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**Small Arms Proliferation and Regional Security: Ecowas and United Nations Interventions in Nigeria (2015- 2024)**

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***Abstract***

*The proliferation of small arms and light weapons has become a major threat to peace and security in Nigeria and the wider West African region. This study examined small arms proliferation and regional security with particular focus on the interventions of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations in Nigeria between 2015 and 2024. The study adopted a qualitative research design and relied on secondary data obtained from academic publications, policy documents, and international security reports. Conflict theory was used as the theoretical framework to explain how competition for power, resources, and political influence contributes to armed conflicts and the demand for illicit weapons. The findings revealed that porous borders, weak institutional capacity, regional conflicts, and the activities of transnational criminal networks have significantly contributed to the proliferation of small arms in Nigeria. The analysis also showed that the availability of these weapons has intensified insurgency, banditry, communal violence, and organized crime across different parts of the country. Furthermore, the study found that although ECOWAS and the United Nations have implemented various arms control frameworks and regional security initiatives, challenges such as weak enforcement mechanisms and inadequate coordination among security agencies continue to undermine these efforts. The study concludes that effective control of small arms proliferation requires stronger regional cooperation, improved border management, and enhanced institutional capacity to promote sustainable peace and security in Nigeria.*

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**Keywords:** Small arms proliferation, regional security, ECOWAS, United Nations, Nigeria.

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**Introduction**

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) has become one of the most serious threats to peace, security, and stability in Nigeria and across the West African region. Small arms such as pistols, rifles, and light machine guns are relatively easy to acquire, transport, and conceal, making them attractive tools for criminal groups, insurgents, and armed militias. The widespread availability of these weapons has contributed significantly to violent conflicts, insurgency, banditry, and communal clashes across many parts of the country. The uncontrolled circulation of these weapons has intensified the scale and frequency of armed violence, thereby undermining national security and peace-building initiatives (Adejumo et al., 2024). The persistence of illicit arms markets has enabled non-state actors to sustain violent campaigns against state institutions and civilian populations (Afuzie, 2025). The expansion of transnational trafficking routes has further complicated the efforts of governments to regulate and monitor the movement of weapons within the region (Balogun, 2024).

Nigeria has faced growing security challenges over the past decade, including insurgency in the northeast, banditry in the northwest, and communal conflicts in the Middle Belt. These security threats are largely facilitated by the easy accessibility of small arms and light weapons among armed groups and criminal networks. The porous borders within the West African sub-region have also made it easier for illicit weapons to circulate across countries without effective regulation. Cross-border arms trafficking has therefore intensified the security challenges faced by the Nigerian state and weakened efforts aimed at restoring peace and stability (Nweke & Ezeamu, 2025). The persistence of illicit arms markets within the region has allowed criminal organizations to sustain violent operations for extended periods (Balogun, 2024). The widespread circulation of these weapons has consequently increased the vulnerability of communities to armed violence and insecurity (Afuzie, 2025).

Small arms have largely contributed to the escalation of violence in a good number of regions in Nigeria. These weapons are usually used by armed groups when they are launching attacks on civilians, security officers, and government buildings. These guns are deployed in kidnappings, robbery with a gun, and organized crime that endangers the general population in several cases. The spread of SALW has consequently provided the space in which violent actors can easily obtain the instruments required to perpetuate conflict and insecurity. The catastrophic outcomes of this state of affairs are seen in the increased number of deaths, property damage, and displacement of populations around the nation (Afuzie, 2025). The prevalence of contraband weapons has also undermined the ability of the security agencies to enforce law and order (Adejumo et al., 2024). The proliferation of arms has continued to increase security challenges facing the Nigerian state (Awotayo et al., 2024).

The international community has been sensitized at different institutions on the risks of the uncontrolled proliferation of small arms and light ammunition. The United Nations has been significant in the formulation of international mechanisms that would control the exportation of arms and illegal trafficking. The Arms Trade Treaty is one of these initiatives as it aims to ensure that the arms trade is more transparent and accountable. These international regulatory mechanisms are aimed at ensuring that the circulation of weapons that might foster conflicts and violence in various regions across the world is reduced. These campaigns evidenced the growing interest of the international community in solving the issue of arms proliferation and the effects this problem has on world peace and security (Atidoga et al., 2024). International collaboration has thus emerged as an issue that is a significant part of the process that would control the propagation of illegal weapons (Awotayo et al., 2024). The United Nations and other international organizations are still urging member states to consolidate their national armaments control policies and implementation systems (Adejumo et al., 2024).

Africa is another region that has had a number of mechanisms implemented by regional organizations to curb the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons was formed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to control the importation and exportation and manufacturing of small arms in the region. This program was aimed at averting unhindered proliferation of weapons that may breed conflicts and destabilize member states. Such efforts have nonetheless seen limited effectiveness of arms control measures in the regions due to a poor enforcement mechanism and poor monitoring systems. In most instances, the existence of the illicit arms markets has continued to compromise the security arrangements in the regions that strive to minimize armed violence (Nweke & Ezeamu, 2025). Poor border control has also allowed the distribution of weapons between countries illegally (Balogun, 2024). The unceasing circulation of contraband weapons in West Africa has thus continued to be a major challenge to peace and stability in the region (Atidoga et al., 2024).

The presence of transnational criminal networks that deal with the illegal trafficking of arms is another critical issue that has helped in the proliferation of small arms in Nigeria. These transnational networks cut across borders and use weak states to ferry weapons into war-torn regions and other vulnerable communities. Besides the smuggling across borders, there are other weapons that are diverted from government military stores or manufactured locally in unofficial smuggling operations. Such practices have greatly enhanced the supply of weapons to the criminals and insurgent groups that are carrying out their activities in the country. The growth of the black markets in arms has consequently heightened the security dilemmas and made it harder in the quest to enhance sustainable peace (Balogun, 2024). Organized criminal networks have also reinforced the distribution of illegal weapons in the West African region (Awotayo et al., 2024). The growing need for weapons by violent groups has also helped to maintain the illicit arms trade within the region (Afuzie, 2025).

The spread of small arms has also posed major challenges to the peace-building efforts in Nigeria. Peace-building initiatives must have stable conditions or environments where institutions are able to operate and communities are able to interact and compromise. Nevertheless, the abundance of illegal weapons usually intensifies the situation and complicates the process of its peaceful resolution. Violence is usually promoted when armies are readily available and, thus, conflicts are dragged on and peace efforts are compromised. The continuation of arms proliferation thus undermines the attempts at ensuring the state of stability and reviving trust among the impacted populations (Adejumo et al., 2024). This has led to a high circulation of SALW and hence a significant threat to security governance and conflict management in Nigeria (Awotayo et al., 2024). The constant supply of contraband weapons has thus been a major impediment to the attainment of sustainable peace and development (Nweke & Ezeamu, 2025).

Due to the increased insecurity in Nigeria, there is an immediate necessity to investigate the correlation between the spread of small arms and light weapons and the peace-building efforts in the country. It is specifically the timeframe of 2017-2023 which saw the escalation of the security challenges and more intense negotiations of the national and international actors to tackle the problem of arms proliferation. The dynamics of SALW circulation at this period are significant to the development of effective strategies that will help to reduce armed violence and reinforce peace-building processes. The study aims to offer information on the role that arms control measures play in ensuring sustainable peace and security in Nigeria by analyzing the causes, patterns, and effects of arms proliferation in Nigeria. It also emphasizes the significance of the concerted measures that would include government institutions, regional organizations, and international partners as a way to cope with the issue of illicit weapons.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper uses Conflict Theory as a theoretical approach to describe how the increase of small arms and light weapons and peace-building in Nigeria relate between 2017 and 2023. Conflict theory, which was initially linked with the thought of Karl Marx asserts that society is marked with unrelenting rivalry among parties regarding power, resources, and political impact. When the political scene becomes highly competitive, that is, when people or groups strive to impose their will, the aspect of violence comes into play. Access to small arms and light weapons enhances the ability of such groups to be involved in violent conflicts and maintain the conflicts over a long time. In the Nigerian context, the increasing circulation of illicit weapons has intensified violent confrontations among insurgent groups, criminal networks, and communal actors (Adejumo et al., 2024).

One of the significant premises of the conflict theory is that consensus is not always the way to maintain social order but a struggle of power between the conflicting interests. In cases where the political institutions

are unable to cope with these struggles, the marginal groups are likely to employ violent methods in achieving their objectives. Armed violence is one means by which players seek to begin influencing or dominating the resources or power in societies that are politically unstable and economically unequal. Proliferation of small arms in weak political set-ups is therefore likely to heighten the chances of social tensions escalating into armed conflicts. This has been more pronounced especially in most areas in Nigeria, where security has been compromised due to the availability of illegal weapons by non-state actors (Afuzie, 2025). The structural deficiencies of governance and institutional fragility have also been associated with the continued presence of armed violence in weak states (Aina, 2025).

The conflict theory goes on to clarify that unequal patterns of economic and political resources may lead to violent struggle in society. A group of people who perceive themselves locked out of the political process or economic resources can also be seen to be adopting violence as a way of questioning the status quo. In this kind of situation, the destructive power of conflicts is greatly enhanced by the presence of weapons. The spread of small weapons has thus enhanced the ability of insurgent groups and crime syndicates in various parts of Nigeria. Such military agents frequently use illegal weapons in their operations to attack, occupy the territories, and even threaten the local communities. The studies of security processes in the area show that the growing spread of weapons has strengthened the operations of terror organizations and transnational criminal organizations (Awotayo et al., 2024). Another issue that has contributed to the increasing local conflicts and communal violence in some Nigerian communities is the easy access to weapons (Atidoga et al., 2024).

The other significant aspect of the conflict theory is the part played by the cross-border dynamics in perpetuating armed conflict. The cross-border transfer of weapons is one of the factors contributing to the incidence of violence in most parts of Africa. Lax border control systems and transnational smuggling networks have allowed the entry of illegal arms into the West African sub-region without much hassle. These are weapons that are mostly found in conflict zones and brought into the neighboring countries which are used to inspire criminal and insurgent activities. The porous nature of the borders has consequently made Nigeria an important source of trafficking small arms and light weapons into the nation (Kolo, 2024). The wider regional context of the arms traffic has posed a great security dilemma in the West African region especially whereby criminal networks across borders are transacting in the illegal business of weapons (Nweke & Ezeamu, 2025).

Conflict theory also highlights the significance of the socio-economic conditions in developing the violence patterns. The high poverty rates, unemployment, and social marginalization may make people more vulnerable to the attack of armed forces. In Nigeria, insurgents, bandits, and political actors have organized the unemployed youths in most of the communities where insecurity is a problem, to carry out violent acts. Availability of weapons that are very easy to obtain makes these people even more likely to engage in armed conflicts as opposed to seeking peaceful solutions. Arms proliferation in Nigeria has been studied suggesting that the spread of small arms has played a dominant role in transforming the local grievances into structured violence (Andrew et al., 2024). These dynamics show the interaction of the structural economic issues with the presence of weapons to aggravate insecurity in society.

The other important lesson of the conflict theory is associated with the obstacles that the proliferation of arms presents to the process of peace-building. The peace-building activities are initiated to help in the development of stable institutions, consolidation of governance structures, and encourage reconciliation amongst communities that have suffered violence. Nevertheless, they can be defeated by the fact that illegally produced weapons are circulated and armed forces can continue their violent campaigns due to this. In a

setting where the availability of weapons is rampant, parties engaged in a conflict might not be motivated to engage in negotiations. Such a scenario tends to extend the period of the conflict and undermine the success of the peace efforts aimed at restoring stability. Conflict-affected societies' evidence demonstrates that the containment of the dissemination of weapons is one of the necessary measures to attain peace and security in the long term (Anaukwu & Onwuekwe, 2024). It is the reduction in the circulation of small arms that thus becomes a key element in the development of effective peace-building strategies.

When using the conflict theory in this paper, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons is considered as a cause and effect of violent conflict. The theory identifies the interplay between political competition, socioeconomic inequalities, and institutional weaknesses to produce environments where armed violence flourishes. In this context, the ease of access to arms enhances power games among competing actors as well as fuels the magnitude of violence in conflicts. The conflict theory is thus an analytical tool that can be employed in explaining why insecurity is still persistent in Nigeria and why peace-building efforts are not successful. By focusing on the connection between structural inequalities, power politics, and accessibility to weapons, the theory contributes to a better understanding of why the containment of the proliferation of small arms is a significant milestone on the way to sustainable peace and stability in Nigeria.

### **Empirical Review**

Adejumo et al. (2024) analyzed the risk and danger of the spread of small arms and light weaponry on the safety of the Nigerian state. The research aimed to examine the contribution of the illegal weapon circulation to insecurity and conflicts of violence in Nigeria. The researchers followed the qualitative research method based on the documentary analysis of the governmental security reports, policy documents, and available academic literature on arms proliferation. The results indicated that the growing accessibility of small arms has greatly augmented the criminal acts, insurgency, and community violence in Nigeria. The research also established that poor law enforcement agencies and porous boundaries have enabled the importation and distribution of smuggled arms in the country. The research is comparable to the current study since they both investigate the security aspect of small arms proliferation in Nigeria. Yet, the analysis presented by Adejumo et al. primarily discussed the threats to national security, whereas the present research centers on the analysis of security interventions in the region, specifically by ECOWAS and the United Nations during the period of 2015-24.

Afuzie (2025) explored the effects of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons on the internal security of Nigeria. The study aimed to measure the correlation between an increase in banditry, terrorism, and violent crimes in the country and arms proliferation. The research design used was a descriptive research design and secondary data, which was gathered through security agencies, international organizations, and academic publications. The results showed that the ready access to small arms has greatly enhanced the ability of criminal gangs to engage in violent attacks, kidnappings, and insurgency. The study also found that poor arms control policies and corruption in the security agencies are some of the reasons why illicit traffic of weapons is still going on. The paper has a similarity with the present study because it equally centers on the implications of the proliferation of arms on security. Nevertheless, this is not the case of the current study as it focuses on how international and regional institutions like ECOWAS and the United Nations can contribute to solving the problem.

Aina (2025) examined the connection between the fragility of the state, proliferation of small arms, and the issue of insecurity in West Africa. The research aimed to examine the role of weak institutions of the state in the distribution of illicit weapons in the region. The study embraced a comparative mode of analysis by applying data on regional security and policy papers of several West African nations. The results indicated

that weak political institutions, ineffective border control systems, and ineffective governance systems have played a major role in the spread of small arms in the region. The paper also found that local cooperation structures are crucial towards regulating weapon trafficking and enhancing security stability. The study connects to the research at hand in that both of them cover the security concerns of the region regarding the proliferation of arms. The point of divergence, however, is in the area of interest as Aina was concerned with the whole of West Africa when the current study is narrowed down to Nigeria and the efforts made by ECOWAS and the United Nations.

Andrew et al. (2024) focused on the proliferation of small arms in Benue State and how it is linked to the international policy on arms control. The objective of the research was to find out how far the global arms control regimes have been adopted locally in Nigeria. The researchers followed the case study research design and gathered data based on interviews, policy analysis, and security reports review. The results showed that even though the international agreements on arms control are in place, their application at the local level is weak because of the lack of capacity to enforce and the poor collaboration among the security agencies. It was also discovered in the study that proliferation of arms has been a contributing factor to communal conflicts and violent attacks in the state of Benue. The research is comparable to the current study as the two studies take into account the role of international frameworks in overcoming the issue of proliferation of weapons. The difference, however, lies in the fact that the present study is about regional and international institutional interventions in 2015-2024 as compared to one case study in one state.

In a study by Anaukwu and Onwuekwe (2024), the interconnection between the proliferation of small arms and peace-building in Sudan was studied in the period between 2017 and 2023. The study was to examine the impact of the flow of illegal weaponry on the activities meant to ensure peace and stability in post-conflict societies. The researchers used the qualitative research approach based on documentary research with the help of the analysis of the peace agreements, international reports, and conflict assessment documents. The results indicated that the prevalence of small arms is a great disadvantage to the peace-building efforts as it empowers the armed forces and increases the conflicts. Another area of focus in the research was the significance of global collaboration in the issue of arms control and stabilization of the post-conflict situation. The literature is similar to the current study, as both studies focus on the connection between the proliferation of arms and peace-building. The distinction, however, is in the geographical focus because the research conducted by Anaukwu and Onwuekwe focused on Sudan, whereas the present study is on the research on Nigeria and regional institutional interventions.

Atidoga et al. (2024) analyzed how the proliferation of small arms can affect the Nigerian security of human life. The objective of the research was to determine the role of the availability of illicit weapons in increasing the cases of violence and insecurity in the communities in Nigeria. The research design employed in the study was descriptive, but they used secondary data from security reports, international organizations, and literature as sources. The results showed that the spread of small arms has greatly contributed to violent crimes, insurgency, and communal conflicts in different regions of Nigeria. The paper also highlighted that the ineffective control of borders and ineffective institutions of law enforcement have led to the ongoing distribution of illegal weapons. The study is comparable to the current study since both studies investigate the security implications of the proliferation of arms in Nigeria. The current study however builds on this argument by concentrating on regional and international interventions in the form of institutions that can be used to tackle the issue.

Awotayo et al. (2024) made a detailed study of the aspects of terrorism and arms proliferation in Sub-Saharan Africa. The research was aimed at investigating the connection between the presence of small arms and the

development of terrorist activities in the region. The authors applied a regional analysis methodology based on the information acquired in the international security agencies and counter-terrorism reports. The result showed that terrorist organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa depend greatly on informal weapons channels to support their activities. Another aspect of the study was the use of transnational criminal networks to make the movement of weapons across borders possible. The study is comparable to the present study as they both focus on the implications of arms proliferation in the region. The difference however is the scope of study, where Awotayo et al. were looking at terrorism in sub-Saharan Africa whereas in the current research, they are concerned with Nigeria and the activities of ECOWAS and the United Nations.

Balogun (2024) explored the process of illicit arms trading and security threats in the West African region and specifically in Nigeria. The study was aimed at examining the role played by the illegal arms trafficking networks in leading to increased insecurity in the region. The study used a qualitative type of research and employed documentary analysis of the security reports and policy frameworks in the region. The results indicated that the illicit arms trade has developed dramatically because of the loose border control regimes and rising weapon demands among the criminal organizations. The research also reported that there would be a need to do regional cooperation among the states in West Africa in order to be able to control the border crossing of weapons. The research is comparable to the current study in the fact that both of them examine the regional aspects of the proliferation of arms. The existing research, however, is differentiated by the fact that the research specifically evaluates the roles of ECOWAS and the United Nations in the context of dealing with arms proliferation in Nigeria in 2015-2024.

Kolo (2024) examined how the insurgency and arms proliferation are related along the Nigeria-Cameroon border. This was done to investigate the role of cross-border weapon trade in insurgency and insecurity in border societies. The study used a case study methodology that deals with border security relations between the two nations. As it was revealed, porous borders and weak surveillance systems have allowed armed groups to haul weapons within the region, which has increased insurgency and attacks. The research is comparable to the present study as both of them study the connection between arms proliferation and security dilemmas. But the difference lies in the fact that Kolo mainly concentrated on cross-border insurgency processes, whereas the current paper examines the expanded area security interventions by ECOWAS and the United Nations.

Nweke and Ezeamu (2025) made a comparative analysis of the strategies of ECOWAS in the fight against arms proliferation and interstate crimes in West Africa. The study aimed to determine the effectiveness of regional security programs that will mitigate transfers of arms and enhance regional security. The methodology used by the researchers was the comparative policy analysis where various ECOWAS security structures and intervention measures were considered across the West African nations. The results showed that, despite the efforts made by the ECOWAS in terms of regional agreements and arms control programs, the implementation issues are still there as the member states do not cooperate effectively and they lack adequate enforcement measures. The paper can be identified as being very related to the current research because it discusses the regional measures in an attempt to limit the proliferation of weapons. The current study, however, is different since it includes the contribution that both ECOWAS and the United Nations have made in dealing with the problem of arms proliferation in Nigeria over the years 2015 to 2024.

### **Methodology**

The research design used in this study was qualitative research so as to investigate the correlation between the proliferation of small arms and regional security intervention in Nigeria. The qualitative method was deemed suitable due to the fact that the research depended on the analysis of the available documents, policy

reports, and academic literature mainly touching on the issue of small arms and light weapons proliferation and functions of the regional and international institutions to combat the problem. The study data were collected in the secondary sources, which comprised academic journals, books, government reports, and publications of international organizations like the United Nations and ECOWAS. The adoption of documentary sources allowed the researcher to analyze the tendencies of arms proliferation and the approaches taken by the international institutions to deal with the issue during the time frame of 2015 to 2024.

The research utilized the documentary analysis as the main type of data analysis. The pertinent documentation and academic literature were also carefully examined so as to determine the major themes that are linked to the issue of arms trafficking, the regional security issues, and the institutional interventions that can be used to curb the spread of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria. The discussion specifically looked at the actions, politics, and security programs undertaken by the ECOWAS and the United Nations in the case of the increasing problem of illicit weapon traffic. In this manner, the study has been in a position to bring together the available empirical data and offer a holistic approach in the formulation of how international and regional cooperation has contributed towards the efforts to curb the proliferation of small arms in Nigeria and facilitate security stability.

### **Analysis**

The problem of the spread of small arms and light weapons within Nigeria in 2015-2024 is one of the most severe threats to the security of the West African region. The illicit weapons circulation was on the rise in this period because of multiple interconnected causes such as permeable borders, ineffective law-enforcement agencies, insurgency, and the growth of the transnational criminal networks. The security situation in Nigeria has been influenced by armed insurgency, banditry, communal conflicts, and organized criminal activities in the North-East, North-West, Middle Belt, and various regions respectively. Such security issues have posed a great demand for illegal guns and this has also promoted the development of illegal weapons markets. Access to small arms has consequently escalated the magnitude and frequency of violent conflicts and conflict management and peace-building has been made very hard.

Unrest in the region has also helped in the proliferation of illicit weapons in Nigeria. The neighboring states of Libya, Mali, and some of the Sahel region were involved in armed conflicts that had resulted in a massive accumulation of weapons that were slowly finding their way through the West African trafficking networks. Smuggling paths were formed along the borders that were not well monitored especially on the northern and eastern borders of Nigeria. The nature of these cross-border arms flows was that they allowed the insurgent groups, criminal gangs, and militia groups to access weapons at a relatively low cost. With the production of more weapons, violent actors could expand their capacity to perform their operations, which led to an increase in the level of sophistication of the attacks and a long-term armed conflict. The distribution of weapons was not only a cause but also an effect of insecurity in the region.

The other aspect of the issue that is crucial is the role of non-state actors in maintaining the weapons demand. Small arms have become the weapon of choice for armed insurgent groups, bandits, separatist militias, and organized criminal networks because they are comparatively cheap, portable, and easy to use. The features of the small arms are what render them the weapon of choice when it comes to irregular warfare and crime. The high availability of such weapons has seen armed groups threaten state power in some areas especially where the security of the governments is low. In several communities, local populations have also resorted to acquiring weapons for self-defense, further increasing the number of firearms circulating outside formal state control.

Various institutional interventions have been sought as a result of regional and international organizations trying to respond to this increasing menace. ECOWAS has also put in place several regional arms control measures to curb the supply of illegal weapons in West Africa. Among member states, these initiatives involve regional arms control agreements, joint operations of border security, and information sharing mechanisms. The United Nations has also participated in arms control, through international treaties, a monitoring framework, and technical assistance programs to enhance the national security institutions. They have been used to create awareness of the risks of illicit weapon proliferation and to increase cooperation among the states in the region. Nonetheless, weak institutional capacity, corruption, and the complexity of transnational networks of arms trafficking remain as obstacles to its implementation.

Regardless of these difficulties, the actions of regional and international bodies have helped to enhance the policy coordination and institutional actions against the proliferation of weapons. Nigeria has embraced a number of regulatory frameworks that can be used to regulate arms circulation and enhance border security. Moreover, joint activities between regional security organizations have been able to frustrate certain trafficking networks and intercept traffickers with shipments of illicit weapons. However, the continuity of armed violence is a pointer that current controls have not fully addressed the factors that lead to the proliferation of arms. Poverty, unemployment, political rivalry, and poor governance are some of the factors that keep on aiding the conditions that perpetrate the demand and supply of illicit weapons. Consequently, successful arms control in Nigeria needs security interventions but more widespread socio-economic and governance reforms.

**Table 1: Major Drivers of Small Arms Proliferation in Nigeria (2015–2024)**

Driver	Description	Security Implication
Porous Borders	Weak border surveillance allows weapons to move across national boundaries	Increased cross-border trafficking and illegal arms markets
Regional Conflicts	Weapons from conflicts in the Sahel and North Africa enter West African networks	Expansion of insurgency and organized crime
Weak Law Enforcement	Limited capacity of security agencies to monitor arms circulation	Difficulty in controlling illegal weapons
Criminal Networks	Organized smuggling groups transport and distribute illicit firearms	Growth of black-market weapons trade
Community Self-Defense	Civilians acquire weapons due to insecurity	Increased number of unregulated firearms

**Table 2: Major Security Threats Linked to Small Arms Proliferation**

Security Threat	Regions Mostly Affected	Impact on National Stability
Insurgency	North-East Nigeria	Prolonged armed conflict and displacement of civilians
Banditry	North-West Nigeria	Kidnapping, rural violence, and economic disruption
Communal Conflicts	Middle Belt	Ethno-religious clashes and community displacement
Organized Crime	Urban and border regions	Expansion of kidnapping, robbery, and trafficking
Political Violence	Various regions	Electoral instability and democratic challenges

**Table 3: Regional and International Interventions**

Institution	Major Intervention	Objective
ECOWAS	Regional arms control conventions and security cooperation	Reduce arms trafficking within West Africa
United Nations	Global arms control frameworks and technical assistance	Strengthen international regulation of small arms
Regional Security Agencies	Joint border patrols and intelligence sharing	Disrupt cross-border weapons smuggling
National Government	Arms regulation policies and security operations	Control domestic circulation of illicit weapons

Overall, the analysis shows that the proliferation of small arms in Nigeria is closely connected to regional instability, weak governance structures, and transnational criminal networks. While interventions by ECOWAS and the United Nations have contributed to improved policy coordination and institutional awareness, the persistence of armed violence indicates that these efforts must be complemented by stronger domestic institutions, improved border management, and comprehensive socio-economic reforms. Addressing these underlying challenges remains essential for reducing the spread of illicit weapons and promoting long-term regional security stability.

### Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study reveal that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons remains a major driver of insecurity in Nigeria and the wider West African region. The analysis indicates that porous borders, weak institutional capacity, and the presence of transnational criminal networks have significantly contributed to the circulation of illicit weapons. These factors have enabled insurgent groups, bandits, and organized criminal networks to obtain firearms that sustain violent conflicts. The availability of these weapons has intensified insurgency, communal conflicts, banditry, and other forms of violent crime, thereby weakening national and regional security structures.

The study also shows that regional and international interventions have played an important role in addressing the problem of arms proliferation. Efforts by ECOWAS and the United Nations have contributed to the development of arms control frameworks, regional cooperation mechanisms, and institutional capacity-building initiatives aimed at reducing the circulation of illicit weapons. However, the findings indicate that implementation challenges, including weak enforcement mechanisms and limited coordination among security agencies, continue to undermine the effectiveness of these interventions. As a result, the persistence of arms trafficking networks suggests that stronger institutional collaboration and improved border security measures are necessary for achieving long-term regional stability.

### Recommendations

**The Federal Government of Nigeria** should strengthen border security and improve surveillance systems to prevent the illegal movement of weapons across national boundaries.

**ECOWAS** should enhance regional security cooperation and improve the enforcement of the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons among member states.

**The United Nations** should expand technical and financial support for arms control programs and security sector reforms in Nigeria.

**Nigerian security agencies** should intensify intelligence gathering and strengthen joint operations aimed at dismantling arms trafficking networks.

**Local communities** should collaborate with security agencies by reporting suspicious movements and activities related to illegal weapons.

**Civil society organizations** should increase public awareness campaigns on the dangers of small arms proliferation and promote community-based peace-building initiatives.

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