THE PROLIFERATION OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS AND NIGERIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY, 2015-2025

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Abstract

Research Problem
The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) remains a major challenge to Nigeria's national security. Although existing studies examine trafficking, local manufacture, insurgency, banditry, communal violence, and institutional responses, these dimensions are often treated separately. This study examines how SALWs circulation interacted with Nigeria's changing security environment between 2015 and 2025 and why proliferation persisted despite strengthened control measures.

Methods/Theory
The study adopted a qualitative historical-documentary design. Evidence was drawn from peer-reviewed literature, government documents, regional and international organisations, security reports and selected credible media sources. Data were analysed through qualitative content analysis and historical interpretation, using source triangulation. Security Dilemma Theory was adapted to examine interactions among state security responses, armed-group rearmament, community self-defence and weapons diversion.

Results
The findings show that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons was sustained by cross-border trafficking, local manufacture, weapons diversion and capture, insecurity-driven demand, criminal economies and institutional weaknesses. SALWs did not independently cause Nigeria's major conflicts but increased the capacity of insurgents, bandits, communal groups and criminal networks to sustain and intensify violence.

Nigeria strengthened its arms-control framework through the NCCSALW, weapons marking and tracing, stockpile management, recovery and destruction programmes, and the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons Act 2024. However, illicit circulation persisted because underlying supply and demand conditions remained.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Nigeria's SALWs problem is a dynamic cycle in which insecurity generates demand for weapons, increased availability strengthens the capacity for violence, and intensified violence produces further insecurity. Institutional strengthening is therefore necessary but insufficient without addressing illicit markets, weapons diversion, insecurity-driven demand, and weaknesses in weapons control.

Key Contribution to Knowledge

The study provides an integrated analysis of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons across Nigeria's major security theatres during 2015–2025. It contributes theoretically by extending Security Dilemma Theory to a domestic context in which state responses, armed-group rearmament and community self-defence can reinforce insecurity. It further conceptualises SALWs as an enabling infrastructure of violence rather than an independent cause of conflict.

Recommendation

The study recommends an integrated arms-control strategy combining effective marking and tracing, secure stockpile management, stronger border and regional cooperation, regulation of local manufacture, sustained weapons recovery and destruction, improved SALWs data systems, and measures that reduce insecurity-driven demand.

Introduction

The proliferation and illicit circulation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) have become major dimensions of Nigeria's security challenges. Their portability and ease of concealment make them useful to insurgents, bandits, kidnappers, communal groups and criminal networks. Beyond deaths and injuries, their circulation threatens state authority, territorial control, public safety, human security and socioeconomic stability. The period 2015–2025 witnessed the expansion and transformation of several security challenges, including Boko Haram/ISWAP insurgency in the Northeast, banditry and kidnapping in the Northwest, and communal and farmer-herder conflicts in the North-Central region. Existing studies identify porous borders, trafficking, local manufacture, weapons diversion, and insecurity-driven demand as important dimensions of Nigeria's SALWs problem. Other studies examine the role of firearms within particular conflict theatres, while recent national studies increasingly assess their broader security implications and government responses.

However, the literature remains fragmented. Studies commonly focus on individual conflict zones, particular sources of weapons or institutional responses, with limited attention to how weapons supply, insecurity-induced demand, conflict dynamics, and institutional capacity interact across Nigeria's major security theatres over time. This is particularly significant because Nigeria strengthened its arms-control framework during the period through the establishment of the NCCSALW in 2021 and the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons Act 2024, yet illicit firearms and armed violence have persisted. The central

research problem is therefore: How did proliferation of small arms and light weapons across Nigeria's major conflict theatres between 2015 and 2025 interact with existing security challenges to undermine national security, and why did proliferation persist despite strengthened institutional responses?

The study has four objectives:

i. To examine the sources and channels of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria between 2015 and 2025.

ii. To analyse the interaction between the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and major conflict and criminal-violence theatres.

iii. To assess its implications for Nigeria's national security.

iv. To evaluate Nigeria's institutional, regional and international responses and their limitations.

The study contributes to knowledge by providing an integrated decade-long analysis of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons across Nigeria's major conflict theatres, rather than treating insurgency, banditry and communal violence as isolated phenomena. It further applies Security Dilemma Theory to a domestic context, showing how state security responses, armed-group adaptation and community self-defence can interact to reproduce insecurity. The study therefore conceptualizes SALWs as an enabling infrastructure of violence, linking weapons availability with insecurity, conflict transformation and institutional capacity.

2. literature review

2.1 conceptual Framework

This study distinguishes between Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs), proliferation, and national security. SALWs are portable conventional weapons designed for individual or small-group use, including pistols, rifles, assault rifles, machine guns, and certain portable crew-served weapons. The ECOWAS framework also covers related issues such as ammunition, transfers, marking, and tracing. Their portability and concealability make them particularly significant in Nigeria's conflict and criminal environments.

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons refers to the illicit or inadequately controlled expansion and circulation of firearms among state and non-state actors. It is broader than trafficking, since it includes local manufacture, diversion, theft, battlefield capture and other forms of unauthorised circulation. Proliferation is therefore treated as a process involving both supply and demand. Insecurity may encourage individuals, communities and armed groups to acquire firearms for protection, retaliation or criminal activity, while increased availability strengthens their capacity to sustain violence.

National security

National security refers to the protection of state sovereignty, territorial integrity, political authority and institutions, as well as the security of the population and socioeconomic stability. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons threatens these dimensions by strengthening armed actors, weakening state authority, intensifying violence, disrupting economic activities and producing deaths, displacement, injuries and loss of livelihoods.

The relationship among the concepts can therefore be expressed as: SALWs sources and circulation → increased availability → greater capacity for violence → intensified insecurity → increased demand for weapons → further circulation. This framework does not treat

SALWs as the sole cause of Nigeria's insecurity. Political grievances, resource competition, weak governance, poverty, criminal incentives and communal tensions may precede weapons acquisition. SALWs become particularly significant because their availability provides the material capacity through which these conditions can be transformed into sustained and more lethal violence.

2.2 Theoretical framework

This study is based on the Security Dilemma Theory, which is a theory traditionally linked to the names of John Herz and Robert Jervis. The theory provides an explanation of how the steps taken by one actor in order to increase security can be interpreted as a threat by others and can provoke rearmament and an escalation of insecurity. The theory has been developed primarily for interstate relations but has been adapted to the domestic security environment in Nigeria. Nigeria's security issues are state, insurgent groups, bandits, criminal networks, communal militias, and communities seeking self-protection. As the state's military and policing effort increases, armed groups can react by rearming or adapting their tactics. Likewise, insecure communities may also obtain weapons in order to defend themselves, which can lead to increased arming by other communities. The theory is also applicable to the understanding of weapons diversion, weak stockpile management, and illicit circulation. Legitimate security institutions can divert, capture on the battlefield, import or manufacture firearms into the hands of unauthorized persons. The state can thus unwittingly be involved in perpetuating the weapons environment through weapons control weaknesses. The Nigerian SALWs security dilemma can then be summarized as: Insecurity → demand for weapons → increased availability of weapons → increased capacity for violence → intensified insecurity. This cycle contributes to the understanding of the continuity of insecurity related to SALWs in the period 2015-2025. But SALWs were not the only factors behind the conflicts in Nigeria. Other factors included political, economic, social, territorial and governance. Security Dilemma Theory is thus employed as an analytical tool for examining the relationship between insecurity, rearmament, and state response, not as a full account of proliferation.

2.3 Empirical review

The issue of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) has attracted a lot of scholarly attention in Nigeria due to its linkage with armed conflict, terrorism, organised crime, communal violence and national security. The literature can be categorized into four broad themes that are interrelated: sources and channels of proliferation; links between SALWs and regional conflict dynamics; socioeconomic and security drivers of demand; and government, regional and international responses. While these strands contain considerable knowledge on Nigeria's SALWs issue, they are not well integrated. There is a considerable amount of literature that explains the origins of weapons, explores the significance of weapons in specific wars, or reviews how institutions have responded to weapons. The dynamics of these dimensions and their interaction over time in the production of Nigeria's broader national-security issue have received less attention.

Sources and Channels of the Proliferation of small arms and light weapons

There is a large body of literature that highlights porous borders, transnational trafficking, local production, diversion from legitimate stockpiles, battlefield capture and political distribution as important routes for the entry or presence of SALWs in Nigeria. For instance, Adeola and Otemuyiwa (2021) highlight the importance of porous borders and

vulnerabilities in arms control in enabling the flow of illegal firearms. Likewise, the Small Arms Survey (2019) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2020) situate Nigeria in broader trends of illicit firearms trafficking in West Africa, indicating that weapons are not only trafficked across national borders but also within regional networks. In addition, Mohammed (2020) correlates the availability of weapons with insecurity in the Northeast of Nigeria, demonstrating how weapons enhance the operational capacity of armed groups. The studies are significant because they refute explanations that see Nigeria's SALWs issue as a solely Nigerian phenomenon. They illustrate the importance of regional arms markets, border vulnerabilities, transnational networks. But their focus on supply channels doesn't tell the whole story about why guns still sell after being brought into this country. Thus, understanding the movement of weapons does not necessarily lead to an understanding of why people, communities and armed groups get weapons. This restriction is important in a setting where there is chronic insecurity, which makes it attractive for both criminal and defensive acquisition. It is now acknowledged in the literature that domestic sources should not be overlooked when dealing with cross-border trafficking. Amali and Buthelezi (2025) for example, explore both supply and demand side issues and highlight local production, diversion, stockpile weaknesses and insecurity-driven demand as key factors of Nigeria's SALWs problem. Their approach is an important development as it goes beyond the traditional focus on porous borders. However, their analysis still allows for more in-depth analysis of the interaction of supply-side and demand-side factors with the evolution of conflict patterns and institutional reactions within a specific time frame. The present study draws on this insight and considers proliferation as an ongoing process in which the availability of weapons and insecurity feed into each other. The notion that illicit firearms are mainly imported is complicated by the fact that they are made locally. Informal markets can be created to allow the distribution of craft-produced firearms to actors who might not be able to access internationally trafficked firearms. There are also other ways in which weapons can be diverted from their rightful owners and captured on the battlefield and then re-entered into illegal circulation. What is important about these channels is that shutting down one of them, e.g., a specific border corridor, does not necessarily solve the problem if other domestic channels are still in operation. Therefore, it is recommended that the entire weapons lifecycle be addressed in order to achieve effective control, which encompasses production, legal possession, diversion, circulation, recovery and destruction. But there is a lack of studies that have incorporated these mechanisms in a national analysis of the circulation of weapons in various conflict and criminal contexts.

SALWs and Regional Conflict Dynamics

The second broad line of research looks at the linkages between SALWs and various conflict theatres in Nigeria. Researchers in the north-east of Nigeria link the presence of guns to the strength and endurance of Boko Haram and associated armed groups. Studies of the insurgency have shown that weapons give the insurgents the means to attack civilians, security forces and state institutions. Samuel's research on Adamawa State also links the proliferation of small arms and light weapons to subnational national-security issues, and Shehu and Musa (2024) explore the link between the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and insecurity in the northeastern Nigeria. This literature is significant in that it shows that guns are not simply objects in the midst of conflict. Their availability may impact the ability of armed

groups to recruit, attack, defend territory, resist security operations, and continue violence. But these studies also suggest an important analytical caveat: SALWs should not be regarded as the root cause of terrorism. The ideological, political, socioeconomic and governance environment contributed to the emergence of Boko Haram, and the subsequent development of the insurgency was influenced by military countermeasures, organizational disintegration, regional changes and community dynamics. Firearms are better, then, as enablers of violence than as causes of it. This is significant for the current study. When guns are the only focus of insecurity, the focus can become diverted from the structural conditions that generate the demand for guns. By contrast, failing to account for the availability of weapons underestimates the ability of armed groups to convert grievances and criminal opportunities into sustained violence. The problem with much of the literature on the insurgency is not that it lacks evidence about weapons, but that it fails to consider how weapons availability affects the intensity, duration and geographical extent of the conflict arising from the broader structural conditions. There is an additional dimension with the emergence of armed banditry and kidnapping in northwestern Nigeria. International Crisis Group (2020) reports on the emergence of organised violence in the Northwest, where criminal networks, local grievances, economic interests and territorial competition converge. Such groups have the means to threaten communities, kidnap people and raid settlements, and to oppose security interventions through the use of firearms. Likewise, the literature on farmer-herder and communal conflicts, such as that of Amnesty International (2020), shows how guns can be used to escalate conflicts over land, livelihoods, resources and community identity. The studies offer useful regional explanations, but tend to be organized by individual types of conflict. As a result, banditry, insurgency and communal violence are treated as distinct security issues, and weapons are not seen as flowing between actors and places. What results is a disjointed view of the national SALWs system. The present study overcomes this limitation by looking at these conflict theatres as a whole and how the availability and circulation of firearms are associated with various types of insecurity in Nigeria.

Socioeconomic and Security Drivers of Demand

The study of the conditions that create demand is also a growing area of interest, in addition to the weapons themselves. For instance, Ogbonnaya and Ogujiuba (2021) link the proliferation of small arms and light weapons to the socioeconomic conditions and structural weaknesses more generally. Their analysis is useful in showing that the purchase of weapons is not a phenomenon that can be isolated from the economic and social conditions under which individuals and groups exist. Similarly, Williams (2019) places African security issues in the broader governance, conflict and socioeconomic landscape. But, when poverty, unemployment or poor governance is assumed to inevitably lead to the acquisition of firearms, they become too general. Such conditions can lead to vulnerability or opportunity but they do not account for the acquisition of weapons by some individuals or communities and not others in similar circumstances. More importantly, the sequence of insecurity to generate demand needs to be paid more attention in socioeconomic approaches. In communities that face multiple attacks and feel that they are not protected by formal security institutions, firearms can be used for self-protection. They can be obtained by armed groups for territorial control, by criminals for profit, or by political groups for mobilization or coercion. This implies that demand is not just an economic phenomenon, but one that is also a function of perceived

insecurity. The relationship may be circular: insecurity can lead to the acquisition of weapons, and greater access to weapons can lead to greater insecurity. Much of the current literature lacks this feedback mechanism, and it is also a key feature of the present study. This study looks at the interaction between supply and demand in Nigeria's evolving security landscape, rather than viewing them as separate variables.

National Security Implications and Institutional Responses

A second line of argument looks at the implications of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons on the national security of Nigeria. Current scholarship links illegal weapons to threats to state authority, territorial control, public safety, economic activity and human security. Armed non-state actors may threaten the state monopoly of legitimate force, and persistent violence may erode public trust in government institutions and disrupt agriculture, markets, education, livelihoods and population movement. In this national-level discussion, Yusuf, Manya Manya and Barau (2026) analyse the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and Nigeria's national security between 2010 and 2025 using Failed State Theory and Human Security Theory. Their research links proliferation and porous borders, insurgency and organized criminal networks, institutional weaknesses, and shows that the impacts are not limited to traditional military security. They play an important role because they expand the definition of national security. The longer time frame, 2010–2025, however, provides a more specific opportunity to examine the decade 2015–2025, especially the dynamics of weapons circulation and evolving conflict patterns and institutional responses. Reading the literature on government responses, Nigeria has gradually tightened up its arms-control architecture. Nigeria has ratified the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons and the Arms Trade Treaty. The domestic framework was further bolstered with the establishment of the National Centre for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (NCCSALW) in 2021 and the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons Act 2024. Expansion of weapons recovery and destruction, marking and tracing; stockpile management, border control and cooperation with regional and international partners.

In particular, Chiwuzie (2026) assesses Nigeria's arms-control response in the period 2015-2025 and concludes that institutional development and cooperation with regional and international frameworks are key developments. The study also identifies ongoing issues of trafficking, local production, diversion and demand due to insecurity. The focus on institutional development is useful, but there is room for more discussion of why institutional strengthening has not led to the end of the conditions that enable illicit circulation. Whether Nigeria has put in place the right institutions and policies is not the only question; the question is whether these have changed the supply-demand and conflict dynamics that generate proliferation. This creates a major paradox in the literature: Nigeria's formal arms-control architecture has grown stronger, but its informal arms-control architecture has not. This leads to a major paradox in the literature: Nigeria's formal arms-control architecture has strengthened, while its informal arms-control architecture has not. The establishment of institutions does not necessarily ensure effective control if there are gaps in enforcement capacity, weapons management systems are not secure, illicit markets are present, and insecurity is driving demand. The literature thus suggests a policy-practice gap, which needs to be further explored in terms of how this gap is reproduced.

Theme / Category	Key Authors / Sources	Main Arguments / Findings	Gaps / Limitations Identified
Sources and Channels of Proliferation	Adeola & Otemuyiwa (2021); Small Arms Survey (2019); UNODC (2020); Mohammed (2020); Amali & Buthelezi (2025)	Identify porous borders, trafficking, local manufacture, diversion, stockpile weaknesses and other channels through which firearms enter or remain in circulation.	Much of the literature identifies supply channels without sufficiently explaining why demand remains strong or how different channels interact across Nigeria.
Regional Conflict Dynamics	International Crisis Group (2020); Zenn (2020); Amnesty International (2020); Samuel; Shehu & Musa (2024)	Examine firearms in insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, and communal/farmer-herder violence and demonstrate their role in sustaining armed violence.	Conflicts are frequently examined separately, limiting analysis of interconnected weapons circulation across different security theatres.
Socioeconomic and Security Drivers	Ogbonnaya & Ogujiuba (2021); Williams (2019); Amali & Buthelezi (2025)	Connect proliferation with socioeconomic vulnerability, insecurity, governance weaknesses and demand for firearms.	Often provide broad structural explanations without sufficiently explaining the behavioural process through which insecurity produces weapons acquisition.
National Security Consequences	Adeola & Otemuyiwa (2021); Yusuf, Manya Manya & Barau (2026)	Link SALWs with threats to state authority, human security, territorial control, public safety and socioeconomic stability.	Less attention is given to the feedback process through which insecurity itself generates further demand for weapons.
Government and Institutional Responses	Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014); Saferworld (2019); Chiwuzie (2026); NCCSALW materials	Highlight national, regional and international arms-control frameworks, institutional development, weapons recovery, marking, tracing and stockpile management.	Greater attention is needed to the gap between formal institutional development and practical prevention of continued illicit circulation.

The literature reviewed, therefore, shows four interrelated limitations. First, research on supply channels is not sufficiently linked to insecurity-driven demand. Second, regional studies tend to focus on insurgency, banditry and communal violence separately, rather than understanding the national linkages of arms flows. Third, while researchers have documented that weapons increase violence, little research has focused on how weapons affect the duration, intensity, and geographic scope of conflict stemming from deeper structural conditions. Fourth, institutional studies show the evolution of Nigeria's arms-control regime but do not adequately account for the continued presence of illicit arms

circulation. The present study tackles these limitations by analyzing the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the national context between 2015 and 2025, connecting weapons supply, insecurity-induced demand, conflict transformation, national-security consequences, and institutional capacity. It thus does not view SALWs as a standalone source of insecurity but rather as an infrastructure of violence that can enable ongoing and more violent political, socioeconomic, communal, and governance conflicts. The study also adds to the literature by exploring the apparent paradox of the strengthening of arms-control institutions and the ongoing availability of SALWs in Nigeria, offering a more holistic account of the ongoing nature of the SALWs problem.Top of Form

3. Materials and methods

This study adopts a qualitative historical-documentary design covering 2015–2025. Data were drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government and policy documents, reports of regional and international organisations, security publications, and selected credible news sources. Particular attention was given to materials from the NCCSALW, Office of the National Security Adviser, Nigeria Customs Service, United Nations, UNODA, UNODC, ECOWAS, African Union, Small Arms Survey and International Crisis Group.

Selection Criteria: Sources were selected based on (a) publication period, with 2015–2025 materials prioritized; (b) geographic relevance, focusing primarily on Nigeria and relevant West African evidence; (c) thematic relevance, particularly the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, trafficking, local manufacture, weapons diversion, armed conflict, national security and arms-control responses; and (d) source credibility, with preference given to peer-reviewed, official and recognized institutional sources. Earlier works were retained only where necessary for theoretical, conceptual or legal background.

The selected materials were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis and historical interpretation. An inductive-deductive approach was employed, with materials coded around recurring themes related to sources of proliferation, conflict dynamics, insecurity-induced demand, national-security consequences and institutional responses. Evidence from different regions and source categories was compared, while triangulation was used to assess conflicting claims and reported figures. The study is limited by the clandestine nature of illicit arms markets, inconsistencies in available security data and the absence of extensive primary field interviews. However, the documentary approach is appropriate for a decade-long national analysis because it permits comparison of evidence across different periods, regions and institutional sources.

4. Discussion of findings

The findings indicate that the increase in Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) in Nigeria from 2015 to 2025 was driven by cross-border trafficking, local production, diversion from legal sources, battlefield capture and re-distribution, and the high demand for SALWs brought on by insecurity. SALWs were not the only drivers of insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, communal violence and organized crime; they were enablers and force multipliers, empowering armed groups and criminal networks to perpetuate and intensify violence. The study also confirms that the process of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons is a continuous one and not just the process of weapons accumulation. There are four aspects of a firearm's movement: acquisition, circulation, possession, and use and re-circulation. The figures of weapons recovered or destroyed should therefore not be taken as

an indicator of a decrease in the illicit weapons market, but rather as an indicator of enforcement efforts. Arms enhanced the operational capacity of insurgents in the Northeast, bandits and kidnappers in the Northwest, and armed groups in communal and farmer-herder conflicts in the North-Central region of Nigeria. But political, economic, social, territorial, and governance factors also play a role in the root causes of these conflicts.

The increasing number of SALWs has important implications for state security and human security. The use of illegal weapons can undermine the effectiveness of the state, allowing armed groups to contest the state's institutions and territorial control. On a community level, ongoing armed violence leads to displacement, loss of livelihoods, disruption of farming and markets, and school closures and other disruptions to essential services. Importantly, insecurity also generates additional need for guns as people, communities and armed groups want to have guns for self-defence, revenge, territorial control or for criminal activities. This creates a vicious circle of insecurity, which leads to a greater demand for weapons, a greater availability of weapons, more violence, and more insecurity. However, Nigeria took significant steps in arms control during the period. In 2021, the National Centre for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (NCCSALW) was established, and the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons Act 2024 was passed, enhancing the institutional and legal framework. The recovery and destruction of weapons, marking and tracing, stockpile management, border control, and inter-agency cooperation also grew in significance. More than 11,600 guns were reportedly recovered, and more than 280,000 rounds of ammunition were recovered between March 2022 and February 2025, of which more than 85 percent of the recovered guns were destroyed. These are the numbers of weapons that have been seized, but not the number of weapons in circulation. The results, therefore, show a progressive but incomplete institutional response in Nigeria. Marking, tracing and border control can contribute to better accountability and help to break up trafficking, but they do not have the capacity to address local manufacture, diversion, battlefield capture or demand created by ongoing insecurity.

Therefore, the control of SALWs should be tackled at both the supply and demand sides. The results also broaden the scope of Security Dilemma Theory from its interstate focus. In Nigeria, insecurity can lead to state security operations, adaptation, and rearmament by armed groups and communities acquiring firearms for self-protection. Poor stockpile management and institutional shortcomings may also be a factor in diverting weapons from legitimate security institutions. The theory, however, does not account for all aspects of the SALWs problem in Nigeria, because other factors such as poverty, criminal profit, political competition, resource conflicts, trafficking networks, and institutional weaknesses also play a role in the acquisition of weapons. It is thus best used as a tool to help understand the relationship between insecurity and rearmament, and between insecurity and security responses. In general, the results confirm that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria is a complex process involving conflict, institutional weakness, and demand for small arms and light weapons due to insecurity. Sustainable control is not just about seizures and border controls. It requires more robust border governance, secure stockpile management, effective marking and tracing, control of local manufacture and diversion, enhanced policing, and conflict prevention measures and measures to reduce the insecurity that fuels demand for firearms.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study found that the increased availability of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria from 2015 to 2025 was driven by cross-border trafficking, local production, diversion, battlefield capture, and illicit re-distribution. These weapons gave armed actors increased capacity to maintain and intensify existing conflicts, helping to strengthen insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, communal violence and organized crime. SALWs thus served as enablers of violence and not as the root causes of violence. The emergence of SALWs has undermined the state, endangered communities, endangered livelihoods, and added to the security institutions of Nigeria. While the establishment of the NCCSALW in 2021, the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons Act 2024, and the enhanced weapons recovery, destruction, marking, tracing, and stockpile management efforts are positive developments, the continued circulation of illicit weapons is indicative of the fact that institutional measures are not sufficient to eliminate the structural conditions that underlie the problem. The study also concludes that the problem of SALWs in Nigeria is a security-dilemma cycle in which insecurity creates demand for guns, gun availability increases capacity for gun violence, and gun violence leads to further insecurity. This shows that the Security Dilemma Theory can be applied not only to interstate relations, but also to relations between the state, armed groups, and communities in a sovereign state.

5.2 Limitations

First, the study is mainly based on documentary and secondary sources, thus failing to give extensive first-hand accounts from actors directly involved in SALWs control, such as security personnel, affected communities, and policymakers. Secondly, the statistics on the availability of SALWs in Nigeria are not reliable, as the illegal trade of weapons is conducted in secret. Thirdly, the official and independent sources may give conflicting estimates of weapons recovered, casualties, and other security indicators, which must be carefully triangulated. Finally, the study is limited to Nigeria for the period 2015-2025, and thus, the results need not be extrapolated to other countries in West Africa with varying security contexts and institutional capacities.

5.3 Future Research

The documentary method used in this study may be complemented with primary field research through interviews with security officials, NCCSALW staff, community leaders, civil-society actors and residents of the communities affected by armed violence. This kind of research might give a better understanding of the factors that lead to weapons purchases, and what communities actually do in weapons-control programmes. Comparative studies of Nigeria and other West African states could also be conducted to establish why some states have been more successful in controlling illicit firearms than others, in order to gain insight into how to improve the situation in Nigeria. Lessons could be learnt from studies of Nigeria's arms-control experience compared to that of other countries like Ghana, Niger, Benin or Senegal.

Lastly, quantitative research may explore the linkages between weapons recovery, insecurity indicators and the level of conflict in the various geopolitical zones of Nigeria. This would be useful for testing more systematically the feedback relationship between the availability of SALWs and insecurity suggested by this study. The overall conclusion of the study is that it has added to the knowledge of the problem of SALWs in Nigeria because it has shown that the problem is not just an illegal-weapon problem but rather a dynamic security process. This finding is attributed to the interplay between weapons

availability, insecurity, adaptation of armed groups, and community self-protection and institutional capacity, despite the formal arms-control architecture being strengthened in Nigeria between 2015 and 2025.Top of Form

5.4 Recommendations

- Strengthen the NCCSALW through adequate funding, staffing, equipment and technical capacity.
- Improve weapons marking, tracing, record-keeping and stockpile management within authorised security institutions.
- Strengthen border control and intelligence cooperation with neighbouring states and ECOWAS to disrupt cross-border trafficking.
- Address domestic sources of illicit weapons, particularly local manufacture, diversion and battlefield capture.
- Integrate SALWs control with conflict prevention, community protection, early-warning mechanisms and effective security governance to reduce insecurity-driven demand.
- Establish a reliable national SALWs database covering recovered, seized, surrendered, destroyed, marked and traced weapons.
- Sustain weapons recovery, destruction, voluntary surrender and public-awareness programmes through coordinated government and community participation.

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