

## Small Arms Proliferation and Its Security Implications in Jos North Local Government, Nigeria

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### Abstract

*After World War II, there has been a steady increase in the volume of small arms produced across the world. While the initial producers stepped up their production as a result of the cold war, some other new producers stepped up their production as a result of the cold war. Some other new producers joined the industry both for the same reason and profits. These arms had, in the period, wrecked havoc on mankind in the violent conflicts they facilitated. Both superpower blocs engaged in the ideological war never considered these negative side effects, as what mattered was the expansion of spheres of influence. The international community woke up in the last two decades to the realization of the havoc the proliferation of small arms has done to mankind. It has suddenly been discovered that the biggest agent of destruction of human lives is small weapons, which are very cheap and easy to acquire. The uncontrolled accumulation and proliferation of small arms have become a major threat to the international community. Jos North, Plateau State of Nigeria, has not been spared the impact of the proliferation of these weapons exacerbates conflicts, making them more violent and more resistant to resolution by non-violent means. The efforts by both the Nigerian government and the stakeholders to curb these problems are examined. The main objective of this study is to examine small arms proliferation and its security implications for Nigerian society with particular emphasis on Jos North Local Government. In furtherance of this, it examines factors that are salient in or paramount to small arms proliferation in Jos North.*

### Keywords

Arms; Conflict;  
Proliferation; Security;  
History; Jos; Nigeria



## I. Introduction

The sudden upsurge and the issue of small arms proliferation and light weapons, as opined by Akpanke et al. (2022), have in recent years been identified as fundamental human problems that require concerted efforts by individuals, groups, organizations and governments to eliminate. Thus, we now have national governments, regional organizations, and the world body, the United Nations Organizations (UNO), actively involved in efforts to stem the proliferation of small arms (Gbadeyan & Osadola, 2023). This trend of activity is quite understandable. The second half of the last century, particularly after World War II, witnessed a tremendous increase in the struggle for independence by the colonized territories of the third world. These struggles, which were both political and armed, were most intense in the Africa continent. This necessitated both the importation and local production of lethal weapons. The political, ethnic and religious cleavages that emerged after the various colonial territories gained independence saw a sustained increase in the demand for the acquisition of these weapons by the political, ethnic and religious factions which emerged to fight the perceived imbalances in the new

system created by the partitioning of the region by the colonial masters (Osadola & Gbadeyan, 2023).

Nwolise (2001) captured the state of Africa when he said, "Africa has been a continent in turmoil since the slave era, it has passed through colonial imperializing conquest to international and internal war". This conflict is sustained and prolonged by the uncontrolled availability of small arms found in the nooks and crannies of the countries in Africa. Nigeria has not been spared of this ugly and devastating experience. Nigeria's peace and security have remained under serious threats since independence, a situation that has continued to threaten the existence of the country as a corporate entity.

Globalization is becoming an ever-influential "architect" of the new international security agenda. Its impact on the evolution of the relations among states is contradictory (Osadola & Emah, 2022). On the one hand, globalization contributes to the accelerated development of productive forces, scientific and technological progress and ever more intensive communication between state and people. On the other hand, it has facilitated the easy transportation of illegal arms from one country to the other. It has transformed domestic law and other problems into a national and international security threat (Adeleye & Osadola, 2022). Globalization results in the long term irreversible contraction in the domain of state authority. Coupled with liberalization, states have, in effect, lost control of markets as reflected in the development of parallel information economics, the rise of grey and black markets and the inability of these states to prevent the flow of illicit arms because of the porous nature of most borders and the adoption of policies such as "free movements" of people in a particular region. Evidence indicates that illegal arms transfers are easier in periods of political transition that are normally preceded by periods of violence. According to Chuma-Okoro (2011), the state then focuses its resources on areas of reconstruction and development only, leaving gaps for the illicit transfer of small arms by crime syndicates. Nigeria's fourth republic has witnessed the upsurge of communal conflict. Years of pent-up anger suppressed by prolonged periods of military misrule found outlets as Nigeria joined the third democratic wave. It is not arms that cause this conflict, but the ease with which these arms are available, leads to easy escalation of festering conflicts. Muggah (2001)

## **II. Review of Literature**

### **2.1 Conceptualizing Small Arms Proliferation**

Small arms proliferation is a post-cold War phenomenon, which has been receiving the attention of international organizations, regional organizations governments and the NGOs, because of the devastating ruin done directly and indirectly to humanity. It is true that before now, there have been a series of wars in which weapons were used. Notwithstanding, the availability of these weapons in the past was not perceived to be excessive and was not commonly made possible to the extent that its accessibility was as cheap and easy as it was in modern times. During this period, weapons of war were absolutely controlled and regulated and, in fact, could not be used anyhow. This was the faith of the African continent before the arrival of the colonial masters. Most wars fought witnessed a total regulation of arms used and strict compliance to rules and regulations of governing war making. In African societies, as pointed out by Nwolise (2001) "Weapons of war were also regulated only the combatants were targets while other categories of persons were protected, especially women, children, old people and strangers. In the same

vein, Basten (1966) observed that in a fight between relatives or people of the same towns, guns were forbidden, while matches, spears, bows and arrows, staves, and such weapons were permitted. At the same time, it was not permissible to use them indiscriminately; there must be no fatal wounding. The regulation of weapons of war created an atmosphere for the prevention of what is known as total war and easy access to weapons. One of the effects of colonized regions, but not to the extent, that proliferation occurred. The advent of the first and most especially, the second world wars welcome the generation of nuclear weapons, and the increase in the existing weapons in circulation around the world to a given level. Although, to large extent, those weapons were restricted to the military circle.

Kumar & Sanam (1998) observe that what was once a state or centralized monopoly of military strength is rapidly being eroded. This erosion was brought into play by the emergence of the Cold War. Small arms proliferation germinated from ideological humanity due to the easy accessibility of small arms. Dambazau (1999) exclaimed that the cold war (that often turns hot in developing countries) ensured unrest reigned and a continuous flow of light weapons from the US, the USSR, and other industrialized countries into developing countries.

Renner (1998) stated that "particularly during the Cold War, vast quantities of these small arms were distributed primarily by the two superpowers, but also by other governments. Conventional weapons, which were abandoned during the period of the Cold War, were distributed. The disarmament project that existed during this period only focused on nuclear weapons and other termed weapons of mass destruction. However, now that agreements and norms have been reached concerning the usage of weapons of mass destruction, small arms have surfaced as contemporary arms of mass destruction, most especially in Africa.

Muggah's (2001) contribution is also in line with the contributive effect of the cold war, as regarding the escalation of small arms. He argued that "but it should be recalled that forty years of cold war encouraged the difussion of small arms through virtually all layers of society. Also, Stemmet (2001) supported the notion that the proliferation of small arms occurred during the Cold War. He said that while large quantities of small arms and light weapons were transferred into the developing world during the cold war, he also mentioned that other factors that have contributed to the proliferation of small arms include:

The dissolution of the Warsaw pact, the weakening and even collapse of state structures in the former Warsaw pact states and the resulting lack of control systems in some of these states created the force of supply. A similar tendency was evident in many post-colonial states in the developing world, as a result of inadequacies, states built proper security systems and democratic political systems (Crowley, 2003). This has created a vacuum to be filled by new non-states actors, fomenting and participating especially in intra state conflicts and creating a demand for small arms and light weapons. The arms reduction brought about by the implementation of the conventional forces in Europe Treaty and the general downscaling of military forces, while the proliferation of interstate and especially intrastate conflict resulting from the termination of the relative global stability of the cold war era fuelled demand.

The aggregated effect of small arms proliferation are: the emergence of child soldering; proliferation of wars in developing countries after the cold war; appearance of non-state entities in the 1990s; increase desire for arms by civilians for defence purposes (private security); escalation of religious conflicts; prevalence ethnic conflicts etc created a favourable ground for the demand for small arms

### III. Results and Discussion

The impact of arms proliferation was characterized by avoidable loss of productive lives through heavy casualties which often threatened the peace in Jos, wanton destruction by distinction and randomization of private and public properties during crisis also threatened the state sustainable peace. Vandalism and looting were routinely carried out due to arms proliferating into the area, which threatened security and its peace and hindered investment opportunities; the internal displacement of residents before, during, and after the crisis; funds meant for development purposes were frequently diverted to rehabilitate victims of crisis and recurrent disruption of economic and social activities – all were serious threats to the sustainable peace and ultimately the wellbeing of the residents of our study area.

From the onset, this work set to unravel small arms proliferation and its security implications on Nigeria, focusing on Jos North Plateau State. The problems and risks associated with the menace were highlighted in the course of treating this subject. These include a rising waves of armed robbery, cross border banditry, formation of ethnic militias and the ever increasing spate of ethno-religious crises and their threat to lives and properties in the state, internally displaced persons associated with these ethno-religious crises, smuggling gun violence via cultism in tertiary institutions etc.

However, the history of illegal arms in Nigeria and the sub-region was traced to the scramble and partition of Africa by the colonial powers. Though, traditionally, the author agreed that prior to the coming of the colonialists, a crude method of manufacturing these weapons via the blacksmiths actually existed. These traditional methods were handed over from generation to generation and were mainly used for farming, hunting, and traditional rites. All these changed with the coming of the colonialists as the owner of such weapons resorted to using them for other things other than the purposes it was acquired for.

Furthermore, the causes of proliferation were ascribed to many factors which include. The sad experience of the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) was not followed by any serious disarmament programme (Osadola et al., 2023). The civil war made cheap illegal weapons available to the generality of the populace. Though this phenomenon is not peculiar to Nigeria alone. Other causes cited include the ridiculously cheap price of these arms, the many violent conflicts in the West African sub-region helped by the porous nature of Nigeria as borders and the geographical spread that make it highly impossible for their-equipped security agents to police effectively (Adu & Osadola, 2022). Also, the lucrative nature of fire arm business in Plateau State, Nigeria, the level of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria, the inability of government to prosecute the rich, powerful influential and highly placed individuals who are involved in the trade, the inability of the police to fight the menace due to her not being properly equipped, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the drying up of funds and grants from the East [Russia], the downsizing of the military by the super power and their allies, etc are the causes mentioned in the work (Gbadeyan & Osadola, 2023).

According to Chuma-Okoro (2011), the implications and consequences of small arms proliferation on National security in Jos North and Nigeria as a whole are high rate of criminal activities such as armed robbery, assassinations, cultism, vandalization of pipelines and kidnapping of Nigerian and expatriate oil workers, intimidation etc, rise in the number of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. In security of lives and properties, investors not having the confidence in Nigeria's economy, credibility problem on policies and tactics of the governments has adopted in handling the activities of these anti-forces, formation of ethnic militias to serve as a vanguard of every perceived ethnic interests, etc.

Preventive mechanism on the management strategies of small arms proliferation will go a long way if not in eliminating the menace completely will drastically reduce it to the barest minimum or manageable proportion. The UN and her agencies, the AU, ECOWAS and other No-governmental agencies have woken up from their slumber and are now seeking to reduce both the supply and the demand of small arms. African countries have now also realize that scarce government resources from health and education are diverted to public security, discourages investment and economic growth, and deprives developing countries of skills and talents of the victim of small arms (Yahaya, 2020).

A more sober picture was painted by Awake magazine [2005:5] edition in which it quoted Michael saying that "light weapons have become the principal tool of combat in the overwhelming majority of conflicts in the post-cold war era. According to the writer, up to 90 percent of casualties in recent wars have been the result of small arms and light weapons. Therefore, all hands ought to be on deck to limit the illegal manufacture and usage of this deadly commodity, which the former UN Secretary General described as "the weapons of choice for the killers of our time"

Also, the issue of the Soviet Union demise and the aid of cold war that swept away military regimes and one party state in Africa and instead brought a surge in pro-democracy movements and an eruption of ethnic and other social tension which has its roots in the accumulation of small arms were discussed. The attendant chaos that was unleashed on the polity saw the rise of war lords who profited from the chaos of war, thereby seeing little or no immediate advantage in laying down arms that helped them in the first place (Walt, 1992).

Curbing the international production, stockpiling, and diffusion of small arms and light weapons must be a central feature provision of the means of cutting the flow of arms all together to self protection under the UN charter, and most will continue to produce or import some weapons for this purpose. However, it should be possible to choke off the flow of black-market ammunition to irregular forces and to significantly restrict the conditions under which government can acquire arms through legal channels (Stott, 2005). Ultimately, it should be possible to block all trickles of weapons to current and prospective belligerents in areas of persistent conflict.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Peace scholars, researchers and experts have come to the conclusion that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) is as harmful as the increasing number of the so called weapons of mass destruction. More than 50% of the conflict fought after the cold war has been executed with small arms. Low intensity conflicts, in which small arms are critical and widely used, are threatening the non-negotiable core value (National Security) of developing countries of Africa and indeed the countries of the West African sub-region, including Nigeria.

The uncontrolled availability of small arms in Jos North and Nigeria as a whole can be linked to both external and internal sources, which have brought an incalculable amount of damage to both human and material resources. The wide availability of small arms in the region has caused damages and increased casualty among the entire populace. The easy accessibility, availability, affordability and lethality of these weapons have also tended to promote the conflict. This has resulted in promoting a culture of violence and promoting conflict better than the ones used by our security agents, turning the state apparatus into a weak agent, incapable of maintaining laws and orders in the society. The reawaking of our cultural and adoption of those real management techniques, which are peculiar to our

culture, will help us to maintain and sustain peace in our society. So that we can link ourselves back to the development track.

The failure of both State and Federal Government in their fundamental functions of providing basic infrastructure and employment opportunities, among others, has led to the growth in gun culture and violence, which has further exacerbated the proliferation of SALWs in Jos North, indeed Nigeria, will be secured only to the extent that the political leadership is able to anticipate, recognize and respond effectively to threats against its human capital and national assets. This can only be achieved using the available resources to ensure the safety of the lives and properties of the citizens.

Corruption and unemployment have made the proliferation of small arms very easy in the country as government officials compromise and unemployed youths take their destiny in their hands by committing one crime or the other as the holders of small arms perceived and have the impression that it has become a means of survival for them Armed robbery becomes the order of the day.

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