

ACQUISITION OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS (SALW) AND ITS IMPACT ON INSECURITY ALONG NIGERIA–BENIN BORDER

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Abstract

This paper examines the acquisition and proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) along the Nigeria-Benin border and how this fuels insecurity between 2017 and 2023. The study highlights the factors driving arms trafficking, the actors involved, and the consequences for border communities. The study is anchored on Frustration-Aggression theory and Criminogenic opportunity theory. Using a descriptive survey design, data was collected from residents, security personnel, and officials in Seme, Idiroko, and Jibia. Findings reveal that porous borders, corruption, weak enforcement, and transnational criminal networks contribute significantly to arms proliferation. The study concludes that SALW circulation remains a major driver of banditry, armed robbery, kidnapping, and communal clashes. It recommends strengthening border control, technological surveillance, regional cooperation, and strict accountability of security officers.

Keywords: *Small Arms, light Weapons, Border, Criminogenic opportunity theory, Insecurity*

Introduction

The proliferation and acquisition of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) remains one of the most intractable security challenges in West Africa. The sub-region has long been identified as a major hub for uncontrolled SALW circulation, a legacy of past conflicts, poorly secured stockpiles, and weak governance. The high demand for weapons among non-state actors including militias, criminal gangs, smugglers, and vigilante groups perpetuates a vicious cycle: more SALW circulation begets more violence, which in turn increases demand for weapons. In analysis of West African security, researchers have emphasized how post-conflict flows, local manufacturing, and illicit trade converge to flood communities with arms, undermining state capacity to maintain order and amplifying cycles of violence (Ecowas, 2023).

Within the wider region, the role of state weakness, corruption, and porous borders cannot be overemphasized in enabling arms trafficking. Many West African states, including Nigeria, struggle with under-resourced border management, limited law-enforcement capacity, and insufficient intelligence-sharing mechanisms. These structural constraints make it easier for traffickers to exploit informal routes and smuggling networks. For instance, in Nigeria which shares long borders with several neighbours including Benin authorities have repeatedly flagged how large swathes of the frontier remain under-patrolled and difficult to monitor effectively, thereby facilitating illicit cross-border arms flows (Freedom, 2017).

The National Centre for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (NCCSALW) and other security actors estimate that Nigeria accounts for as much as 70 percent of the illicit SALW circulating in West Africa. Such a concentration significantly elevates the risk that SALW will feed violence, from banditry to kidnapping, communal conflict, and armed robbery. Empirical and policy-oriented studies have drawn clear connections between high levels of SALW circulation and the rise of insecurity in Nigeria characterizing SALW proliferation as a

structural enabler of insurgency, organized crime, and communal violence (National Accord, 2025).

In the borderland between Nigeria and Benin a region marked by formal and informal trade, as well as extensive human mobility the cross-border acquisition of weapons acquires special salience. The porous nature of the border, the presence of numerous unregulated crossing points, and the overlapping networks of traders, smugglers, and local communities create a fertile environment for illicit arms flows. With the period between 2017 and 2023 witnessing a surge in banditry, kidnappings, communal clashes, and other forms of violence across Nigeria (and by extension affecting neighbouring border areas), weapons acquired through these illicit border channels arguably played a significant role in shaping security outcomes. The ease of access to SALW has thus not only enabled criminal and non-state actors to increase their operational capacity but has also made border communities more vulnerable to cycles of violence, displacement, and social disruption.

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) have become central to Nigeria's insecurity challenges. Along border areas like Seme, Idiroko, and Jibia, arms smuggling has intensified due to porous borders, weak security institutions, and transnational crime networks. The Nigeria–Benin border is recognized as one of West Africa's busiest routes, making it vulnerable to illicit trade. Between 2017 and 2023, Nigeria witnessed rising banditry, kidnapping, and armed robbery, much of which is linked to uncontrolled SALW proliferation. This study investigates how these weapons are acquired and how they contribute to insecurity along the Nigeria - Benin border.

Statement of the Problem

Despite numerous policies and interventions, the proliferation of SALW persists in Nigeria. Border communities continue to experience crime, armed attacks, smuggling, and other threats. Weak enforcement, corruption, porous border routes, and poor regional cooperation worsen the situation. The key problem explored in this seminar is how the acquisition and movement of SALW fuel insecurity along the Nigeria–Benin border.

The problem is further compounded by weak surveillance capabilities, poor interagency cooperation, corruption among border officials, limited intelligence sharing, and the presence of informal trade routes beyond official state control. These challenges have made it difficult to regulate cross-border movement, enabling arms traffickers, bandits, and other non-state armed actors to acquire weapons with relative ease.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to examine SALW acquisition and its impact on insecurity along the Nigeria-Benin border (2017–2023). the specific objectives are:

1. To identify factors responsible for the proliferation of SALW along the Nigeria–Benin border.
2. To examine patterns and methods of SALW acquisition and distribution.

Conceptual Review

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) are generally defined as weapons manufactured for individual or small-group use, including revolvers, pistols, assault rifles, sub-machine guns,

light machine guns, hand-held grenade launchers, and portable explosives. The United Nations categorizes SALW based on portability and ease of operation, highlighting that they can be handled by one or two persons without the need for heavy support equipment (United Nations, 2018). This portability distinguishes them from heavier conventional weapons and contributes to their widespread use by both state and non-state actors. Because SALW are relatively cheap, durable, and widely available, they have become the most commonly used weapons in many contemporary conflicts in Africa and beyond (Small Arms Survey, 2020).

A key characteristic of SALW is their small size, which makes them easy to conceal and transport across long distances. Traffickers exploit natural features such as forests and rivers, as well as informal trade routes, to move these weapons across borders without detection. Research shows that smugglers often break weapons into components to avoid security checks, reassembling them upon arrival at their destination (Aning & Atuobi, 2019). In regions with weak border surveillance, such as parts of West Africa, this mobility enables arms traffickers to bypass customs officers and security checkpoints with minimal effort, reinforcing the difficulty states face in controlling illicit flows.

Moreover, the relatively simple maintenance requirements of SALW contribute greatly to their longevity. Many assault rifles and pistols can remain functional for decades with minimal servicing, making them ideal for criminal groups, insurgents, and local militias with limited resources (Florquin & King, 2018). This durability has resulted in the persistence of weapons from past conflicts such as civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire continuing to circulate throughout West Africa long after hostilities ended. Scholars have noted that such "legacy weapons" form a major portion of illicit arsenals in countries like Nigeria, Niger, and Benin (Krause, 2012).

Another critical factor underlying SALW proliferation is their suitability for asymmetric warfare and criminal operations. Because SALW can be easily handled by small groups or individuals, they offer an accessible means for armed robbers, bandits, kidnappers, and extremist groups to challenge state authority and operate with significant lethality (Ewi & Salifu, 2017). In addition, political actors in fragile states have at times relied on SALW to arm youth groups, vigilantes, or private militias, further deepening the cycle of violence and insecurity. The combination of low skill requirements, high lethality, and ease of circulation explains why SALW have become central to the escalation of conflicts across Africa.

Finally, SALW proliferation has devastating effects on development, stability, and human security across affected regions. Studies consistently link high SALW availability to increased homicide rates, displacement, piracy, trafficking, and general insecurity in both rural and urban areas (OECD, 2021). The humanitarian impact is also profound: communities exposed to illicit weapons experience reduced access to markets, deteriorating social trust, and weakened local governance structures. For policymakers and security institutions in West Africa, the complex nature of SALW proliferation underscores the urgent need for coordinated border management, improved arms-marking systems, and stronger regional collaboration to disrupt trafficking networks (ECOWAS, 2019).

Border Security

Border security refers to the collection of policies, institutional mechanisms, and operational strategies designed to regulate and safeguard the movement of people, goods, and services across national boundaries. States employ border security as a tool for protecting sovereignty, preventing illegal migration, curbing smuggling, and maintaining national stability. As Newman (2006) argues, borders function not only as physical demarcation lines but also as spaces where states exercise authority, surveillance, and territorial control. Effective border security therefore requires clear policy frameworks that define responsibilities, outline enforcement protocols, and guide interagency collaboration among military, customs, immigration, and intelligence institutions.

A critical component of border security is manpower frontline personnel responsible for monitoring entry and exit points, enforcing regulations, and detecting illegal activities. According to Andreas (2013), border personnel serve as the “human interface” between the state and transnational flows, making them essential to identifying threats such as weapon trafficking, drug smuggling, and irregular migration. However, in many developing regions, border management is weakened by limited staffing, insufficient training, and corruption, which undermine state capacity to control porous frontiers. Personnel shortages and inadequate oversight often allow illicit networks to exploit gaps in surveillance, facilitating the movement of contraband and armed groups.

Technological systems form another major pillar of border security. Modern borders increasingly rely on advanced surveillance tools such as drones, biometric scanners, satellite imagery, CCTV networks, and digital databases to track movements and authenticate identities. As Dunn (2017) notes, border technology has become central to 21st-century security governance, enabling states to identify potential threats more rapidly and to monitor vast territories that would otherwise be impossible to cover manually. For African states with extensive land borders, technology offers opportunities to compensate for manpower shortages though its effectiveness depends on maintenance, funding, and interoperability with existing security systems.

Border security also involves interagency and international cooperation, particularly in regions where borders cut across long-standing trade routes and ethnic networks. According to Alemanno and Garde (2018), successful border governance requires coordination between customs, immigration, police, and military bodies, as well as cross-border collaboration with neighbouring states. West Africa demonstrates the importance of regional partnerships, as illegal arms trafficking, human smuggling, and terrorism often span multiple countries. When states fail to share intelligence or harmonize border regulations, criminal networks exploit inconsistencies to transport weapons, evade taxes, and avoid detection.

Finally, the effectiveness of border security has profound implications for national and human security. Poorly managed borders contribute to rising insecurity, facilitate the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), and undermine public confidence in state institutions. In contrast, strong border systems enhance economic development by promoting safe trade, reducing crime, and supporting lawful movement (Larkins, 2020). For communities living along borderlands, improved border governance means greater stability, reduced

exposure to trafficking networks, and stronger integration into national security structures. Ultimately, border security is not merely a physical or institutional framework it is an essential foundation for state resilience, regional cooperation, and public safety.

Insecurity

Insecurity refers to a condition where individuals, communities, and the state experience threats to life, property, and social stability, often resulting from criminal or violent activities. In the West African context, insecurity manifests in multiple forms, including armed robbery, kidnapping, banditry, terrorism, and communal clashes (Alemika, 2020). These threats have intensified in recent years, partly due to the widespread circulation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), which serve as tools that facilitate violent activities. The proliferation of such weapons alters the balance of power between civilians and state institutions, creating an environment where criminal actors operate with greater confidence and efficiency (UNODC, 2021).

Armed robbery in border regions, for instance, has become increasingly organized and violent because of easy access to illicit weapons. Criminal groups exploit porous borders and weak enforcement capacity to obtain firearms that empower them to conduct highway attacks, border raids, and targeted property crimes (Okenyi & Ojukwu, 2021). As SALW become more accessible, the sophistication and frequency of robbery operations increase, placing border communities, travellers, and traders at heightened risk. This directly undermines economic activities, especially in border markets and transport routes that serve as major lifelines for local populations (Eze & Abiodun, 2022).

Kidnapping has also evolved from isolated incidents into a widespread security challenge across Nigeria and parts of the Benin borderland. Armed groups leverage SALW to abduct civilians for ransom, relying on the threat of force to deter resistance and complicate rescue operations (Afolabi, 2020). The availability of firearms emboldens these actors, allowing them to expand their operations from rural zones into previously secure towns and border corridors. As a result, kidnapping not only creates direct physical insecurity but also psychological fear that discourages mobility, investment, and cross-border economic interaction (Okoli & Iortyer, 2021).

Similarly, banditry and terrorism particularly in northern Nigeria are significantly reinforced by the circulation of SALW. Bandit groups operating around border corridors often rely on smuggled firearms to launch attacks on communities or security posts, using these weapons to assert dominance and evade law-enforcement responses (Adewale, 2021). Terrorist networks linked to regional extremist movements have also benefitted from illicit arms flows, enabling them to sustain operations, recruit followers, and destabilize border security architectures (International Crisis Group, 2020). These dynamics contribute to a cycle in which insecurity fuels more arms trafficking, and arms trafficking further fuels insecurity.

Communal violence represents another dimension of insecurity aggravated by the proliferation of SALW. Historically, disputes over land, resources, or political control were often settled through non-lethal means; however, the influx of firearms has escalated the intensity and frequency of these confrontations (Ibrahim & Yusuf, 2022). In borderland communities, competition over farmland, grazing routes, or smuggling profits frequently turns violent when

groups can access weapons that amplify the scale of harm. This undermines inter-communal trust, weakens traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms, and places additional burdens on already stretched security institutions (UNDP, 2020).

Factors Responsible for SALW Proliferation

Porous and unmanned border routes

Porous borders, with numerous unofficial crossing points, create vulnerabilities that traffickers exploit to move SALW undetected. Many sections of the Nigeria–Benin frontier remain unmanned or inadequately monitored, making it difficult for security agencies to control illicit movement (Ekoh & George, 2020). These gaps allow not only weapons but also criminals and contraband to cross with minimal risk, directly contributing to increased insecurity in border communities.

Corruption among border officials

Corruption undermines the effectiveness of border management, as some officials may accept bribes to ignore illegal crossings or actively facilitate trafficking. This reduces the deterrent effect of law enforcement and encourages traffickers to operate with impunity (Aning & Atuobi, 2019). The resulting lack of accountability perpetuates the circulation of illicit weapons and fuels insecurity along border towns.

High demand for weapons by criminals

The demand for SALW among criminals, bandits, and kidnappers sustains illicit arms markets and encourages smuggling networks. When individuals or groups seek to increase operational capacity or assert dominance, the ready availability of weapons makes violent crime more feasible and frequent (Hazen & Horner, 2007). High demand, therefore, interacts with supply mechanisms to perpetuate cycles of violence and insecurity.

Regional conflicts in the Sahel

Ongoing conflicts in the Sahel region generate surplus weapons and create transnational flows of arms into West Africa. Traffickers exploit instability to transport weapons southwards, often using the porous borders of Nigeria and Benin to bypass official controls (Small Arms Survey, 2018). These regional dynamics link border insecurity to broader geopolitical crises and illustrate the transnational nature of the SALW problem.

Weak enforcement and surveillance technologies

Inadequate technology and limited enforcement capacity hinder the ability of border security agencies to detect and intercept illicit movements. Many borders lack modern scanning equipment, digital monitoring systems, and sufficient patrol resources, leaving large areas unmonitored (Dunn, 2017). Weak surveillance allows traffickers to exploit blind spots, making law enforcement reactive rather than preventive.

Smuggling networks and black markets

Established smuggling networks and informal black markets serve as key conduits for SALW proliferation. These networks often involve cross-border collaboration, corruption, and established logistical channels, which make it easier to transport weapons to high-demand areas (Afolabi, 2020). By linking supply and demand efficiently, smuggling networks ensure that weapons continue to reach criminal actors, sustaining cycles of insecurity.

Empirical Review

Hazen and Horner (2007) in their study *Small Arms, Armed Violence, and Insecurity in Nigeria: The Niger Delta in Perspective* examined the empirical relationship between the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and patterns of violent insecurity in Nigeria. The objective of the study was to determine how illicit arms availability shapes armed violence and criminality. Using documentary evidence and field-based analysis, the authors found that easy access to SALW through black markets, political patronage, and cross-border smuggling significantly intensified militancy, armed robbery, and communal violence. The study revealed that weapons availability transformed social grievances into sustained armed conflicts and criminal enterprises. The authors concluded that SALW proliferation constitutes a structural driver of insecurity in Nigeria and that without disrupting arms supply chains, security interventions would remain ineffective. However, a contrary view is that the study's strong focus on the Niger Delta limits its applicability to border regions like the Nigeria–Benin frontier, where criminal rather than resource-based motivations dominate.

Okoli and Orinya (2013), in *Weapons Proliferation and Insecurity in Nigeria*, set out to assess how the spread of illicit weapons contributes to Nigeria's internal security challenges. The study aimed to link SALW proliferation with rising incidents of armed robbery, banditry, and communal conflicts. Drawing on qualitative evidence, the authors found that porous borders, corruption among security officials, and weak enforcement mechanisms enabled the steady inflow of weapons into Nigeria. Their findings demonstrated that increased weapons availability directly escalated the frequency and lethality of violent crimes. The study concluded that Nigeria's insecurity crisis cannot be effectively addressed without prioritizing arms control and border security reforms. Nonetheless, critics argue that the study underemphasizes ideological and political factors that also drive violence, particularly in insurgency-affected areas.

Ekoh and George (2020), in their critical analysis titled *Small Arms Proliferation and Insecurity in West Africa*, sought to examine the structural and regional factors sustaining SALW circulation and their implications for insecurity. The objective was to provide a region-wide empirical explanation of how arms proliferation undermines peace and stability. The study found that porous borders, ongoing regional conflicts, weak state institutions, and ineffective regional cooperation jointly facilitate illicit arms flows. It further revealed that border communities are the most vulnerable, experiencing heightened levels of violence and criminal activity. The authors concluded that SALW proliferation in West Africa is a transnational security problem that requires coordinated regional responses rather than isolated national efforts. A contrary view, however, is that the study relies heavily on secondary data, limiting its ability to capture localized dynamics specific to individual border corridors such as Nigeria and Benin.

The Small Arms Survey (2018) report titled *Weapons and the World: Global Trends in Small Arms Proliferation* aimed to empirically document global and regional trends in SALW circulation and their security implications. The report found that West Africa remains one of the regions most affected by illicit weapons, with Nigeria accounting for a substantial share due to porous borders and thriving black markets. It highlighted how legacy weapons from past

conflicts and weak stockpile management continue to fuel criminality and violence, especially in border regions. The report concluded that SALW proliferation is a major catalyst for insecurity, state fragility, and humanitarian crises. However, some scholars argue that the report's broad, macro-level focus limits its practical usefulness for designing targeted interventions at specific border communities.

Onuoha (2013), in *Porous Borders and Transnational Threats in the West African Sub-region*, examined how weak border management facilitates transnational crimes, including arms trafficking. The objective of the study was to analyze the security implications of poorly regulated borders in West Africa. The findings revealed that inadequate surveillance, weak inter-agency cooperation, and limited intelligence sharing allow illicit weapons to move freely across national boundaries, particularly into Nigeria. The study concluded that border insecurity is central to the region's broader security crisis and that strengthening border governance is essential for controlling arms proliferation. Nevertheless, a contrary view suggests that the study focuses more on border weaknesses than on domestic demand factors that sustain illicit arms markets.

Kum (2021), in the study *Border Security and Transnational Crime in West Africa*, sought to empirically evaluate the effectiveness of border security mechanisms in combating transnational crimes such as SALW trafficking. The findings indicated that insufficient manpower, limited technological capacity, and corruption among border officials severely undermine border security operations. As a result, criminal networks exploit these weaknesses to traffic weapons across borders with minimal resistance. The study concluded that strengthening institutional capacity, surveillance technology, and accountability mechanisms is critical to reducing SALW proliferation and insecurity. However, critics caution that excessive securitization of borders may disrupt legitimate cross-border economic activities and deepen socioeconomic grievances among border communities.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by the Frustration-Aggression Theory and Criminogenic Opportunity Theory, both explaining how socioeconomic factors and weak security systems create opportunities for weapons trafficking and violence. The Frustration-Aggression Theory, originally developed by Dollard et al. (1939), argues that aggression often emerges when individuals or groups are blocked from achieving their goals. In situations where people experience economic hardship, unemployment, political marginalization, or social inequality, frustration can build up and create conditions where aggression becomes more likely. In border communities, limited economic opportunities and high poverty levels may push some individuals toward activities such as smuggling, trafficking, or participation in armed groups. The theory therefore helps explain why people who feel deprived or excluded may engage in actions that undermine security.

When applied to the Nigeria-Benin border, the theory suggests that socioeconomic challenges such as lack of formal employment, weak government presence, and poor infrastructure intensify frustration among border residents. Many young people in these areas struggle to find stable income sources. When legitimate pathways for success feel inaccessible, illicit activities like weapons trafficking or participating in armed groups may appear as alternative ways to

cope with hardship. Thus, aggression and criminal behavior are not random; they are shaped by conditions that make some people feel trapped or ignored.

Frustration–Aggression Theory also highlights how weak state structures contribute to insecurity. When citizens perceive that government institutions cannot provide security, justice, or economic support, frustration may be redirected toward the state or society. This may manifest as increased willingness to cooperate with smugglers, rebel networks, or criminal gangs that promise financial gain or protection. In this way, the theory connects emotional responses to structural problems and provides insight into how circulating weapons escalate insecurity.

On the other hand, Criminogenic Opportunity Theory focuses on the availability of opportunities to commit crime rather than on emotions or frustrations. The theory, associated with scholars like Cohen and Felson (1979), argues that crime occurs when three elements converge: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of capable guardianship. In the context of border security, this theory helps explain why poorly monitored borders, weak law-enforcement capacity, and inadequate surveillance make illegal activities easier to carry out.

At the Nigeria–Benin border, several features create criminogenic opportunities: porous routes that are difficult to monitor, high cross-border movement, corruption among some officials, and the presence of informal markets that facilitate smuggling. When security systems are weak or inconsistent, traffickers find it easier to transport SALW without detection. This theory therefore shifts attention from why people offend to how the environment allows offending to happen. It emphasizes the importance of strengthening border patrols, intelligence networks, and technological surveillance to reduce opportunities for crime.

Together, Frustration–Aggression Theory and Criminogenic Opportunity Theory provide a comprehensive explanation for weapons trafficking and insecurity. The first explains how socioeconomic pressures motivate individuals to consider illegal activities, while the second explains how weak security systems create the space for those activities to occur. By combining both perspectives, the seminar demonstrates that addressing border insecurity requires both improving the living conditions that reduce frustration and strengthening security systems that limit opportunities for trafficking.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, which is most appropriate given the nature of the research questions and the type of data required. Qualitative methods are especially suitable for studies like this, which rely on non-statistical, non-measurable data. The data used in this study are drawn primarily from documentary and secondary sources, including official publications of international organizations such as the United Nations, government policy documents, and relevant institutional records. Additional materials include scholarly texts, journal articles, conference papers, and online academic resources. The method of data analysis applied is qualitative descriptive analysis, which focuses on identifying patterns, attributes, and relationships within the data (Kerlinger, 1973; Selltitz et al., 1979; Holton & Burnett, 1997). Through this method, the study aims to reveal the underlying linkages between diplomatic breakdowns and recurring environmental disasters resulting from the management

of the Lagdo Dam, ultimately providing nuanced insight into Nigeria-Cameroon water relations.

Findings

The study found that porous borders characterized by multiple unofficial routes and weak surveillance significantly facilitate the acquisition and circulation of Small Arms and Light Weapons along the Nigeria–Benin border. These structural weaknesses allow traffickers and criminal networks to transport weapons with minimal risk of interception. Another major finding of the study is that corruption among border and security officials, combined with the activities of transnational black-market networks, constitutes a dominant pattern through which SALW are acquired and distributed. Respondents highlighted instances where law enforcement personnel either colluded with traffickers or neglected their duties due to bribery, political pressure, or personal gain. Such corrupt practices weaken the deterrent capacity of security institutions and allow traffickers to operate with relative impunity. This finding aligns with existing literature that identifies corruption as a critical enabler of illicit arms trafficking in Nigeria and the wider West African sub-region (Aning & Atuobi, 2019).

The findings showed that the proliferation of SALW directly fuels insecurity in border communities, manifesting in armed robbery, banditry, kidnapping, economic disruption, and population displacement. The widespread availability of weapons has intensified violence and undermined social and economic stability along the border.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that porous borders remain one of the most significant factors enabling the acquisition and circulation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) along the Nigeria–Benin border. The existence of numerous unofficial crossing points, poorly monitored routes, and expansive border terrains creates opportunities for traffickers to transport weapons with minimal risk of detection. These structural weaknesses are compounded by the limited presence of security personnel and inadequate border infrastructure, making effective monitoring difficult. Similar studies have emphasized that porous borders facilitate not only smuggling but also the establishment of safe corridors for criminal and insurgent networks operating across national boundaries (Ekoh & George, 2020).

In addition, the high level of human mobility and informal cross-border interactions among border communities further complicates border regulation. Long-standing cultural, economic, and social ties between communities on both sides of the border often blur the distinction between legal and illegal movement. Arms traffickers exploit these interactions by concealing weapons within legitimate trade activities, thereby evading security checks. This finding supports earlier assertions that informal border economies and weak surveillance systems provide cover for illicit arms flows in West Africa (Onuoha, 2013).

The implication of this finding is that border porosity constitutes a fundamental security challenge rather than a mere administrative lapse. Without addressing these structural vulnerabilities through improved surveillance technology, adequate manpower, and coordinated border patrols, efforts to curb SALW proliferation may remain largely ineffective. The study therefore reinforces the argument that strengthening border governance is central to controlling

illicit arms circulation and enhancing security along the Nigeria–Benin border (Small Arms Survey, 2018).

The study revealed that corruption among border and security officials, combined with the operation of transnational black-market networks, constitutes a major pattern through which SALW are acquired and distributed. These networks exploit informal trade channels and institutional weaknesses to sustain illicit arms flows.

The study also identified black-market networks as critical enablers of SALW acquisition. These local and transnational networks provide ready access to firearms, often sourced from conflict zones, surplus stockpiles, or illegal manufacturing hubs. By exploiting informal trade channels and strong family or community ties, these networks are able to distribute weapons efficiently while avoiding detection. Respondents agreed that these markets directly contribute to increased criminal activities such as armed robbery, banditry, and kidnapping, a finding consistent with earlier studies linking black-market arms availability to rising violent crime (Hazen & Horner, 2007).

This finding demonstrates that SALW proliferation is sustained by a convergence of institutional failure and organized criminal enterprise. Combating arms trafficking therefore requires more than the physical presence of security agencies; it demands strong accountability mechanisms, anti-corruption reforms, and intelligence-driven operations. Without addressing corruption and dismantling black-market networks, institutional efforts to regulate arms movement along the Nigeria–Benin border are unlikely to yield sustainable results (Ekoh & George, 2020).

The study further revealed that the proliferation of SALW directly fuels insecurity in border communities, manifesting in armed robbery, banditry, kidnapping, and other forms of violent crime. The widespread availability of weapons emboldens criminal groups and enhances their operational capacity, making violent attacks more frequent and lethal. Respondents reported heightened fear and vulnerability among residents, as armed groups often possess superior firepower compared to local communities. This finding supports existing research that establishes a strong link between SALW availability and escalating levels of violence in fragile border regions (UNODC, 2020).

Beyond physical insecurity, the study found that SALW proliferation has severe socioeconomic consequences for border communities. Economic activities such as farming, trading, and transportation are disrupted as insecurity discourages movement and investment. Businesses are reluctant to operate in high-risk areas, agricultural activities are abandoned, and households are forced to relocate in search of safety. These disruptions undermine livelihoods and exacerbate poverty in already marginalized border areas, reinforcing the cycle of insecurity and underdevelopment (Hazen & Horner, 2007).

The findings further underscore the interconnected nature of porous borders, corruption, black-market networks, and weak law enforcement in driving insecurity along the Nigeria–Benin border. SALW proliferation erodes social cohesion, weakens trust in state institutions, and undermines long-term development prospects. Addressing this challenge therefore requires a multi-faceted approach that includes strengthening border infrastructure, enforcing accountability among security personnel, dismantling illicit arms markets, and enhancing the

operational capacity of law enforcement agencies. Community engagement and regional cooperation are also essential for achieving sustainable security and restoring stability in affected border areas (Small Arms Survey, 2018; Kum, 2021).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

Insecurity along the Nigeria–Benin border is closely linked to the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), and addressing it requires more than isolated interventions. Reducing arms trafficking is central because the availability of weapons directly amplifies criminality, armed robbery, banditry, and communal violence in border communities. Without limiting the flow of SALW, other security measures such as patrols, checkpoints, and intelligence gathering may only achieve limited results, as traffickers can continuously replenish their arsenals. Strengthening security systems including better-equipped border patrols, enhanced surveillance technologies, and well-trained personnel is therefore essential to deter and intercept illegal movements effectively.

Equally important is political will at both national and regional levels. Governments must prioritize border security, implement robust arms-control policies, and hold accountable institutions or individuals that facilitate trafficking. Political commitment ensures that security reforms are sustained, adequately funded, and consistently enforced across all border points.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthen border surveillance with drones, scanners, and digital monitoring**
Enhancing border surveillance using modern technology is critical for detecting and intercepting illicit activities, including SALW trafficking. Drones provide aerial coverage of large or difficult-to-access border areas, allowing authorities to monitor movement in real time and respond promptly to suspicious activity.
2. **Increase training and accountability of customs, police, and immigration officers.**
The comprehensive training should include understanding trafficking patterns, recognizing suspicious behavior, and using technological tools efficiently. In addition, establishing robust accountability mechanisms such as performance audits, anti-corruption measures, and disciplinary frameworks helps reduce collusion and misconduct among officials.

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