

A PROGNOSIS OF NATIONAL POLICY: SMALL ARMS, LIGHT WEAPONS AND HUMAN SECURITY NEXUS IN NIGERIA

Chinedu Magnus Ejezie

Department of Political Science, University Of Nigeria, Nsukka

Ikeagwu, Emmanuel Onyekachi*

Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of Nigeria's National Policy on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) on human security between 2015 and 2024. Against the backdrop of increasing armed violence, insurgency, and criminality, the study explores how the policy through its institutional frameworks has sought to curb the proliferation of illicit arms and improve citizen safety.

The research adopts a qualitative methodology, drawing on primary and secondary data from government reports, academic literature, and policy documents. It is anchored on the Human Security Theory, which emphasizes the protection of individuals from critical threats to their safety and well-being. Two core research questions guide this study: whether the National Policy has strengthened institutional capacity, and whether legislative frameworks have promoted socioeconomic stability. Findings reveal that (1) the National Centre for the Control of SALW (NCCSALW) and other institutions suffer from inadequate funding, weak inter-agency collaboration, and porous border controls, undermining their operational effectiveness. (2) Legislative frameworks, though well-articulated, remain poorly implemented, with corruption and political interference weakening arms control measures and impacting human security outcomes.

The study recommends: (1) enhancing institutional capacity through increased funding, advanced surveillance technologies, and improved coordination among security agencies; (2) initiating comprehensive legislative reforms, including the amendment of outdated laws like the Firearms Act (1990), and aligning them with regional instruments such as the ECOWAS Convention on SALW. These steps are essential to addressing arms proliferation and promoting sustainable human security in Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Conflict and violence has been a phenomenon which has been identified with mankind since the beginning of time. According to Michael Douglas cited in Mohammed and Baba (2017); wherever arms flow, violence follows. Bullet replace ballots as the solution to political disputes. Nigeria has become far volatile and there has been a high spread of arms and ammunitions. Weapons of harm and chaos have now found their way into the hands of the people who ought not to have or possess them.

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) are two distinct concepts which are Small Arms (SA) being kinetic projectile firearms and they include; Handguns (Revolvers, Pistols, derringers and Machine pistols), muskets, shotguns, rifles, submachine guns, personal defense weapons.

Light Weapons (LW) on the other hand include; anti-material rifles, anti-tank rifles, general-purpose machine guns, medium machine guns, etc. According to the report of the Panel of governmental Experts on Small Arms, United Nations document cited in Malam, (2014), "light weapons are heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-tank and anti-aircraft missile systems and mortars of calibers of less than 100mm".

According to Ityonzughul, Segun and Gbamwuan (2018), when a country has a loose or weak security, the proliferation of SALW becomes the order of the day. This is to say, when a country experiences weak or ineffective security structures, it creates a favorable environment for the proliferation of SALW. In such context, the lack of adequate security enforcement, weak institutional frameworks, and porous borders enable illegal trade, smuggling, and unregulated distribution of arms. This widespread availability of weapons exacerbates violence, crime, and armed conflict, destabilizing the country further. The proliferation of SALW becomes a self-perpetuating cycle, where weak security enables the spread of arms, and the increased availability of arms further weakens national security.

SALW proliferation is widespread, with an estimated 875 million small arms in circulation globally, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and Small Arms Survey reports. These weapons are found not only among state actors but also in the hands of insurgents, militias, organized crime groups, and civilians, contributing to violence in conflict zones and even in otherwise peaceful societies. (United Nations, 2001)

SALW are often trafficked across borders through illicit markets. Many of these weapons are remnants of previous conflicts, diverted from military stockpiles, or sold by arms dealers operating in weakly regulated regions (Small Arms Survey, 2019). According to the Geneva Declaration Secretariat cited by Malam (2014); SALW kill between 500,000 and 750,000 people annually and are a contributory factor to armed conflict and the displacement of people, organized crime and terrorism thereby undermining peace, reconciliation, safety, stability and sustainable social and economic development.

The illegal arms trade fuels violence, insurgencies, and criminal activities. The black market for SALW has grown globally due to ineffective regulations and weak border controls, allowing non-state actors to easily access weapons (Marsh, 2017). The security challenges which has been posed by the proliferation of SALW has been increased violence and armed conflicts and as Florquin and Berman puts it: SALW are a primary tool in many modern conflicts and contribute to protracted

violence. Civil wars, insurgencies and terrorism are sustained by easy access to small arms, which intensifies the scale and duration of violence (Florquin & Berman, 2005). Dreyfus, (2008) also stated that in regions plagued by weak governance and law enforcement, SALW proliferation has significantly fueled organized crime. Countries in Latin America, such as Brazil and Mexico, face high homicide rates due to criminal groups having easy access to firearms. So due to the presence of these weapons increases the lethality of criminal activities and makes it more challenging for law enforcement to restore order. Chuma-Okoro, (2011) alludes that “from Nigeria’s perspective, the pernicious and multidimensional effects of the proliferation and misuse of SALW have also been felt through the prevalence of organized armed violence and criminality, which have become defining characteristics of the socio-political landscape”.

The widespread availability of SALW has negatively affected human security by ways of increasing the instability which has undermined development. It has contributed mainly to the forced displacement and the disruption of economies and has negatively affected humanitarian efforts in zones of conflict. According to the Geneva Declaration Secretariat, SALW proliferation leads to widespread human rights abuses, including killings, kidnappings and gender-based violence. These weapons are often used to target vulnerable populations, including women, children and minorities. The unchecked spread of arms heightens insecurity and perpetuates cycles of violence and abuse (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2015).

Various international organizations like the UN have lead various initiatives to contain the proliferation of SALW globally. The UN Programme of Action (PoA) which was adopted in 2001 provides a framework for national, regional and global efforts to regulate SALW, improve stockpile management and curb illicit arms trade (United Nations, 2001). In addition, there has also been regional efforts like the ECOWAS Convention on SALW which has been a key instrument in tackling SALW proliferation. The treaty mandates member states to strengthen border controls, promote disarmament and regulate the arms trade within the West African sub-region (ECOWAS, 2006). SALW proliferation in Nigeria has been a long plaguing issue that has its historical roots in early conflicts, colonial legacy and crime. The proliferation of SALW in Nigeria can be traced back to the colonial era when firearms were introduced for colonial control and conflict suppression. Post-independence, the weapons remained and were used in various conflicts, including the Nigerian Civil War between 1967 and 1970 which significantly escalated the availability of arms and contributed to a culture of violence.

In order to curb this proliferation, the National Policy on SALW was adopted in Nigeria because SALW has become a major contributor to insecurity which has fueled violence, insurgencies, communal conflicts and led to a high spate of organized crime. In a bid to respond to these budding threats, the Nigerian government has taken various approaches which includes a National Policy on Small Arms and Light Weapons, the establishment of the National Center for the control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (NCCSALW) and the National Security Strategy (NSS) 2019. These frameworks aim to curb the illegal trade, spread and use of SALW which improves border security, enhance law enforcement capacity and engage in regional and international cooperation to alleviate the risks which has been posed by these weapons.

The term “National Policy” as applied to this study does not refer to a single official document but rather to an overarching framework which is composed of institutions, laws and strategies that articulate the Nigerian government’s intentions and actions towards combating SALW proliferation. This framework includes various legislative instruments, executive directives,

enforcement mechanisms and collaborative efforts aimed at regulating the flow of SALW, enhancing border security and improving capacity to address the menace of arms proliferation.

The key components of this policy framework include the; NCCSALW, NSS of 2019 and earlier mechanisms like the PRESCOM. It also involves adherence to international and regional frameworks such as the ECOWAS Convention on SALW and the United Nations Programme of Action (UNPoA). To enable the Federal Government, combat these challenges, the National Centre for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (NCCSALW) was established to serve as an institutional mechanism for the prevention and control of SALW towards strengthening peace and security in Nigeria (NCCSALW, 2024).

The NCCSALW which was established in 2021 is primarily tasked with coordinating and implementing SALW control measures. The center oversees arms tracking, regulation of legal arms possession and disarmament efforts. It serves as a central body for monitoring arms flows, particularly in high-conflict areas and works closely with security agencies to combat illegal arms trafficking. The NCCSALW serves as the national Focal Point on SALW in Nigeria and leads a multi-stakeholder process involving Government Ministries, Departments, Agencies and Civil Society in implementing all national, UN and ECOWAS plans of action on the control of SALW (Abdulkareem, 2021).

The issue of SALW is directly connected to human security as it is a matter of grave concern especially in areas of conflict, weak governance and state fragility. In Nigeria, the availability of SALW has had a drastic impact in communities, stalled development and undermined livelihood.

In the context of this study, human security is a comprehensive concept that shifts the focus from traditional, state-centric security to the protection of individuals and communities. It refers to the protection and empowerment of individuals and communities from pervasive threats to their survival, dignity and well-being which encompasses both freedom from fear (safety from violence and conflict) and freedom from want (access to basic needs and opportunities). Unlike in the traditional state-centric security which prioritizes the sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations, human security shifts the focus to the individual as the primary referent thus emphasizing a multidimensional approach that integrates physical safety, economic stability, social cohesion and environmental sustainability. According to Newman, (2010) human security suggests that security policy and security analysis, if they are to be effective and legitimate, must focus on the individual as the referent and primary beneficiary.

Insecurity has persisted in Nigeria despite implementing the National Policy on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) from 2015–2024. While the policy was well-intentioned, enforcement and institutional challenges—such as weak border controls, corruption, and inadequate technological resources—have undermined its effectiveness. The proliferation of SALW continues to escalate, with an estimated 70% of these weapons in civilian possession being illegally acquired. This has fueled armed conflicts, insurgency, and organized crime, exacerbating human security concerns across Nigeria. The root causes of SALW proliferation, including socio-economic inequality, political instability, and ethnic tensions, remain largely unaddressed. Additionally, systemic corruption within law enforcement and political interference further hinder policy enforcement. Disarmament initiatives and border security measures lack sufficient resources and technological support, allowing arms trafficking to thrive.

While many studies have explored the causes of SALW proliferation and the challenges of enforcement, there is limited empirical research evaluating the policy's direct and indirect impacts on human security, particularly in conflict-prone regions. Furthermore, the absence of robust mechanisms for inter-agency coordination, stakeholder engagement, and technological innovation highlights a critical gap between policy formulation and implementation. Arising from this, therefore this study aims to examine the factors which have hindered the National policy on SALW from curbing the menace of arms proliferation, which has thus affected human security in Nigeria between 2015 and 2024. This periodization is significant because it captures the Nigerian government's renewed efforts at addressing SALW proliferation through the establishment of the NCCSALW in 2021 and the adoption of the NSS in 2019. It also encompasses the years of heightened insecurity, particularly with insurgency, armed violence and other security challenges that necessitated policy interventions.

This research seeks to assess the effectiveness of Nigeria's National Policy on SALW in reducing arms proliferation and enhancing human security between 2015 and 2024. It also aims to examine how institutional structures and surveillance tools have shaped the policy's outcomes. By addressing these issues, this study will provide actionable insights to inform more effective strategies for combating SALW proliferation in Nigeria. However, while many studies have focused on the causes of arms proliferation, the role of weak enforcement and systemic corruption, there is insufficient empirical research evaluating how these policies have directly or indirectly impacted human security between 2015 to 2024. It is against this background that the following research questions were raised. (1) Has the National Policy on SALW enhanced institutional capacity? (2) Have the legislative frameworks on SALW enhanced socioeconomic stability? The specific objectives of this study are: (1) To evaluate the extent to which the National Policy on SALW has strengthened the operational and coordination capacities of the National Center for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (NCCSALW) in Nigeria between 2015 and 2024. (2) To assess the impact of legislative frameworks on SALW in promoting socioeconomic stability in Nigeria by examining trends in violence reduction and economic indicators from 2015 to 2024.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter contains literature review and it is aimed at reviewing related literature to locate the gap in extant literature with regards to the research questions raised in the study. Thus, we adopted a thematic review of literature based on the following themes:

- National policy on Small Arms & Light Weapons (SALW) and Reduction of Armed violence
- Legislative frameworks and Socioeconomic stability

2.1. National Policy on SALW and Reduction of Armed Violence.

In the years leading up to 2015, there has been quite a lot written on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in Nigeria and also in relation to how it affects human security. The National policy on SALW is a policy that aims to prevent the proliferation of weapons in Nigeria. The National Commission against the proliferation of SALW which is responsible for promoting and ensuring the coordination of concrete measures for effective control of SALW was established. According to ECOWAS as cited in Onuoha (2011),

Small arms' refers to arms used by one person and which include firearms and other destructive arms or devices such as exploding bombs incendiary bombs or gas bombs grenades rocket launchers missiles missile systems or landmines revolvers and pistols with automatic loading rifles and carbines machine guns assault rifles and light machine guns light weapons' are portable arms designed to be used by several persons working together in a team and which include heavy machine guns portable grenade launchers mobile or mounted portable anti-aircraft cannons portable anti-tank cannons non-recoil guns portable anti-tank missile launchers or rocket launchers portable anti-aircraft missile launchers and mortars with a caliber of less than millimeters.

For Onuoha (2011, p. 51), there are regional, continental and international instruments which have been designed to curb the proliferation of SALW and some of them include;

- The ECOWAS convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons: Their Ammunition and other related Materials (2006);
- The Bamako Declaration on the Common African Position on the Proliferation, Circulation and Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (2000); and
- The United Nations (UN) Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects (UNPoA).

According to Jekada (2005), experts have agreed that “the proliferation of SALW, rifles, handguns, machineguns, grenades and bazookas- is just as harmful as the increasing number of so- called weapons of mass destruction. Of the 50 or so conflicts fought since the end of the cold war, the vast majority of them have been fought predominantly with small arms.”

The introduction of firearms into Nigeria can be traced right from the pre- colonial period during the trans-Atlantic trade interactions with the Europeans which were later used by the colonials as a tool to suppress the locals which set the stage for its spread.

The first small arms came into general use in the end of the 14th century. Initially, they were nothing more than small cannon held in the hands, fired by placing a lighted match at the touch hole. Later a stock was added- the match lock and the first real handgun. Guns were introduced by the Europeans prior to colonialism during legitimate and illegitimate (slave) trade between them and Africans. Subsequently, guns and other arms, ammunition and weapons were used by Europeans to realize their imperial ambitions when they were forced to suppress Africa's resistance to European incursion, conquest and colonialism (Uwa & Anthony, 2015, p. 15).

These arms or guns possibly found their ways to the hands of Africans during the period of colonialism subsequently used in tradition and hunting in the rural community (Soetan, 2017, p. 34).

The challenges of the institutional capacity in combating illicit arms proliferation in Nigeria have been significant thus having affected the country's human security landscape between 2015 and 2024. The examination of these challenges are;

- **Porosity of National Borders:** The poorly managed and monitored borders in Nigeria has aided in the facilitating of the smuggling of illicit arms in neighboring countries like; Chad, Mali, and Niger with their histories of political instability and conflicts have exacerbated the problem. The size of Nigeria is not responsible for her vulnerability but rather poor management of the porous borders in terms of personnel and the facilities for proper monitoring of the nation's border posts (Ehiane & Uwizeyimama, 2018, p. 74). According to a participant cited in Ehiane and Uwizeyimama (2018), some of the weapons are shipped into the country through the sea ports though the security agencies at the borders do not impound these weapons and destroy them. The scale of Nigeria's landmass, coupled with numerous seaports, makes border control a daunting task especially with the limited resources.
- **Complicity of State and Non-State Actors:** Corruption within the security forces with armed traffickers have been one of the notable issues being faced in Nigeria. There are instances with security personnel being involved with arms smuggling and racketeering or leakage of arms from government stockpiles. The crude nature of Nigerian politics is one key factor driving the process the process of SALWs proliferation. The stake in Nigerian politics is incredibly high making politicians desperate in the quest to win election at all costs. As a result, many of them recruit specialists of violence such cultists, gangs and thugs to attain and retain political power. (Ojewale & Osasona, 2024, p. 54).
- **Inadequate Training and Equipment for Security Forces:** The Nigerian security forces have often been described as ill- equipped and undertrained for the task of combating arms proliferation effectively. This includes the lack of modern surveillance equipment, intelligence gathering capabilities and training in arms control and border management. Poorly trained and ill- equipped security personnel are often unable to effectively monitor and secure Nigeria's extensive and porous borders, which facilitates the smuggling of illicit arms.

The battle against the proliferation of SALW has been a pivotal aspect of its national strategy. The enforcement of policies which have been aimed at controlling these weapons has seen various successes and failures across different fronts such as border security and arms seizures and various case studies have been highlighted such as;

- **Operation SWIFT RESPONSE (2019-2020):** This operation by the Nigerian Military and security forces resulted in significant seizures of arms. In 2019, a large cache of weapons were intercepted along the borders of Katsina and Niger States, which were believed to be designated for bandit groups. The operation involved coordinated intelligence and military action which led to the disruption of arms trafficking networks (Adeyeye, 2020; Egbuta, 2019).
- **Border Security Enhancements:** The Nigerian government's commitment to enhancing border security has led to several successes in 2022, border patrols at the Cameroon - Nigeria border managed to seize weapons smuggled through porous borders which have significantly reduced the inflow of SALW in various regions in Nigeria. (Umaru, 2021). Border security has become the focal point in Nigeria due to the proliferation of SALW which has impacted human security. In 2019, Nigeria implemented a land border closure policy which was aimed at reducing the influx of illegal arms. According to the Institute of Security Studies, (2021), it hasn't fully achieved its purpose due to the continued

smuggling through less monitored areas (ISS, 2021). Despite these measures, the effectiveness of border security in Nigeria is often questioned. The continued occurrence of arms smuggling suggests that there might be corruption, insufficient resources or inadequate implementation of policies. The sheer length and nature of Nigeria's borders make complete control challenging (Ehiane & Uwizeyimama, 2018; Olomu, & Alao, 2019).

2.2 Legislative frameworks and Socioeconomic stability.

The legislative frameworks within the realm of SALW control are systematic collections of laws, regulations and policy directives which have been designed by governments to enable them manage the lifecycle of arms which includes their manufacture, possession, transfer and use. The primary purpose of these frameworks is to establish legal boundaries to prevent illicit arms trafficking in order to ensure responsible ownership and promote safe use of firearms. They also aim to harmonize national policies with international treaties and conventions such as the UNPoA and the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). In Nigeria, the frameworks have been aimed to prevent weapons proliferation by establishing stringent control mechanisms over the manufacture, importation and distribution of SALW so to this, the government seeks to mitigate the spread of weapons particularly into illegal markets. The NCCSALW was established to spearhead these efforts which aligns with international commitments like the ECOWAS convention on SALW. (ECOWAS, 2006; UN, n.d.).

Various scholars have given recommendations for the strengthening of legislative frameworks as regards to arms proliferation in Nigeria. Strengthening and implementation and enforcement of Nigeria's existing SALW laws is crucial for combating arms proliferation and enhancing human security. A major focus according to the United Nations is on institutional reforms which is aimed at addressing corruption and inefficiencies within law enforcement agencies. This includes increasing budget allocations for these agencies to procure modern technology for tracking and monitoring arms. For instance, integrating digital arms registries and biometric verification systems which will ensure accountability and reduce the diversion of legally acquired arms. (UNODC, 2022). In addition, public awareness campaigns about existing laws can improve compliance. Onuoha (2019) highlights that effective enforcement also requires inter-agency coordination to prevent overlaps and enhance operational efficiency. The implementation of community-based programs aimed at increasing public knowledge about the dangers and legal implications of SALW can enhance the compliance with laws. These initiatives should involve local leaders and use local languages to achieve a broader impact (Olumayowa, 2024).

Various emerging threats such as 3D- printed firearms and the use of drones for illicit arms delivery, are necessary to the development of forward-looking legal frameworks. Nigeria must update its legislation to criminalize these practices and provide mechanisms for monitoring and addressing technological innovations that exacerbate arms proliferation. The current Firearms Act from 1959 is outdated for addressing today's challenges with SALW. A new or revised act should include provisions for homemade weapons, 3D-printed guns, cyber-arms trafficking. Scholars like Aja have emphasized the importance of periodic legal reviews to adapt to global trends in arms proliferation thus ensuring domestic laws with international standards (Aja, 2024). These measures include imposing strict penalties on offenders and encouraging whistleblowing through protected reporting mechanisms.

2.3 Gap in Literature

Existing studies on the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in Nigeria have largely focused on the impact of armed violence, criminality, and insecurity arising from the illicit circulation of weapons. Scholars such as Ettang (2013) and Aja (2024) have examined the historical trends of arms trafficking in West Africa, emphasizing the role of porous borders, weak law enforcement, and socio-economic factors in the persistence of the problem. However, these studies have not provided a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of Nigeria's National Policy on SALW, particularly the institutional mechanisms established to address the crisis.

While the literature extensively covers the causes of the proliferation of SALW such as the historical origins, porous borders and corruption and the challenges of policy such as weak institutions, inadequate resources and governance failures, there is insufficient empirical research which evaluates the direct and indirect impacts of the National policy on SALW on human security in Nigeria within the time frame of 2015 and 2024. This is seen in the various studies of policy documents like the border control, arms registries and its alignment with frameworks like the ECOWAS convention and UNPoA but they lack quantitative or qualitative assessments of its effectiveness in reducing arms proliferation and enhancing human security outcomes such as safety, livelihood and community stability.

Although the establishment of the National Centre for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (NCCSALW) in 2021 and the National Security Strategy (NSS) of 2019-mark significant policy efforts toward arms control, there remains a paucity of empirical research evaluating their actual impact on institutional capacity, enforcement mechanisms, and arms proliferation reduction. Most existing works have analyzed Nigeria's general security policies without isolating these frameworks as key indicators of governmental response. The absence of data-driven studies examining their effectiveness creates a knowledge gap that this study seeks to fill.

Weak security apparatus and enforcement challenges such as inadequate training, funding and corruption has been exacerbated by technological deficiencies and political interference. Scholars such as Onuoha, (2011) and Jekada, (2005) confirms these issues but does not access whether the NCCSALW or NSS (2019) have addressed these weaknesses or improved the enforcement outcomes from 2015 to 2024.

On SALW proliferation and the threats to human security, Numerous scholars have contributed to the discussion on how illegal proliferation of SALW drives armed violence and undermines human security with specific impacts like displacement and livelihood destruction. While Adeola, (2021) and Soetan, (2017) espoused on this, it lacks empirical analysis of how policy has mitigated these threats over the 2015-2024 period.

Furthermore, while legislative frameworks are recognized as essential tools in arms control and security enhancement, there is limited research on their role in promoting human security, particularly in the areas of protection of lives, personal safety, and community well-being. Studies have explored Nigeria's security challenges in broad terms but have not systematically examined the extent to which legislative instruments contribute to addressing these security concerns.

This study, therefore, seeks to bridge this gap by providing an empirical analysis of the effectiveness of the NCCSALW and the NSS of 2019 in enhancing institutional capacity and enforcement mechanisms. It also examines how legislative frameworks within the National Policy on SALW have contributed to human security in Nigeria between 2015 and 2024. By doing so, this research will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the policy frameworks governing SALW control in Nigeria and their implications for national security.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Human Security Theory. This was popularized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the Human Development Report of 1994. The report broadened the scope of security to include economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security. The UNDP's approach redefined security from a state-centered view to one that prioritizes the security of individuals (UNDP, 1994).

According to Newman, (2010) "human security suggests that security policy and security analysis, if they are to be effective and legitimate, must focus on the individual as the referent and primary beneficiary". One of the main assumptions of human security theory is its basic premise that security should focus on the individuals rather than the state.

Newman states that all approaches to human security agree that the referent of security policy and analysis should be the individual, but they disagree about which threats the individual should be protected from, and what means should be employed to achieve this protection.

Other assumptions of the human Security theory are the Broad definition of threats which the Human Security assumes that threats to people's safety extend beyond military threats.

According to the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS), Human security application within the United Nations (UN) system includes;

- The right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair. All individuals, in particular vulnerable people, are entitled to freedom from fear and freedom from want, with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential;
- Human security calls for people-centered, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people and all communities;
- Human security recognizes the interlinkages between peace, development and human rights and equally considers civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights;
- The notion of human security is distinct from the responsibility to protect and its implementation;
- Human security does not entail the threat or the use of force or coercive measures. Human security does not replace State security;
- Human security is based on national ownership. Since the political, economic, social and cultural conditions for human security vary significantly across and within countries, and at different points in time, human security strengthens national solutions which are compatible with local realities (UNTFHS, 2016).

This theory shifts the focus from traditional state-centric security, which emphasizes territorial defense and sovereignty, to the security of individuals and communities. Human Security Theory encompasses protection from chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and repression, as well as protection from sudden and harmful disruptions in the daily lives of people, including armed violence.

Application of the Theory.

We have observed that the assumption of the Human Security Theory is that security should focus on the individual rather than the state, emphasizing freedom from fear, want, and indignity. It assumes that threats to human security are multifaceted, encompassing not only armed conflict but also poverty, hunger, disease, and environmental degradation. The theory suggests that sustainable peace and development can only be achieved when individuals' basic needs and safety are prioritized, and it promotes collaborative and inclusive measures to address these interconnected threats.

Human security has been applied to a number of thematic issues as an evaluative framework for assessing the state of affairs, and for critiquing and designing public policy. It can be useful for social, economic and environmental themes in focusing on the downside risks, complementing conventional analyses which focus on progress, deprivation or disparities (Fukuda-Parr & Messineo, 2012).

The National Policy on Small Arms and Light Weapons and Human Security in Nigeria, the theory emphasizes the protection of individuals from threats that compromise their safety, including armed violence, insecurity, and societal instability, rather than focusing solely on state security.

Applying human security theory to the national policy on SALW from 2015 to 2024 reveals a multifaceted approach to enhancing security beyond traditional state security concerns. The theory emphasizes protection in economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security dimensions, which the policy aims to address by reducing the proliferation of illegal arms that fuel violence across these areas. By controlling SALW, the policy seeks to directly improve personal security, decreasing the prevalence of violence in daily life, which is a core aspect of human security.

The establishment of the NCCSALW in 2021 was a significant step towards implementing this policy, focusing on arms destruction, border control, and reducing the availability of weapons to non-state actors. This action not only aims at lowering the incidence of violent conflict but also supports socio-economic stability by allowing for safer economic and agricultural activities, thereby indirectly bolstering food and economic security.

However, the policy's effectiveness has been hampered by challenges such as arms diversion from security forces to criminal elements, indicating issues with governance, oversight, and corruption within the security apparatus. These issues highlight the complexities of applying human security principles where state responses are inconsistent or compromised.

Despite these challenges, the policy's intent aligns with human security by aiming to reduce threats to human life and wellbeing. It supports human rights by potentially lowering instances of death, injury, and displacement due to armed violence. For broader human security outcomes, reducing

the circulation of SALW could lead to environments more conducive to development, peace, and community stability.

Yet, for the policy to more effectively embody human security theory, Nigeria must address the root causes of weapon demand, improve community policing, enhance the welfare and accountability of security forces, and foster regional cooperation for better control over arms trafficking. The mixed results from 2015 to 2024 illustrate that while there have been steps towards human security, the journey is fraught with governance and implementation obstacles, requiring a persistent and holistic approach to truly safeguard the Nigerian populace.

3.2 Hypotheses

Based on the foregoing, we raised the following hypotheses:

1. The National Policy on Small Arms and Light Weapons has no significant effect on the institutional capacity of the National Centre for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (NCCSALW) in Nigeria between 2015 and 2024.
2. Legislative frameworks on Small Arms and Light Weapons have no significant effect on socioeconomic stability in Nigeria between 2015 and 2024.

3.3 Research Design

Ex-post facto research design is also known as causal comparative research design because it tries to establish causal relationships of a variable or variables when compared with other variables (Nwanolue & Egbuchulam, 2018). This type of research is suitable when experimental research is being plausible. In this, the researcher begins by specifying a dependent variable and tries to identify the reasons for its occurrence.

The ex post facto research design, also known as “after the fact” research, is a non-experimental research method that examines the causal relationship between independent and dependent variables when the researcher cannot control or manipulate the independent variables due to ethical or practical constraints. It involves studying the effects of an independent variable, after it has occurred, on a dependent variable (Psychology, 2024).

This research design is very relevant to the study given the nature of the phenomenon under investigation. The ex-post facto design assumes the form of an experimental design where existing case is observed overtime in order to study or evaluate it. The design is represented as follows;

This design guided us in testing the hypothesis which involved observing the independent variable “National Policy on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)” and the dependent variable “Human Security in Nigeria” at the same time because the effects of the former on the latter have already taken place before this investigation. Randomized judgmental selections of series of “before” and “after” observations of the variables in Nigeria were used to test the hypotheses.

This study was hinged on two hypotheses in which we sought to understand whether the policy has had a meaningful and measurable impact on reducing armed violence and improving human security, how it Provide insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the SALW policy, helping to assess its overall effectiveness and areas needing improvement and shed light on how similar policies could be better designed or implemented to address human security challenges in other contexts. These hypotheses and the main indicators of the major variables are contained in the Logical Data Framework.

3.4 Method of Data Collection

We adopted for this study the documentary method which provided documented and written materials that are already existing although they may or may not be provided for the benefit of the investigator. We sourced data from documented materials such as journals and blogs, newspapers, books, official documents such as; the National Security Strategy (NSS) of 2019, National Centre for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (NCCSALW) Reports (2021-2024), ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons (2006), Nigeria's Firearms Act (1990), United Nations Programme of Action (UNPoA) Reports and Terrorism Prevention Act (2011)), magazines including audiovisual materials such as podcasts and video documentaries. These data provided better opportunities for replication, increased the credibility of research findings and also yielded available data on a large scale.

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

According to Nwanolue and Egbuchulam (2018), Data Analysis involves verbal or statistical interpretation of information. Data analysis involves using the appropriate tools and techniques in interpreting the relationships between and among the key variables gotten during the course of research. Okeke *et al*, cited in Nwanolue and Egbuchulam (2018) sees data analysis as the interpretation and description of information in a qualitative/verbal or qualitative form.

The data collected during the course of this research was often dissected and treated appropriately to understand the meaning from the mass data generated, presented, tested and interpreted. In this study, we adopted the content analysis method for documented materials. Baily, (1978) cited in Abeng (2017) posits that "content analysis is a structured technique used for the analysis of documents, and then records the frequency with which each of the categories is observed in the documents studied". This method involves analyzing policy documents, official reports, and media coverage to identify patterns, themes, and insights regarding the implementation and impact of Nigeria's National Policy on SALW. It will help evaluate the policy's effectiveness and its challenges.

We also adopted the descriptive statistics approach which enabled us utilize available quantitative data (e.g., crime rates, incidents of armed violence, or trends in human security indicators) from secondary sources to summarize and present trends over the 2015-2024 period. We analyzed the information gathered in both secondary and primary sources. Qualitative descriptive analysis according to Asika, (2006) cited in (Ikeagwu, 2021), is summarizing the information generated in the research.

In summary, the main objective of analysis is to explain and grasp how the constitutive elements of a complex whole are related with a view to gaining a better knowledge and insight of the subject matter. The mass of data used in this study were analyzed qualitatively, thereby extracting valuable information from the available evidence. We arrived at conclusions which in turn informed our recommendations.

3.6 Logical Data Framework

S/N	Research Question	Hypotheses	Major Variables	Empirical Indicators of the Variables	Sources of Data	Methods of Data Collection	Methods of Data Analysis
1.	Has the National Policy on SALW enhanced institutional capacity?	The National Policy on Small Arms and Light Weapons has no significant effect on the institutional capacity of the National Centre for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (NCCSALW) in Nigeria between 2015 and 2024.	(X) National Center for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons and (NCCSALW).	• Total number of illicit weapons recovered by NCCSALW. • Establishment and functionality of regional offices. • Number of partnerships or joint operations with security agencies, ECOWAS and civil society organizations. • Adoption and domestication of international SALW protocols (e.g., ECOWAS Convention, UN Plan of Action). g., establishment of Joint Task Forces).	Secondary Data: Official Reports from NCCSALW. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Reports. ECOWAS Small Arms Control Reports.	Documentary Methods and Observation.	Content analysis and Thematic Analysis.

			(Y) Institutional Capacity.	• Staffing levels and expertise within the NCCSALW. • Volume of illicit SALW recovered and destroyed. • Frequency and scope of joint operations with security agencies and regional bodies. • Number of arrests and successful prosecutions of SALW violations.	Secondary Data: Books, Book Chapters, Journal Articles, Newspaper and Magazine publications, Institutional reports, Online sources.	Documentary Methods and Observation.	Content analysis and Thematic Analysis.
--	--	--	--	--	--	---	--

S/N	Research Question	Hypotheses	Major Variables	Empirical Indicators of the Variables	Sources of Data	Methods of Data Collection	Methods of Data Analysis.
2.	Have the legislative frameworks on SALW enhanced socioeconomic stability?	Legislative frameworks on Small Arms and Light Weapons have no significant effect on socioeconomic stability in Nigeria between 2015 and 2024.	(X) Legislative Frameworks	• Number of SALW-Related laws or amendments enacted. • Establishment and legal status of SALW control bodies. • Budget allocation to SALW control agencies. • Number of SALW policy documents or action plans adopted.	Secondary Data: National Bureau of Statistics (NBS)., ECOWAS Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) Reports, United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC), NCCSALW Official Reports, National Assembly Legislative Records, Small Arms Survey Reports on Nigeria.	Documentary Methods and Observation.	Content analysis and Thematic Analysis.

			(Y) Socioeconomic stability.	• Incidence rate of armed violence (e.g., homicides, kidnappings, banditry). • Number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) due to SALW-driven conflicts. • Number of communal clashes or reprisal attacks. • Unemployment rate in SALW-affected regions.	Secondary Data: National Bureau of Statistics, Global terrorism Index, Nigeria's National Human Rights Commission, Department of State Services, NCCSALW.		
--	--	--	---	---	--	--	--

4. NATIONAL POLICY ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) remains a major security challenge in Nigeria, rooted in historical events such as the civil war of 1967-1970, which initiated arms circulation in the country. The absence of a comprehensive disarmament strategy after the war, coupled with regional instability and porous borders facilitating smuggling, has led to widespread availability of illicit weapons. These arms have fueled violent conflicts, criminal activities, and insurgency, undermining public trust in state institutions and destabilizing society. In response, Nigeria developed the National Policy on SALW to regulate firearms, strengthen institutional frameworks, and enhance community safety, emphasizing community-based disarmament and awareness programs.

Scholarly literature highlights the strong link between SALW proliferation and human insecurity in Nigeria, noting that illicit arms trade sustains organized crime, terrorism, and communal violence (Aja, 2024; Ettang, 2013). Weak governance structures and limited institutional capacity—hampered by corruption, inadequate funding, and lack of technical expertise—exacerbate these issues, making it difficult to effectively combat arms trafficking. Community safety suffers directly from armed violence, leading to loss of lives, displacement, and heightened insecurity. While the National Policy on SALW is a vital step, its success hinges on effective implementation, sustained political commitment, and collaboration between government agencies and local communities to address root causes and curb the proliferation of illicit weapons.

4.1 Institutional Capacity in Implementing the National Policy on SALW

When we talk about institutional capacity, we refer to the ability of primary agencies and organizations to effectively implement policies, enforce laws and deliver the desired outcomes of a given initiative. According to USAID, institutional capacity is defined as the quality of leadership, incentives, systems, resources and personnel that produce results based on the mission, goals and objectives of the institution. It refers to both the organizational capacity as reflected by the institution's public mandate, legitimacy, resources and systems and the human capacity reflected by the motivation, status, technical and managerial skills of its leaders and staff (USAID, 2013). In the context of SALW, institutional capacity encompasses the structural, operational, financial and technical capabilities of relevant agencies in curbing the proliferation of illicit arms and improving human security.

Figure4.1: *Small arms.*



Source: (Onuoha, 2011)

The Nigerian Police Force (NPF) plays a crucial role in enforcing Nigeria's SALW policy by serving as the primary law enforcement agency responsible for maintaining internal security and combating the proliferation of illicit arms. Their core functions include investigating, preventing, and prosecuting crimes related to SALW misuse, with a focus on intercepting illegal arms movement through intelligence gathering, surveillance, and operations conducted by specialized units such as the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). Between May 2023 and May 2024, the NPF arrested over 30,000 suspects for firearm-related offenses and successfully intercepted arms shipments, including 17 rifles and ammunition from trafficking syndicates. They also collaborate closely with the Nigerian Customs Service and other security agencies to enhance border security, intercept smuggling activities, and dismantle arms trafficking networks, thereby contributing significantly to efforts aimed at reducing illicit arms and improving human security across Nigeria.

Figure 4.2: *Police bust gunrunning syndicate, arrest 2,700 suspects across Nigeria*



Source: (Oyediran, 2024).

The Nigerian Customs Service in Oyo State intercepted six pump-action rifles and 1,125 live cartridges concealed inside sacks of garri, highlighting ongoing efforts to combat arms smuggling and enhance national security (Dauda, 2024). This seizure was part of a broader achievement by the Joint Border Patrol Team, which over five years seized contraband worth N36.7 billion and arrested 280 suspected human traffickers. The use of Joint Task Forces (JTF), such as Exercise Swift Response launched in August 2019, exemplifies coordinated operations between the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and border agencies aimed at targeting arms trafficking networks through intelligence, advanced technology, and capacity-building initiatives (TVC News, 2019). Despite these efforts, Nigeria's porous borders—spanning over 4,000 kilometers—pose significant challenges, compounded by bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption, which undermine interdiction efforts and facilitate illicit arms entry (UNODC, 2022).

Corruption remains a critical obstacle, with reports of bribe-taking and collusion among security personnel at border points, which enable illegal arms and human trafficking. The infamous “Arms gate” scandal in 2015, where funds meant for arms procurement were embezzled, exemplifies systemic issues that weaken enforcement and resource allocation (Tsfagiorgis, 2016). Similarly, poor inter-agency coordination, rivalry, and lack of a unified communication framework hinder effective operations, leading to missed opportunities for interception and disruption of arms trafficking networks. Strengthening institutional capacity through reforms such as establishing centralized coordination bodies, shared technological platforms, and regional cooperation via organizations like ECOWAS is vital to improving inter-agency collaboration and enhancing border security (Ajia, 2024).

The proliferation of SALW severely impacts human security in Nigeria, fueling violence, insurgency, and crime, which threaten communities' safety, livelihoods, and social cohesion. Weak institutional capacity—due to underfunding, inadequate training, corruption, and technological deficits—limits efforts to control illicit arms flows, thereby exacerbating conflicts involving groups like Boko Haram and criminal syndicates (Ojewale, 2024). The resulting violence causes displacement, economic decline, and social fragmentation, especially in vulnerable regions. Addressing these challenges requires substantial investment in capacity-building, modern surveillance tools, and community engagement, alongside broader socio-economic development and trust restoration initiatives, to mitigate the human security crisis and promote sustainable peace in Nigeria.

4.2 Enforcement Mechanisms of the National Policy on SALW and its Effectiveness

Nigeria's national policy on SALW emphasizes a comprehensive approach to curb the proliferation of weapons through systems designed for tracking and regulating firearms. Key initiatives include firearm marking, registration, and the establishment of databases to ensure accountability and facilitate tracing illegal arms. Nigeria actively collaborates with regional and international bodies such as ECOWAS, UN, INTERPOL, and the Arms Trade Treaty to strengthen its arms tracking systems, share intelligence, and prevent illicit weapons from reaching conflict zones or criminal networks (ECOWAS, 2006; UN, 2022). Despite these efforts, challenges persist due to inadequate funding, limited personnel training, weak border controls, and corruption, which hinder effective implementation and coordination among security agencies.

To address these issues, Nigeria has deployed advanced surveillance technologies, established joint task forces like NATFORCE and Operation Safe Corridor, and enhanced border security efforts involving multiple agencies. Regional cooperation through platforms such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and cross-border partnerships are crucial, especially given Nigeria's extensive borders with neighboring countries grappling with arms trafficking. The destruction of confiscated illicit weapons by the NCCSALW underscores the government's commitment, serving both as a deterrent and a public message of non-proliferation. However, the scale of illicit arms remaining in circulation limits the overall impact, highlighting the need for sustained preventative measures, stricter regulation, and improved interdiction capabilities to effectively reduce arms proliferation and enhance national security (Abdullahi, 2021; Sahara Reporters, 2024).

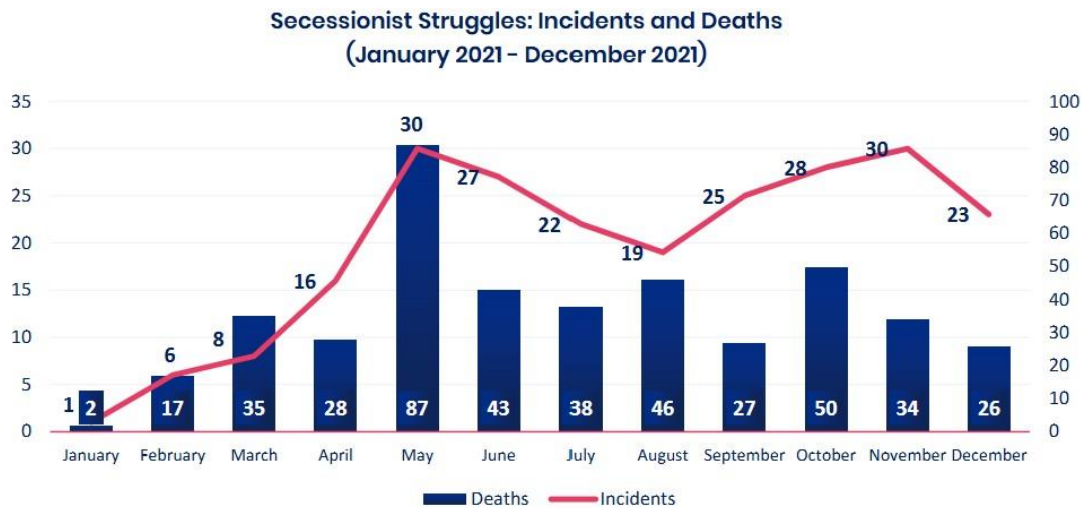
4.3 Trends of Armed Violence in Nigeria

The persistent armed violence in Nigeria, driven by insurgency, organized crime, communal conflicts, and political instability, has been significantly worsened by the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). From 2015 to 2024, groups like Boko Haram and its splinter faction, ISWAP, have maintained access to illicit arms, enabling ongoing attacks and insurgent activities despite military efforts to reclaim territories and seize weapons caches. Porous borders and smuggling networks continue to facilitate the influx of illicit arms, undermining security operations in regions such as the North-East. Meanwhile, in the North-West, armed groups involved in banditry and kidnapping for ransom exploit weak law enforcement and difficult terrain, making disarmament efforts largely ineffective. Similarly, in the Middle-Belt, farmer-herder conflicts have escalated violence due to widespread SALW circulation, complicating peace-building initiatives in the area, while the Niger Delta region experiences sporadic violence linked to oil theft and illegal bunkering, despite government programs like amnesty and arms buybacks.

In the South-East, insecurity has surged since 2021, fueled by separatist movements such as IPOB and its armed wing, ESN, which have acquired sophisticated weaponry through smuggling channels. Violent clashes between separatists and security forces have become more lethal, with the circulation of SALW intensifying the scale of violence and regional instability. Overall, despite efforts by the Nigerian government to curb arms proliferation through disarmament, military operations, and peace initiatives, illicit weapons remain widely accessible, perpetuating cycles of violence across the country. The ongoing challenge of porous borders, limited disarmament

success, and sophisticated smuggling networks continues to hamper Nigeria's ability to effectively control SALW and restore lasting security in affected regions.

Figure 4.3: Secessionist Struggles: Incidents and Deaths in Nigeria, 2021



Source: (Nextier Violent Conflict Database, Secessionist Struggles: Incidents and Deaths (January 2021 - December 2021), 2022)

Beyond separatist violence, Nigeria's South-East has seen a surge in criminal activities such as armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, and communal disputes, with armed gangs leveraging the widespread availability of SALW to expand their reach across rural and urban areas like Anambra, Enugu, and Imo states. Although national data from 2015 to 2019 indicate a rise in armed violence during heightened security challenges, some progress was made from 2020 to 2024, particularly in regions where disarmament efforts, such as military campaigns in the North-East, led to the recovery and destruction of weapons. However, violence persists in areas like the North-West and Middle-Belt, driven by banditry and farmer-herder conflicts, with limited success in disarmament due to corruption, resource constraints, and weak community engagement. While localized peace initiatives in places like Benue have temporarily reduced violence, the continued proliferation of SALW hampers these efforts, and in the Niger Delta, many ex-militants have reverted to criminal activities after surrendering their weapons, highlighting ongoing challenges in disarmament and community stability.

Figure 4.4: Farmer-Herder Conflict: Deaths and Incidents in the Middle-Belt region of Nigeria.



Source: (Nextier Violent Conflict Database, Farmer- Herder Conflict: Deaths and Incidents (January 2022 – June 2022), 2022)

These findings highlight the profound human costs of SALW proliferation, which go beyond statistics to significantly impact citizens' daily lives. Communities that once enjoyed relative harmony now face increased tensions and eroding trust, weakening social structures vital for collective well-being. The unchecked spread of small arms has fueled violent crimes, communal conflicts, and gender-based violence, leading to heightened insecurity, psychological trauma, and social disintegration, thereby undermining both individual safety and community resilience across Nigeria.

Human Security Perspective.

The human security theory emphasizes protecting individuals from threats to their survival, livelihood, and dignity, extending security beyond the state to personal safety and well-being. Nigeria's National Policy on SALW reveals significant gaps in this regard, focusing primarily on reactive measures like arms seizures while neglecting socio-economic factors such as unemployment and poverty that drive arms proliferation. This unchecked access to SALW has exacerbated violent crimes, insurgencies, and communal conflicts, particularly in rural areas where vigilante groups and hunters acquire firearms for self-defense, often leading to misuse and cycles of violence. The resulting insecurity disrupts livelihoods, displaces communities—over 3.2 million internally by 2024—and hampers economic development, especially in conflict-prone regions like the Middle Belt. Institutional weaknesses, including corruption, poor governance, and judicial inefficiencies, further undermine efforts to build resilience and effectively combat arms proliferation, leaving the broader goal of safeguarding human security unfulfilled.

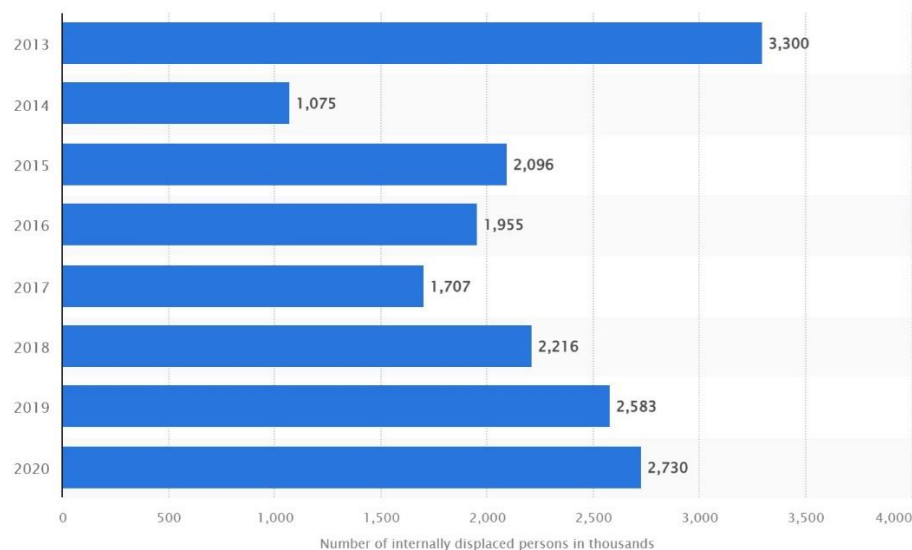
5. Socioeconomic Implications of SALW Legislation

The socioeconomic implications of legislation that controls SALW are profound and has influenced a range of factors such as economic growth, investment climate, social cohesion and overall human development. Armed violence which has been fueled by illicit weapons proliferation has caused a significant economic toll on Nigeria over the years. Prior to the implementation of the National policy on SALW, the cos of violence was staggering which has been evident in the economic losses from reduced productivity, destruction of infrastructure and the displacement of communities. Nigeria witnessed consistent losses in agriculture, trade and local investments in regions which have been plagued by armed conflict such as the North- East due to the Boko Haram insurgency whose activities intensified from 2009 and had a peak between

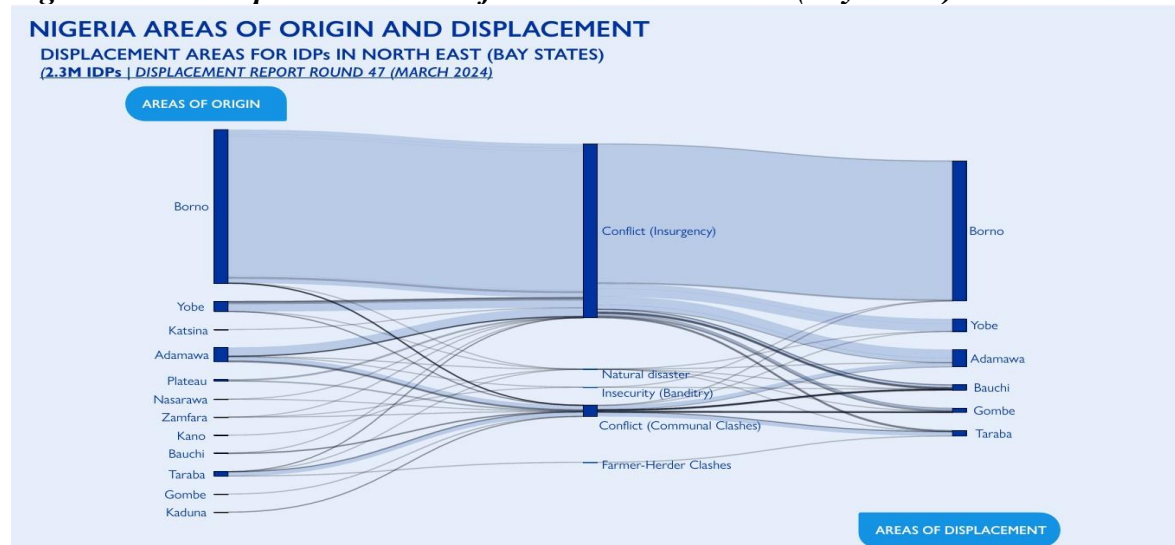
2013 and 2017 with major displacements and economic losses in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe States. The North- West which has been a stronghold for banditry and communal clashes which surged significantly around 2017 particularly in states like Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto and Niger states. Armed violence also exacerbated poverty levels as communities that relied on subsistence farming or local businesses were displaced which has been the leading cause for unemployment and food insecurity.

The introduction of the National policy on SALW in 2013 sought to reduce these economic costs by curbing the flow of illicit arms and promoting peacebuilding initiatives however, while the policy led to the increased arms seizures and a reduction in armed violence in some regions, other regions particularly communities at the borders have continued to experience insecurity due to weakness and corruption. The lopsided implementation of legislative frameworks has therefore limited the overall economic recovery in affected regions. One of the most significant indicators of economic costs before and after policy changes is the trend in internally displaced persons (IDPs) whose number peaked between 2015 and 2020 due to escalating violence which led to mass displacements and loss of livelihoods. In contrast to the period from 2021 to 2024 which witnessed a slight stabilization in IDP numbers which is attributed to localized peacebuilding efforts and the partial implementation of the SALW legislation.

Figure 5.1: Number of internally displaced persons (IDP) in Nigeria from 2013 to 2020 (in 1,000s)



Source: (Sasu, 2022)

Figure 5.2: Displacement Areas for IDPs in North-East (Bay States)

Source: (IOM UN Migration, 2023)

The proliferation of SALW has severely undermined Nigeria's investment climate by creating an environment of uncertainty and instability, deterring both domestic and foreign investments. Affected regions have become high-risk areas, leading businesses to relocate or shut down, which has resulted in reduced foreign direct investment (FDI) in sectors like agriculture, tourism, and mining. Prior to the National Policy on SALW, insecurity hampered economic growth, causing erratic GDP performance, agricultural decline, and infrastructure destruction that impeded trade. Since its implementation, there have been modest improvements; enhanced SALW regulation and better coordination through NATCOM-SALW have contributed to improved security, especially in urban centers, fostering some recovery of SMEs. Consequently, Nigeria's GDP growth rate increased from an average of 2.2% (2015–2020) to 2.8% (2021–2024), particularly in regions where SALW control measures were effectively enforced.

Table 5.1: Nigeria GDP Growth Rate - Historical Data (2015-2023)

Nigeria GDP Growth Rate - Historical Data		
Year	GDP Growth (%)	Annual Change
2023	2.86%	-0.39%
2022	3.25%	-0.40%
2021	3.65%	5.44%
2020	-1.79%	-4.00%
2019	2.21%	0.29%
2018	1.92%	1.12%
2017	0.81%	2.42%
2016	-1.62%	-4.27%
2015	2.65%	-3.66%

Source: (Macrotrends, 2025)

5.3 Protection of Lives and Property

One of the primary objectives of arms control policies is to reduce violent crimes and improve the security of lives and property. However, the implementation of Nigeria’s National Policy of SALW has faced several challenges that have influenced its effectiveness. Nigeria has experienced fluctuations in crime rates due to an increase in the circulation of illegal arms despite the existence of legal framework

Table 5.2: Crime Rate Trends in Nigeria (2015–2024)

Year	Homicide Cases	Armed Robbery	Kidnapping Cases	Terrorist Attacks	Communal Clashes
2015	6,523	3,712	2,758	564	1,238
2016	6,912	3,982	3,214	712	1,412
2017	7,321	4,105	3,511	845	1,543
2018	7,859	4,510	3,892	902	1,762
2019	8,230	4,902	4,312	1,123	2,019
2020	8,751	5,324	4,721	1,312	2,301
2021	9,032	5,710	5,112	1,498	2,567
2022	9,213	5,982	5,542	1,682	2,831
2023	9,611	6,214	5,872	1,945	3,067
2024*	9,345	5,967	5,743	1,811	2,948

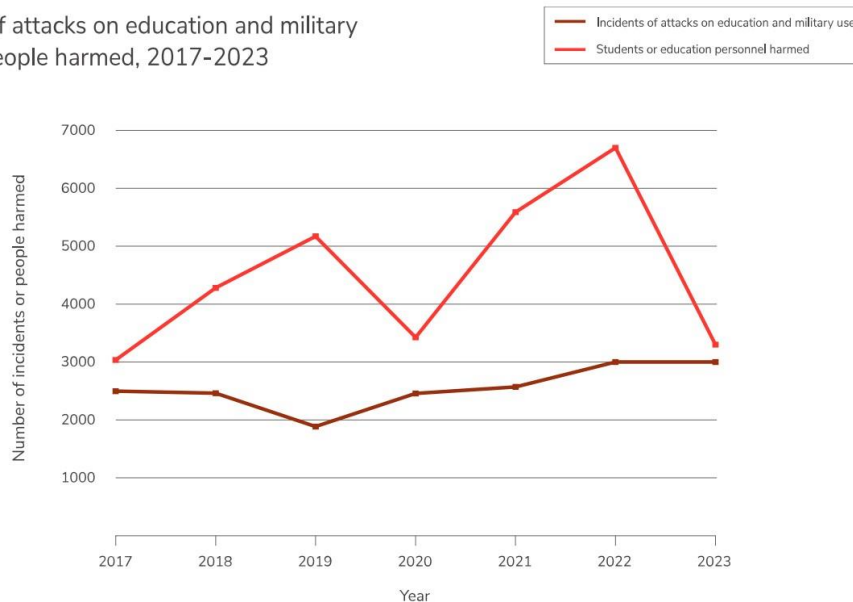
Source: (NBS, 2024).

Data indicates a steady increase in violent crimes such as homicide, armed robbery, banditry, and kidnapping, correlating with greater access to small arms, though a slight decline in 2024 suggests some policy effects; nonetheless, enforcement gaps remain. SALW proliferation has worsened

property security, leading to more armed robberies, burglaries, and land disputes, with corruption and organized crime further exacerbating the issue. Crime rates have fluctuated over the past decade, with localized security improvements in urban areas following the partial implementation of SALW control measures like NAPSALW in 2017, but rural regions continue to experience high levels of violence, especially in conflict zones like North-East Nigeria, where armed conflict has severely impacted healthcare infrastructure, increased casualties, and heightened mortality and mental health issues. Additionally, insecurity has severely disrupted education, with numerous school abductions and attacks leading to school closures and displacement of students and teachers, although some states have seen improvements through legislative efforts and community engagement, highlighting the ongoing need for stronger enforcement and comprehensive security strategies to protect lives and human security.

Figure 5.4: Education Under Attack.

Incidents of attacks on education and military use, and people harmed, 2017-2023



Source: (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2024)

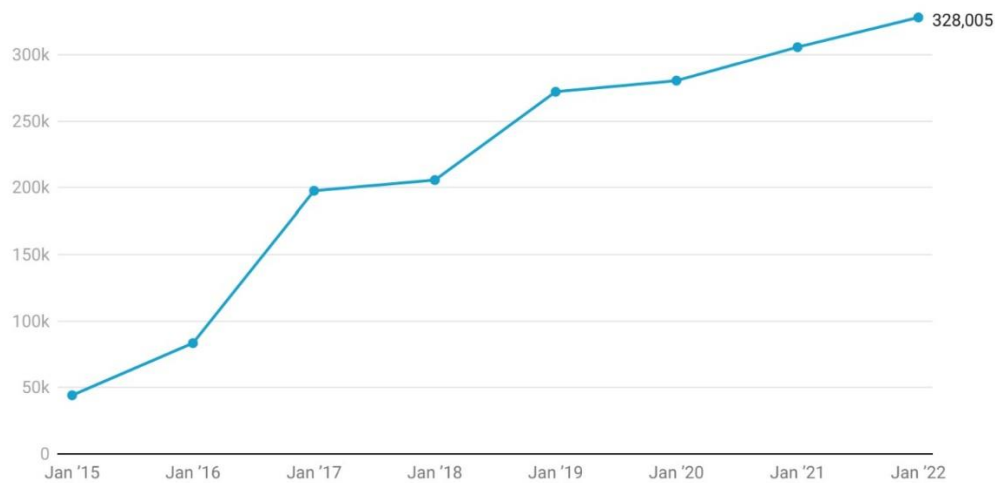
Legislative frameworks targeting arms control have contributed to some security improvements in Nigeria, but ongoing attacks by armed groups reveal significant enforcement limitations, with insurgents and militias continually adapting their tactics. The persistent violence, especially targeting schools, underscores the urgent need for enhanced intelligence, stronger arms policies, increased security around vulnerable sites, and active community engagement, as local communities are vital first responders. Despite some progress, illicit arms proliferation and enforcement challenges continue to undermine efforts, while insecurity has severely deterred investment, increased operational costs for businesses, and disrupted key sectors like agriculture and trade, leading to rural displacement, food shortages, inflation, and economic instability. Armed conflicts have also devastated farming communities, causing large-scale displacement, declining productivity, and intercommunal clashes, further deepening economic vulnerabilities. Security measures such as disarmament, law enforcement reforms, border controls, and conflict resolution initiatives have achieved limited success, often hampered by structural challenges, weak enforcement, and ongoing threats, leaving many affected populations in dire economic and security conditions.

5.4 Community and Regional Impact

The effectiveness of Nigeria's National Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) policy heavily depends on local community perceptions, engagement, and trust in government initiatives, which vary widely across regions due to security dynamics, trust levels, and socioeconomic factors. While some communities, especially in urban centers, have shown tentative cooperation with disarmament programs, skepticism persists in conflict-prone areas like the Northeast and Northwest, where armed groups still hold sway and community distrust remains high. Community-led security efforts such as vigilante groups have played crucial roles in supplementing formal security but raise concerns about potential instability if not properly regulated. Public skepticism about government enforcement, perceived reactive policies, corruption, and lack of inclusion in policymaking have hampered disarmament efforts and eroded trust, particularly in rural and volatile regions. Additionally, cross-border arms trafficking fueled by weak border controls, regional instability, and neighboring conflicts exacerbates internal insecurity and prolongs violence, with regional cooperation efforts limited by funding, enforcement, and political challenges. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that enhances community participation, improves transparency, and strengthens regional cooperation to build trust and effectively curb arms proliferation and associated violence.

The graph below presents the data on the number of Nigerian refugees in neighboring countries due to armed conflicts.

Figure 5.5: Number of Nigerian refugees in neighboring countries due to armed conflicts. Nigerian Refugees in Chad, Cameroon and Niger



Source: (Uzuegbu, 2022)

Another key dimension of the regional impact is the economic cost of arms proliferation. The presence of illicit arms in circulation disrupts economic activities by fostering insecurity, discouraging investment and increasing the cost of doing business. The agriculture sector which is vital to Nigeria's economy and it has been particularly affected as armed conflicts between farmers and herders have led to displacement, food shortages and reduced productivity.

5.5 Challenges and Opportunities in Legislative Frameworks

Nigeria's legislative framework governing SALW is complex, involving national, regional, and international instruments, but it faces significant gaps and overlaps that hinder effective enforcement. The absence of a fully autonomous, dedicated regulatory agency—despite the establishment of NCCSALW in 2021—creates bureaucratic bottlenecks and coordination challenges among security agencies like the police, customs, DSS, and military, with unclear jurisdictional boundaries and weak intelligence sharing. Inconsistencies between Nigeria's national laws and regional commitments under the ECOWAS convention, particularly regarding firearm possession and licensing, further undermine efforts to curb illicit arms. Additionally, current laws do not adequately address emerging threats such as 3D-printed firearms and cyber-enabled arms trafficking, leaving enforcement gaps in digital spaces. To improve the situation, recommendations include establishing a fully empowered, independent agency for small arms control, harmonizing domestic laws with regional treaties, implementing a centralized digital tracking system—potentially utilizing blockchain technology—and introducing legislative provisions to criminalize online arms sales and cyber-trafficking, thereby strengthening Nigeria's capacity to combat illicit arms proliferation and enhance human security.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study examined the National Policy on Small Arms and Light weapons and its impact on human security in Nigeria from 2015 to 2024. The research sought to evaluate the effectiveness of the policy in reducing the proliferation of illicit arms thus enhancing institutional capacity and

improving human security. The study established that the availability of illicit SALW has significantly contributed to violent crimes, armed conflicts, insurgency and communal clashes across Nigeria. Despite efforts by the Nigerian government to control arms proliferation, gaps in policy implementation, weak institutional capacity, corruption and porous borders continue to undermine progress.

The study therefore raised two basic research questions which were derived from the identified problem. The research questions are;

1. Has the National Policy on SALW enhanced institutional capacity?
2. Have the legislative frameworks on SALW enhanced socioeconomic stability?

In other to guide and focus the study, two hypotheses were stated and these hypotheses served as tentative answers to the research questions. The hypotheses are:

- The National Policy on Small Arms and Light Weapons has no significant effect on the institutional capacity of the National Centre for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (NCCSALW) in Nigeria between 2015 and 2024.
- Legislative frameworks on Small Arms and Light Weapons have no significant effect on socioeconomic stability in Nigeria between 2015 and 2024.

Furthermore, we adopted the human security theory which was popularized by the UNDP in 1994. The choice of the theory for this study was likely guided by its ability to explain the relationship between the proliferation of SALW and human security in Nigeria.

Accordingly, the study was structurally designed to achieve specific objectives:

- To examine the effectiveness of Nigeria's National Policy on Small Arms and Light Weapons in enhancing institutional capacity and enforcement mechanisms to reduce armed violence and improve personal safety in Nigeria.
- To assess the impact of the legislative frameworks within Nigeria's National Policy on Small Arms and Light Weapons on socioeconomic stability and the protection of lives and property in Nigeria.

Secondary data was used in this study. The secondary data were collected from books, book chapters, journal articles, official documents, magazines and newspapers. The entire study was structurally divided into six chapters with chapter one dealing with the introduction which included background to the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the problem and significance of the study. Chapter two deals with literature review while chapter three contains the method of research, i.e. methodology which included the theoretical framework; hypotheses, research design, methods of data collection, methods of data analysis and logical data framework. Chapters four and five looked at the data analysis with regards to the hypothesis under the subheadings: **National Policy on Small Arms and Light Weapons and Institutional Capacity** and **Legislative Frameworks on Socioeconomic Stability**. Finally, chapter six contains the summary, conclusion and recommendation.

6.2 Conclusion

The study examined the effectiveness of Nigeria's National Policy on SALW in addressing the proliferation of illicit arms and enhancing human security between 2015 and 2024. Findings revealed that despite the adoption of various policy pleasures which includes the establishment of

the National Center for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (NCCSALW) and alignment with international frameworks such as the ECOWAS convention on SALW, the persistence of armed violence, insurgency and organized crime and it suggests that the policy has not entirely been successful.

The study established that weak institutional enforcement, corruption, porous borders and limited technological advancements have significantly undermined the effectiveness of the National Policy on SALW. Despite the policy's intent to regulate arms ownership, curb illegal trafficking and enhance security, the availability of illicit weapons continues to fuel conflicts, insurgency and criminal activities particularly in the North-East with the Boko Haram insurgency, North West with the banditry, North- Central with the herder-farmer clashes and South-South with the militancy and oil related violence.

Moreover, the research highlighted that human security concerns—such as physical safety, displacement, and economic instability—have been exacerbated by the continued proliferation of SALW. The failure to fully implement Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs, along with weak border security mechanisms, has allowed non-state actors to maintain access to arms, thereby perpetuating cycles of violence.

However, the study also acknowledges some progress made through arms control initiatives, including the seizure and destruction of illicit weapons, enhanced cooperation with international organizations, and ongoing efforts to strengthen border surveillance. Nonetheless, the current enforcement mechanisms remain inadequate to fully address the proliferation of SALW and its impact on human security.

Thus, while Nigeria's National Policy on SALW provides a critical framework for arms control, it requires stronger institutional backing, better enforcement mechanisms, improved technology adoption, and enhanced regional cooperation to be fully effective. Without addressing these fundamental challenges, the policy will continue to have limited impact on reducing the availability of illicit arms and improving human security in Nigeria.

This study has been able to validate our hypothesis:

- The findings indicate that the NCCSALW and the NSS of 2019 have encountered substantial challenges which includes; weak institutional capacity, poor-interagency coordination, corruption, and inadequate funding. Despite the robust efforts to combat SALW proliferation, these factors have undermined effective implementation which has resulted in continued threats to human security.
- It reveals that outdated laws, weak enforcement mechanisms and poor implementation have limited the effectiveness of legislative frameworks like the Firearms Act (1990), Terrorism Prevention Act (2011) and the ECOWAS Convention on SALW (2006). These frameworks have not adequately addressed the threats posed by illicit arms proliferation, thus failing to enhance human security.

The study findings partially support the first hypothesis while there have been some positive developments such as the establishment of the NCCSALW, increased arms recovery efforts and regional cooperation, armed violence has not significantly reduced and human security remains a major concern.

On the second hypothesis, the study we conducted fully supports this hypothesis as evidence shows that several structural, institutional and operational challenges have severely limited the policy's effectiveness in addressing the proliferation of SALW and improving security.

6.3 Recommendation

With regards to the findings of this study, we have made the following recommendations;

1. There should be an increase in funding and technological investment as the Federal Government should allocate more financial resources to the NCCSALW and security agencies responsible for arms control and also the government should invest more in surveillance technologies, arms-tracking systems and biometric databases should be made a top priority to enhance monitoring and enforcement.
2. Inter-Agency coordination should be improved as there should be an establishment of an Arms control coordination center under the supervision of the NCCSALW to facilitate information sharing and operational synergy among the various agencies and also to develop clear protocols to enhance data exchange and joint operations between the NCCSALW, Police, Customs, Immigration and other relevant bodies.
3. High anti-corruption measures should be put in place to combat corruption and there should be trainings for the personnel involved in arms control and monitoring. Oversight mechanisms should also be strengthened to ensure transparency and accountability in the enforcement of the NSS and other control frameworks.
4. The NSS of 2019 should be updated and expanded regularly to include emerging threats which are related to the proliferation of SALW and the scope of localized security threats and ways of combating them to enhance human security.
5. The Firearms Act of 1990 should be reviewed and updated to address emerging security threats which are related to SALW proliferation. It should also incorporate stricter penalties for illicit possession, trafficking and unauthorized manufacturing of SALW.
6. There should be strengthening of the enforcement mechanisms such as the establishment of specialized arms control units within the security agencies which is dedicated to enforcing the Terrorism Prevention Act of 2011 and monitoring compliance with the ECOWAS Convention on SALW of 2006. Regular training programs for law enforcement agencies should be implemented to improve their capacity to enforce the existing legislative frameworks.
7. National and regional frameworks should be harmonized to align with each other and ensure consistency in enforcement. In the same vein, a National Arms Control Policy Document (NACPD) which integrates all the relevant legislative frameworks into a comprehensive strategy should be developed.
8. A legislative review committee under the NCCSALW which periodically evaluates the effectiveness of existing laws and recommend necessary amendments should be

established. This would enhance political commitment and promote inter-agency collaboration to provide adequate resources for arms control.

REFERENCES

JOURNAL ARTICLES

- Adebajo, A. (2018). Small Arms and Light Weapons in Africa: Nigeria's Experience. *Journal of African Military Studies*.
- Adekola, N. O., Zamani, A., Shittu, H. B., Chongs, W. M., & Adama, A. M. (2022, October). Influence of weak legislation and non-state armed actors on arms proliferation: Evidence from terrorism in Nigeria. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews (WJARR)*, 16(01), 613-621. doi: https://www.researchgate.net/deref/https%3A%2F%2Fdoi.org%2F10.30574%2Fwjarr.2022.16.1.1059?_tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIn19
- Adesiyun, O. I., & Ogundele, C. O. (2022, September). Analysis of Effect of Agricultural Output on Nigeria Economic Growth (1990-2020). *International Journal of Advances in Engineering and Management (IJAEM)*, 04(09), 1642-1646. doi:10.35629/5252-040916421646
- Afuzie, N. (2024, May-Aug). Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons: An Assessment of its Impact on Nigeria's Internal Security. *ESCAE Journal of Management and Security Studies (EJMSS)*, 04(02), 211-221. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21520844.2014.903579>
- Ehiane, S. O., & Uwizeyimama, D. D. (2018, December). Challenges in Combating the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in Nigeria: A Human Security Perspective. *Journal of African Foreign Affairs (JoAFA)*, 5(3), 66-85. doi:DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31920/2056-5658/2018/v5n3a4>
- Eyina, N. N., & Kabari, J. B. (2021, November). An Assessment of Arms Proliferation and Control Mechanisms in Nigeria, 2010-2020. *International Journal on Integrated Education*, 04(11), 93-103. Retrieved February 03, 2025, from <https://media.neliti.com/media/publications/352377-an-assessment-of-arms-proliferation-and-2b621495.pdf?utm>
- Gandi, A. A., Sulu, A. A., Zamani, A. E., Obasa, A. B., Ibiloye, O. J., & Onibiyo, R. E. (2024, May 12). Proliferation of small arms and light weapon in Nigeria: Conspiracy or failure of governance? *International Journal of Social Science Management, Peace and Conflict Research (IJSMPCR)*, 1(4), 42-54. Retrieved December 26, 2024, from <https://ijsmpcr.com>

- Idehen, R. O., & Subair, A. A. (2021, June). The Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons: A Re-emerging Threat to National Security. *International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace and Conflict Studies (IJMSSPCS)*, 4(2), 327-341. Retrieved October 24,
- Oladimeji, S. O. (2022). Incompetency in Governance and Menace of Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in Nigeria: Causes, Impacts, and Solutions. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Reviews*, 1(2), 44-58. Retrieved November 26, 2024, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367068570_Incompetency_in_Governance_and_Menace_of_Proliferation_of_Small_Arms_and_Light_Weapons_SALW_in_Nigeria_Causes_Impacts_and_Solution
- Olomu, B., & Alao, D. O. (2019). Border Security Issues and Challenges of the Nigeria Customs Service. *International Journal of Latest Research in Humanities and Social Science (IJLRHSS)*, 02(03), 10-19. Retrieved December 28, 2024, from <http://www.ijlrhss.com/paper/volume-2-issue-3/2-HSS-330.pdf>
- Omitola, B., & Awotayo, G. (2016). Arms Proliferation an Challenges of National Security and Sustainable Developments in Nigeria. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 18(02), 1-11. Retrieved December 27, 2024, from https://jsd-africa.com/Jsda/Vol18No2-Spring16B/PDF/Arms%20Proliferation%20and%20Challenges%20%20of%20National%20Security.Goke%20Awotayo.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- Onyekelu, A. C. (2022). Insecurity and Crime: A Threat to South-East of Nigeria Deeply Rooted in Unknown Gunmen. *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities.*, 8(3), 146-156. doi:10.13140
- Osimen, G. U., Akintunde, U., & Anthony, B. (2015). Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) Proliferation and Problem of National Security in Nigeria. *International Affairs and Global Strategy*, 29, 12-20. Retrieved December 17, 2024, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361889222_Small_Arms_and_Light_Weapons_SALW_Proliferation_and_Problem_of_National_Security_in_Nigeria
- Olowolagba, F. (2019, December 4). Buhari unveils national security strategy. *Daily Post*. Nigeria: Daily Post. Retrieved October 22, 2024, from <https://dailypost.ng/2019/12/04/buhari-unveils-national-security-strategy/>
- Oyediran, T. (2024). Police bust gunrunning syndicate, arrest 2,700 suspects. *Police bust gunrunning syndicate, arrest 2,700 suspects*. Retrieved January 20, 2025, from https://punchng.com/police-bust-gunrunning-syndicate-arrest-2700-suspects/#google_vignette
- Punch. (2024, October 17). *Fix the porous borders*. Retrieved February 04, 2025, from punch.com: https://punchng.com/fix-the-porous-borders/?utm_source=chatgpt.com#google_vignette
- Ramalan, I. (2024, October 17). *Nigerian Customs seized 10,598 arms, 114.929 ammunition in 6 years — CGC*. Retrieved January 24, 2025, from Daily Nigerian: <https://dailynigerian.com/nigerian-customs-seized/>

- The Cable. (2024, October 22). *Arms proliferation and Nigeria's security outfits*. Retrieved February 04, 2025, from The Cable: <https://www.thecable.ng/arms-proliferation-and-nigerias-security-outfits/?utm>
- Salihu, M. (2019, August 27). Proliferation of Small Arms, Light Weapons and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria: What Role for the United Nation? *International Journal of Recent Innovations in Academic Research*, 3(8), 114-121. Retrieved December 17, 2024, from https://www.academia.edu/43252185/Proliferation_of_Small_Arms_Light_Weapons_and_Ethnic_Conflict_in_Nigeria_What_Role_for_the_United_Nation
- Soetan, S. (2017). Proliferation of Arms and Security Challenges in Nigeria. *International Journal of History and Cultural Studies (IJHCS)*, 3(3), 33-38. Retrieved from <https://dx.doi.org/10.20431/2454-7654.0303004>
- Umaru, S. T. (2021, June 10). The Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons. *Asian Research Journal of Arts & Social Sciences*, 14(3), 10-23. doi: 10.9734/ARJASS/2021/v14i330238
- Uzoruka, M. C., & Omeh, P. C. (2020). Identity Politics and Economic Effects of the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) In the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria. *Port Harcourt Journal of History and Diplomatic Studies*, 85-99.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2019). *Human Development Report 2019: Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: Inequalities in human development in the 21st century*. . United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)., Human Development Report Office (HDRO). United Nations Development Programme. Retrieved October 22, 2024, from <https://hdr.undp.org/>
- UNODC. (2001, May 31). *The Firearms Protocol*. Retrieved January 22, 2025, from United Nations Office on Drug and Crime: https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/the-firearms-protocol.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- UNODC. (2022). *Illicit trafficking of firearms in West Africa*. Retrieved January 17, 2025, from United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime: https://www.unodc.org/documents/toc/Reports/TOCTAWestAfrica/West_Africa_TOC_FIREARMS.pdf
- UNODC. (2022). *MIGRANT SMUGGLING FROM NIGERIA: Key Findings on Migrant Smuggling of Nigerians*. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). UNODC. Retrieved January 21, 2025, from https://www.unodc.org/res/som/docs/Observatory_StoryMap_3_Nigeria.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- UNODC. (2024). *UNODC Strategic Vision for Nigeria 2030*. Retrieved January 22, 2025, from United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime: https://www.unodc.org/conig/uploads/documents/2024-05-13_UNODC_Strategic_Vision_for_Nigeria_2024-WEB_VERSION.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

- UNOHCHR. (n.d.). *Strengthening the rule of law and accountability for human rights violations*. Retrieved January 14, 2025, from Regional Office of the Middle East and North Africa: https://romena.ohchr.org/en/node/184?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- USAID. (2013). *G2G Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool*. Office of Education. Retrieved January 20, 2025, from https://www.edu-links.org/sites/default/files/media/file/ICA_Tool_FINAL_Sept2014.pdf
- USIP. (n.d.). *Accountability to the Law*. Retrieved January 14, 2025, from United States Institute of Peace: https://www.usip.org/guiding-principles-stabilization-and-reconstruction-the-web-version/rule-law/accountability-the-law?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- (WHO), W. H. (2014). *Global status report on violence prevention 2014*. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Geneva: WHO. Retrieved November 28, 2024, from <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241564793>
- Weekly Trust. (2024, January). Proliferation Of Light Arms Heightening Conflict Between Herders, Farmers - IPCR. Weekly Trust. Retrieved November 28, 2024, from <https://www.msn.com/en-xl/news/other/proliferation-of-light-arms-heightening-conflict-between-herders-farmers-ipcr/ar-AA1lAMvg?ocid=BingNewsVerp>