



Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons and Internal Security of Omala Local Government Area of Kogi State

BY

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Abstract

The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) has emerged as one of the most pressing security challenges confronting many local communities in Nigeria. This paper examines the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and its implications for internal security in Omala Local Government Area of Kogi State between 2015 and 2024. The study investigates the factors responsible for the spread of these weapons, their impact on community safety, and the effectiveness of government and community responses. Using both primary and secondary data, the research adopts a descriptive and analytical approach to explore how political instability, porous borders, youth unemployment, and weak law enforcement have contributed to the circulation of illicit arms in the area. Findings reveal that the easy accessibility of SALW has intensified communal clashes, armed robbery, kidnapping, and other violent crimes, thereby undermining peace, social cohesion, and local development. The study concludes that curbing SALW proliferation requires a multidimensional approach that combines effective border management, public awareness, youth empowerment, and strong institutional collaboration. It recommends that government, security agencies, and community stakeholders strengthen arms control measures and promote peacebuilding initiatives to restore sustainable security in Omala LGA.

Keywords: Small Arms, Light Weapons, Internal Security, Omala LGA, Kogi State, Proliferation



1. Introduction:

Small arms and light weapons proliferation are acclaimed to be a major security challenge to people, societies, and states globally, and it fuels insurgency, human trafficking and drugs, terrorism, organized crimes, internal insurrections, and civil wars, which poses obstacles to the sustenance of stable peace and security. The destructive impact of the misappropriation and abuse of small arms and light weapons has attracted international attention, particularly since the end of the Cold War.

According to the Small Arms Survey (2011), there are at least 875 million firearms in the world. There are more than 1,200 companies in 90 countries that produce small arms. SALW kills between 500,000 and 750,000 people annually and is a contributory factor to armed conflict, displacement of people, organized crime, and terrorism, thereby undermining peace, reconciliation, safety, security, stability, and sustainable social and economic development (Small Arms Survey, 2011). Since the end of the Second World War in 1945, many nations of the world have gone through various violent armed conflicts such as civil wars, military coups, religious crises, communal crises, etc, these conflicts place a high demand on small arms and light weapons.

Africa has had its share of violent armed conflict aided by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons within the continent. The easy availability, accessibility, and indiscriminate usage of these arms have wreaked devastating havoc on the continent (Sule et al., 2024). The rise in arms production and its proliferation dynamics within Africa has a direct connection with the events that evolved during the Cold War. The Cold War



saw Africa being used as a dumping site for arms by both superpowers (the United States of America and the Soviet Union) in preparation for any possible attack or aggression by both parties, which would result in mutually assured destruction. The end of the Cold War in 1991 saw these arms finding their way into the young emerging states of Africa and the hands of violent non-state actors. These arms now became instruments used to fuel armed conflicts within the continent (Ofori-Ayeh, 2022). Africa houses a large cascade of arms, which are used to conduct various criminal acts and prosecute conflicts. According to the Small Arms Survey, small arms in Africa are distributed among their users as follows: 79% are in the hands of civilians, 16% with the military, 3% with the police, and 2% with insurgents (Alimba, 2017). This suggests that in Africa, arms are more in the hands of civilians than the real security agencies that are meant to bear arms a point emphasized by Auwal and Aluaigba (2021), who argue that weak governance and institutional failure have enabled widespread civilian access to weapons.

In Nigeria, the proliferation of SALWs is a persistent security challenge. The country has become a hub for illicit arms trafficking, with weapons flowing in from neighboring countries and conflict zones. Nigeria's porous borders, combined with internal security challenges like insurgency, banditry, and communal clashes, have made it a fertile ground for the illegal trade in arms. The Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast, violent herder-farmer conflicts in the Middle Belt, and the rise of armed militias and kidnappers in various regions are all exacerbated by the availability of SALWs. According to Onuoha (2014), many of the weapons used by criminal elements in Nigeria were originally



smuggled into the country as a result of the 2011 Libyan crisis, and ongoing conflicts in neighbouring countries like Chad and Mali have contributed to the arms influx.

Kogi State, located in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, has not been spared from the consequences of SALW proliferation. The state has witnessed a rise in armed violence, including ethnic conflicts, political thuggery, banditry, and kidnappings. These conflicts have been fueled

1.1 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Various scholars, security specialists, and analysts have defined and discussed the idea of small and light weaponry. This plethora of definitions will thoroughly define the concept for easy comprehension. And, because no universally accepted definitions exist, some scholars have attempted to define the term, which will be provided here.

According to Kanwal (2018) SALWs, are smaller infantry weapons such as pistols, submachine guns, shotguns, carbines, assault rifles, rifle squad automatic weapons, light machine guns, general-purpose machine guns, medium machine guns, and hand grenades that an individual, particularly a rebel, could carry. The majority of these firearms are obtained illegally with the sole intent of fulfilling specific goals. Small arms and light weapons are classified as such depending on the situation in which they are employed. Machine guns, rocket launchers, rifles, and other weapons may be used (Jenzen-Jones, 2023).

According to Safer World (2012) "They are weapons, designed for individual use,". They



are mainly in the lower calibre range (4.6-40 or 66 mm). Small arms include handguns (auto loading pistols and revolvers) and shoulder arms (rifles and carbines, submachine guns and light machine guns, and grenade launchers). Light weapons are weapons designed for two or three people to use as a crew, though some can be carried and used by a single person. Heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles, portable anti-tank missiles and rocket systems, portable anti-aircraft missile systems, and mortars with calibres less than 100 mm are examples of light weapons.

Security like other concepts in social science has no generally accepted definitions, since it has been viewed by various scholars and writers. The concept of security has various analogies and conceptions because no universally accepted definitions exist, many scholars have attempted to define the term, some of which will be provided here.

Malec (2003), defines security as a value and/or system maintenance over time, and the absence of threats to it, after inquiring as to the nature of the term 'security', wondering if it was a goal, a concept, a discipline, an issue-area, or a research program (Malec, 2003).

Mijah (2007) defines security as, "the freedom from danger, or threat to nation's ability to protect and develop itself, promote its cherished values and legitimate interests and enhance the well-being of its people. Security here, manifests at the level of nation-state, group and individuals and has internal and external dimensions. External security has to do with the freedom from danger or threat from the external environment.



National Security has been defined variously by different scholars and experts. According to Buzan (2008), national security refers to the protection and promotion of a country's survival, territorial integrity, political independence, and societal welfare. This definition emphasizes the holistic approach to national security that encompasses economic, political, military, and social dimensions. Similarly, Albright and Shultz (2019) define *national security* as a state's ability to defend itself against external threats and maintain internal stability and prosperity.

1.2 The Impact of Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons on Security in Nigeria

Everyday experience in West Africa shows that the proliferation of small arms is a catalyst for crises and armed violence and helps to destabilize governments and states, in particular as a result of the activities of subversive movements, guerrilla campaigns, terrorism, drug trafficking, civil wars and other attacks on fundamental rights and human dignity (Yakubu, 2005).

Nigeria is not just a transit and destination of SALW, it is also a fabricator of these small arms. This was revealed by the Presidential Committee on small arms and light weapons in 2015 when it was asserted that 60 per cent of all illicit arms used in the South-East were locally fabricated in the region (Akpan, 2011).

According to Ebele (2018), the illegal proliferation of SALWs is presently one of the main security challenges Nigeria, Africa and indeed the entire world is grappling with. The availability and trafficking of these weapons fuel and strengthen political instability,



communal clashes (e.g., Fulani/herdsmen clashes), terrorism, insurgency, kidnapping, militancy, and other forms of crime, which are detrimental not only to national security but also to sustainable development in Nigeria.

1.3 Proliferation of Small Arms and the Security of Kogi State

Arms proliferation is a significant concern for security in Nigeria, and Kogi State is not exempt from the challenges posed by the widespread availability of small arms and light weapons. The state's strategic location and proximity to conflict-prone regions make it vulnerable to arms smuggling and illegal possession of firearms. The following literature review provides an overview of relevant studies and research on arms proliferation and its impact on the security of Kogi State residents:

In the work "Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation and Its Implications for Insecurity in Kogi State, Nigeria", Ibrahim and Yusuf (2019) examine the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Kogi State, assessing its implications for security. It highlights the sources of arms and routes used for smuggling, as well as the patterns of arms possession among various groups in the state. The research identifies the factors contributing to arms proliferation and its impact on crime rates and communal conflicts.

In another study, Lawal and Odoma (2018) discuss The Nexus between Small Arms Proliferation and Insecurity in Kogi State, Nigeria. This article focuses on the interplay between arms proliferation and insecurity in Kogi State. It examines how the availability of firearms affects criminal activities, such as armed robbery, kidnapping, and communal



clashes. The research explores the role of arms trafficking networks and the need for effective control measures to mitigate security risks.

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are a number of theories that can be used to explain the impact of the proliferation of arms and weapons on internal security in Kogi State. However, the study adopted the Realist Theory. The theory of Realism could be traced to such ancient practitioners and thinkers as Sun Tzu (544 – 496 B.C), the Chinese General and the author of “The Art of War;” Thucydides (460 – 399 B.C) a Greek Historian and the author of “The History of Peloponnesian War” and Niccolo Machiavelli (1469 – 1527) a political philosopher and the author of “The Prince.” Therefore, more recently, realism as a tool of analysis took centre stage in diplomacy when Otto Von Bismarck (1815 – 1898), the Iron Chancellor, engineered the unification of Germany under Prussian control. Nevertheless, it finally became a tool of analysis when it emerged in the years surrounding the Second World War (1939 – 1945) as the dominant theory in the newfound discipline of International Relations. Some classic proponents of the Realist school of thought are Edward H. Carr and Hans Morgenthau, who argued in his work “Politics among Nations” (1948:13), that “International Politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power.” Realism’s foundation is the principle of dominance; alternatives are based on reciprocity and identity (Goldstein & Pavehouse, 2009). The realists maintained that world politics is driven by competitive self-interest. Realism, therefore, believes that the decisive dynamic amongst nations is a struggle for power in an effort by each to reserve or, preferably,



improve its military security and economic welfare in competition with other countries. Furthermore, the realists see this struggle for power as a “ZERO-SUM GAME,” one in which a gain for one country is inevitably a loss to the other. According to Machiavelli (1512), national interest can best be pursued in terms of power. He believes in the naked potential of power when it comes to the issue of national interest. In other words, the best way in which the state can achieve its interests, also called the “raison d’état” without having accidents is through power. Realism dominated in the Cold War years because it provided simple but powerful explanations for war, alliances, imperialism, obstacles to cooperation, and other international phenomena and because its emphasis on competition was consistent with the central features of the American-Soviet rivalry (Walt, 1998).

Realism traces the root of conflicts in society to flaws in human nature which is seen to be the selfish pursuit of personal interest defined as power. The theory, which is rooted in classical political theory, shares theological and biological doctrines that talk about an apparent weakness and individualism that is inherent in human nature. The realist theory sees the world as an arena of conflict and believes that there are genetic defects that make human beings behave negatively (Best, 2012). It further stated that the imperfection in the world has its roots in forces that are inherent in human nature. Thus, it can be correctly said that this theory explains why human beings will engage in negative acts that promote the free flow of small arms and light weapons into their society, as these acts of criminality are inherent in humans.



1.5 METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The paper adopts a mixed-methods survey research design that integrates quantitative questionnaires and qualitative interviews to examine the proliferation of small arms and its implications for internal security in Omala Local Government Area of Kogi State. 400 copies of questionnaire were distributed and 382 were retrieved and used in the analysis.

1.6 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Socio-Demographic Distribution of the Respondents

Table 1.6.1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

S/No.	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Male	267	69.9
2	Female	115	30.1
	Total	382	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 1.6.1 indicates that, 267 of the respondents representing 69.9% are males, while 115 representing 30.1% are females. The result shows that most of the respondents are male. The study sampled more of males because they are the ones mostly involved in the activities that have to do with arms proliferation.



Table 1.6.2: Distribution of Respondents by Age

S/No.	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	18-25	24	6.3
2	26-30	51	13.3
3	31-35	95	24.9
4	36-40	115	30.1
5	41 and above	97	25.4
	Total	382	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 1.6.2 shows that 24 of the respondents representing 6.3% are between the ages of 18-25, 51 representing 13.3% are between the ages of 26-30, 95 representing 24.9% are between the ages of 31-35, 115 representing 30.1% are between the ages of 36-40, and 97 representing 25.4% are between the ages of 41 and above. From the foregoing, it is obvious that most of the respondents are between the ages of 36 to 40. This owed to the fact that people between this age bracket are assumed to be still very active and at the same time have some experience regarding the subject matter.

Table 1.6.3: Distribution of Respondents by Ethnic Group

S/No.	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Igala	99	25.9
2	Agatu	58	15.1
3	Gwari	40	10.5



4	Bassa Nge	54	14.1
5	Yoruba (Okun)	36	9.4
6	Nupe	43	11.3
7	Idoma	17	4.6
8	Others	35	9.1
	Total	382	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 1.6.3 indicates that 99 of the respondents representing 25.9% are Igala, 58 representing 15.1% are Agatu, 40 representing 10.5% are Gwari, 54 representing 14.1% are Bassa Nge, 36 representing 9.4% are Okun, 43 representing 11.3 are Nupe, 17 representing 4.6% are Idoma, and other ethnic groups such as Huasa, Igbo, Yoruba, among others fall on 35 representing 9.1%. This reveals that majority of the respondents were drawn from Igala ethnic group.

Table 1.6.4: Distribution of Respondents by Occupation

S/No.	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Civil/Public Servant	113	29.6
2	Farming	87	22.8
3	Business	92	24.1
4	Student	67	17.5
5	Others	23	6.0
	Total	382	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 1.6.4 shows that 113 of the respondents representing 29.6% are civil/public servants, 87 representing 22.8% are farmers, 92 representing 24.1% are into business, 67 representing 17.5% are students, and 23 representing 6.0% constitutes other



occupations. It is obvious that majority of the respondents are civil/public servants.

Table 1.6.5: What are the factors responsible for the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Omala Local Government Area?

S/No.	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Yes	306	80.1
2	No	36	9.4
3	Undecided	40	10.5
	Total	382	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 1.6.5 reveals that 306 of the respondents representing 80.1% agreed that there are cases of proliferation/influx of illicit arms into Omala Communities, 36 representing 9.4% said there are no cases of proliferation/influx of illicit arms into their communities, and 40 representing 10.5% are undecided.

On the other hand, all the fifteen (15) key informants that were interviewed are in agreement with the majority of the questionnaire respondents who agreed that, there are cases of proliferation/influx of illicit arms into their respective communities. For instance, Prof. Ameh Ataguba holds that: “Of course, there are cases of illegal arms proliferation in Omala Local Government Area, particularly in Agojeju-ojo, Abejukolo, where I once lived” (Interview, 11/8/2024, 10:00 am, at Federal University, Lokoja).

Similarly, Dr. Adejoh stated that:



Yes, because in Ojuwu where my mother stays, they are been attacked by various people in their area; using both sophisticated and non-sophisticated weapons. The vigilantes in that area are also arming themselves for self-defence. In addition to this, some of these weapons are locally made, not all of them are imported (Interview, 26/7/2024, 5:00 pm, at Abejukolo, Ojuwo, Omala LGA).

According to Mr. Solomon:

There are so many cases about arms proliferation in the entire Eastern Kogi, but the attention now is in Omala Local Government. I remember in my community, there was a time that there was a crisis, when the soldiers intervened; one of the soldiers was killed. Also, here in Ogodu, a brother to the formal Deputy Governor was once kidnapped. That tells you the level at which these arms are used (Interview, 4/8/2024, 10:47 am, at Ogodu, Omala LGA).

Table 1.6.6: The factors responsible for the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Omala LGA.

S/No.	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Porous border	57	14.9
2	Strive for self-defence	72	18.9
3	Ineffective security system to checkmate arms circulation within the LGAs	64	16.8
4	Ethno-religious conflicts	49	12.8



5	All of the above	136	35.6
6	Others	4	1.0
	Total	382	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 1.6.6 shows that 57 of the respondents representing 14.9% agreed that porous border is the major factor responsible for the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Omala Communities, 72 representing 18.9% said it is strive for self-defence, 64 representing 16.8% said it is ineffective security system to checkmate arms circulation within the local governments under study, 49 representing 12.8% said it is ethno-religious conflicts, 136 representing 35.6% are of the opinion that all of the above are responsible, and 4 representing 1.0% stated other factors.

According to an interview granted by Dr. Simon, she said

First and foremost, I will attribute it to porosity of the borders of my community. So, people from different states and communities can easily have access to my community at any time with these weapons, and the people of my communities will not even take notice of it in time (Interview, 1/8/2024, 6:00 pm, at Ife, Omala LGA).

Similarly, to the submission of Dr. Simon, Dr. Adejoh submitted that:

According to my understanding, the factors include porous border and lack of proper checking of vehicles at check points by both security agencies and paramilitary. Once small money is given to them by drivers, they will not bother to do the needful by doing proper searching. Also, the issue of self-defence is another factor (Interview, 26/7/2024, 5:00 pm, at Abejukolo, Ojuwo, Omala LGA).



1.7 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) presents a serious and complex security threat globally, affecting individuals, communities, and nations by fuelling insurgencies, terrorism, organized crime, and civil conflicts. This is largely due to the ease with which these weapons can be accessed, their affordability, and their portability. As history has shown, SALWs have been used extensively in various conflicts worldwide, and since the end of the Cold War, the international community has increasingly recognized their role in perpetuating violence and criminal activities.

In Nigeria, the proliferation of SALWs is particularly evident through the frequent seizure of illegal arms by security forces, their use in conflicts and criminal activities, and the high casualty rates and destruction associated with their misuse. The country is not officially at war, but it is plagued by widespread armed violence, insurgency, and criminality. The presence of armed groups like Boko Haram, as well as conflicts related to ethnic, religious, and political tensions, has made Nigeria a country where the impact of SALW proliferation is felt acutely. This has exacerbated insecurity across the nation, including in regions such as Omala LGA of Kogi State.

Previous studies have established a clear link between SALW proliferation and communal conflicts. However, the specific role that arms proliferation plays in fuelling communal conflicts in Omala LGA has not received sufficient attention in past research. This study sought to fill that gap by examining the impact of small arms and light weapons on



internal security in Omala.

With the above conclusion, the study came up with the following recommendations:

1. The relationship between small arms proliferation and internal security is evident in the rising criminal activities and insecurity. To address this, a robust security framework should be established, focusing on enhanced intelligence gathering, improved border security, and stricter arms control measures.
2. To combat the factors driving arms proliferation, such as unemployment, porous borders, and weak punishment, a multi-pronged approach is necessary. First, government efforts should focus on creating employment opportunities for the youth to reduce their involvement in arms trafficking. Strengthening border control through modern surveillance technologies and increased personnel deployment is crucial to prevent the inflow of arms.
3. Given the adverse impacts on the security architecture, including banditry, kidnappings, and communal conflicts, it is recommended that local security forces be better integrated with national security frameworks. Increasing the capacity of local vigilante groups and law enforcement agencies to act swiftly against armed groups is crucial. More funding for advanced security infrastructure, such as surveillance drones and communication technologies, will help improve Omala LGA's security response. Establishing conflict resolution centres that address farmer-herder conflicts and other communal disputes can reduce reliance on arms.



4. While current measures such as checkpoints, home searches, and peace dialogues have been somewhat effective, they need to be enhanced. A systematic arms recovery program should be developed, providing incentives for individuals and communities to surrender illicit weapons.

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