a state's budget, there is no clear definition of what qualifies as an activity that maintains peace and security (HRW, 2007 pp. 32).

### **Limited Capacity of the Security Forces**

The problems of armed violence and Small arms Proliferation are further exacerbated by the inability of the police to reduce violent crime, ensure law and order, and provide security to the population at large. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, the police are the main security force charged with ensuring law and order. They are assisted by the customs service, the army, the navy, and the Mobile Police Unit, who also patrol the borders and the flow of goods and people into the country. However, none of the security services currently possesses the training, resources, or personnel to do its job effectively. The lengthy and porous nature of the borders contributes to these logistical problems. Poor police capacity has led to the development of a security gap in which communities have often been forced to create their own local security arrangements (Bah, 2004). This has involved the creation of vigilante groups, which are intended to function as community watch patrols, and the establishment of community armouries. The use of vigilante groups is widespread. In some cases they have enhanced community security and reduced crime, while in other cases they have taken the law into their own hands and meted out punishments.

While they appear to have contributed to a reduction in crime levels in some areas, they are not a substitute for an effective police force. Community armouries appear to be a common phenomenon. These are small collections of guns, usually 100-200, that are stored by and for the community in a known central location for use in self-defence should the community be attacked. Reportedly, the weapons are stored in a central location because of concerns over illegal ownership and the potential for individuals to be arrested for possession if the weapons were kept at home by individuals. This suggests that most of the weapons in the community armouries are not properly licensed and therefore illegally possessed. Weapons in the community armouries include shotguns, rifles, and Dane guns, as well as more sophisticated small arms, such as AK-47 Assault Rifles. In some cases, the control of community armouries has devolved to self-appointed local commanders, or warlords, who have used the weapons to engage in criminal activities (Davis and Von Kerner, 2006, p. 22).

While community armouries can serve a self defence purpose, their commandeering by leaders for self-enrichment suggests that these armouries pose as much of a threat to communities as they provide a means of defence.

### **Legal Measures to Address Small Arms**

Nigeria has been an active participant in international and regional discussions on small arms proliferation. The country has signed on to a number of international measures pertaining to small arms and light weapons. It supported the adoption in 2005 of the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons, and has argued that this political document needs to be transformed into a legally binding instrument in order to control effectively and criminalize the illicit movement of small arms (Adekanye, 2006).

Nigeria has also recommended consideration of sanctions for those found diverting arms into illegal networks, the establishment of a common international standard for regulating the activities of arms brokers, integrating small arms measures into comprehensive national development strategies, and the establishment of a common standard for end-user certification and stockpile management (Adekanye, 2006). In addition, Nigeria has supported West African regional measures aimed at reducing the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

At the national level, Nigeria continues to rely on the national Firearms Act of 1959 as the legal instrument governing small arms possession, manufacture, and use in the country. The act has been amended and complemented by additional legislation since its introduction. On paper, the national legislation provides clear indications of what is legal and illegal, and all weapons without proper licensing are illegal. However, the legislation has been inadequately implemented and enforced. In addition, many fines imposed for breaches of the legislation are relatively minor,

leading some to claim that they have no deterrent effect (Agboton-Johnson, Ebo, and Mazal, 2004, p. 24). Proposals were made that the laws be revised and updated following the UN Programme of Action in 2001, but to date there have been no efforts to overhaul the national legislation on small arms. President Obasanjo initiated a number of committees aimed at addressing the issues of proliferation, disarmament, and related matters, but to date these committees have made little progress in tackling these issues.

In July 2000, the government established a National Committee on the Proliferation and Illicit Trafficking in Small Arms and Light Weapons to respond to the growing crime in the country and the proliferation of small arms. The purpose of the committee was to determine the sourcing of illegal small arms and collect information on small arms proliferation in Nigeria (PANA, 2000). In May 2<sup>nd</sup>, into a single committee after determining that redundancy in efforts made two committees superfluous. The committee has accomplished very little in the past five years. In large part, this is the result of a lack of political will, financial support, technical expertise, and capacity. Rather than being established as an independent commission, the committee has been placed within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Staffing of the committee is not permanent, but, rather, individuals with other full-time posts are asked to serve on the committee. The committee did produce an ambitious work plan in 2003, but has been unable to implement these activities. Originally conceived of as a primary documentation centre on small arms and light weapons, the committee has not yet demonstrated its capacity to act in this role.

There were renewed efforts in 2007 to revive the activities of the committee, and legislation is being written to convert the committee into a national commission. This conversion was significant in that its expectation changed the nature of the institution from an ad hoc measure to a permanent institution with a budget from the national government and financial and institutional autonomy (Agboton-Johnson, Ebo, and Mazal, 2004, p. 26). The committee contributed to prepare for the conduct a national survey of small arms by the end of 2007. It is seeking support from the ECOWAS Small Arms Programme to conduct the survey and to undertake other activities in support of the implementation of the 2006 ECOWAS Convention. The survey is expected to provide a baseline for devising policy, determining future activities, and assessing any programmes implemented.

### **Disarmament Efforts in the Niger Delta**

The Nigerian government has attempted a number of disarmament exercises in the country over the past several decades. Presently, their attempts in the Niger Delta region will be highlighted here. Many of these strategies of disarmament have taken place in the Delta region, but their implementation was never fully documented. To date there are no reliable figures on the numbers of weapons collected during any of the disarmament programmes, nor accurate data on the amounts paid for weapons submitted to the process. Many claim that the proliferation of small arms in Nigeria began following the end of the Biafran civil war, due to the lack of an effective disarmament programme at the time (Obasi, 2002, p. 69). This trend has continued, most recently in 2004 in Delta state. The impacts of these unsuccessful disarmament programmes continue to be felt through the prevalence of armed robbery across the country and the growing role of armed groups.

Between 1997 and 1999 the Delta state government initiated a disarmament programme calling on warring ethnic factions from the Ijaw, Urhobo, and Itsekiri ethnic groups to hand in their weapons. The call went unheeded (Lewis and Davis, 2006, p. 64). Shortly thereafter, the Governor of Delta, offered cash, short-term training, and employment to militant youths who gave up their weapons. This call was met with scepticism, and ultimately little success (Lewis and Davis, 2006, p. 64). These initiatives failed to reduce significantly the number of arms in circulation. In July 2004, the governor of Rivers state initiated a disarmament programme. The programme provided financial benefits and amnesty to those who turned in their weapons. Although some weapons were handed in, the programme failed to deliver a sustainable peace. Renewed fighting between the NDPVF and NDVS, as well as a declaration of all-out war by Asari, led to the intervention by the federal government. In September 2004, President Obasanjo invited the leaders of the NDPVF and NDVS, Asari and Tom, to meet with him in Abuja. This initiative for peace negotiations to end the rising violence in Rivers state in the Niger Delta was successful, and a peace agreement was signed on 1<sup>st</sup>, October 2004. This agreement, which provided payments for weapons turned in to authorities, a general amnesty, and promises of employment, paved the way for another disarmament programme to take place.

The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration programme was established, but it failed to live up to the expectations of the militants. The government had promised 4,000 jobs (HRW, 2005, p. 21). Although training was provided through the reintegration phase for nearly 2,000 youths, the inability of those youths to obtain jobs following the training programme resulted in growing disenchantment with the process (Bekoe, 2005). Although the disarmament programme collected nearly 3,000 weapons (Bekoe, 2005), observers claim that this was only a small fraction of what was circulating in the Niger Delta, that the weapons turned in were old or unserviceable and that the process actually encouraged the purchase of additional weapons in order to benefit from the high prices being paid for weapons submitted to the disarmament process. An inventory of weapons destroyed in early November 2004 supports the claim that the weapons were old. Of the 848 recorded weapons, more than one-third of them were AK-47 assault rifles from the late 1960s.



The disarmament process failed to secure a sustainable peace. Disputes over levels of disarmament and cash payments received for submitted weapons increased tensions within and between groups. Disagreements over payments and accusations of leaders keeping the money for themselves led to a split within the NDPVF, while smaller groups threatened the government with violence unless they were paid. By early November 2004 armed groups had broken the ceasefire in a series of clashes and attacks. The peace process continued despite these attacks, but leaders of the groups remained suspicious of the process (Asuni, 2006, p. 82). The Rivers state governor held a meeting of all factions on 19 November, at the end of which another peace agreement was signed, which set the stage for a Peace Ambassadors Camp to be held in January 2005, with more than 700 representatives from armed factions and youth groups attending (Asuni, 2006, pp. 82-83). The camp took place, but failed to resolve the remaining contentious issues. The 2004 disarmament process not only failed to disarm the factions, but also reduced confidence in the government, thereby making future disarmament measures more difficult. The key element preventing real progress on the 2004 disarmament process was the lack of attention to reintegration efforts and opportunities for former militants to earn gainful employment. Although over 4,000 jobs were promised, the posts that materialized were temporary, low paying, and oddly located in areas not directly affected by the conflict (Asuni, 2006, p. 83). As a result, the militants felt short-changed by the process. The failure of this disarmament process left armed groups distrustful of the government and its motives, and apprehensive about any future disarmament initiatives. This shadow continues to hang over ongoing government efforts to resolve the crisis in the Niger Delta particularly.

The main enforcement agencies responsible for checking arms trafficking and proliferation of SALW in Nigeria are the Nigeria Police Force, the custom service, the immigration service, among others. The law enforcement agencies have made various efforts at checkmating SALW trafficking and proliferation.

**Findings:** The findings of this study are:

1. That the increase in the illegal possession of arms may be attributed to the state's inability to address the basic needs of the masses;
2. That the circulation of the small arms and light weapons during the general elections in Nigeria actually undermined political participation;
3. That easy accessibility and availability of SALW has become a catalyst to insurgencies in the polity;
4. And that the long year of peaceful co-existence and inter-socio-economic ties among Nigerians has been eroded as a result of fear, which has given way to violence between Muslims and Christians particularly in the northern part of the country. The most recent is the activities of the Boko Haram, an Islamic sect who has since 2009 been unleashing terror on the people living in that part of the country with dead and casualties culminating to several thousand.

### **Recommendations**

1. Reconstituting the Nigerian state in such a way as to be proactive in dealing with the demand factors of SALW that heightens the proliferation of SALW and Strengthening the law enforcement agencies in order to enable them check the supply factors of SALW that worsens security situations in the Northern part of Nigeria.
2. On the issue of the living standard it is obvious that Urbanization has risen unabated in Nigeria over the years resulting in deplorable housing and environmental conditions (Olotuah, 2007). There is an overarching need to arrest the rapid rate of urbanization in the country. Government policies have to be revisited to slow down the urbanization process (Olotuah, 2005). Integrated rural development is imperative in this regard. This should involve the location of educational and health institutions in the rural areas, provision of infrastructural facilities, as well as the development of rural housing which will serve to improve the general living conditions of the rural dwellers (Arayela, 2002).
3. In its policy formulation government has to define its proper role in urban housing provision and processes involved in housing development. In reaching a policy it is imperative to introduce changes that will stem further degradation of urban housing situation. Housing is in short supply and therefore a comprehensive review of the housing needs of Nigerians' urban areas is required (Olotuah, 2007).
4. More importantly the housing needs of the low income earners, who constitute the vast majority of urban dwellers, have to be clearly discerned to engender adequate planning for them. Ecological considerations have to be taken into account in policy formulation and decision-making. Urban centres that suffer environmental pollution, erosion devastation and desert encroachment will have special consideration taken into account in determining government role (Olotuah, 2005). Urban development and restoration should be a major concern of government in order to reduce the environmental stress experienced in the urban centres. This is achievable with major investments committed to urban infrastructure and services. This however requires the will of government

coupled with public interests in making infrastructure choices that will yield long-run results without undue politicking (Basorun, 2003).

5. Certain measures need to be taken during elections too. On the part of the police, we will need to be more proactive, sharpen our intelligence gathering network and deploy more men in subsequent elections. Motorized patrols should also be intensified and anti-riot squads placed on standby. Training and retraining should be given serious attention all in a bid to avoid the circulation of arms during elections.

6. On the part of INEC, Voter education should be taken more seriously in all the states at all levels and both the print and electronic media. Also, more polling centres may need to be established and election materials should arrive at all polling centres early enough so that voting can commence as scheduled and special attention should be given to areas with difficult terrain- not accessible by road/vehicles, riverine and mountainous areas etc. In addition to this, incidents of names missing from voters registers should be addressed, and omission of registered party logos from ballot papers should be avoided. Voting should commence in time and concluded on time so that it does not drag into the night as much as possible. That way election result can also get to collation centres in good time.

## Conclusion

Without any point of contradiction arms proliferation is a global phenomenon, especially after the cold war. In other word the proliferation of SALW is not limited to a particular region or continent but a global affair. However, the acquisition of SALW by non-state actors and its use in conflict prone area is a matter of concern. The long military rule and its attendant effect on civil-military relation in Nigeria and the inability of the government to deliver socio political goods has inadvertently impact the upward demand for SALW, hence a threat to socio-political and economic development.

As earlier stated the possession of small arms does not itself cause violence but intensify and prolong violence. In such a way it has indirectly integrated into economic values of local manufactures who sell it locally either legally or other wise and those that receives and engage it in predatory violence against one another. Put in another word, the easy accessibility of SALW has become a catalyst to insurgencies in the polity. It is of interest to note that the long year of peaceful co-existence and inter-socio-economic ties among Nigerians has been eroded. It is also worthy of interest to note that the long year of peaceful co-existence and inter-socio-economic ties among Nigerians has been eroded as a result of fear which has given way to violence between Christian and Muslims particularly in the northern part of the country. The most recent is the activities of the Boko Haram, an Islamic sect who has since 2009 been unleashing terror on the people living in that part of the country with casualties already above two thousand. As reported by *The Economist* (September 29, 2012 edition), the insurgency has done great economic damage, Foreign and domestic investors have fled the area, the GDP of northern Nigeria is reckoned to have shrunk by around 30% since 2010. In some places public services have ceased because frightened civil servants no longer turn up for work. The gap between the already poor north and the wealthy south is widening fast. Not that alone, the culture of bitterness, mistrust and suspicion which has widened and fractured the gap between the various ethnic groups in the country, has not only given room for the use of SALW but also allow it to create an atmosphere of fear which often deprive the populace to resume socio-economic and cultural activities.

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