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## **An Exploratory Analysis of the Role of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in Exacerbating Armed Conflicts in Northern Nigeria**

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### **Introduction**

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) encompass a wide range of firearms and explosive devices, including mini bombs, propelled grenades, rifles, rocket launchers, and missile systems, which are utilized for both offensive and defensive purposes in armed conflicts. These weapons are sourced both locally and internationally. Locally produced SALW, often manufactured illegally, include bombs, grenades, and firearms crafted using makeshift techniques. On the other hand, imported SALW consist of more sophisticated weapons such as rocket-propelled grenades, light machine guns, revolvers, and pistols. While small arms are typically operated by an individual, light weapons are designed for collective or joint use, making them significantly more destructive (GIABA Report, 2013:12).

The proliferation of SALW has profound implications for global security, affecting the lives, livelihoods, and future prospects of millions of people worldwide. These weapons are intricately linked to human suffering and contemporary humanitarian crises. Their presence exacerbates issues related to international security, border management, terrorism, organized crime, public health, socioeconomic development, deradicalization, and post-conflict reconstruction. While governments often use SALW for defense and security purposes, the majority are unregulated and find their way into the hands of rebels, armed groups, terrorists, ethnic militias, and criminal gangs (United States Institute for Disarmament Research, 2006:1).

Globally, it is estimated that between 100 million and 500 million SALW are in circulation, excluding millions of weapons formally used by security agencies or legally owned by civilians. However, these figures are speculative due to the covert nature of their production and trade, which often bypasses official arms trade statistics. More than 70 countries manufacture SALW, with direct sales from manufacturers to foreign governments or private entities being a primary source of supply. Such transactions are typically regulated by national governments. For example, in 1996, the U.S. State Department licensed over \$470 million worth of light military weapons for export.

Other significant sources of SALW include surplus weapons from the Cold War era, which are often sold at discounted rates to global arms markets, and covert gun-running operations conducted by governments, supplying foreign states, insurgents, or criminal groups (<https://fas.org/asmp/campaigns/smallarms/primer.html>).

Recent reports from the United Nations detail how SALW are illicitly exported and transported, often with the complicity of government officials. These weapons frequently end up in conflict zones, with alarming statistics revealing that approximately 59% are in civilian hands, 38% are held by government armed forces, 2.8% by police, and 0.2% by armed groups (Global Policy Forum, 2011). Current estimates indicate that 640 million SALW are in global circulation, with Africa accounting for approximately 100 million of these weapons. Sub-Saharan Africa alone hosts around 30 million, while an estimated 10 million are concentrated in West Africa. This influx of SALW has fueled prolonged conflicts, violence, humanitarian crises, and widespread human suffering across the continent (Method, 2018).

Nigeria is particularly affected by the proliferation of SALW. In 2016, the United Nations reported a significant surge in SALW circulation in West Africa, estimating that 500 million weapons were in the region, with 350 million presents in Nigeria. This alarming statistic highlights the prevalence of illicit weapons, which have increasingly fallen into unauthorized hands (Nwachukwu, 2018).

Northern Nigeria, in particular, has become a major destination for illegal SALW trafficked through porous borders with Cameroon, Niger, Chad, and the Lagos coastline. This steady influx has significantly contributed to the persistence and escalation of armed conflicts in the region. The prevalence of these weapons has fueled various forms of violence, including terrorism, communal clashes, banditry, and kidnappings, destabilizing communities and exacerbating humanitarian challenges.

This study investigates the role of SALW in the escalation of armed conflicts in Northern Nigeria, focusing on their proliferation and impact on the region's security landscape. The choice of Northern Nigeria as the study area stems from a critical review of existing literature, which reveals a notable gap in research specifically addressing this part of the country. By shedding light on the dynamics of SALW proliferation and its consequences, this research aims to contribute to the discourse on conflict mitigation and regional stability.

## **Literature Review**

This section critically examines existing and relevant literature related to the study's focus. The review identifies research gaps and highlights the study's contribution to knowledge. The literature has been organized thematically as follows: Small Arms and Light Weapons: Conceptualization, The Global Spread of Small Arms and Light Weapons, Emergence of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Africa, Small Arms and

Light Weapons in Nigeria: Emergence, Causes, and Spread, and Legal and Institutional Efforts Against the Illicit Trafficking of SALW.

### **Small Arms and Light Weapons: A Conceptualization**

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) encompass a range of firearms and weaponry categorized based on their use, design, and operational purpose.

#### **Definitions and Classifications**

According to Meek and Stott (2004:11), Small Arms include revolvers, self-loading pistols, rifles, carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles, and light machine guns. In contrast, Light Weapons refer to heavy machine guns, mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, rocket system launchers, portable anti-aircraft missile systems, and mortars with calibers less than 100 mm (Meek & Stott, 2004). Additionally, Meek et al. (2004:12) assert that SALW also include surplus, obsolete, and confiscated semi-automatic and automatic weapons, as well as sniper rifles with calibers up to and including 12.7 mm.

Another perspective, provided by the Central African Convention for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (2011), views Small Arms as any man-portable lethal weapon designed to expel or launch a projectile by explosive means. This definition includes revolvers, self-loading pistols, sub-machine guns, and similar weapons. On the other hand, Light Weapons are typically used by groups and include heavy machine guns, grenade launchers, and portable anti-tank weapons. These distinctions highlight that while Small Arms are often individual-use weapons, Light Weapons are primarily designed for group operations and coordinated use.

#### **Scope of SALW**

SALW encompass a variety of weaponry, both individual and collective, utilized for both lawful and illicit purposes. They include revolvers, self-loading pistols, assault rifles, sub-machine guns, light machine guns, portable grenade launchers, anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons, and mortars of less than 100 mm caliber. Ammunition and explosives associated with these weapons are also categorized under SALW.

Compared to major weapon systems, SALW are notably inexpensive, easily accessible, simple to operate, portable, and readily repairable or replaceable. Despite being utilized legally by state actors and international agencies, it is estimated that approximately 60% of the 640 million Small Arms in circulation globally are controlled illegally by insurgents, criminal groups, and armed factions (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2006).

### **Supply and Demand Dynamics**

Efforts to address the SALW crisis are being taken by the international community through dual strategies: *supply-side interventions and demand-side strategies*. Supply-side measures include enhanced monitoring, controls on production, and restrictions on the trade of SALW. Demand-side strategies focus on understanding the motivations behind individuals and groups' acquisition of such weapons (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2006).

### **Types and Functions of Small Arms and Light Weapons**

Small Arms can range from pistols, semi-automatic rifles, and assault rifles to other firearms, including portable and anti-tank weaponry. Likewise, Light Weapons include heavy machine guns, grenade launchers, mortars, and howitzers that are typically operated by crews or groups, although some can also be operated individually under specific circumstances (Saferworld, 2012:2).

### **Global Consensus on SALW Definitions**

The definitions and classifications of SALW have gained widespread acceptance by international organizations. Bodies such as the United Nations, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) recognize these conceptualizations as international standards for monitoring and addressing SALW issues.

These definitions and conceptual frameworks are vital for understanding the nature, use, spread, and control strategies associated with Small Arms and Light Weapons in the context of regional and international security challenges.

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

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) are more widespread today than at any other point in history and are closely linked to conflicts and violence across the globe. According to *Francois Delattre*, a representative of France and the European Union at the United Nations Conference on Combating SALW under the auspices of the Security Council, an estimated 800 million SALW are in circulation worldwide, accounting for 90% of the victims of armed conflicts. Delattre emphasized that this issue is constantly evolving, with the illicit trafficking of these weapons posing a significant obstacle to development in fragile states. During his opening address, *David Pressman* of the United States revealed that the estimated transfer of SALW costs \$1 billion annually, while the black market contributes an additional \$200 million (United Nations, 2015).

The 2015 *Security Council Report* highlighted the devastating effects of Small Arms on societies. These weapons do not merely cause loss of life but also undermine economies and the social bonds necessary for societal development and progress. SALW are described as easily portable, accessible, and often used casually to

commit violence, thereby enabling human suffering and cruelty. *Ban Ki-Moon*, the United Nations Secretary-General, pointed out that the widespread availability of SALW had fueled over 250 armed conflicts in the past decade, resulting in the deaths of over 50,000 individuals annually and unprecedented levels of displacement (United Nations, 2015).

During the same Security Council session, *Karamoko Diakete*, the President of Côte d'Ivoire, recounted the horrors his nation experienced during electoral violence fueled by the distribution of SALW by political factions. Thousands of lives were lost, and the economic toll was incalculable. Additionally, the Council recognized that following Muammar Gaddafi's removal in Libya, weapons flooded Sub-Saharan Africa, exacerbating terrorist activities in regions such as Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, and Cameroon.

The representative of China, *Lie Jieyi*, highlighted that the proliferation of SALW and the advent of advanced technologies had created a perilous global security situation. Similarly, *Petr Iliichev* of the Russian Federation warned of the increasing use of SALW by terrorists and illegal armed groups, urging member states to adopt and implement the United Nations Programme of Action on SALW (United Nations, 2015).

Furthermore, *Mahamat Zene Cherif* from Chad lamented that his country had suffered for years from the widespread effects of SALW, including widespread deaths, violence, and displacement. The Nigerian representative, *U. Joy Ugwu*, also noted that violence in Nigeria was exacerbated by the easy availability of SALW. Similarly, *Roman Oyarzun Marchesi* from Spain identified SALW as the leading cause of deaths in modern warfare while attributing their proliferation to rising terrorism.

The victims of SALW are often civilians, with women and children disproportionately affected through acts of sexual violence, recruitment as child soldiers, or as victims of forced displacement. *Rafael Damiro Ramirez Carreno* of Venezuela highlighted those arms diversions had intensified conflicts and human rights violations, particularly in the Middle East and Northern Africa. *Ismael* from Angola underscored that unrestricted access to SALW has exacerbated global terrorism and criminal networks. Lastly, *Raimonda* of Lithuania reported that illicit trade and the uncontrolled spread of these weapons result in an estimated 500,000 deaths annually and lead to widespread displacement, sexual violence, child recruitment into armed groups, and profound societal devastation (United Nations, 2015).

These observations underline the urgent need for international cooperation and action to control the spread of SALW and address the multifaceted threats they pose to global peace, security, and development.

### **Emergence of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in Africa**

The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in Africa is primarily driven by illicit trafficking, local arms production, and socio-political factors. Africa's vast geography, with its numerous land and ocean borders, dense jungles, and extensive deserts, has made it particularly vulnerable to the trafficking of arms. The continent's porous borders make it challenging for any nation or organization to monitor and control these routes effectively (Yacubu, 2005:57).

Local arms production has also contributed significantly to the rise of SALW in Africa, particularly over the last few decades. While local production was minimal during the 1980s, the emergence of sustained ethnic militias, religious insurgencies, criminal gangs, and terrorist groups has led to a dramatic increase in arms production. This has further exacerbated conflicts, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ohene-Asare, Aklavon, Mossou & Ikelegbe, 2014:3).

Theft of arms, whether from states, organizations, or individuals, has also played a pivotal role in arming groups and spreading illicit weapons across Africa. Additionally, the pursuit of financial gain has resulted in the diversion of SALW by supplier countries, with little concern for the end-users' intentions. Many of these weapons end up in the hands of armed groups and criminal networks.

Political instability in Africa is another significant contributor to the proliferation of SALW. Political actors have been known to arm ethnic militias and violent groups to intimidate opposition factions during elections. Once these groups are armed, they often do not surrender the weapons after election periods. Instead, these weapons are diverted toward criminal activities such as banditry, kidnapping, communal violence, and armed robberies, as is the case in many African states today (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2008:7).

Socioeconomic challenges also exacerbate the proliferation of SALW in Africa. Issues such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, disease, corruption, malnutrition, and governance failures have left many African youths vulnerable and without hope. These conditions make them susceptible to recruitment into criminal activities and armed groups, particularly as they struggle to find a sense of purpose and economic stability (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2002:4; Keili, 2009:17).

### **Impacts of SALW on African Security**

The widespread presence of SALW has devastating effects on African security, contributing to a variety of armed conflicts and societal crises. Conflicts fueled by illicit weapons are widespread, including insurgencies in Somalia, Mali, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, as well as ethnoreligious clashes in the Central African Republic and South Sudan. Insurgencies have also been reported in Kenya and Ethiopia, and ethnic conflicts are prevalent in Uganda.

In Nigeria, the effects of SALW are particularly devastating. The presence of illicit weapons has fueled numerous social crises, including farmers-herders clashes, ethnic violence, armed banditry, kidnapping, religious conflicts, and political militarization. These conflicts have led to the displacement of millions of people, economic instability, and a range of other social and humanitarian issues, including gender-based violence, child soldiers, health crises, and refugee problems (United Nations, 2015).

The ripple effects of SALW in Africa are far-reaching, contributing not only to armed conflicts but also to economic downturns, social disintegration, and the displacement of vulnerable populations. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-dimensional approach focused on reducing trafficking, controlling local arms production, addressing political instability, and addressing the socioeconomic root causes driving youth recruitment into armed groups.

### **Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in Nigeria: Emergence, Causes, and Spread**

The spread of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) across the globe has had devastating effects, and Africa has been one of the hardest-hit regions. Nigeria, in particular, has become a major destination for illicit weapons, with over half of these weapons entering the country through routes linked to Libya and other unstable regions. Most of these illicit weapons find their way into Nigeria via Mali, Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, contributing to the instability in the region.

There are varying estimates regarding the number of SALW in Nigeria. One view suggests that out of 650 million SALW circulating globally, about 30 million are in Sub-Saharan Africa, with around 10 million of these weapons present in Nigeria, particularly in its Northern region. Meanwhile, the United Nations reports that approximately 350 million SALW are located within Nigeria alone (Method, 2018). These numbers paint a grim picture of the role these weapons play in armed conflict and violence across the region.

### **Causes of SALW Proliferation in Nigeria**

The presence of SALW in Nigeria is the result of multiple interconnected factors:

#### **1. Trafficking through Porous Borders**

Nigeria shares extensive borders with several countries: 770 kilometers with Benin, 1,500 kilometers with Niger, 1,700 kilometers with Cameroon, and 90 kilometers with Chad. Additionally, it has 850 kilometers of maritime border along the Atlantic Ocean. Many of these borders are porous and poorly monitored, making it easy for weapons to cross into the country through smuggling networks. The collapse of order in Libya further exacerbated the problem, as weapons from Libya have flowed through routes like Mali and Niger into Nigeria (Nowak & Gsell, 2018).

## **2. Historical Smuggling Patterns**

- Arms trafficking in Nigeria predates recent insurgencies, going back to the 1990s. For instance:
- In 1999, Nigerian Customs intercepted six West African nationals with 75,000 rounds of ammunition and rifles in a canoe in Lagos.
- In 2001, 10,000 magazines were seized in Ikeja, Lagos.
- The Port of Warri in the Niger-Delta has long served as a hub for arms smuggling.
- Northern Nigeria's borders with Niger, Cameroon, and Chad are major routes for these smuggling networks, enabling the movement of weapons and illicit goods across borders (Yacubu, 2005).

## **3. Local Arms Production and Knowledge Transfer**

The rise of local production has worsened the SALW problem in Northern Nigeria. Armed groups like Boko Haram have become adept at producing homemade weapons such as grenades and bombs. These groups acquired manufacturing techniques through training in Mali, Libya, and other terrorist strongholds. Another significant source of SALW in Northern Nigeria is the theft of state-owned weapons. Armed insurgents often raid security bases, acquiring military-grade weapons to fuel their insurgency (Nowak & Gsell, 2018).

## **Impacts of SALW in Northern Nigeria**

The influx of weapons into Northern Nigeria has fueled violent conflicts, ethnic militias, and insecurity in numerous ways:

### **1. Ethnoreligious Conflicts and Militia Activities**

The availability of weapons has contributed to rising tensions and violence across regions like Kaduna, Taraba, Adamawa, Benue, and Plateau. Ethnoreligious clashes and the emergence of local militias fighting for control have escalated these conflicts.

### **2. Insurgency and Armed Banditry**

The presence of weapons has intensified insurgencies, particularly in the Northeast, where groups like Boko Haram have exploited the easy availability of arms to destabilize entire regions. Meanwhile, in the Northwest, armed banditry has become a significant threat to security, especially in Zamfara, Kaduna, Sokoto, Kebbi, and Katsina States.

### **3. Kidnapping and Violence Against Civilians**

Kidnapping has become a major consequence of widespread access to SALW. Armed groups use weapons to target civilians, exacerbating food insecurity, economic decline, and displacement. Violence against women and gender-based

violence have also increased, adding another layer of suffering to the crisis (Farr, Myrntinen & Schnabel, 2009).

### **Consequences of SALW Proliferation**

The impacts of SALW in Nigeria are severe and far-reaching:

- Thousands of deaths occur annually due to armed violence.
- Millions of people have been displaced, creating large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) with precarious living conditions.
- The economy has been sabotaged by violence, instability, and destruction.
- Health crises and humanitarian emergencies have worsened as violence continues to displace populations and deprive them of access to essential services.

The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in Nigeria has been shaped by trafficking through porous borders, historical patterns of smuggling, local arms production, and armed insurgencies. These weapons are fueling widespread violence, criminality, and displacement, particularly in Northern Nigeria. Addressing the SALW crisis will require a coordinated, multi-faceted approach that focuses on securing borders, halting arms trafficking networks, addressing socioeconomic factors driving insecurity, and strengthening governance.

### **Legal and Institutional Measures Against the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)**

The widespread distribution of illicit weapons globally has prompted the international community to take proactive measures to combat the problem and reduce the influence of illegal armed groups and communal violence. The United Nations (UN) has spearheaded numerous initiatives to prevent and control the spread of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) through various legal protocols and institutional frameworks.

### **Global Legal Frameworks and Efforts**

The UN has implemented several measures to address the issue of illicit weapons. Notably:

1. **UN Security Council Embargo Violations and Accountability Issues:**  
Reports from the United Nations highlighted violations of arms embargoes by various nations, largely due to lapses in accountability. This underscored the need for stricter oversight mechanisms to curtail arms trafficking.
2. **UN Group of Governmental Experts (GGE):**  
Established in December 2001 under General Assembly Resolution 54/54 V, the GGE was tasked with examining arms brokering activities and developing measures to counteract them.
3. **The UN Protocol Against Illicit Manufacturing and Arms Trafficking:**  
Adopted in 2001 and entering into effect in 2005 after ratification by 40

member states, this protocol provides the legal foundation for countries to address the illegal production, distribution, and trafficking of firearms, their components, and ammunition. It outlines specific legal obligations for states under Article 15(1).

4. **Programme of Action (PoA):**

In 2001, the UN organized a conference to agree on the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (PoA). The initiative sought to address all dimensions of the illicit SALW trade (United Nations, 2006).

These international efforts provide the backbone for coordinated global action against illicit arms trade, but they are supplemented by regional and multilateral efforts to strengthen these frameworks.

### **Regional Responses to Combat SALW Proliferation**

Several regions and organizations have adopted frameworks and legal instruments to tackle the spread of SALW. These regional initiatives, although promising, have had varying levels of success:

1. **The Americas:**

The Organization of American States (OAS), through its Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), has developed model regulations to control small arms brokers. These efforts target brokers involved in arms trafficking to restrict illicit trade in the region.

2. **Africa:**

In Africa, numerous regional bodies like the African Union (AU), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have implemented agreements to control the illicit trade of SALW. However, while these agreements are legally binding, most have yet to be incorporated into national laws.

3. **Europe:**

Europe has seen significant strides in addressing arms brokering through agreements under the European Union (EU) and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Efforts include monitoring air transport routes used to smuggle weapons to reduce their diversion into unauthorized hands (SIPRI, 2009).

4. **Asia and the Middle East:**

While the Asia-Pacific region lacks standardized frameworks to combat illicit arms brokering, efforts have been initiated by regional organizations. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has worked to address arms smuggling as part of transnational crime. Additionally, Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 2004 banned non-governmental arms

brokers and restricted the transfer of man-portable air defense systems (United Nations, 2006).

These regional measures demonstrate collaborative efforts to address SALW but also highlight the challenges of implementation due to gaps in legal enforcement and national ratification.

### **Notable National and Regional Efforts to Counter SALW**

To strengthen global and regional responses, countries have adopted innovative policies and institutional mechanisms:

1. **South Africa's National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC):**

South Africa established the NCACC to identify and destroy illicit weapons, focusing on redundant, obsolete, and confiscated semi-automatic and automatic weapons. Through Operation Mouflon, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) destroyed approximately 260,000 small arms to limit their proliferation (Mock & Stott, 2004).

2. **Central African Convention for the Control of SALW:**

This regional framework has established clear guidelines, such as:

- o Prohibiting the transfer of weapons to non-state armed groups.
- o Creating proper authorization processes for arms transfers.
- o Preventing civilian ownership of weapons to reduce the risk of the emergence of armed groups (Central African Convention for the Control of SALW, 2011).

3. **UN-Led Training and Support in West Africa:**

The UN has supported countries in West Africa by providing logistical training to armed forces and law enforcement agencies. This training focuses on identifying illicit weapons, tracing them, marking them, destroying them, and creating mechanisms to prevent their spread (Ayissi & Sall, 2005).

### **Challenges in Implementing Legal and Institutional Measures**

Although global and regional frameworks show progress, challenges remain:

1. **Regional Implementation Gaps:**

Despite the existence of treaties and protocols, effective regional enforcement remains an issue. Bourne (2007) identifies that insufficient focus on regional cooperation and strategies undermines efforts to control illicit arms flows.

2. **Diversions from Supply Chains:**

Efforts to prevent diversion of arms through manufacturers, national agencies, and multilateral organizations are critical but continue to encounter challenges.

3. **Legislation and Marking Standards:**

The UN has guided nations on drafting effective SALW legislation,

including proper marking to ensure traceability and prevent illicit trade. However, many countries still struggle with compliance and effective implementation (Ashkenazi, Beeck & Isikozlu, 2007).

The legal and institutional responses to the spread of illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) involve a combination of international treaties, regional agreements, and national policies. Frameworks like the UN's Programme of Action, regional agreements in Africa, Europe, and Asia, as well as national strategies such as South Africa's destruction initiatives, highlight a multi-faceted global response. Despite these efforts, challenges such as regional enforcement gaps, diversion from legal trade routes, and incomplete legislative compliance persist. Continued collaboration, support, and effective implementation of these measures are essential to mitigate the proliferation of SALW and their devastating effects on peace, security, and development globally.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts two primary theoretical frameworks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research context, analysis, and findings. The selected theories are:

- 1. Securitisation Theory**
- 2. Social Conflict Theory**

These two theoretical lenses are employed to examine the underlying factors contributing to the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in Northern Nigeria, as well as the social, economic, political, and environmental dimensions of insecurity in the region.

#### **Securitisation Theory**

The *Securitisation* Theory emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, primarily developed by Barry Buzan and the Copenhagen School, as part of a new strategic studies paradigm. This theory represents a significant shift from the traditional military-focused security studies to a broader and more multidimensional conceptualization of security threats.

#### **Core Concepts of Securitisation Theory**

Buzan (1983) and the Copenhagen School argue that the traditional understanding of security was overly limited to military threats and inter-state conflicts, neglecting other non-traditional security challenges. They propose that security should incorporate a wide array of political, economic, social, environmental, and human needs as threats to societal stability and peace, emphasizing that these non-military threats are as critical as traditional military challenges.

According to Buzan and Hansen (2009:2), the key dimensions of non-traditional security threats include:

1. **Political Insecurity:** Issues such as ethnic politics, lack of social cohesion, political violence, subversion of democratic processes, and unresolved national questions undermine state stability and public trust.
2. **Economic Insecurity:** Factors like underdevelopment, inflation, economic mismanagement, low industrial productivity, and poverty exacerbate instability and fuel conflict.
3. **Social Insecurity:** Corruption, unemployment, inequality, hunger, malnutrition, disease, and gender-based violence can lead to social unrest and increase susceptibility to criminal or violent groups.
4. **Environmental Insecurity:** Environmental degradation, climate change, desertification, deforestation, floods, drought, pollution, and other natural and man-made disasters disrupt societies and create conditions for conflict.

Buzan (1983) stresses that any attempt to conceptualize security solely in military terms is misguided in the contemporary world. The theory suggests that non-military threats must also be addressed as part of a holistic security strategy. These dimensions of insecurity are interconnected, and their effects can lead to crises just as significant as traditional military confrontations.

### **Application to the Context of This Research**

The *Securitisation Theory* is particularly relevant to this study because it provides a lens through which to analyze the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in Northern Nigeria. The persistent spread of these arms can be linked to systemic failures in addressing social, political, and economic insecurities. Many residents in Northern Nigeria live in poverty, malnutrition, unemployment, and extreme hardship, despite the country's wealth. These systemic failures have created conditions in which vulnerable and disenfranchised individuals, particularly unemployed and restive youth, are susceptible to recruitment into armed groups and criminal networks.

This theoretical framework highlights that the proliferation of SALW is not merely a result of military conflicts but a reflection of broader social, economic, and political insecurities. Addressing SALW requires tackling these root causes, including social inequality, environmental degradation, unemployment, and governance failures.

### **Social Conflict Theory**

The *Social Conflict Theory* is rooted in Karl Marx's philosophy and focuses on the underlying struggles and competition for resources, power, and opportunities within a society. This theory provides an economic and class-based explanation of conflict, emphasizing the dynamics between competing groups in the struggle for scarce resources.

### **Core Concepts of Social Conflict Theory**

The Social Conflict Theory argues that societal conflicts arise due to inequalities in resource distribution, exploitation, and competition. According to this perspective:

1. **Class Struggles:** Conflict emerges from competition between social classes, where the ruling class (bourgeoisie) maintains control by exploiting and subordinating the working class (proletariat).
2. **Exploitation and Domination:** The ruling class uses the structure and superstructure (political systems, ideologies, laws, and institutions) to maintain their dominance and ensure access to scarce resources.
3. **Inequality and Struggle for Survival:** As the working class faces exploitation and oppression, some groups resort to criminal activities or rebellion to address their economic and social suffering.

The theory provides insight into how systemic economic disparity and exploitation lead to social unrest and instability.

### **Application to the Northern Nigerian Context**

Applying the Social Conflict Theory to Northern Nigeria underscores the role of political, economic, and social inequalities in the region's ongoing conflicts. In Northern Nigeria, socio-economic marginalization, underdevelopment, and exploitation of the working class have created conditions of despair and hopelessness. Access to political power has become a struggle for self-enrichment rather than equitable governance, further deepening inequalities and resource competition.

Many people in Northern Nigeria find themselves trapped in cycles of poverty and disenfranchisement, with limited opportunities for upward mobility. This economic marginalization has forced many to rely on alternative survival strategies, including joining armed groups or engaging in criminal ventures. The theory explains how the working and peasant classes are compelled to take up arms, driven by desperation and exclusion from the formal economy.

In this light, the Social Conflict Theory identifies the primary causes of insecurity in Northern Nigeria as systemic poverty, exploitation, and political exclusion. The competition for resources, coupled with neglect by political leaders and governance failures, has fostered conditions conducive to armed group formation and the proliferation of illicit arms, creating cycles of violence.

### **Integration of the Two Theoretical Frameworks**

The Securitisation Theory and Social Conflict Theory provide complementary perspectives for understanding the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in Northern Nigeria. While the Securitisation Theory highlights how multiple insecurities—economic, social, political, and environmental—contribute

to instability, the Social Conflict Theory emphasizes class struggle and economic exploitation as root causes of conflict.

Together, these two frameworks provide a multi-dimensional analysis of insecurity in Northern Nigeria by integrating structural socio-economic factors with broader non-traditional security threats. They collectively underscore the interconnectedness of poverty, unemployment, governance failures, political exclusion, and environmental degradation in contributing to the SALW crisis.

By applying these theories, this study seeks to explore how systemic socio-political failures, economic disparities, and competing struggles for resources lead to the proliferation of SALW and the resulting social instability in the region. Both frameworks offer a solid foundation for analyzing the factors that enable the spread of arms and their long-term implications on peace and security in Northern Nigeria.

### **Method of Data Collection and Analysis**

This study employed both primary and secondary data sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. A qualitative research design was adopted for both data collection and analysis, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the subject matter. The method combined direct interviews with selected informants and extensive literature review to gather and analyze relevant information.

### **Primary Data Collection**

The primary data for this study was collected through **in-depth semi-structured interviews** with key informants possessing specialized knowledge and firsthand information on the research topic. This method was chosen due to its ability to provide detailed insights into the participants' experiences, perspectives, and expertise.

### **Informant Categories**

The informants were selected from five distinct categories to ensure diverse perspectives and comprehensive data coverage. These categories were chosen based on their relevance to the study's research questions and the specific roles they play in security issues in Northern Nigeria:

#### **1. Security Personnel (Category A):**

Four senior security officials from military and paramilitary institutions were selected. These individuals were interviewed based on their accessibility, seniority, and familiarity with the subject matter. Their expertise provided direct insight into operational security concerns related to the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW).

**2. Senior Officials from the Ministry of Defense:**

Three officials were selected from the Defense Headquarters in Abuja. These individuals were chosen because they are directly involved in security administration and policymaking, offering an institutional perspective on defense strategies and SALW control.

**3. Academics Specializing in Security and Strategic Studies:**

Four academicians were selected from reputable Northern universities specializing in security, strategic studies, and conflict analysis. Their academic perspective brought theoretical insights, analysis, and critical understanding to the study.

**4. International Donor Agencies:**

Four informants from international donor organizations, such as Save the Children and UNICEF, were selected. These agencies operate extensively in Northern Nigeria and are involved in security-focused interventions. They provided insights into donor efforts, challenges, and programs targeting SALW control and conflict mitigation.

**5. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs):**

Five members of different civil society organizations based in Abuja were interviewed. These organizations are actively involved in peacebuilding, security monitoring, and community intervention, making their perspectives vital for understanding community-level security challenges.

In total, **nineteen (19) informants** were interviewed across these five categories.

### **Interview Design and Ethical Considerations**

The interview questions were **semi-structured**, allowing flexibility while ensuring that the responses addressed the key research objectives. Each category of informants was asked tailored questions to capture their unique perspectives and areas of expertise. Avoidance of direct or leading questions was prioritized to ensure unbiased responses and the collection of genuine insights.

To maintain the ethical integrity of the research:

- Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity to build trust and encourage openness.
- Informants were interviewed under the oath of confidentiality, ensuring their identities would not be disclosed, especially considering potential security risks.
- These measures were crucial in upholding both ethical research standards and the safety of participants.

### **Secondary Data Collection**

The **secondary sources** consisted of a wide range of existing literature and information, including:

- Books and academic journals
- Internet resources
- Reports from security-related agencies and organizations

These secondary sources were critical for conducting a **comprehensive literature review**, building the theoretical framework, and identifying research gaps. They supplemented the primary data by providing context, historical trends, and theoretical perspectives on SALW proliferation, conflict, and security dynamics in Northern Nigeria.

The secondary data analysis involved critically reviewing existing literature to ensure that the study was grounded in established research while identifying areas where additional insights and contributions were necessary.

### **Data Analysis Methodology**

The data from both the primary and secondary sources were analyzed using **thematic analytical interpretation**. This method involved identifying patterns, themes, and trends from the responses of the informants and the insights gained from the literature review. The steps followed in thematic analysis included:

1. Familiarization with Data: Reading through all the interview transcripts and secondary data multiple times to ensure familiarity and comprehensive understanding.
2. Initial Coding: Identifying and marking meaningful data segments from both primary and secondary sources.
3. Generating Themes: Grouping the initial codes into key themes relevant to the research objectives and questions.
4. Reviewing Themes: Cross-examining themes to ensure they accurately reflect the underlying data and research questions.
5. Defining and Naming Themes: Clearly identifying and naming the key themes to ensure clarity and depth in analysis.
6. Producing the Final Report: Synthesizing the analysis into a coherent narrative that addresses the research objectives and findings.

This approach allowed the study to systematically analyze responses and theoretical insights, drawing connections between the findings, literature, and research objectives.

### **Summary of Methodology**

- **Primary Data Collection:**  
Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 informants across five categories: security personnel, senior officials from the Ministry of Defense, academics, representatives from international donor organizations, and civil society members.

- **Secondary Data Collection:**  
A systematic review of relevant books, journal articles, agency reports, and other scholarly and institutional sources.
- **Analysis Approach:**  
Thematic analysis was used to analyze both the primary and secondary data, with themes identified through patterns, coding, and critical examination of the data.

By triangulating the primary and secondary data through thematic analysis, the study was able to derive nuanced and comprehensive insights into the research problem, ensuring the research findings were robust, reliable, and well-contextualized.

## **Discussions and Findings**

### **The Role of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in Exacerbating Armed Conflicts in Northern Nigeria**

This section presents, analyzes, and discusses the findings derived from the field data and literature review. The research findings are analyzed through sub-themes that connect the empirical data with the theoretical framework, offering a nuanced interpretation to support the research objectives.

### **The Boko Haram Phenomenon in Northeastern Nigeria**

The Boko Haram insurgency stands as one of the most devastating insurgencies in contemporary times, having far-reaching effects across Northern Nigeria and beyond. This insurgency has destabilized multiple regions, caused mass displacements, and solidified Nigeria's position as a key player in global security concerns.

### **Historical Context of Boko Haram's Emergence**

Boko Haram, officially known as Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunnah Lid-Da'Awati wal-Jihad, began as a radical movement in Borno and Yobe states during the early 2000s. It metamorphosed into a violent insurgent group in 2009 following the extrajudicial killing of its leader, Muhammad Yusuf. The group's initial movement was rooted in anti-Western sentiments, particularly opposing secular education, but it has since expanded into a full-scale insurgency, targeting military personnel, government agencies, civilian populations, and international aid groups (Bowser & Sanders, 2012).

According to Forest (2012), multiple factors underpin the insurgency's growth, including socioeconomic deprivation, unemployment, political marginalization, and ignorance. However, the proliferation of **Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)** has exacerbated the insurgency, fueling the group's ability to mobilize, arm, and launch violent attacks.

### **Geographical and Strategic Impact of Boko Haram**

Boko Haram's territorial control spans about 20 local government areas across Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states, accounting for nearly 30% of the Northeastern region. The group uses various SALW, such as AK-47s, semi-automatic rifles, anti-aircraft guns, and machine guns, to carry out brutal attacks on military personnel, civilians, and government installations. The insurgency has resulted in widespread humanitarian crises, displacing over 2.5 million individuals and fostering mutual distrust between religious communities (Omotosho, 2015).

From the interviews conducted with key informants, all participants agreed on the role of illicit arms trafficking as a key driver behind the rise of Boko Haram. One informant explained:

*“The escape route for illicit weapons through the Trans-Saharan routes after the collapse of Libya paved the way for the Boko Haram insurgents to gain unrestricted access to arms. This access facilitated the training, networking, and operational strength of the insurgents. Today, they rank among the deadliest insurgent groups in the world.”*

### **Theoretical Explanation**

The findings align with **Securitisation Theory**, which examines non-traditional security factors such as poverty, political instability, and socioeconomic deprivation. Furthermore, **Social Conflict Theory** is relevant in this context, as it explores how struggles for scarce resources and power within marginalized groups can lead to violent insurgencies. Boko Haram represents a social movement driven by poverty, competition, and rebellion, aiming to challenge the status quo.

### **Farmers-Herders Conflict in Northwestern Nigeria**

The **farmers-herders conflict** is another significant dimension of insecurity in Northern Nigeria, intensified by the proliferation of SALW. Historically rooted in competition for land and resources, this conflict escalated dramatically due to easy access to illicit weapons, facilitating violent clashes.

### **Root Causes of Farmers-Herders Conflict**

Although farmers-herders' conflicts have existed in Nigeria since the 1970s, the spread of Small Arms and Light Weapons has exacerbated the situation. The key drivers of the conflict include:

1. Ineffective agricultural policies.
2. Climate change altering traditional grazing patterns.
3. Political instability.
4. Porous borders enabling the smuggling of arms.
5. Mismanagement of natural resources and media portrayal of ethnic tensions (Kwaja & Adelehin, 2017).

Reports from **the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (2017)** indicate that illicit weapons have facilitated rapid and violent confrontations between farmers and herders, often leading to mass casualties.

One informant shared this perspective:

*“The farmers-herders conflict is driven by competition over grazing routes and resources, but SALW have made it even deadlier. They are easily accessible, non-traceable, and highly dangerous, allowing communities to engage in reprisal attacks and prolonged violence.”*

### **Theoretical Perspective**

Both **Securitisation Theory** and **Social Conflict Theory** provide valuable insight into these findings. Securitisation highlights that poverty and resource competition can escalate into violence when political governance fails, while Social Conflict Theory explains the unequal distribution of scarce resources as a key driver of violent competition.

### **Cattle Rustling and Armed Banditry in Northwestern Nigeria**

Cattle rustling and armed banditry have become pervasive in Northwestern Nigeria, linked directly to the proliferation of SALW. The problem has crippled local economies, displaced communities, and led to the loss of thousands of lives.

### **Key Drivers of Banditry and Rustling**

According to reports (Egwu, 2016), cattle rustling and armed banditry are fueled by factors such as unemployment, greed, armed group activities, and ineffective law enforcement. Additionally, SALW are integral to these crimes, offering bandits access to high levels of violence.

The widespread availability of illicit arms has worsened this situation, especially in regions such as Zamfara, Katsina, and Sokoto. As communities struggle with insecurity, economic activities such as farming have come to a halt, exacerbating food insecurity and social displacement.

One informant noted:

*“The failure of governance has allowed armed groups to infiltrate rural areas. Many villages in Birnin Gwari, Shinkafi, and Maru were wiped out due to unchecked banditry, which has a direct connection to the widespread availability of Small Arms and Light Weapons.”*

### **Theoretical Analysis**

Both **Securitisation Theory** and **Social Conflict Theory** are applicable here. Securitisation explains how systemic failures in governance lead to the proliferation

of arms and instability, while Social Conflict Theory highlights how competition for limited resources contributes to armed conflicts and criminal banditry.

### **Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Northern Nigeria**

Ethno-religious conflicts are long-standing sources of violence in Northern Nigeria. While historically influenced by political mismanagement and socioeconomic deprivation, the proliferation of SALW has provided a new and dangerous dimension to these conflicts.

### **Triggers of Ethno-Religious Conflicts**

Key contributing factors include poverty, political manipulation, unemployment, and misgovernance. SALW, smuggled through the Trans-Saharan routes, have further fueled these clashes by enabling militias and extremist groups to conduct widespread attacks.

One interviewee noted:

*“The introduction of SALW has intensified ethno-religious conflicts. These weapons have allowed ethnic groups and religious extremists to wage violence that displaces thousands and destroys countless communities.”*

### **Theoretical Explanation**

The **Securitisation Theory** and **Social Conflict Theory** are applicable here. Lack of political unity and socioeconomic progress destabilize the region, while Social Conflict Theory explains the competition for scarce resources as a significant driver of violence.

### **Kidnapping in Northern Nigeria**

Kidnapping has emerged as a major security threat, exacerbated by the proliferation of SALW and the activities of armed criminal groups.

### **Impact of SALW on Kidnapping**

Kidnapping rates in Northern Nigeria have risen dramatically due to the ease of access to illicit weapons. Criminal groups often rely on SALW to perpetuate their crimes.

An informant explained:

*“Kidnapping in Northern Nigeria has become a lucrative crime for many groups due to the easy availability of arms and the absence of effective law enforcement.”*

### **Theoretical Explanation**

The **Securitisation Theory** and **Social Conflict Theory** highlight that political instability, poverty, and access to arms fuel this issue. Social dislocation and the competition for scarce resources push marginalized groups toward criminal activity.

The findings collectively underscore that the **proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)** is a common denominator fueling multiple security challenges in Northern Nigeria, including insurgency, farmers-herders conflict, armed banditry, ethno-religious conflicts, and kidnapping. The theoretical underpinnings provided by Securitisation and Social Conflict theories offer a comprehensive understanding of these phenomena, connecting poverty, unemployment, political instability, and arms proliferation to the persistence of insecurity in the region.

The findings emphasize the urgency of implementing effective disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs, improved border security, and conflict resolution mechanisms to address the security challenges exacerbated by SALW in Northern Nigeria.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

#### **Conclusion**

This research provides an in-depth analysis of the role of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in escalating and perpetuating armed conflicts across Northern Nigeria, employing both primary and secondary data sources. The study highlights that the proliferation of SALW is largely influenced by Nigeria's porous borders and the global flow of illicit arms, which have devastating effects on national stability and security.

The findings reveal that SALW have significantly exacerbated and prolonged various forms of armed violence across the region. These include the Boko Haram insurgency in Northeastern Nigeria, farmers-herders' conflicts in Northcentral Nigeria, armed banditry and cattle rustling in Northwestern Nigeria, as well as ethno-religious conflicts and widespread kidnapping across the entire Northern region.

The analysis demonstrates that the devastating impacts of SALW are multifaceted, as they contribute to the continuous loss of thousands of lives, destruction of properties worth billions of Naira, disruption of farming and commercial activities, displacement of communities, and heightened mutual suspicion among local populations. These findings underscore the urgent need for multi-dimensional, long-term interventions to mitigate the problem posed by the uncontrolled circulation of SALW.

The study's comprehensive findings draw attention to the interconnectedness of criminal activities and armed conflicts facilitated by SALW, necessitating a well-coordinated approach involving government agencies, security personnel, community actors, and international organizations to address this pressing national security challenge.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are proposed to provide sustainable solutions for addressing the threat of SALW proliferation and their role in exacerbating armed conflicts in Northern Nigeria:

1. **Signing of International Treaties and Agreements:**

The Nigerian government should actively engage in international and regional treaties focused on the marking, tracing, brokering, and possession of SALW. This includes adherence to global arms control agreements and frameworks such as the United Nations Programme of Action (UNPoA). Such agreements would establish accountability mechanisms for illicit arms trade and ensure proper cooperation with neighboring countries and international bodies.

2. **Enhanced Training for Security Personnel:**

Security agencies should undergo comprehensive and continuous training to develop specialized skills in identifying, tracking, and containing SALW along Nigerian borders and within the country's interior regions. This involves utilizing technological advancements and strategic security methods to combat the influx of illicit weapons through smuggling routes.

3. **Prioritize Intelligence-Gathering Mechanisms:**

Intelligence operations must be reinforced and prioritized to ensure the identification and disruption of networks involved in the illegal possession, trafficking, and distribution of SALW. A well-coordinated and multi-agency intelligence framework should be established to enhance collaboration among different security agencies and streamline the detection of arms trafficking networks.

4. **Public Awareness and Community Sensitization:**

There is currently a low level of public awareness regarding the spread, impacts, and dangers of SALW in Nigeria. Government and civil society organizations should prioritize public education campaigns and awareness programs to inform all segments of society, including intellectuals, policymakers, and local communities, about the devastating effects of SALW proliferation. These programs should aim to foster collective efforts to combat the problem through education and active participation.

5. **Strengthened Border Monitoring and Security Scrutiny:**

Nigerian borders should be rigorously monitored and scrutinized to prevent the smuggling of SALW into the country. This requires the strategic deployment of security personnel, technological interventions such as

surveillance drones, and the establishment of fortified checkpoints along known smuggling routes. Border security operations should be proactive, transparent, and adequately equipped to deter illicit arms trafficking.

### **Final Note**

The problem of SALW proliferation in Northern Nigeria is not merely a security issue but a complex interplay of socioeconomic, political, and governance-related challenges. Addressing this issue requires a multi-sectoral and collaborative approach that integrates law enforcement, intelligence, regional cooperation, community engagement, and international assistance. This study serves as a call to action for policymakers, security agencies, and international partners to adopt a more robust, strategic, and proactive approach to tackling the spread of SALW and their role in perpetuating armed conflicts.

The proposed measures, if effectively implemented, have the potential to reduce the circulation of illicit arms, disrupt violent conflicts, and foster long-term peace and stability across Northern Nigeri

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**Appendix**

**Securitisation Theory**

**Social Conflict Theory**

Source: Designed by the Author

