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# Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons and Insecurity in Northwestern Nigeria: A Review

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## Abstract

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This paper critically reviews the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in Northwestern Nigeria, examining their sources, implications, and connections to rising insecurity. Drawing on a wide range of scholarly and institutional literature, the study highlights the way how both locally fabricated and imported SALW contribute to terrorism, banditry, and cross-border crimes, particularly in states like Zamfara, where herder-farmer tensions have escalated into armed conflict. The review also explores global trends, regional vulnerabilities, and the porous borders that facilitate arms trafficking, while identifying key research gaps such as the gendered impact of SALW and the role of emerging technologies. It concludes by emphasizing the need for targeted policy responses that combine security measures with socio-economic development and regional cooperation.

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## Keywords:

Insecurity; Northwestern Nigeria; Small Arms and Light Weapons; Arms Proliferation.

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## Introduction

The spread of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) has been one of the most critical issues in world security, especially in areas where the instability is chronic, and the governance systems are weak. In this perspective, the concept of SALW is widely interpreted in accordance with the scheme established by the United Nations as being a weapon that is aimed at individuals and groups. Small arms are usually weapons like pistols and rifles, which can be wielded by an individual, whereas the light weapons, like rocket launchers and other high-impact mechanisms, are supposed to be used by groups or in coordinated efforts. This difference is significant, as it is necessary not only to have a clear conceptual picture but to know the patterns of use, circulation, and influence. Even though there are ongoing regulatory measures, these weapons, both locally produced and imported illegally, still find their way out of the formal state control, and therefore contribute to the escalation of insecurity in various settings.

The effects of the proliferation of SALWs go beyond direct violence, and their impacts on human security, economic growth, and governance are far-reaching. Their proliferation has been associated with continued armed conflicts, loss of human rights, abuse of executive power, and instillation of fear among the targeted groups of people. According to the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (2006), although state actors can use these weapons reasonably to protect themselves and their countries, a considerable part of them is controlled by non-state actors, including insurgents and militias, as well as criminal groups. This relationship makes it difficult to preserve state order and disrupts larger peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery efforts. The region of the Northwest is of particular concern in Nigeria. Made up of the states of Kaduna, Kano, Jigawa, Katsina, Sokoto, Kebbi, and Zamfara, the region is one of the most populous and geographically vast regions in the country, having a size of about 216, 065 square kilometers. Having more than 54 million inhabitants, most of whom are Hausa and Fulani descent and mostly subscribe to the Islamic religion (Nigerian Population Census 2019), the area has been facing higher insecurity levels within the past several years.

These security issues are based on a complicated combination of socio-economic and political aspects, such as poverty, underdevelopment, the weakness of borders, insurgency, human trafficking, and the lack of system governance (Okoli and Ioroyer 2014). The continuity of these situations has helped to make violence a normalized condition and increase dependency on SALW in the organized and opportunistic types of conflict. There are domestically produced guns and smuggled guns, which have become the key tools of conflict in violent situations throughout the region (Duperas 2020). Despite the fact that previous researchers have explored the elements of proliferation of arms and insecurity in Nigeria, most of the literature is still fragmented and, in most cases, they fail to provide a logical framework of analysis that incorporates the clarity of the concept with region-specific dynamics. It

is on this basis that this paper takes a systematic literature review in order to critically analyze the proliferation of SALW in Northwestern Nigeria.

The paper aims to elucidate major conceptual questions related to SALW, provide a synthesis of the existing literature, and also cover a gap in the current research. Thus, the research paper seeks to better and more consistently illustrate the way SALW proliferation collides with wider security issues in the area, besides serving as a basis for future empirical and policy-based studies.

### **Revised Problem Statement**

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) proliferation has been the main cause of insecurity in Northwestern Nigeria since its unregulated spread has seriously weakened the safety of the population, empowered the capabilities of militants and armed groups, and fueled the development of inter-communal conflicts. Despite increasing amounts of policy reports and field-based research that have been used to describe the magnitude and impact of such proliferation, current analyses are quite fragmented, and they are not well integrated ([Durkin 2019](#)). The patterns of violence and insecurity in the region are, in most cases, seen as issues that are secondly considered as a result of the dynamics of the arms flows, and not as an essential factor that influences the region.

This policy analysis gap restricts the usefulness of policy reactions. The flow of SALW in Northwestern Nigeria is supported by an interrelationship of interdependent causes, such as poverty alleviation, local fabrication, and transnational smuggling channels. Such dynamics are also facilitated by permeable borders and poor institutional capacity in security institutions that together encourage the continuation and growth of black markets in weapons ([Ahmadu 2019](#)). The activities directed towards the control of the proliferation of weapons and the re-establishment of state power are unlikely to be effective without a thorough understanding of these interconnected processes.

In addition, the geographical aspect of the SALW proliferation in major states like Zamfara, Katsina, and Sokoto reveals the necessity to increase the variability of the analysis into a more coordinated and context-specific mode. The study of the interactions and movement patterns within and across these areas is crucial to the development of critical and efficient interventions. In this regard, to understand the issue of SALW proliferation in Northwestern Nigeria, it is necessary to go beyond isolated narratives and access a more systematic and integrated view of the problem.

### **Revised Methodology**

The given study assumes a systematic literature review (SLR) to summarize and critically evaluate the current academic and institutional resources on the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and the resultant insecurity

in Northwestern Nigeria. The method is both a qualitative and an analytical one, which is intended to produce structured knowledge on what is known and what is not known in the literature. The sources used in the review are varied and cover peer-reviewed journal articles, reports by organizations and various bodies, as well as reports by reliable media outlets that were released between 2000 and 2024. The inclusion criteria had been explicitly determined, and the selection of materials was based on their relevance to SALW proliferation, insecurity patterns, and socio-political relationships of the region of Northwestern Nigeria.

The sources that failed to interact with these themes directly or were not deep enough in analysis were not included in the review. To achieve analytical coherence, the chosen literature was systematized and analysed using thematic analysis. The materials were classified into major thematic categories, such as sources and typologies of SALW, local and transnational distribution patterns, associations between SALW and organized violence, security politics in the region, and available policy and institutional responses. The process made it possible to define the points of intersection and contradiction in the literature and the number of analytical gaps.

Moreover, a critical appraisal of the chosen works was performed in order to assess the methodological rigor, contextual relevance, and policy/scholar debate contribution of the selected works. Special attention was also given to the extent to which the current literature is sufficient to reflect the complexity of SALW proliferation and its effects on the insecurity in the region. This organized presentation of the SALW-insecurity nexus in Northwestern Nigeria offers a consolidated and critical description of the topic that presents unexplored aspects of the topic and provides a more comprehensive basis for future research and policy intervention.

## **Small Arms, Light Weapons and Their Proliferation in Nigeria**

There is a need to have conceptual clarity of what is meant by the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) before understanding their proliferation. In the international policy and law, the United Nations stipulates that small arms are weapons designed to be used by individuals, and they include pistols, rifles, carbines, light automatic weapons, light weapons that are meant to be used by a group, such as mortars less than 100 mm, rocket launchers, anti-aircraft, and anti-tank weapons. (Eselebor 2019). This difference forms a valuable point of reference when examining the patterns of use, distribution, and effects.

Outside this structure, there are a number of scholars and institutional definitions that have extended these notions. According to Meek and Stott (2004), small arms comprise carbines, semi-automatic weapons, assault rifles, and self-loading rifles, whereas light weapons are mortars, rocket launchers, anti-aircraft guns, and other mounted or high-impact systems. Equally, the Convention on the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Central Africa (2011) defines small arms as handheld, lethal weapons

that shoot out projectiles by a mechanical process, and this reaffirms this point of easy handling and individual usage. The United Nations Institute of Disarmament Research (2006) expands this even further to emphasize their functional diversity; the automatic and semi-automatic firearms have different firing capacities.

Besides this, Saferworld (2012) broadens the conceptual discussion by including ammunition and other associated parts, including cartridges, propellants, and projectiles, as part of the small arms systems. This more global outlook matters, since it highlights the contribution of supply chains and logistics to the perpetuation of employment and spread of these weapons. Collectively, these views show some overlaps as well as divergence in the definition of SALW, especially in terms of scope and constituents.

SALW proliferation has become one of the major causes of insecurity in the Nigerian context. Miller (2022) suggests that these weapons are no longer linked with a state security force, but it has become a frequent tool of control, violence, and economic survival in the hands of non-state actors. They are mostly available, easily accessible, and destructive, and this has led to increasing violence, deaths, displacement, and livelihood destruction. Likewise, Alimba (2017) attributes the prevalence of SALW to the rising strength of armed groups that include OPC, MEND, MASSOB, well-armed groups of herdsmen, and Boko Haram, and assumes that the access to weapons has increased their power and presence as well as their capabilities of action.

These studies are supported by other researchers who confirm the relationship between SALW proliferation and criminal violence. Adamu, Mat, and Taya (2018) point to the importance of small arms in supporting the activities of gangs and criminal organisations, such as armed robbery, kidnapping, and sexual violence. Malam (2014) goes on to support this by arguing that the presence of illicit weapons promotes the application of violence instead of dialogue, deteriorates development, and perpetuates cycles of violence and corruption. Similarly, Ayuba and Okafor (2015) relate the dissemination of armed violence in various regions, such as the Niger Delta, the Northeast, and the Northwest, with the continuity of the illegal arms supply.

Despite these contributions, the current body of literature tends to be more specific on definitions and effects of SALW, and lacks in its integration of clarity of the concept and context dynamics. The absence of this gap highlights a stronger requirement for a more analytical methodology that does not just delimit SALW but also puts their proliferation in a wider context of security issues in Northwestern Nigeria.

### **The Global Spread of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)**

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) have received sustained scholarly and policy interest because of the key place that it plays in the contemporary violence and insecurity patterns. The United Nations (2015) believes that the prevalence

of SALW, even the legally obtained ones, is still strongly linked with the ongoing armed conflicts in various regions. The estimates that have been made at the international deliberations have indicated that hundreds of millions of SALW are already in circulation across the globe, and the weapons have contributed a significant percentage of the casualties in both intra-state and inter-state conflicts. This highlights the magnitude of the issue and the need to institute global actions.

In addition to direct deaths, there are more socio-economic and political impacts of SALW proliferation. As the United Nations Security Council (2015) mentions, such weapons lead to loss of life and a weakening of economic systems, erosion of social cohesion, and institutional instability. They are relatively inexpensive, easy to carry, and especially appealing to state and non-state actors because of their portability and ease of use, thus making their proliferation in various conflict organizations quite easy. According to Ban Ki-moon, over the past decades, hundreds of conflicts have claimed the lives of many people and displaced them, most of which would not have been possible without the convenient accessibility of such weapons.

The transnational aspect of SALW proliferation also makes the problem more complicated. The weakness of state authority in conflict areas has led, in many cases, to the spread of weapons over the borders. As an example, Libya became unstable after the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi, which led to the spread of weapons in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, and Cameroon (United Nations 2015). These trends explain why regional insecurity can create broader security effects due to black market weapons transfers.

Meanwhile, the legal and illegal arms trade in the world market perpetuates the supply of SALW. Small arms and light weapons such as pistols, rifles, machine guns, rocket launchers, and grenades are available in the marketplace through intricate systems that include state actors, private actors, and non-state armed formations (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 2019). This trade has greatly increased in recent years, with the world witnessing arms transfers at a higher level compared to the previous years, which were seen at the end of the Cold War. The large proportions of global arms distribution are represented by major exporting nations, such as the United States, Russia, China, France, and Germany, although a large portion of states and non-state actors remain among the main recipients.

Moreover, the lack of transparency in transactions of arms, especially illegal ones, makes it hard to effectively regulate and monitor them. As SIPRI (2019) states, not only governments but also a wide variety of non-state armed organizations and international players have been supplied with arms, but in many cases, via informal or even hidden channels. This sophistication adds weight to the continuation of SALW proliferation as a challenge to the national and regional security around the world. Even though the global literature is rich, most of the studies done so far tend to focus on aggregate trends without adequately connecting them to local settings

and processes. This brings out the necessity of more context-based studies, which can relate global trends of SALW flow to regional displays like those found in Northwestern Nigeria.

### **Nexus between Arms Proliferation, Terrorism, and National Security**

The connection between national security, Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) proliferation, and terrorism is not a recent topic of analysis in both academic and policymakers' publications. The nexus is especially relevant since the distribution of SALW has a direct effect on the functional ability of terrorists and other non-state actors, directly affecting the overall safety consequences. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2006) suggests that the twenty-first century has seen the growing overlap between terrorist organisations and transnational criminal networks. Drug trafficking, arms smuggling, money laundering, and other rogue economic phenomena are some of the activities that maintain this convergence and lead to the growth and sustained insecurity.

In this regard, SALW also acts as a key facilitator of terrorism and organised violence. Their portability, affordability, and ease of use make them especially appealing to non-state actors, such as insurgents, bandits, and criminal gangs. According to GIABA (2013), the susceptibility of the socio-economic situation, particularly unemployment and poverty, provides opportunities to join the arms trafficking networks, as well as to engage in terrorist operations. This is the case in Nigeria, where economically marginalised people are usually lured into illicit arms dealings and violent networks at the expense of earning basic survival needs.

Researchers also state that there is a two-way correlation between the proliferation of arms and conflict. Bassey (2003), Edeko (2013), and GIABA (2013) note that the supply of SALW fuels conflict and criminal violence, but at the same time, the uncertainty that persists results in the demand to have more weapons, thus continuing a cycle of insecurity. This vicious circle makes it difficult to deal with arms proliferation or terrorism separately.

In a larger context, the outcomes of the SALW proliferation are not limited to the conventional concept of national security. In their arguments, Barash and Webel (2009) argue that the concept of national security cannot be understood in a purely military sense, but must have social, economic, and political facets. In this respect, the prevalence of SALW is an undermining factor to social cohesion, governance structures, and worsening inequalities, all of which decrease insecurity in the long-term. On the same note, Kelvin (2007) points out that SALW has enabled various violent acts in the form of terrorism, organised crime, civil violence, and human trafficking, thus creating an all-around danger to state and human security.

This nexus is further enhanced by the role of transnational networks and globalisation. The growing interconnectedness of the states has enabled the

cross-border flow of arms; thus, terrorist and criminal groups can acquire arms with relative ease. Research by La Sage (2010) and Ngboawaji (2011) reveals the profitability and sustainability of illegal smuggling networks in Africa, including some of the most important routes, such as the Lagos-Seme-Cotonou route. These networks usually overlap with activities of arms trafficking, which strengthens the supply of SALW in conflict-prone regions. As in Nigeria, Aluede (2017) and Shaw (2017) observe, cross-border trafficking and local production also contribute to the supply of weapons, making it difficult to control it.

Besides that, cross interventions of arms trafficking with other dark economies, especially drug trafficking, have been well recorded. Alphaeus et al. (2013) and Aluede (2017) underline that Nigeria is one of the regions and the whole world involved in drug trafficking because its borders are porous, and its location allows trafficking to thrive. These intersecting illegal markets produce mutually constitutive structures that perpetuate arms proliferation as well as organised violence.

Although the available literature is rather wide, most studies have a tendency to focus on arms proliferation, terrorism, and criminality as individual phenomena. Such fragmentation does not allow a complete picture of how these dynamics can play out in a given situation. The closer nature of the relationship between SALW proliferation, terrorism, and national security needs a more integrated approach to analysis, especially in areas like the Northwestern part of Nigeria.

### **Sources of the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria**

The distribution of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in Nigeria has been described to have a number of, although not mutually exclusive, causes, both domestic and international. The available literature establishes some of the crucial avenues through which such weapons are procured, distributed, and maintained in the country. They are cross-border smuggling, arms theft and diversion, armed group activities, local fabrication, and inadvertent peace support operation leakages (Keith Krause 2007).

Cross-border smuggling is one of the most-documented sources. Nigeria has long and mostly unregulated borders with its neighbours, thus providing opportunities to smuggle arms. The borders shared by the country are over 4,000 kilometres in length, as reported by Oke (2002), and there are numerous illegal points of entry that are hard to guard. This difficulty is also described by the reports that several unmanned routes exist, especially in the Nigeria-Benin route (Nigerian Ports Authority Handbook 1995). The magnitude of this issue is indicated by the number of seizures and the assumptions on the number of illegal inflows of arms, with Nigerian Tribune (2018) estimating that great amounts of weaponry and ammunition have been introduced in the country in this manner. The porous boundaries have remained open and have contributed to the continuous supply of SALW into the conflict-prone areas.

Theft and diversion of arms are also a major source of proliferation. Uche and Iwuamadi (2018) associate the emergence of armed banditry, especially in Northwestern Nigeria, with cattle rustling-retaliatory violence cycles, which are associated with the procurement and use of illegal guns. On the same note, Sunday (2023) links tendencies of violent conflict with environmental forces like climate change, which facilitate migration and resource competition, thus raising the demand for weapons. These dynamics show how the need and flow of SALW are produced through local conflicts.

The spread of weapons is also strengthened by the role played by armed groups and militias. According to historical descriptions by Nwankwo and Udeh (2005), the rise of groupings like the Bakassi Boys was directly related to the rise in insecurity and self-defence, resulting in more citizens having access to guns. Similarly, the attainment and employment of arms has been linked to separatist groups such as the Movement of the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), which are fuelled by a sense of marginalisation and political discontent. The actions of the groups like Yan-daba and Yan-Banga, which were initially connected with the traditional and political organisation, have turned into the types of organised violence that depend on the availability of weapons in Northern Nigeria.

Another important aspect of SALW proliferation is local fabrication. According to Ahmed (2002), the fact that indigenous production of firearms by local blacksmiths was initially meant to serve the purpose of hunting has seen an increase in demand over time. These home-made weapons are sometimes cheap and readily available, and consequently appealing to the criminal gangs and militia. Their presence has led to other categories of violence, such as ethno-religious conflicts in the different regions of the country.

Moreover, they have also highlighted the unintended effects of peace support operations (PSOs) and military operations as a cause of arms leakage. According to Dokubo (2003), when Nigerian personnel were put on international peacekeeping missions, they were exposed to weapons that were occasionally smuggled or diverted into the local markets. Likewise, the reasons for internal deviation, such as a situation when the military forces provided weapons to non-state forces, also demonstrate the institutional weaknesses in the arms regulation systems (Voice of America 2016).

Although these findings have been noted, most of the literature available has a tendency to study these sources separately and fails to indicate the interrelations between them in a proper manner. However, as the reality goes, it is the interplay of the cross-border flows, domestic production, weak institutions, and conflict processes that perpetuate the SALW proliferation in Nigeria. The solution to the issue, therefore, must be holistic and synthesise these various sources, instead of considering them as independent variables.

## The Origin of Fulani-Herder Banditry in Zamfara State

The origin of Fulani-herder banditry in Zamfara State is vital in explaining the security crisis in Northwestern Nigeria. Zamfara has been a well-known center of insecurity since the conduct of banditry has been expanding slowly to other states within the region (Rufa'i 2021). On historical background, banditry in Zamfara is not a recent phenomenon, as it can be traced as far back as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when horse-mounted bandits used to raid villages to steal livestock and valuables. During this time, some of the traditional leaders in the Dan-Sadau area were reported to have participated in violent robberies and cattle rustling. The modern Fulbe-herder banditry, however, has a more recent rise due to the intensification of the fights between the herders and farmers on the farmland and destruction of crops as a result of cattle grazing (Rufa'i 2021).

Government gold mining and smuggling have also led to an increase in armed banditry. Mining sites are frequented by bandits who steal resources and take residents for ransom, which makes the life of local communities and development extremely strained (OE Watch Africa Commentary 2019). Environmental pressures, population increase, and scandalous government land distributions in places like the Kuyambana forest, Maru, and Zurmi local government districts have aggravated the long-standing conflicts over land and water resources, which, historically, were resolved by community leaders. The developments decreased grazing land for herders and compelled them to encroach on agricultural lands, increasing tensions (Crises Group Africa Reports 2020).

Another outcome of the rural insecurity was the rise of vigilante forces like Yan Sa Kai (volunteer guards), who were mostly made up of young men belonging to Hausa societies. The primary intention of these vigilantes was to safeguard the villages, but they often meted out severe extrajudicial punishment on alleged robbers, especially the Fulani herders. Among them were indiscriminate arrests, torture, killings, and burning of Fulani communities, which only fuelled interethnic conflicts and had reviving impacts (Crises Group Africa Reports 2020).

Fulbe communities retaliated by establishing paramilitary organizations, especially Yan-Bindiga (gun owners), to protect cattle and retaliate against vigilante attacks. In some cases, these groups are kidnapped to receive ransom, which they use to purchase weapons and make protective efforts. Their source of income is acquired through the use of criminal acts. With time, these protective organizations became more structured bandit networks, with some becoming the Herder Alliance that further instilled insecurity in the area (Crises Group Africa Reports 2020; Hassan Dantawaye, cited in report).

It has been analyzed that after 2009, cattle rustling and armed banditry increased significantly, especially after the 2011 general elections, when political and

socio-economic tensions increased (Anka 2017). Although some researchers blame the crisis on years of conflicts over grazing land and farmland, others highlight the effect of socio-political marginalization or the opportunistic criminality, as some individuals adopt the role of the Fulani herder and engage in banditry (Omitola et al. 2021).

On the whole, the literature indicates that there is a close relationship between herder-farmer conflicts and the spread of armed banditry in Zamfara. However, there are still loopholes in the real mechanisms by which common herders might have become full-fledged bandits, or the degree to which people in the countryside have been politicized and taken advantage of by the youth or political faction, or the youthful or otherwise dubious criminals. This highlights the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon, which combines historical resentment, economic benefits, environmental factors, and the inefficiency of local authorities.

### **Review Gaps**

Despite the fact that the available literature offers a general insight into the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in Nigeria, it has a number of gaps, especially when it comes to the security crises in Northwestern Nigeria.

To start with, there are fewer regional dynamics in the SALW proliferation that are analyzed. Although national-level research points to the overall trends in arms proliferation, limited research on the dynamics of these trends at the hotspot level has been done in Zamfara State. The study of the origin of the Fulani-herder banditry in Zamfara indicates that the availability of SALW has intensified the old herder-farmer tensions, making it easy to organize banditry and ransom kidnappings. Nevertheless, the literature lacks a comprehensive investigation of the way in which the combination of environmental, demographic, and local governance failures is unique in influencing SALW proliferation and insecurity in this region. The targeted regional literature may shed some light on the geographical factors related to armed banditry and the way SALW increases insecurity in the rural areas.

Second, gender and community-level analyses are lacking in the literature. Women and children are most affected by SALW violence in Zamfara, as well as by other problems such as abduction, forced migration, and economic marginalization. Nevertheless, very minimal literature answers their unique susceptibility, coping mechanisms, or their possible involvement in peacebuilding and disarmament. These aspects need to be understood to develop inclusive interventions that can empower community resilience towards the destabilizing impacts of SALW.

Lastly, we noticed a lack of research on the new technologies and international connections affecting SALW proliferation in Northwestern Nigeria. Although cross-border trafficking is mentioned as having been affected by Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, and the participation of external actors, they do not explore the role

of new technology like 3D printing, illicit networks, and the provision of weapons used in peace support operations to support local banditry. This would be further investigated within these technological and international aspects to improve methods of controlling and regulating arms, particularly in areas such as Zamfara, where SALW have become one of the main instruments of formalized criminal and insurgency operations.

It is these gaps that would give a more detailed picture of the interaction between SALW proliferation and localized conflict dynamics, raise security issues like Fulani-herder banditry, and predetermine human and national security outcomes in Northwestern Nigeria.

### **Research Justification**

The gap areas that have been described in the current literature reflect the sense of urgency in conducting specific research on the problem of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in Northwestern Nigeria, and Zamfara State, in particular. Although the existing literature offers broad information on the subject of SALW proliferation and the national security concerns thereof, it overlooks local peculiarities of insecurity identification and fueling by developing and maintaining insecurity at a local level. The Fulani-herder banditry history of Zamfara provides lessons on how SALW respond to environmental factors, socio-political marginalization, and ineffective local governance to enact a chain reaction of violence extending to other states. The close analysis of these localized dynamics is hence significant in explaining the way how insecurity related to arms in the region occurs.

Furthermore, the literature on the topic pays little attention to the gendered and social impacts of SALW proliferation. The women, children, and vulnerable members of the community are disproportionately at risk, with some of the risks being abduction, forced migration, and economic deprivation. Exploring their lives, coping mechanisms, and possible contributions to conflict reduction will give a more inclusive picture of the human costs of SALW proliferation and will inform interventions that are socially aware and efficient.

Lastly, there is the issue of changing technological and international aspects of SALW proliferation that have not been fully explored. The new challenges to arms control in Nigeria are cross-border trafficking, the redistribution of arms during peace support operations, and the development of new technologies like 3D printing. The interaction of these factors with local insecurity will enable more effective policy responses and specific interventions to limit the proliferation of SALW and bring the spread of organized banditry and armed conflict to a minimum.

Overall, the gap in knowledge about the localized drivers of SALW proliferation, the human impacts, and the global connections, in general, justifies this study. Through the use of Zamfara and the Northwestern part in general, the research aims at creating

empirical evidence that can inform policymakers and security organs to come up with specific, effective, and context-sensitive measures to fight the continued threat of small arms proliferation and its effects on the stability of the region.

## Conclusion

The available literature on the subject of small arms and light weapons (SALW) proliferation in Nigeria depicts the widespread dangers of such weapons to national security, social cohesion, and economic stability. Whereas the former sources offer impressive information on the overall nature, origins, and effects of SALW, they neglect the important aspects of the problem of the region, gendered consequences, and new technological and international factors. The example of Zamfara State shows that localized conflicts, such as Fulani-herder banditry, are interrelated with the presence and abuse of SALW and generate the cycles of violence that cross the borders of states.

The following knowledge gaps would make it impossible to gain a comprehensive picture of the problem of SALW proliferation in Nigeria. The evidence base required to have a more practical intervention will be represented by research concerning the Northwestern area, the weaknesses of women and children, and the impact of new technologies and foreign actors. After all, a subtle knowledge of these factors will help policymakers, security agencies, and the community involved to come up with context-sensitive and specific measures to counter small arms proliferation, armed violence, and a lasting peace in Nigeria.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no potential conflict of interest.

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