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# Small Arms And Light Weapons Proliferation And Control: The Niger Delta Experience, 1999-2022

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## ABSTRACT

The Niger Delta region has been plagued by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, resulting in a myriad of social, economic, and security challenges. This article examines the dynamics of small arms and light weapons in the Niger Delta between 1999 and 2022, with a focus on the factors driving their proliferation and the consequences of this phenomenon. The study was anchored on *securitization theory*. A descriptive research survey was conducted, covering 400 residents randomly selected from the 45,715,000 million population of the Niger Delta area. The study reveals that oil-for-arm exchange, sales, and rentals by retired and serving security personnel are among the primary sources of small arms and light weapons in the region. Communal conflicts, inadequate internal security, and poor governance are identified as key factors contributing to the proliferation of these weapons. The consequences include human rights abuses, conflict-related deaths, injuries, and disabilities. This study highlights the inadequacies in trans-border control, logistics problems, and poor governance as significant challenges to curbing small arms and light weapons proliferation in the Niger Delta. The findings are critical in informing policy recommendations to address the underlying causes of this issue and promote sustainable peace and security in the region.

**Keywords:** Conflict, Disarmament, Proliferation, Light Weapons, Niger Delta, Security, Small Arms,

## INTRODUCTION

Arms proliferation represents a pressing challenge facing the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The Nigerian state has witnessed a lot of cataclysms arising from misunderstanding or disarticulation of interest between or among communities and this has affected the political stability of the State (Egobueze, 2025). The prevalence of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) in both public and private hands is alarming, and studies have established a clear correlation between armed violence and the proliferation of these weapons (Njioroge, 2016; Ngboawaji, 2011). As hostilities and insecurity grow, it becomes evident that the distribution of SALWs is on the rise throughout the Niger Delta. The region today grapples with numerous armed conflicts that not only threaten local stability but also pose broader risks to global security.

The sources of this arms proliferation are multifaceted and deeply rooted in longstanding issues within the Niger Delta. Poverty remains a predominant factor, compounded by flagrant human rights violations, the absence of fiscal federalism, and a denial of access to the wealth derived from the region's oil resources. Environmental degradation has further exacerbated the situation, leaving communities with diminished livelihoods and poor welfare programs. Additionally, hegemonic politics, strategies of divide and rule,

rampant unemployment, electoral rigging, and pervasive bad governance have all contributed to an environment where arms proliferation flourishes.

In response to the intricate challenges of SALW proliferation, various mechanisms and strategies have been established to mitigate this crisis. However, despite the efforts of cross-border security agencies, including the Nigerian police, Nigeria Customs Service, and the Immigration Service; there remain significant gaps in enforcement. These agencies have been described as ineffective, allowing illicit arms trafficking to thrive and perpetuate the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the region (Thom-Otuya, 2009). The Niger Delta has become not only a source but also a transit and destination point for illegal arms trafficking, underscoring the global nature of the SALW problem.

Historically, the conflicts between oil companies and militant groups in the Niger Delta have exacerbated the situation, escalating into deadly confrontations fueled by the availability of SALWs. The consequences have been dire, including the massacre of civilians and security personnel, displacement of thousands from their homes, loss of educational opportunities for children, and a staggering decline in development efforts. The grim reality of poverty looms large, and competition for scarce resources often manifests as violent armed conflict. Faced with an inadequate physical presence of law enforcement, insufficient infrastructure, rampant corruption, and challenging terrain, many individuals and communities feel compelled to arm themselves for personal, communal, or familial defense.

While various social, political, and economic approaches have been implemented to foster cohesion, political stability, and economic alternatives, the conflict in the Niger Delta persists. Militancy, related violence, tribal conflicts, and violent robberies continue to plague the region. The reasons for this continued volatility remain ambiguous, raising questions about the efficacy of existing interventions. Despite considerable scholarly attention to the multifaceted nature of conflict in the Niger Delta, the problems associated with small arms proliferation endure, suggesting a need for further investigation.

This paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of SALW proliferation in the Niger Delta and the complexities surrounding its control. By focusing on the underlying causes of arms proliferation and exploring the challenges to effective governance and security, this research seeks to offer insights that can inform strategies for mitigating this critical issue. Ultimately, addressing the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the Niger Delta is essential for achieving long-term peace, security, and sustainable development in the region.

The aim of the study is to investigate small arms and light weapons proliferation and control in the Niger Delta between 1999-2022. Based on the above aim, two specific questions are asked, thus:

- i. What are the source of small arms and light weapons in the Niger Delta area?
- ii. What are the factors responsible for proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the Niger Delta area?

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SECURITIZATION THEORY**

Securitization theory, primarily developed by Barry Buzan in the late 20th century, represents a fundamental shift in the field of security studies. Emerging from the Copenhagen School, Buzan and his colleagues redefined the parameters of security discourse, moving beyond the conventional focus on military threats to encompass a wide range of non-traditional security concerns (Côté, 2021). This transformation reflects the evolving dynamics of global security, particularly following the complexities introduced by the Cold War and the subsequent changes in international relations.

The origins of securitization theory can be traced back to the heightened awareness of global security issues in the aftermath of World War II. In the pre-World War II era, discussions surrounding security were predominantly military in nature, centering on state-centric threats and the potential for armed conflict. However, Buzan's work in the 1980s, particularly his seminal book "People, States and Fear" (Buzan, 1983), expanded the discourse to include a variety of threats that transcend traditional military definitions. Buzan argued that security must be understood as a broader concept that incorporates political, economic, social, environmental, and human dimensions (Gunter & Ibrahim, 2022).

Dialectical theory, the securitization theory posits that security is a socially constructed phenomenon, meaning that what constitutes a threat is determined by the perceptions and discourses prevalent within a society. This dialectical perspective on security includes several key dimensions. Buzan emphasizes the role of various actors—states, non-state entities, and individuals—in the securitization process (O'Reilly, 2023). Different actors have divergent perceptions and interests, shaping what they deem to be security threats. For instance, a state may prioritize military threats, while marginalized communities might focus on social injustice or economic deprivation (Phillips & Ngwira, 2020).

The audience plays a crucial role in the securitization process. For a security issue to gain traction as a legitimate concern, it must resonate with a wider audience, often requiring the mobilization of public opinion. Successful securitization relies on the ability of political leaders and institutions to frame issues compellingly, persuading their constituents of the urgency of the threat (Weller, 2024).

The context in which security threats are perceived is crucial. Securitization is influenced by historical, cultural, and situational factors that shape the social environment. For example, the framing of immigration as a security threat may differ between contexts where there is widespread economic disparity versus contexts where social cohesion is prioritized.

The temporal aspect of securitization is also significant. Security threats can evolve over time, and issues once considered secondary can ascend to prominence based on changing circumstances. For example, environmental concerns, which may have been overlooked in earlier security discussions, have gained substantial prominence in recent years due to climate change and its impacts on global stability (Gunter & Ibrahim, 2022).

The Niger Delta region has experienced one of the highest rates of small arms and light weapons proliferation in the world, with devastating consequences for human security, economic development, and political stability. The securitization of this issue is critical in understanding the dynamics of small arms control in the region. Securitization theory suggests that security threats are socially constructed and require a broad discourse to address effectively. In the Niger Delta, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons has been framed as a security threat by various actors, including governments, non-state entities, and local communities.

The Niger Delta experience highlights the importance of considering non-traditional security threats, such as the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, which have contributed to human insecurity, displacement, and environmental degradation. The securitization of this issue has led to the involvement of various actors, including international organizations, governments, and local communities, in efforts to control the proliferation and mitigate its impacts. For instance, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) has worked with governments and local communities to promote disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs, which aim to collect and destroy illicit small arms and light weapons.

The Niger Delta experience also underscores the need for a comprehensive approach to small arms control, addressing not only the supply side (production and trafficking) but also the demand side (use and possession). Securitization theory emphasizes the importance of considering the social and political context in which security threats emerge. In the Niger Delta, the root causes of small arms proliferation include poverty, unemployment, and lack of economic opportunities, which have driven many individuals to engage in illicit activities. Addressing these underlying issues is critical to reducing the demand for small arms and light weapons.

In conclusion, securitization theory represents a critical advancement in understanding the multifaceted nature of security in the modern world. The Niger Delta experience highlights the relevance of securitization theory in understanding the complexities of small arms and light weapons proliferation. By recognizing the social construction of security threats and the need for a broad discourse to address them effectively, securitization theory provides a framework for understanding the dynamics of small arms control in the region. The Niger Delta experience underscores the importance of a comprehensive approach to small arms control, addressing both supply and demand sides, as well as the need to address underlying social and political issues driving small arms proliferation.

By advocating for a broader and more inclusive approach, Buzan's framework allows for the analysis of a wide range of threats that impact global peace and stability. Contemporary security challenges demand a re-evaluation of traditional paradigms, and securitization theory provides the tools necessary for addressing the complexities of global insecurity, emphasizing the need to consider both military and non-military dimensions in security discourse. This comprehensive perspective is essential for formulating effective policies aimed at addressing the diverse threats that confront societies today.

## CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

### **Small arms:**

Small arms and light weapons are critical concerns in the context of global security, conflict, and human rights. Small arms are defined as weapons designed for individual use, including pistols, sub-machine guns, assault rifles, and light machine guns. Additionally, small arms can encompass any means of lethality other than sheer physical force (Stemmet, 2011; Nweke & Berman, 1985). According to the 1997 report from the United Nations panel of Government experts on small arms, these weapons are specifically designed for personal use and may also be operated by several individuals serving as a crew.

The categorization of small arms typically includes revolvers, self-loading pistols, rifles, carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles, and light machine guns. In contrast, light weapons are classified as infantry-portable arms, which are either crew-served kinetic firearms, incendiary devices, or munitions that can cause explosive damage. Examples of light weapons include anti-material rifles, anti-tank rifles, general-purpose and medium machine guns, unmounted heavy machine guns, flamethrowers, grenades, grenade launchers, recoilless rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, and mortars with a calibre of less than 100 millimetres (3.9 inches). While light weapons are generally designed for use by two to three individuals, they can sometimes be operated by a single person.

Small arms and light weapons also encompass ammunition, explosives, hand grenades, land mines, and any other man-portable armaments not specifically listed (Njoroge, 2016; Nwanolue & Iwuoha, 2012). The widespread use of these weapons contributes significantly to global conflicts, leading to injuries and fatalities (Ocheche, 2005). The issue of small arms control was first introduced with UN Resolution A/RES/46/36 and subsequently expanded by ARES/50170 Resolution. This resolution established a panel of experts to investigate the types of small arms and light weapons used in global conflicts, as well as identify which weapons should fall under an arms control regime.

The recommendations from expert reports presented to the General Assembly, specifically, culminated in the July 2001 United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms, which was followed by another conference in July 2006. Furthermore, on 26 September 2013, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2117, urging nations to uphold small arms embargoes and adhere to small arms and light weapons control protocols. Understanding these terms and the complexities surrounding them is essential for developing effective strategies to combat the illicit trade in these weapons and prevent their misuse.

### **Small Arms Proliferation**

The term "small arms proliferation" refers to the unregulated availability of small arms. This phenomenon is characterized by the rapid increase in the quantities of small arms existing in a place, such as a community, region, or country. The easy accessibility of small arms, often through illicit channels, is a key feature of small arms proliferation. According to Abdel-Fatau M. (2004), the factors that make small arms appealing to non-state actors, including warlords, armed rebels, bandits, insurgents, terrorists, and criminals, are their low cost, simplicity of use, durability, ease of transport and concealment, and lethal nature.

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons has been a pressing international concern since 1998. This issue is deeply embedded in the survival of emerging nations, particularly in Africa, and has significant implications for national stability, growth, and security. The widespread availability of small arms fuels social unrest, political instability, and poses a danger to security and sustainable development.

Furthermore, the proliferation of small arms has led to a rise in organized crime and military violence, making it a significant security concern for states globally (Sears, 2012; Nte, 2011).

The factors driving the need for small arms in states are multifaceted and can be categorized under three main heads: the activities of the military, the multiplicity of conflicts, and personal security management. These factors are critical in understanding the motivations behind the possession of small arms by states. In essence, the proliferation of small arms is a complex issue that requires a comprehensive approach to address its root causes and mitigate its devastating effects.

Small arms are characterized by their low cost, simplicity of use, durability, ease of transport and concealment, and lethal nature. These factors make small arms an attractive option for non-state actors seeking to exert influence or control. The easy accessibility of small arms, often through illicit channels, has contributed to their proliferation, particularly in regions affected by conflict and social unrest.

The proliferation of small arms has significant implications for global security, stability, and sustainable development. The widespread availability of small arms fuels social unrest, political instability, and poses a danger to security and development. Furthermore, the proliferation of small arms has led to a rise in organized crime and military violence, making it a significant security concern for states globally (Stott, 2016; Stohi & Tuttle, 2009; Stemmet, 2021).

In conclusion, small arms proliferation is a complex issue that requires a comprehensive approach to address its root causes and mitigate its devastating effects. Understanding the characteristics of small arms and the factors driving their proliferation is crucial in developing effective solutions to this pressing global concern. Ultimately, addressing small arms proliferation requires a commitment to addressing the social, economic, and political factors that drive its spread.

### **Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in the Niger Delta of Nigeria**

What fuels the present-day proliferation of SALW in the Niger Delta? This paper from the African Journal on Conflict Resolution analyzes the primary sources of conflict in the region, notably the thriving small arms trade. Weapons smuggled through Guinea-Bissau, Gabon, and Cameroon continue to supply various ethnic militias. While addressing arms trafficking through enhanced border control could mitigate the escalation of conflict, a key issue remains the inequity within Nigerian federalism (Uwa & Anthony, 2015; Usang & Ngozi, 2014). Adequate representation of minority interests needs to be addressed as an integral part of efforts to create a genuine democracy, promote good governance, enhance the position of ethnic minorities, and ensure transparent fiscal management.

Despite producing a significant portion of Nigeria's national wealth, the Niger Delta region suffers from recurring violent conflict, largely due to the adverse effects of oil extraction and ongoing disputes over profit distribution. The struggles of the Ogoni and Ijaw peoples have proven particularly difficult to resolve. Serious environmental degradation—resulting in poor health, destruction of wildlife, flooding, and other issues—has further fueled the anger of the region's marginalized "oil minorities." The proliferation of small arms and light weapons emerged as a significant security threat in the 1990s, following the Cold War's end, and now plays a pivotal role in intra-state conflict throughout the region.

The increase in illegal arms trafficking is closely tied to the porosity of Nigeria's borders, presenting a critical threat to the nation's future stability. This crisis is exacerbated by a culture of violence and militarism from both the government and local oil communities. The frequent deployment of military forces to the Niger Delta to quell local unrest has led to the militarization of local ethnic militias. Further findings indicate that the leadership of various ethnic groups in the Niger Delta struggle has often selfishly pursued individual interests while neglecting those of the communities they represent. Some elites and leaders in these areas have engaged in opportunistic behavior, collaborating with government and oil company officials in what has been termed the "compensation game."

To address these myriad challenges, a national conference represented a significant step toward curbing regional violence and convening key stakeholders. However, fundamental problems within Nigerian federalism remain unaddressed. The government must not overlook the welfare of its citizens in favor of profit-driven relationships with multinational oil companies (MNOCs). Furthermore, MNOCs must be

held more accountable to local communities in their operational practices. Recommendations for a way forward include fostering dialogue between government and the oil communities, moving away from militaristic approaches, and establishing a master development plan for the Niger Delta. The government should also create a viable environmental policy to regulate oil operations in the region, enact laws to protect the environment, and ensure strict enforcement. Adequate compensation should be provided to affected local communities—not merely in the form of monetary payments to individuals or intermediaries, but through community development projects agreed upon with local residents. The establishment of separate local governments that reflect the diverse composition and origins of the warring ethnic groups could also help to mitigate politically motivated conflicts.

As a matter of national security, the government must ensure that both land and maritime borders are effectively policed, and that illegal trafficking is eradicated. The role of law enforcement agencies in the proliferation of arms cannot be overlooked. A significant portion of arms is acquired to meet the operational needs of these forces. Consequently, their increasing demand for arms and ammunition exacerbates the proliferation of small arms in the country. Moreover, the legacy of prolonged military rule is widely regarded as a critical factor in the proliferation of illicit SALW within Nigeria; this period entrenched a militarized mindset and a culture of violence that characterizes much of contemporary criminality and fuels the escalating demand for small arms among non-state actors. Additionally, the culture of impunity that has persisted since the military era undermines the rule of law, affecting the efficiency of regulations concerning SALW in Nigeria. This situation is compounded by corruption and governance failures, which not only undermine the rule of law but also create pervasive animosity that fuels conflicts across the country, further driving the demand for SALW.

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

### Research Question 1

*What are the sources of small arms and light weapons in the Niger Delta Area?*

**Table 1: Response of the sources of small arms and light weapons in the Niger Delta Area**

s/n	Items	SA	A	SD	D	Mean	Std. D	RM
1.	Purchase from national arms dealers	96	138	90	62	2.69	1.75	A
2.	Sales and rentals by retired and serving security personnel's	109	183	61	33	2.95	1.79	A
3.	Sales by returning peacekeepers	9	15	93	269	1.39	1.31	R
4.	Sales of recycled weapons from decommissioning exercise	23	35	144	184	1.73	1.46	R
5.	Oil-for arms exchange	120	114	80	72	2.73	1.77	A
6.	Weapons provided by political parties	163	138	51	34	3.11	1.84	A

**Key:** Mean value  $\geq 2.5$  is accept (A) while that  $\leq 2.5$  is rejected (R)

**Source:** Field work 2023.

Table 4.1 showed that the mean responses of the various sources of small arms and light weapons in the Niger Delta Area. The table revealed that weapons provided by the political parties ( $\bar{X} = 3.11$ , Std = 1.84), Oil-for-arm exchange ( $\bar{X} = 2.73$ , Std = 1.77), sales and rentals by retired and serving security personnel's ( $\bar{X} = 2.95$ , Std = 1.79) and purchase from national arms dealers ( $\bar{X} = 2.69$ , Std = 1.65) were the accepted response of the source of small arms and light weapons in the Niger Delta Area with high mean score greater than critical mean rating of 2.5.

**Research Question 2:** *What are the factors responsible for proliferation of arms and light weapons in the Niger Delta area?*

**Table 2: Response of the factors responsible for proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the Niger Delta**

s/n	Items	SA	A	SD	D	Mean	Std.D	RM
1.	Porous borders	122	108	95	61	2.75	1.77	A
2.	Inadequate Internal Security	188	109	55	34	3.16	1.86	A
3.	Lethality	106	96	90	94	2.55	1.74	A
4.	Portability and easiness to conceal	82	198	85	81	3.03	1.73	A
5.	Low costs and availability	99	97	95	95	2.51	1.74	A
6.	Communal Conflicts	102	116	91	77	2.62	1.75	A
7.	Religious crises	174	108	61	43	3.06	1.84	A
8.	Social agitation	122	144	62	58	2.85	1.79	A

**Key:** Mean value  $\geq 2.5$  is accept (A) while that  $\leq 2.5$  is rejected (R)

**Source:** Field work 2023.

Table 4.2 showed that communal conflict ( $\bar{X} = 2.62$ , Std = 1.75), inadequate Internal security ( $\bar{X} = 3.16$ , Std = 1.86), social agitations ( $\bar{X} = 2.85$ , Std = 1.79), portability and easiness to conceal ( $\bar{X} = 3.03$ , Std = 1.73), low cost and availability ( $\bar{X} = 2.51$ , Std = 1.74), and religious crisis ( $\bar{X} = 3.06$ , Std = 1.84). All the aforementioned sources and other were associated with high mean scores greater than the critical mean rating of 2.5

## DISCUSSION OF FINDING

### Sources of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Niger Delta

The results indicate that the various sources of small arms and light weapons in the Niger Delta area include oil-for-arms exchanges, sales and rentals by retired and serving security personnel, weapons provided by political parties, and purchases from national arms dealers, among others. This finding aligns with the observations of Okorie, Egobueze and Amadi (2025), who noted that sources of these weapons include those captured during confrontations with the Nigerian military and police, as well as weapons sold to militias and illegal arms dealers by corrupt elements within the Nigerian military. Additionally, political parties have been known to supply weapons for electoral violence and intimidation, while stolen oil offshore has been exchanged for arms. Weapons have also been acquired from ex-military personnel stationed in Bakassi and other locations, as well as from both local and foreign arms dealers. Some weaponry has reportedly been captured or purchased from Cameroonian soldiers, and there are indications of direct supplies to Boko Haram fighters from Al-Qaeda affiliates.

Ogele, Egobueze & Owabie (2021) posit that small arms and other weapons were introduced in Africa by Europeans prior to colonialism during the illegitimate slave trade. Europeans utilized guns and ammunition to achieve their imperial ambitions, often using force to suppress African resistance to their incursions and conquests. The British also employed gunboat diplomacy to compel African chiefs into signing various treaties.

The weapons currently circulating in Nigeria largely originate from local fabrication, the remnants of arms used during the Nigerian Civil War, thefts from government armories, smuggling, and dishonest dealings by government-accredited importers. Additionally, ethnic militias, insurgents from neighboring countries, and multinational oil companies operating in the oil-rich Niger Delta contribute to the armament situation. Astonishingly, among the 640 million small arms circulating globally, it is estimated

that 100 million are in Africa, with approximately 30 million in sub-Saharan Africa and about 10 million in the West African sub-region. Kingana (2010) concluded that neighboring countries are significant sources of small arms and light weapons, a situation exacerbated by porous borders and ongoing conflicts in those regions.

Evidence suggests that illegal arms transfers are more likely to occur during politically charged periods, such as presidential elections and transitional governments, which are often preceded by violent conflict and instability. Politicians may distribute arms to groups of political thugs to ensure victory in elections, leading to the problematic situation where, even after elections conclude, these weapons remain with the thugs. Subsequently, such individuals may use the remaining arms to instigate violence against the government.

### **Factors responsible for Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Niger Delta**

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) in the Niger Delta region can be attributed to a myriad of interconnected factors. Research indicates that communal conflict, inadequate internal security, social agitations, and factors intrinsic to the weapons themselves—such as portability, ease of concealment, lethality, and durability—significantly contribute to the worrying trend of arms proliferation (Kingana, 2010). The region, known for its rich oil reserves, has experienced recurring violent confrontations between various ethnic groups and government forces, leading to a desperate need for protection among citizens and militias alike.

Communal conflicts often erupt due to disputes over land, resources, and ethnic grievances, making weapons an attractive option for individuals and groups seeking to defend their interests. In the Niger Delta, the failure to resolve these tensions amicably has led to arms becoming a necessity for self-defense, further fueling the proliferation of SALWs. This situation is exacerbated by inadequate internal security measures, where state security forces are either overwhelmed or ineffective, as seen in the rise of vigilante groups that take the law into their own hands (Kingana, 2010).

Social agitations, particularly those involving oil extraction and environmental degradation, have led various communities to mobilize and demand their rights. Groups like the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) have used violence as a means of protest, amplifying the demand for arms among these groups (Pavanello et al., 2012). The societal context in which these groups operate often legitimizes the use of violence, creating a culture where SALWs become integral to the struggle.

Moreover, the inherent characteristics of small arms and light weapons further facilitate their proliferation. Their portability and ease of concealment make them particularly attractive for individuals looking to evade scrutiny. As noted by McLean (2000), the lethality of these weapons means that they can be used effectively in a range of violent confrontations, leading to their high desirability among both criminals and civilians.

The availability of weapons at low costs also plays a critical role in proliferation. With a plethora of local and international arms dealers operating in and around the Niger Delta, access to these weapons has become alarmingly easy. This situation is further complicated by porous borders, allowing for the smuggling of arms from conflict-ridden neighboring countries, thus increasing the supply of SALWs in the region (Kingana, 2010).

Cultural customs and traditions can also influence the proliferation of small arms. In some communities, owning a firearm is viewed as a symbol of power or status. The desire to protect one's family or community from perceived threats often leads individuals to acquire weapons, reinforcing the cycle of violence (McLean, 2000). Additionally, religious crises and tensions between different faith groups have led to outbreaks of violence, which further necessitate the need for firearms as a means of self-defense or retaliation.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The findings of this study indicate that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) has inflicted significant hardship on the populace of the Niger Delta and has undermined the rule of law,



posing a serious threat to the development of democracy in the region. The ramifications of this proliferation extend to the national economy, diverting substantial resources from national, state, and local government budgets toward security measures. Consequently, this has promoted criminal activities, including community conflicts, youth restiveness, oil bunkering, hostage-taking, political thuggery, and armed robbery. These issues have contributed to the escalation of crises in the Niger Delta, leading to increased attacks on oil facilities and personnel, particularly expatriates.

The study focuses on the investigation and analysis of arms proliferation and its detrimental effects on the development of democracy in Nigeria. It reveals that politicians acquire and utilize weapons during election periods, further exacerbating the climate of violence and insecurity. The findings illustrate that the proliferation of arms stifles democratic development, ultimately impeding overall progress in the region. Moreover, the research highlights that the legacy of protracted internal and regional conflicts in Africa has resulted in a vast accumulation of weapons in the region, which are frequently employed to perpetrate violent crimes and fuel ongoing conflicts within Nigeria. The study also underscores the challenge posed by the weak capacity of government institutions to strengthen, harmonize, and enforce effective arms control legislation across the continent.

Regional institutions are becoming increasingly significant in addressing peace and security issues in Africa, yet the widespread proliferation of SALW continues to lead to human rights abuses, mass displacement, and an erosion of the rule of law, among other negative consequences. As such, it is critical for stakeholders—both local and international—to prioritize robust measures aimed at curbing the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, thereby fostering a more secure and peaceful environment conducive to democratic development in the Niger Delta and beyond.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Institutional Strengthening and Job Creation:** The Nigerian government should prioritize strengthening its institutions and processes to enhance social provisioning for its citizens, who are increasingly frustrated with governance failures. This frustration often leads to violence and crime, which in turn increases the demand for small arms and light weapons (SALW). Additionally, the government should implement an aggressive job creation program aimed at Nigerian learners and idle youths, who are becoming hopeless due to lack of opportunities. By addressing these socio-economic challenges, the government can mitigate the factors driving the proliferation of SALW.
2. **Promoting Peaceful Coexistence:** Intervention efforts at the national, state, and local levels should be strengthened to promote peaceful coexistence among the diverse ethno-religious and political groups in Nigeria. Such initiatives can help minimize the outbreak and persistence of violent conflicts that fuel arms proliferation. By fostering a culture of peace and tolerance, Nigeria can reduce the reliance on SALW and create an environment conducive to sustainable development.
3. **Security Awareness and Orientation:** The National Orientation Agency should collaborate with credible civil society organizations (CSOs) and the media to implement enlightenment and orientation programs. These programs should focus on security situation awareness and security consciousness, which are critical to crime prevention. By educating the public on the importance of monitoring their surroundings and reporting suspicious activities, including arms trafficking, to security agencies, Nigeria can leverage community participation in preventing the proliferation of SALW.
4. **National Arms Control Strategy:** The adoption of a National Arms Control Strategy (NACS) is essential to guide the clean-up and prevention of SALW circulation in Nigeria. This strategy should outline clear policies, regulations, and enforcement mechanisms to control the flow of small arms and light weapons, both within and into the country. By having a comprehensive framework in place, Nigeria can more effectively tackle the challenge of SALW proliferation.
5. **Enhanced Border Security:** The strengthening of border security arrangements is crucial through enhanced intra- and inter-state collaboration among security and intelligence agencies in maritime and land border areas. This cooperation is necessary to ensure the effective trafficking and interdiction of

SALW traffickers. By securing Nigeria's borders, the country can significantly reduce the influx of illegal arms and thereby decrease the availability of SALW, which is a critical step towards curbing their proliferation and mitigating associated violence and insecurity.

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