



Arms Production and Proliferation as a Major Threat to Nigeria's National Security: A Comparative Regional Analysis

Effiong, Jonah Ekpo (Ph.D)¹ & Inemesit, Enobong Uwah (Ph.D)²

Department of History and International Studies
Ritman University, Ikot Ekpene Akwa Ibom State

²Department of Business Administration, Akwa Ibom State University, Nigeria

¹0803528019, 0905345781, dreffiongekpo48@gmail.com

²08034921199, inemuwah@yahoo.com

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Abstract

The production and proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) constitute a major threat to Nigeria's national and human security architecture. While formal arms manufacturing remains limited, Nigeria is a conduit for illicit arms due to porous borders, weak regulation, local craft production, and transnational criminal networks. This research examines arms through a comparative regional analysis of Nigeria's major conflict zones, focusing on insurgency in the Northeast, banditry in the Northwest, farmer-herder conflicts in the North-Central region, separatist violence in the Southeast, and militancy in the Niger Delta. The findings reveal that arms proliferation in Nigeria is driven by a combination of economic deprivation, institutional failure, corruption, and regional insecurity dynamics. The paper highlights that arms proliferation is not merely a security problem but a governance and development crisis in all regions. The method involves contacting texts, relevant journals, and security and state fragility frameworks to explain how arms availability undermines the state monopoly of violence, escalates communal conflicts, weakens law enforcement, and sustains

criminal economics in Nigeria. The paper concludes that without comprehensive arms control, regional cooperation, community-based disarmament, and institutional reform, Nigeria's security challenges will persist. The paper recommends a multidimensional approach integrating border management, arms regulation, livelihood alternatives, and strengthened accountability mechanisms.

Keywords: Arms Proliferation, Small Arms and Light Weapons, National Security, Human Security, Nigeria, Light Weapons.

Introduction

Nigeria's security landscape reflects multiple overlapping conflicts fueled by the widespread availability of small arms and light weapons (SALW). Over the past two decades armed violence has expanded dramatically, with insurgency, banditry, communal clashes, separatist tensions, and militancy becoming persistent challenges. Central to these conflicts is the circulation of the production of weaponry beyond formal state control, undermining the Nigerian state's capacity to govern and provide security. While international research documents the impact of SALW on conflict, the Nigeria context presents unique dynamics marked by local arm production, illicit imports via porous borders, and a weak regulatory system. These conditions have empowered non-state actors and militarized criminal networks to challenge the state's monopoly of violence (Adekola, 2021). Further examining this, Umoh (2025) research the role of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) in intensifying the indigene–settler conflict in the Northern Senatorial Zone of Plateau State, Nigeria, between 2000 and 2012. The study demonstrates that the widespread availability of illicit firearms significantly increased both the frequency and lethality of violent confrontations, particularly within the ethno-religious tensions between indigenous communities and Hausa/Fulani settlers.

This paper examines arms production and proliferation as major threats to national security using comparative regional case studies from Bornu, Zamfara, Benue, Plateau, Enugu, and the Niger Delta. The study adopts human security and state fragility frameworks to explore how arms availability deepens insecurity and destabilizes communities. While arms production and proliferation are global phenomena, Nigeria presents a unique case due to its strategic location in West Africa, history of internal conflicts, and weak regulatory mechanism.

Arms Production and Proliferation

Arms production refers to the manufacture or assembly of weapons, either through formal defense industries or informal craft production. Arms proliferation involves the uncontrolled spread, circulation, and accumulation of weapons beyond legitimate state control (Afolayan 2020).

The proliferation of arms and weapons has negatively impacted global security and has become a high priority for international efforts to limit the production of weapons, especially those capable of mass destruction, such as chemical weapons. The world government has embarked on the integration of defense development, foreign policy, legal instruments, and multilateral trade arrangements. The world has witnessed the consequences of arms proliferation on global populations, especially in post-conflict societies. There is a critical need to consider the fragile nature of the peace they have achieved.

According to Nairobi (2000) Declaration:

The problem of the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons in the region has been exacerbated by internal political strife and extreme poverty. ... a comprehensive strategy to arrest and deal with the problem must include putting in place structures and processes to promote democracy, the observance of human rights, the rule of law, and good governance, as well as economic recovery and growth.

On the production of small arms, depending on their sophistication, they can be produced anywhere in the world. In Nigeria, there are many outlets thriving in the production and sales of “aba” guns in the eastern part of the country. Guns and petrol bombs are manufactured in virtually all parts of Nigeria. But these local arms are crude and unsophisticated, unlike the ones coming from Europe, America, and Asia. One cannot compare “aba” rifles with the Kalashnikov AK-47 assault rifles (Albin, 2018).

It is worth knowing that despite the sophistication of these rifles, they are cheap, robust, and durable, as they are very easy to manufacture. They can be easily assembled, transported, and used by children. For instance, in the Liberian war, many child soldiers used AK-47 rifles in the prosecution of the civil war. This has given the international community great concern about formulating and implementing strategic policy actions to reduce the proliferation level of small arms and light weapons, particularly among the world's civilian population.

Thus, these weapons have continued to kill or exterminate an average of 200,000 people on an annual basis in the so-called peaceful societies, while over 300,000 people are killed in conflict-ridden societies as millions of people suffer various degrees of injuries.

The crime rate of banditry, arson, communal conflict, religious crisis, and assassination has gone up in Nigeria since the 1990s, when the war in Liberia became intense. Some of the refugees hosted by Nigeria were ex-combatants who were not properly demobilized and had their arms hidden in their boxes. When hunger started playing its rhythms due to insufficient warfare facilities provided by the Nigerian government, then the human instinct of survival of the fittest became fanciful. Some of them sold these rifles to Nigerian criminals in order to have money to cater for their immediate needs, and these beneficiaries saw the deal as an opportunity to further equip their armory for smooth operations (Aluko, 2019).

But some other ex-combatants from Liberia resolve to join some criminal gangs in Nigeria to continue the shooting spree for material resources. Thus, since the outbreak of the Liberia crisis, the violent situation in Nigeria has tremendously increased, as the civil unrest has taken a new form. The activities of secessionist and regionist groups have become very virulent (Aning, 2023).

Arms proliferation has attracted high possession of weapons, which usually leads to misuse of these weapons. Through the arms proliferation, terrorist activities have been on the increase. The killings of innocent civilians and children through the use of bombs and grenades by terrorists have become very rampant in recent times. These activities occur in virtually every part of the world, which includes the London bombing, the Unabomber incident in the USA, coke prize operations in Columbia, insurgent bombing in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, bombing in the East, and the Basque bombing in Spain, among others.

The distribution pattern of arms proliferation can take either a vertical or horizontal form. Horizontal distribution pattern involves the distribution or access to arms by all state and non-state actors. The weapons that can be found at this level may include small arms and light weapons. On the other hand, vertical distribution patterns usually involve larger weapons or weapons of mass destruction like nuclear weapons, which are limited in access or production to some powerful nations while other state and non-state actors are prohibited from possessing them (Arowosegbe, 2010).

Arms production and proliferation are central to Nigeria's security crisis, reinforcing cycles of violence, displacement, and state fragility. Addressing these issues requires integrated arms control, strengthened governance, and socio-economic development. Military solutions alone are insufficient. For example:

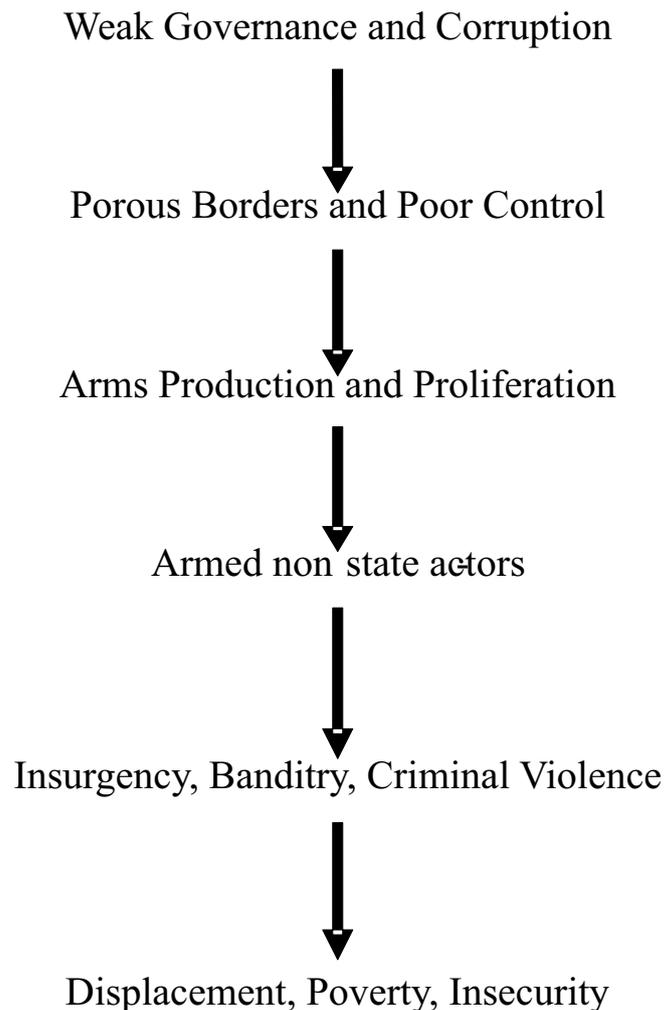


Figure 1: illustration of governance failure and border weakness

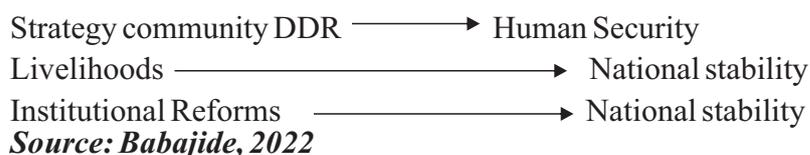
Source: Aning, 2003

This model illustrates how governance failure and border weaknesses enable arms proliferation, which fuels armed violence. The resulting insecurity further weakens state capacity, creating a self-reinforcing cycle. For instance, see comparative regional conflict and dynamics in Nigerian in the table below:

Table 1: Comparative regional conflict and dynamics in Nigeria.

North – East	Transnational Arms, Insurgency
North-West	Criminal Arms, Banditry
North – Central	Craft Arms, Communal Conflict
South – East	Black Market Arms Separatist Violence
Niger Delta	International Arms Militancy

Although arms proliferation is a national problem, its form and impact vary regionally requiring tailored policy response as:



- I. North-East Nigeria: Borno and insurgency. The Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) insurgencies have been sustained through a combination of smuggled arms, weapons seized from Nigerian forces, and cross-border supply networks from Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. These arms have transformed localized resistance into protracted insurgency, eroding civilian protection and state capacity.
- ii. North-West Nigeria: Banditry and criminal arms markets. In Zamfara, Kastina, and Kaduna states, bandit groups use assault rifles and machine guns acquired through illegal trade routes linked to cattle rustling and gold mining. These weapons enable large-scale kidnapping and rural depopulation.
- iii. North-Central: Benue and Plateau, Farmer-Herder Conflict. Pastoralist and farming communities in Benue and Plateau have migrated from rudimentary weapons to automatic rifles, escalating killings and displacement. Locally fabricated firearms have become increasingly sophisticated.

- iv. South-East Nigeria: Enugu and separatist violence. Separatist movements in the South-East, including elements associated with Biafran identity politics, acquire arms via black markets and clandestine channels. Homemade firearms and smuggled weapons have fueled episodes of violence and militarized confrontations with state forces.
- v. Niger Delta: Militancy and resource-based violence. In the Niger Delta, oil theft and militancy groups exploit illicit arms to challenge state authority and disrupt petroleum infrastructure. These groups benefit from transnational networks and black-market arms supplies (Onwoha, 2011).

Table 2: Regional arms dynamics in Nigeria and areas of arms proliferation.

S/NO	REGION	CONFLICT TYPES	SOURCE OF ARMS	ACTORS	OUTCOME
1	North-East	Insurgency	Smuggled and captured	Book-Haram	Territorial Insecurity
2	North-East	Banditry	Smuggled	Bandits	Kidnappings
3	North Central	Communal	Craft and Illicit	Militant	Displacement
4	South –East	Separatist	Black Market	Armed Group	militarization
5	Niger Delta	Militancy	Illicit trafficking	Criminal gangs	Economic sabotage

Source: Onwoha, 2011 and Babajide, 2022

Safety Measures for Management and Man-Made Threats: Man-made threats are a common challenge faced by all societies, making it essential to develop effective strategies to minimize the losses they cause. One critical approach is educating members of society on practical security measures for managing such threats. Public awareness and capacity building are central to effective security management in any society.

As security experts, it is imperative to consistently promote security awareness among armed personnel and clients by equipping them with practical knowledge on how to protect their lives and property from man-made threats (Bogumil, 2020). Through this process, the public and security stakeholders are empowered to act proactively when threats arise, thereby reducing their potential impact on overall well-being.

A typical example of a man-made security threat is kidnapping. Kidnapping is a criminal act that involves the unlawful abduction or detention of a person against their will, often for the purpose of ransom or other illegal gains, and constitutes confinement without legal authority (Buhari, 2021).

There are several practical measures through which kidnapping can be prevented or effectively managed. One important safety tip is to avoid behaviors and social activities that may attract the attention of kidnappers. Individuals are advised to refrain from openly displaying their wealth, nationality, or institutional affiliation. For instance, kidnappers may deliberately target employees of wealthy organizations for ransom. When individuals publicly advertise their association with such organizations in pursuit of social recognition, they inadvertently increase their vulnerability to abduction (Edeko, 2011). This exposure makes them easy targets, as kidnappers may place a ransom on them before release.

Another effective preventive measure is limiting movement and avoiding predictable routines. Regularly using the same routes can provide kidnappers with opportunities to monitor movement patterns and identify suitable locations for an attack. By varying routes and schedules, individuals make it more difficult for kidnappers to plan and execute an abduction (Ibeanu, 2006).

Furthermore, in the event of a gun battle between kidnappers and rescue teams, individuals are advised to lie flat on the ground and place their hands on their heads. This posture minimizes the risk of being struck by stray bullets and clearly signals that one is unarmed and poses no threat. Such actions reduce the likelihood of being mistakenly harmed by rescue personnel who may not be able to immediately identify civilians during such operations (Krause, 1999).

Arms Distribution Pattern: Major Threats to Nigeria's Security

Proliferation of arms or weapons really posed a great challenge to the maintenance of law and order in all countries, including Nigeria, as no country can boast to be 100% free of violent crimes. The adverse effect of this threat to national and international security has necessitated giving greater security to minorities by various governments, initiating unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral approaches and policies to limit the production of weapons, particularly those considered capable of causing mass destruction, like gas bombs. The world government has embarked on the integration of defense development, foreign policy, legal instruments, and multilateral trade arrangements to mitigate the threat of arms weapons production and proliferation (Ladan, 2019).

The world has become aware of the implication that arms proliferation can have on the world population, particularly those from post-conflict societies and economically weak states, like in Nigeria.

The crime rate of banditry, arson, communal conflict, religious crisis, and assassination has gone up in Nigeria since the 1990s, when the war in Liberia became intense. The Liberian civil war has contributed to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the neighboring countries, including Nigeria (Muggah, 2001).

However, the use of sophisticated and deadly weapons by criminals in different states of Nigeria, mostly in Borno, Benue, and others, is experienced both locally and internationally. For instance, insurgent bombing and shooting in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and violent armed robbery attacks like the Idi-Ape bank robbery incident in Ibadan, where many innocent civilians and policemen were killed by the robbers, have shown the destructive nature of modern weapons used and their high capacity to undermine the security of any people or community.

On the international front, the danger that the proliferation of weapons poses to the security of lives and property was displayed in several ugly events like the London bombing, this “Unabomber” incident in the US, the Coke prize, operations in Columbia, the bombing in Egypt, and the Basque bombing in Spain, among others.

Some of the terrorist organizations in the world have even adopted the use of chemical weapons like anthrax against their target population. The United States of America experienced an incident of anthrax attacks on some of its citizens just after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States (Nwolize, 2000).

The initial demobilization exercise, surprised by the economy that took place in Liberia, failed because there were still many arms in circulation among the civilians, and another reason was that the Taylor ex-combatants were not demobilized, which created room for suspicion, which later (among other reasons) resulted in another outbreak of armed conflict in that country. The developments, however, hindered the efforts to effectively rebuild post-conflict Liberia, preventing lasting peace and security in the country until the end of Taylor's rule.

Simulation in security planning and management of arms production and proliferation as major threats: The concept of simulation can be described as an essential instrument of decision analysis. It provides a valuable opportunity for security experts and practitioners to identify deficiencies in service delivery and operational practices, as

well as potential threats that were inadequately managed by Nigerian military officers. The relevance of simulation in contemporary security planning and management is immense, given the high level of uncertainty that now characterizes societal affairs, including security challenges, particularly in relation to Nigeria's issues of arms production and proliferation (Onwoha, 2011).

This sector was poorly organized and managed by unintelligent military officers. That was why the military failed in this aspect of the assignment in Boronu, Benue, and Jos Plateau. For instance, since the end of the Cold War, state actors have constituted less of a threat to national and international security compared to the destructive attitude portrayed by some non-state actors, which absolutely undermines the potential of the security sector to maintain law and order.

The event of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack in the United States has shown the very destructive dimension that the threat emanating from non-state actors has assumed, a dangerous situation as such. In Nigeria most organized killing and kidnapping is being planned by civilians or politicians. Prior to September 11, 2001, that ugly incident, we could hardly conceive the idea that commercially planned buildings could be used as weapons of mass destruction by terrorists. There is no doubt simulation assists us to appraise and compare alternative design plans and policies so that we can choose those that will enable us to achieve optimal performance for the best result as far as Nigeria's security is concerned (Osghae, 2016).

Simulation is vital to security planning because of its ability to clarify uncertainties and support the development of quantifiable solutions to challenges that may affect operations and policy actors within the security sector. Above all, simulation provides a valuable platform for exploring strategies to improve preparedness for risks, hazards, and security threats (Pezard, 2006).

Simulation is not a new concept and practice in security as far as military planning is concerned. In military fora, simulation is often applied by the guards and warriors. For instance, in the traditional Ila-orangun in present Osun State, Nigeria, after a series of simulation exercises by the community guards, they discovered that offensive attacks may come from enemies without prior notice, especially in the middle of the night; that is the tactic used by Fulani terrorists in Nigeria (Reno, 2011).

In most cases, in simulation practice, they may decide to dig a trench to surround the entire community for close observation as a body trap against the enemies, who may wish to launch an offensive attack and avoid being caught unaware. Other examples may

include the old Oyo empire wall, the Kano wall, etc. At this juncture, let us draw our attention to the task of this segment of the study as far as this research paper is concerned, which is to expose ourselves to some of the existing definitions of the term simulation.

However, simulation can be defined as the initiation of some real thing, state of affairs, or process. The act of simulating something generally entails representing certain key characteristics or behaviors of a selected physical or abstract system or a process of creating a model of an existing or proposed system in order to identify and understand those factors that control the system and/or to predict (forecast) the future behavior of the system (Suleman, 2020).

Almost any system that can be quantitatively described using equations and/or rules can be simulated. The underlying purpose of simulation is to shed light on the underlying mechanism that controls the behavior of a system. More practically, simulation can be used to predict the future behavior. That is, simulation can be used to predict the way in which the system will evolve and respond to its surroundings so that you can identify any necessary changes that will help make the system perform the way that you want it to.

It is a broad collection of methods used to study and analyze the behavior and performance of actual or theoretical systems'. Simulation studies are performed not on the real-world system but on a model of the system created for the purpose of studying certain system dynamics and characteristics. The purpose of any model is to enable its users to draw conclusions about the real system by studying and analyzing the model (Waldman, 2008).

In military studies, models are developed instead of analyzing real systems for several primary reasons: cost considerations, the unavailability of a real system, and the necessity to gain a deeper understanding of the relationships among system components. Similarly, the police can conduct simulation exercises to test their level of preparedness, particularly in terms of how promptly and effectively they can respond to security threats (Hoffman, 1998).

During such exercises, participants act out simulated scenarios as though they were real. However, it is evident that the Nigeria Police Force lacks a strong culture of security simulation. If such a culture were well established, the frequent loss of police officers to attacks on police stations, armed robbery, gunfire, and other security threats would likely be significantly reduced. The recurring failure of police personnel to respond

appropriately and effectively to emergencies suggests a low level of preparedness. This deficiency has contributed to public calls for the introduction of joint patrols comprising members of the police, vigilante groups, and the armed forces, particularly the army (Baseli, 2009).

Information Warfare as a Security Threat:

"Information warfare" is a relatively new term that has become popular vocabulary in national and international security settings. The concept of information has traditionally been a prominent feature of warfare, even right from the primitive age. The concept has moved beyond the traditional methods of propaganda and spying.

Computers have brought a new dimension to information warfare. In contemporary times computers are used to perform a lot of functions, as they now have a great impact on every aspect of human relations and development. Ten years ago no less than 400 million people were using computers for various tasks, but now there are more than one billion computer users, which shows the growing relevance computers enjoy in the new world order.

However, the basis of this research work is not only to conceptually define information warfare but also to focus on how information technology constitutes a security threat in Nigeria due to poor management and application. It will amount to a disservice if we fail to explain some of the major types of (modern) information warfare (Bar, 2005).

Traditionally, parties sought to know the strategic secrets of the other parties with the aim of gaining strategic advantage over the enemy parties. Some people would be sent to enemy camps for information sipping and espionage. Information could also be applied in the form of propaganda and destructive rumors with the aim of subjecting every party to perpetual confusion for political reasons.

Presently, information has assumed a more prominent role in the relation between one actor and the other in the contemporary global system. The reason for this is not far-fetched. The emergence of the information revolution in the Nigerian security system has created a new, uncompromised expression and a paradigm shift in modern warfare (Treverton, 1997).

The philosophical idea, which formed the basis of the emerging information warfare, can be ascribed, or better still be linked to, Sun Tzu's ideological orientation, which is interpreted as thus: "Attaining one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the pinnacle of excellence; subjecting the enemy's army without fighting is the true pinnacle of excellence."



Sun Tzu tried to present another face of strategy and warfare when he stressed the importance of creative application of information among parties, the greatest strategy through which parties can meet their political goals rather than adopting the traditional means of warfare like the use of weapons (Sulton, 1966).

The use of information in warfare is very important and is relatively cheaper, but its implication may be unprecedented and more destructive than the traditional means of warfare. That is why Boko Haram and bandits used it to destroy some communities in the north-eastern parts and middle belt of Nigeria.

Boko Haram has enough information on the location of the Nigerian Army and the types of ammunition; that is why, in most cases, they succeeded in capturing Nigerian Army locations and disarming them.

This research paper considers a scenario whereby groups of politicians, young people, and some security personnel archive information from a nation's military intelligence network and subsequently corrupt and destroy its strategic information infrastructure. Consequently, the impact of such electronic institutions and damage may be more devastating than aerial bombardment of such action. This tells us the importance of information technology in modern warfare and security management (Robert, 1974).

Therefore, the definition of information warfare has been a great subject of debate, especially in the 1990s. The term "information warfare" appears too wide. It includes several aspects of traditional military policy, such as battlefield command and control warfare, as well as other traditional types of electronic warfare. In Nigeria, as regards arms production and proliferation, information warfare is offensive and not defensive, used to give reliable information needed at the given time. Information systems were to exploit, corrupt, or destroy an adversary's information while protecting one's own. Such actions are designed to achieve advantages over military or business adversaries in Nigeria, but the reverse is the case (Lawmen, 1961).

Conclusion

The comparative analysis reveals that arms product and proliferation in Nigeria are regionally differentiated but structurally rooted in governance failure, economic marginalization, and institutional weakness. Military responses alone have proven insufficient, highlighting the need for comprehensive arms control and development-oriented strategies.

Arms production and proliferation represent a fundamental threat to Nigeria's national security and social stability. The persistence of armed violence across regions demonstrates that arms proliferation is both a cause and consequence of state fragility. Addressing this challenge requires coordinated national, regional, and community-based interventions that prioritize human security, governance reform, and sustainable development.

Recommendations

There is a growing number of illegal arms and weapons circulated among civilians in Nigeria. The incidence of violent crime has reached a very destructive dimension such that every innocent civilian and security practitioner in the country lives in perpetual fear due to the lethality of the weapons being used by criminal agents in recent times. The paper made the following recommendations for proper maintenance of peace and security. Nigeria needs to:

- i. Strengthen border security and regional cooperation.
- ii. Regulate and dismantle illicit local arms production.
- iii. Improve arms stockpile management.
- iv. Expand disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs.
- v. Address poverty and youth unemployment in conflict-prone areas.

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