

Factors and Effect of the Proliferation of Small and Medium Arms in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: Proliferation of Small and medium arms have become a common sight since Nigeria returned to democratic governance in 1999. It has been observed that violence before, during and after elections have been orchestrated due to the presence and misuse of these weapons. This avoidable catastrophe is traceable to a number of factors. This study therefore examines the factors influencing the proliferation of small and medium arms in Nigeria. The objectives of the study seek to identify the factors responsible for proliferation of small and medium arms, the effect of proliferations of small and medium arms and measures to mitigate the menace. This study identified factors responsible for the proliferation of small and medium arms to include among others, conflict racketeering, poverty and unemployment, weak border controls, political instability, international arms trade, lack of effective gun control legislation and cultural and social factors. Group conflict theory and subculture of violence theory were espoused as theoretical framework. The paper thus submits that political violence, terrorism, ethnic militia, bad governance and a militarized election system which are all vestiges of an arms-festered society will prevail, until and unless the organic context which precipitates it (championed by corporate buccaneerism, poverty and festering primitive materialism) is comprehensively and adequately checked. It is recommended that a conscious effort at the regional, sub-regional and international levels must be made in order to help check the threat to peace and development within the sub-region. Also, the push factors for arms proliferation must be abated and severed.

KEYWORDS: criminal networks, criminogenic environment, ethnic militia, militarized elections, proliferation, small and medium arms

INTRODUCTION

Africa and her many component States have suffered and are still suffering from internal conflicts and armed violence. The widespread and misuse of Small and Medium Arms (SMAs) has become a nightmare for government and policy makers. Small arms spread has generated lots of concern due to its linkage to various forms of social vices. Kirui (2020) defined small arms as military-type or commercial-type weapons which comes in different shapes, types and sizes. Many factors have been identified over time by scholars and stakeholders as influencing the surge in arms proliferation. Major factors include poverty, economic disparity, lackadaisical attitude in stocking arms by police, ethno-religious diversity, the quest for easy profits, self-defence reflex, rise in crime, cultural practices, greed, porous borders, inadequate border protection, etc. Gerhard (1987) asserts that arms proliferation is influenced by unchecked military activities, multiplicity of conflicts and personal security arrangements, burgeoning insecurity and privatization of security. The scholars hold the view that these factors have far-reaching impact on the quantum of arms in circulation in Nigeria.

Unchecked arms have led to a militarized Nigeria where at every electoral regime, small arms and light weapons are commonly on display among agents of contending political parties jostling for political power. Nigeria has faced various security challenges including insurgency, terrorism and communal violence, often involving the use of small and medium arms. These challenges necessitate a better understanding of weapon proliferation. The presence of illicit arms can exacerbate conflicts, leading to loss of life, displacement and economic instability. Small and medium arms proliferation in Nigeria poses a grave danger to regional borders and international neighbours. Nigeria's security issues can spill over into neighbouring countries, making it a regional concern. The issue of arms proliferation in Nigeria is a complex one, and it is influenced by various legal, political, and socioeconomic factors. Small Arms Survey (2005) noted that the vestiges of a colonized Nigeria are a militarized political system which leaves in its trail large caches of small and medium arms in unauthorized hands. The effect of these quantum of arms on the Nigerian State can only be imagined, especially given the rising spate of criminality, armed banditry and terrorist attacks the country is witnessing in recent times.

An analysis of existing laws and regulations regarding arms control in Nigeria is crucial to understanding the regulatory landscape. For example, Nigeria has the Firearms Act of 1959, which regulates the possession and use of firearms in the country. This law

Factors and Effect of the Proliferation of Small and Medium Arms in Nigeria

governs the licensing and registration of firearms, as well as penalties for illegal possession. There is also the National Firearms Control Policy which the government periodically introduced to control firearms. Besides, Nigeria is a signatory to various international treaties and conventions related to arms control and disarmament. These include the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPAPCEITSALW). Within its sub-region, Nigeria is part of regional initiatives like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons. However, available historical facts suggest that in spite of these policies, treaties and conventions, the national challenge of arms proliferation has neither been abated nor curbed within the country. The problem of small and medium arms proliferation in Nigeria is a complex and multifaceted issue that poses significant challenges to the country's security, stability, and development. It represents a grave security concern characterized by the widespread availability and circulation of firearms, including rifles, handguns, and light weapons, among various non-state actors and criminal groups. This proliferation exacerbates existing security challenges, including insurgency, terrorism, armed robbery, communal conflicts, and militancy, leading to increased violence, loss of lives, displacement of communities, and hindrances to socio-economic progress. The uncontrolled flow of these arms undermines state authority, fosters lawlessness, and threatens national cohesion, necessitating urgent measures to curb their availability and enhance arms control mechanisms. Studies on the quantum of illegal arms in Nigeria have raised the alarm that Nigeria has about 350 million illegal arms stockpiled in various location around the country (United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNRCPDA, 2017; Umore, 2020; Alimba, 2020). These illegal arms are reported to have been used to wreak havoc across the country and are still being used by terrorists in their dastardly acts. Addressing this problem requires comprehensive efforts from the Nigerian government, regional organizations, and the international community to curb arms trafficking, strengthen border security, improve disarmament and demobilization programs, and promote socio-economic development to address the root causes of violence and insecurity.

This study makes bold an attempt to situate the issue squarely within the context of factors influencing arms proliferation with a view to mitigating their inflows and attendant catastrophe. Although Lafollette (2000) and Alusala (2007) opined that disarmament and arms control are not exactly one and the same thing, it is hoped that this study aimed at identifying factors responsible for small and medium arms proliferation in Nigeria will become a viable resource material for security agencies and other stakeholders working to eradicate or minimize the proliferation of small and medium arms from our neighbourhoods where they have become harbingers of criminality and avoidable deaths.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study investigates the factors influencing the proliferation of small and medium arms in Nigeria. The specific objectives are:-

1. To examine the factors responsible for small and medium arms proliferation in Nigeria.
2. To ascertain the effects of proliferation of small and medium arms in Nigeria.
3. To identify measures to be adopted so as to mitigate the proliferation of small and medium arms in Nigeria.

Conceptualizing Small and Medium Arms

Within literature, there is a wide definition of what constitute Small and Medium Arms (SMAs). However, this study sees small and medium arms as constituting weapons which are portable and they come in various sizes and shapes. They may include mortars of calibres of less than 100mm, anti-aircraft missile systems, anti-tank and portable launchers. Small and medium arms have become a common sight in Nigeria's socio-economic neighbourhoods. Uwazie, Albert and Uzogwe (1999) and Conklin (2001) also aver that small and medium arms proliferation is the fall-outs of corporate buccaneerism. Corporate buccaneerism here refers to a system where agents and institutions of government aid arms proliferation or gloss over the criminal act in the face of glaring evidence of its occurrence. Jacob (2017) argued that more worrisome is the seemingly uncontrollable proliferation of small and light weapons in rural areas of the Nigerian climate, the availability of which makes violence imminent when conflicts ensue. These proliferated arms come in many types and sizes.

Brief Review of Relevant Literature

There are empirical studies which provide valuable insights into the various dimensions of arms proliferation in Nigeria, its causes, consequences, types and potential policy solutions. A report by the Small Arms Survey (2005) provides a comprehensive overview of armed violence and arms proliferation in Nigeria. In its study titled *Armed Violence in Nigeria: Patterns and Trends*, Small Arms Survey (2020) included data on the types of weapons involved, their sources, and their impact on different regions of the country. Among the arms included in the category of weapons commonly proliferated are AK-47 assault rifles, pistols and handguns, shotguns and submachine guns. Others include the RPGs (Rocket-Propelled Grenades), Grenades and Explosives and Light Machine Guns (LMGs). These weapons are easily found within illicit arms market. The proliferation of these small and medium arms has contributed to insecurity, violence, and conflict in different regions of Nigeria, making it a pressing issue for the government and international organizations to address.

Literature for this study on factors influencing the proliferation of small and medium arms in Nigeria, literature was reviewed in the following thematic areas: -

Factors and Effect of the Proliferation of Small and Medium Arms in Nigeria

Factors Responsible for Small and Medium Arms Proliferation in Nigeria.

The proliferation of SMAs in Nigeria is a major factor that has triggered violence in many parts of the country, leading to loss of lives and properties. It is important to note that arms proliferation has heightened the rate of terrorism in the nation and accounts for the pervasive and sustained political violence orchestrated by politicians in their quest to influence the electoral process to their advantage. Proliferated arms according to Ayantayo (2019) has spiralled disasters in the country. In his study titled "Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation in Nigeria: Consequences and Policy Implications, Ayantayo (2019) observed that small arms and light weapons have impacted negatively on security, violence and the development of the country. The study discusses policy recommendations for addressing the issue, including stricter arms control measures.

Historically, Nigeria has experienced periods of conflict and instability, which have left a legacy of arms in circulation. Events like the Nigerian Civil War and ethnic conflicts have contributed to the proliferation of arms (Klare, 1996). Conflict in neighbouring countries, such as Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, can spill over into Nigeria, leading to arms smuggling and increased availability of weapons (Rimmey, 2018). Some scholars focus on the supply side or push factors of proliferation of SMAs. They identify willing sellers, arms lucrativeness and porous borders. Yet others concentrate on demand or pull factors like crime, violence, conflicts, riots and unrests (Ayissi & Sall, 2005). Corruption within security forces and customs agencies has been observed as also facilitating the illegal importation and distribution of arms (Florquin & Berman, 2005; Okeke & Oji, 2014).

Small and medium arms proliferation is further strengthened by a combination of other factors such as armed groups. The presence of various armed groups, including militant groups in the Niger Delta and terrorist organizations like Boko Haram, contributes to the demand for arms. According to Raheem (2015), arms proliferation in the country has contributed largely to the activities of the extremist group Boko Haram. Raheem (2015) arrived at this conclusion in his study titled Boko Haram and the Arms Proliferation Challenge in Nigeria: A Perspective from the Lake Chad Basin. The study explores the sources and routes of arms supply to the group and concluded that there is the need for regional cooperation to combat arms trafficking. Other factors observed by scholars to contribute to arms proliferation include poverty and unemployment, weak border controls, political instability, international arms trade, lack of effective gun control legislation and cultural and social factors. In a similar study titled "Illegal Arms Proliferation and Conflicts in Nigeria: Implications for Sustainable Peace and Development", Alubo (2013) noted that among the implications of illegal arms proliferation is absence of peace and development. Alubo (2013) concluded that there is need for effective disarmament and arms control strategies.

Studies have revealed that there is a connection between arms proliferation and conflict racketeering. While Njoku (2017) argued that there is a strong link between arms proliferation and conflict dynamics in Nigeria, Ezekwesili and Ramachandran (2015) are of the opinion that the merchants of arms are closely linked to the merchants of death, especially in Northern Nigeria. Njoku (2017) maintained that availability of small arms has contributed to communal and ethno-religious conflicts in the country. Ezekwesili and Ramachandran (2015) on their part submitted that many of those trading illegally in arms do so in active connivance with terrorist armed groups principally for economic reasons.

Arms proliferation is also exacerbated by sociocultural and religious factors. It is on record that in some regions of Nigeria, the possession of arms is seen as a symbol of power and prestige, which ultimately encourage their acquisition.

Effects of Proliferation of Small and Medium Arms in Nigeria.

The effects of proliferation of SMAs are multifaceted and multidimensional, owing to the various reasons for the cartels running guns and weapons. Rimmey (2018) believes that there is ample evidence that arms are also made within Nigeria. Rimmey (2018) holds the view that the locally-made firearms include handguns, shotguns, among others. Illicit arms, supported by laundered financial flows have become the driving force behind insecurity in Nigeria, fuelling insurgency, terrorism, human trafficking, organized crime, internal insurrections among other destabilizing trends, thus posing an obstacle to the sustenance of peace and security (Morgan 2020). However, Adeniyi (2017) argued that reliable data on conflict fatality rates in Africa are unreliable, and most times misleading, although the death toll in such conflict-prone areas are often attributed to illegally sourced arms.

Soetan (2017) heaps the blame of the many-sided security issues confronting the nation on proliferated arms. Soetan (2017) traced the scourge to the era of the civil war (1967-1970s), and concluded that it burgeoned at the dawn of the Fourth Republic in 1999. A study by Morgan (2020) titled "Reducing Illicit Financial and Arms Flows to Achieve Target 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals: Perspectives from Nigeria and the West African Sub-Region", concludes that the direct effect of proliferation of SMAs and terrorism financing in Nigeria and the sub region is evident in the serious challenge of insecurity and the human and material cost to Nigeria and the sub region at large.

The widespread availability of these weapons has contributed to increased violence, including armed conflicts, communal clashes, and other criminal activities, leading to loss of lives and property. Proliferation of arms has exacerbated insecurity across the country, making it challenging for the government to maintain law and order. This has led to displacement of communities and created a climate of fear. Human Rights Abuses are commonplace in Nigeria today due to so much arms in circulation and they are being handled by criminal elements and unauthorized persons. The use of small and medium arms in conflicts often results in human rights abuses, including civilian casualties, forced displacement, and sexual violence. The insecurity stemming from arms

Factors and Effect of the Proliferation of Small and Medium Arms in Nigeria

proliferation hampers economic development as it deters foreign investment, disrupts agriculture, and leads to the loss of livelihoods, particularly in conflict-affected areas. The effect of proliferated small and medium arms has a serious linkage with political instability. The availability of arms is usually exploited by political actors leading to political instability and undermining democratic processes.

Much of the catastrophe experienced within the sub-region are as a result of regional spill-over of conflicts. Arms proliferated in Nigeria can have regional implications, as weapons can cross borders and contribute to conflicts in neighbouring countries, potentially destabilizing the entire region. Widespread arms proliferation also has debilitating effect on Disarmament. Disarming and demobilizing armed groups and individuals becomes more challenging when most parts of the country suffer arms proliferation, and it requires significant resources and political will to check.

Measures to Mitigate the Proliferation of Small and Medium Arms in Nigeria.

Mitigating the proliferation of small and medium arms in Nigeria requires a comprehensive and multi-pronged approach. As widespread as the effect of SMAs' proliferation is in Nigeria, the measures required to mitigate it are also multidimensional. Ayissi and Sall (2005) noted that work in partnership with civil society and political authorities, establishing close collaboration with the economic stakeholders at the regional and sub-regional level is the panacea for achieving the much-desired goal of curtailing reckless arms inflows into Nigeria. Improving border security, disarmament programs, stricter arms control measures, community engagement and education and awareness are some of the quick-fixes that may be on the table.

Strengthening Border Control: Improved border security to prevent the illegal entry of arms into the country will surely impact positively in the drive to curb illicit arms. This may include better surveillance, increased patrols, and collaboration with neighbouring countries to curb arms smuggling.

Disarmament and Demobilization Programs: The conscious implementation of effective disarmament and demobilization programs to encourage armed groups and individuals to surrender their weapons voluntarily should be pursued. This can be matched with the alternatives of incentives provision such as job training and community reintegration support.

Arms Traceability and Marking: government should enforce regulations that require the marking and traceability of firearms, making it easier to track the origin and movement of weapons. When the origin and destination of fire arms are easily traced, arms bearers will want to find alternative to such illicit business.

Firearms Registration and Licensing: There are laws regarding registration and licensing of fire arms in Nigeria. Government and stakeholders must insist that the process for registering and licensing firearms is followed strictly, ensuring that only responsible individuals and entities have access to them. Regularly audit and update firearm registries.

Community Engagement: there is no gain saying that most of the violence that results from armed conflict affect community folks more. Hence, stakeholders must engage with communities affected by armed violence to build trust and promote peaceful conflict resolution. Communities should be encouraged to report illegal arms and they should be provided with alternatives to violence.

Education and Awareness: arms proliferation can be mitigated with stoutly launched public awareness campaigns about the dangers of arms proliferation and the importance of disarmament. Target Schools, youth groups and local leaders should be the target audience so as to promote a culture of peace.

Law Enforcement and Prosecution: The Strengthening of law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute those involved in arms trafficking and illegal possession of firearms would go a long way in checking arms proliferation. This should followed with the implementation of stricter penalties for offenders.

International Cooperation: this study submits that collaboration with neighbouring countries and international organizations to combat arms smuggling across borders is a right step that can help curb arms proliferation. This would involve sharing of intelligence and resources to address the regional dimension of the problem.

Conflict Resolution: Address the underlying causes of conflicts in Nigeria, such as poverty, governance issues, and ethnic tensions, through diplomatic means and inclusive peace processes, is in itself a strategy to reducing arms in circulation. Unmitigated conflicts are the primary harbingers of arms proliferation.

Stockpile Management: the office of National Security Adviser (ONSA) should, in collaboration with the security agencies of government initiate, empower and improve the security and management of government stockpiles of weapons to prevent theft and diversion to unauthorized users.

Small Arms Collection Programs and Regular Firearms Audits: the establishment of voluntary small arms collection programs that incentivize the surrender of weapons in exchange for compensation or community development projects. And conducting regular audits of military and law enforcement arsenals to ensure accountability and prevent leakage of weapons to non-state actors could go a long way to strengthen control on arms proliferation.

Engage Civil Society: Work on arms control cannot be successful until there is a close working partnership with civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that focus on arms control and peacebuilding. They can play a crucial role in advocacy and awareness campaigns. Mitigating arms proliferation is a complex and long-term endeavour that requires the

Factors and Effect of the Proliferation of Small and Medium Arms in Nigeria

commitment of the stakeholders in the Nigerian project. These would include the Nigerian government in cooperation with regional partners, and the involvement of local communities and civil society.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the theoretical perspectives of group conflict theory (GCT) and the subculture of violence theory respectively.

Group conflict theory

Group conflict theory was propounded by George Bryan Vold in 1958. The theory also known as the group conflict theory of crime, focuses on the role of group dynamics and conflicts in the occurrence of crime, argues that the social nature of crime is as a result of opposing interests between groups within the same culture. Vold (1958) further stated that humans are naturally social beings, forming groups based on biases favourable to them at one point or the other.

The basic assumption of group conflict theory of crime holds that crime in society was a product of individuals' and groups' interest; and that criminalization was a contention between powerful groups over powerless groups. Synthesized in its theoretical argument, the GCT as developed by Vold (1958) focused on the cardinal reasons for which group sociations are formed. Vold (1958) argued that humans would not seek to belong to groups unless to satisfy two distinct needs; the first is due to an inner drive to relate with other individuals as members of the community, the second is in recognition that their membership of certain interest groups guarantees their individual (personal) interests made possible by the collective strength from the group.

Arms are usually proliferated by cartels, and political violence is usually committed by group members either as representatives of a political party or their sympathizers, to demonstrate their might over other contending group(s); or as a buffer or as a reprisal. When individuals join such arms dealing groups and end up using the arms to perpetrate violence, from the understanding of GCT, such persons may have only found a fertile environment to satisfy their inner drives.

Taking the argument further, Baumeister and Vohs (2015) argued that perceived competition for limited resources leads to hostilities between groups. In their strand of realistic group conflict theory, Baumeister and Vohs (2015) observed that scarce resources to satisfy individuals in society are enough to push one group or the other into criminality including the sourcing of lethal weapons with which to prosecute the conflict. As Raosaheb (2016), Chandio, Tarique and Fatima (2019) puts it, the crime of arms proliferation only goes to substantiate the existentialists' argument that man engages himself only on the things which he considers ancillary to his existential appetites

Criticisms

Group conflict theory of crime has generated its share of criticism over the years.

Critics argue that the theory oversimplified the concept of conflict within society Jeffery (1958). They contend that not all crime can be attributed solely to group conflicts, and that individual motivations and psychological factors also play a significant role.

Another strong criticism of the GCT is its lack of empirical evidence. Some scholars have criticized Vold's theory for its limited empirical support (Bernard, 1981). They argued that it is difficult to test and validate the theory through empirical research, which raises questions about its scientific validity. The GCT also suffer other criticisms. Critics assert that group conflict theory neglects other important factors contributing to crime, such as economic conditions, social inequalities, and individual deviant behaviour. Other scholars criticized Vold's theory for its deterministic nature. They argue that the GTC suggests that crime is a direct result of group conflicts, which some find overly deterministic and reductionist, failing to account for the complexity of human behaviour. Despite these criticisms, the theory is not invalidated, as it still explains the factors influencing the proliferation of small and medium arms in Nigeria.

Subculture of violence theory.

Wolfgang and Ferracuti introduced the subculture of violence theory in 1967 in their book "The Subculture of Violence: Towards an Integrated Theory in Criminology". The theory primarily focuses on explaining the variation in violent behaviour within societies. Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1982) subculture-of-violence theory uses norms and values as explanatory variables of the origin of violent crime. The theory states that the norms shared by a group of people sometimes define violence as an appropriate response to certain circumstances. These norms have a reality of their own and influence behaviour, sometimes leading people to engage in violent crime in order to conform to other's expectations. Although the theory does not explore the historical and socio-structural origins of these norms in detail, it argues that norms originate in the social conditions of certain societies, social class, racial and ethnic groups and are learned by successive generations (Conklin, 2001; Adler, Mueller & Laufer, 1995).

Subculture of violent theory provided insights into the factors contributing to the use and spread of small and medium arms in Nigeria within the context of violence.

From the standpoint of the theory, arms proliferation exist due to the fact that some members of society who belong to certain subcultural groups find themselves conforming to such group norms as dictated by the group (s). In other words, arms proliferation is said to be a subcultural response, and a conformity to subculture norms by its members. The subculture of violence theory posits

Factors and Effect of the Proliferation of Small and Medium Arms in Nigeria

that in some societies or subcultures, violence becomes normalized as a means of resolving conflicts or gaining status. In Nigeria, certain cultural or social groups might have developed a subculture where the possession and use of arms are seen as acceptable ways to assert power, settle disputes, or protect one's interests. This supports the argument of Loftin and Robert (1974) that arms bearing and arms dealing have something in common, especially in societies where conflict is a repeated occurrence and the moral fibre is weak.

According to the theory, individuals learn violent behaviour through socialization processes within their subculture. In Nigeria, this could mean that many young people are exposed to a culture where arms are readily available, and the use of violence is learned and reinforced through peers, family, or community networks. When this happens, the presence of arms within the neighbourhoods becomes commonplace. Young persons within such areas would usually find it difficult to adjust to generally permissible social standards. Keen (2001) describes such situation as “enforcing interest and readjustment of socio-economic strategies”.

With arms within the reach of many unauthorized non-state actors, legitimization of violence becomes inevitable. The subculture theory holds the view that violent actions may be legitimized when too many illegal arms are within reach in a society and laws prohibiting such arms-flow are weak or loosely enforced. This might manifest as individuals and groups justifying the acquisition and use of arms for self-defence, territorial control, or achieving political goals. A fall-out of this illegal legitimization of armed violence is a cycle of retaliation. The subculture of violence theory argues that conflicts can escalate because violence begets more violence. In Nigeria, this could explain how localized disputes and conflicts can spiral out of control, with each party feeling compelled to arm themselves to protect against potential threats. The aftermath of such an escalated violence scenario is a near-uncontrolled availability of weapons. Arms proliferation in Nigeria is said to have been influenced by the spiralled violence which are ethnic, religious, politically or socio-culturally motivated. Such a situation makes the proliferation of small and medium arms inevitable (Loftin & McDowall, 1981). Loftin and McDowall (1981) have argued that violence that involves arms will automatically influence/motivate the aggressor-party or the victim-party to resort to arms-bearing, a cyclical arms-induced conflict becomes inevitably practicable.

Wolfgang and Ferracuti's (1982) subculture of violence theory is understood in this study to have been able to explain small and medium arms proliferation in Nigeria based on the influence subcultural norms have on members of such subcultures, which influence their behaviours, impacting negatively on the rest of the society.

Criticisms

Wolfgang and Ferracuti's subculture of violence theory has been influential within the field of criminology and sociology. Despite its ability to explain crime in society, and as used to justify arms proliferation in Nigeria by this study, the theory still suffered some scholarly criticism.

One major criticism is that of Jack (1985) who said the theory can be overly deterministic in its emphasis on culture as the primary driver of violent behaviour. The critic argued that it oversimplifies complex social phenomena by reducing violence to cultural factors alone, neglecting the importance of structural and economic factors (Miller, Cohen & Bryant, 1997).

Critics (Keen, 2001) contended that the theory can be ethnocentric because it was initially developed in the context of studying violence in the United States. When applied to other cultural contexts, it may not adequately consider the unique historical, social, and political factors that influence violent behaviour. As lack of attention to structural factors is a strong criticism against the subculture theory of violence, the theory tends to downplay structural issues such as poverty, inequality, and limited access to resources that can contribute to violent behaviour. Critics argue that focusing solely on cultural factors ignores the broader social context in which violence occurs (Adler et al, 1995).

Wellford and Soule (2002) argued that the subculture theory over placed emphasis on individual learning. The scholars argue that it may not account for the broader social forces and institutions that shape behaviour. For example, it may not adequately address the influence of institutions like the criminal justice system.

Thornberry, Cohen and Krisberg (2002) criticized the subculture of violence theory on account of its limited predictive power. The critics suggested that the subculture of violence theory lacks strong predictive power. It may describe patterns of violence but did not offer practical guidance for intervention or prevention efforts. Ikoh (2002) on his part criticized the theory for what he termed its neglect of gender and intersectionality. The scholar noted that the original theory largely focuses on male violence and does not adequately address gender-based violence or the intersectionality of various social identities. This omission he argued, limits its applicability to understanding all forms of violence.

DISCUSSION OF KEY ISSUES

Nigeria is set for a gradual but critical development in all areas of its economic spheres which by design would trickle down to social and economic recovery of the nation and the citizenry. This is the ambition of the President Muhammadu Buhari-led Federal Government of Nigeria as it launches the 2021-2025 National Development Plan on December 22, 2021. However, to achieve this great ambition, the security challenges the country faces at the moment must be subdued at all cost (Larson, 2002). As already

Factors and Effect of the Proliferation of Small and Medium Arms in Nigeria

highlighted in this paper above, the cost of illegal arms in the country cannot be overstated as arms in the wrong hands are often misused and have caused and are still causing untold catastrophe (Aver, Nnorom & Ilim, 2014).

As opined by Abiodun, et al (2018), the most potent threat to our democracy and the survival of the nation today is the quantum of proliferated SMAs. It is true that the effects of proliferated SMAs have been felt in many areas of our national life including in politics, such that our electioneering atmosphere is usually littered with all manner of arms (legal and illegal). This position aligns with the Cross River State Armoury, Department of Operations, Nigeria Police Command, Calabar (2021), which states that although the quantum of arms supplied to the Cross River State Command of the Nigeria Police was grossly inadequate to meet the fire arms need to police the Command, a substantial number of these arms have been lost to criminals, and are being deployed to cause mayhem including election violence in the state. The result of these can only be imagined, as arms-aided elections in itself is the corruption of the concept of free and fair election, a dent on the rule of law and a travesty of democracy. This no doubt, led Moses and Ngomba (2017) to state that Nigeria's security has descended so terrifyingly and the continued proliferation is a drain on the political, economic, and socio-cultural development of the Nigerian state.

CONCLUSION

This study on the factors influencing the proliferation of SMAs in Nigeria concludes on the premise of available data that the evil bedevilling the nation in the form of SMAs proliferation is indeed endemic and cancerous. The study submits therefore, that this cankerworm must be brought to its knees, if we desire a peaceable, violence-free country where investors (local and foreign-sourced) can come and engineer a deliberate, sustainable development paradigm.

The survival of democracy is the liberalization and entrenchment of the ethos of full, deliberate, conscious, participatory governance. Besides being uncompromising with insecurity or the threat thereof, the concept of good governance by itself would mean among other things, the identification, nurturing and promotion of the realization of the potentials of citizens, who, in turn, engineer and catalyse national development and prosperity. Where there is good governance, development flourish and Citizens' living standards will improve remarkably.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing the proliferation of small and medium arms in Nigeria requires a multifaceted approach, including improved regional, sub-regional and international alliances, border controls, disarmament initiatives, poverty alleviation, and more effective gun control measures.

1. It is recommended that regional, sub-regional and international alliances must be brought to help check the threat to peace and development within the sub-region. This would include border security alertness, closure of illegal transit routes and stiff penalties for culprits.
2. The pull factors for arms proliferation must be severed. This would make the lucre attached to it to wane. In most places where arms proliferation is high, political violence is also high.
3. It is thought that if public office occupation can be made less attractive by way of closed opportunities to make quick and unaccounted wealth therefrom, the lust for political power at all cost, would gradually reduce and ditto, arms proliferation.
4. Those who use and misuse arms must be educated by all means necessary, the dangers associated with arms violence. No nation in arms struggle or arms conflict experiences growth and development. Everybody becomes a victim; both the aggressor and the victimized. Only the cartel profiteers, who, in most instances (with the case of Africa), are millions of kilometers away.
5. Arms struggle usually results in a vicious circle. To avert the scourge of this repetition, this criminality must be put to a halt to forestall an uncertain future. To achieve this, the Federal Government, in collaboration with the States and Local Government, and indeed all stakeholders must be brought to the discussion table, to sieve ideas and solutions from each and every one, on the best way forward.
6. It is almost certain that democracy, that is government through the ballot, has come to stay in Nigeria. To this end, this study recommends also that those who employ armed violence during elections should be tried and when found guilty by a court of law, they should be barred from standing for elections or holding public offices forthwith. This measure would curtail the lust for political power at all cost, and invariably check arms proliferation that have political undertone. It is suspected that when there is little or no political fanning on the embers of illegal arms dealing cartels, some may begin to consider alternative legitimate options of livelihood, since the crime of arms dealing would no longer be business-as-usual.

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Factors and Effect of the Proliferation of Small and Medium Arms in Nigeria

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Factors and Effect of the Proliferation of Small and Medium Arms in Nigeria

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