

UNGOVERNED SPACES AS STRUCTURAL DRIVERS OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS PROLIFERATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract. The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) in Northwestern Nigeria has emerged as a significant driver of insecurity, disrupting social, economic, and political stability. This study examines the role of ungoverned spaces as structural enablers of SALW proliferation, focusing on Sokoto, Katsina, and Jigawa states. Employing a qualitative approach, data were collected through Key Informant Interviews, field observations, and secondary sources, with thematic analysis conducted using NVivo 15. Findings reveal that porous borders, weak state presence, inadequate law enforcement, and socio-economic deprivation have created fertile conditions for the spread of SALWs and the rise of armed groups. These factors contribute to widespread violence, including banditry, kidnapping for ransom, and armed robbery, while also causing displacement, disruption of agricultural and economic activities, and erosion of community welfare. The study concludes that ungoverned spaces function as structural drivers of arms proliferation and exacerbate insecurity in the region. It recommends strengthening state presence, improving socio-economic infrastructure, engaging local communities, enforcing regulatory frameworks, and enhancing regional cooperation to mitigate SALW proliferation and its associated risks.

Keywords: *Small Arms and Light Weapons, ungoverned spaces, proliferation, security, Northwestern Nigeria*

Introduction

The spread of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) in Africa cannot be seen independently of the regime settings in which these weapons are spread. The availability of uncontrolled or lightly controlled spaces in much of the continent especially in the vulnerable and war-torn areas has created the conditions under which proliferation of illicit weapons will occur. The ease of access to SALWs by non state actors has been turned into a significant menace to national security, harmony, and political stability (Kawu, 2022). Even though the issue of arms proliferation is a worldwide issue, Africa is largely affected. Among the 640 million SALWs in the global circulation, only about 100 million existed in Africa with 30 million in sub-Saharan Africa and nearly 8 million in West Africa alone. The percentage of weapons in civilian hands is approximately 59, in the hands of government armed forces is 38, in the hands of the police is 2.8, and in the hands of armed groups is 0.2. Nigeria is one of the most significant examples in this area trend. It has been estimated that there are one-three million small arms and light weapons currently in circulation in the country. The security implications have been drastic. Accessibility of these weapons has facilitated kidnapping of ransom, sexual violence, cattle rustling, armed robbery, banditry, ethno religious conflicts and insurgency. Although SALWs themselves do not create conflict, the presence reduces the barrier to violence and aggravates the already existing conflicts.

The arms circulation is less difficult to maintain in the contexts where the state authority is poorly projected and the control over the territory is challenged. This is supported by the findings in Nigeria where empirical developments are taking place. The insurgency by Boko Haram in the Northeast has been pegged on the availability of advanced military equipment that has facilitated its killing of over 35,000 people and displacement of over two million individuals since 2009. Bands of banditry, mass abductions have also gained momentum in the Northwest, and they usually take place in regions where the state security is scarce. In the Niger Delta, armed groups have been using SALWs to destroy oil infrastructure that have cost the economy about 15 billion dollars annually (Afuzie, 2025). In these areas, the dynamics of violence overlap with territorial areas in which regulatory authority is poor and the non state actors have different levels of control. Such policy responses have tried to deal with the challenge, such as the creation of the National Centre on the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons in 2021 and the pledge by Nigeria to the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons. Nevertheless, loopholes are still apparent. The security agencies reportedly intercepted nearly 15 percent of illegal arms traffic into the country in 2015-2020 (Olowonihi and Musa, 2024). Officials being corrupt in security institutions, poor border monitoring, low data precision, and socio-economic forces further complicate the efforts to regulate it. These repeated constraints indicate that weapon of mass destruction is not merely a case of a criminal traffic or personal interests, but is entrenched within more general structural failures of governance and land allotment. This research paper thus analyses uncontrolled areas as structural forces of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Instead of seeing uncontrolled spaces as passive environments of insecurity, the paper claims that they actively create spaces of regulatory void, alternative orders, and illegal market systems that reinforce the demand and supply of SALWs.

Nigeria has over the years been widely known to having ungoverned spaces and leadership deficit, despite the efforts made by the cross-border security agencies including the Nigerian Police Force, the Nigeria Customs Service and the Nigeria Immigration Service. The condition has enabled various transnational crimes such as human trafficking, smuggling, drug trafficking, armed robbery, money laundering, and trafficking of illicit arms. The persistent increase of the Small Arms and Light Weapons has been the cumulative effect. Although it is the mandate of these agencies to control the cross-border movements, their inability to control the movements effectively through territorial controls represents bigger governance issues. There is an estimated 640 million small arms circulating around the world with some 100 million in Africa, 30 million in sub-Saharan Africa and 8 million in West Africa alone. Among them, approximately 59 percent of these are civilian owned, 38 percent are owned by government armed forces, 2.8 percent by the police, and 0.2 percent by armed groups (Nte, 2011). Nigeria is persistently influenced to a great extent in this regional concentration. Over 50 communal conflicts, sectarian violence, and ethno religious conflicts have been documented in the country between 1999 and 2023, all of which have been marked by huge loss of lives, destruction of property, and internal displacement especially of women and children. It is reported that the proliferation and application of SALW in ethno religious violence and armed robbery have claimed lives of over 10, 000 lives with an average of 1, 000 deaths every year since 1999. In the Kano riot of 2004, the proportion of casualties was about 66 percent of the victims of the SALW related injuries, with many of them becoming permanently disabled. On a

larger scale, SALW-related injuries have been growing at an unprecedented rate in urban Nigeria, where the vast majority of homicides are carried out with the help of these weapons (Olamide and Emmanuel, 2018).

The issue of armed violence continuity is also compounded by the fact that the law enforcement institutions have limited abilities of preventing or containing violent crime. Available literature indicates that the current security agencies lack adequate resources, training, and manpower to sufficiently patrol the vast and inhospitable landscape of Nigeria especially the long and porous borders of the country (Hazen and Horner, 2007). The failure to regulate some of the territories poses the situation where illegal arms trafficking can be performed with minimum interference. Although the porous borders and poor institutional capacity have been most frequently mentioned as the causes of SALW proliferation, they are commonly spoken of as the signs of operational weaknesses as opposed to the underlying structural governance failures. The presence of unequal states and minimal territorial penetration in Nigeria leads to places in which formal authority is undermined and non state actors take advantage of regulatory gaps in a number of regions in Nigeria. Their further spread of illegal weapons thus leads to an even deeper inquiry, to what extent is the presence of governance voids and environments with a weak hold serving as structural facilitators of interacted proliferation of arms? Answering this question is necessary because it is only after that that the arms control strategies can be advanced beyond the reactive facets of the control to a more comprehensive conception of the ways in which governance conditions contribute to the supply, demand, and persistence of the Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria.

This study is based on the Failed State Theory, where the weakness of a state is associated with the issues of security and development. The state failure concept came to the limelight during the 1990s, and it focused on the inefficiency of states to execute their basic roles especially providing security to citizens (Rotberg, 2010). Rotberg defines a failed state as one that is engulfed in internal violence and it no longer provides basic political commodities. Maintaining security in a specific territory is the major political good. Failed State Theory refers to those nation-states that have institutions that are either weak or dysfunctional such as the police, the judiciary, the bureaucracy and the armed forces. The problem of such states is that, in most cases, law and order are partially or completely ineffective, the performance of the government is poor, the infrastructure is of bad quality, the utility service is weakening, and the human development indicators (infant mortality and illiteracy rates, etc.) worsen. Those circumstances provide a favourable atmosphere to corruption, economic stand still, and insecurity (Rotberg, 2010). The signs of the fragility of the state are seen in the context of Nigeria. Natural lawlessness epitomized by McDonald attacks by unknown gunmen, cattle rustlers or armed bandits and the incapacity of the security agencies to respond efficiently or prosecute villains depict lack of governance. Poor institutional capability compromises the state monopoly of the legitimate application of force, which gives room to criminal actors to move freely. The Failed State Theory will be specifically applicable in this study since it gives us a theory on the role of structural vulnerability in governance creating ungoverned or poorly governed areas, which subsequently permit the trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons. Illegal weapons trade and bloodshed flourish in regions where the state is unable to exercise an effective territorial control, as well as offer some basic security, and where the lack of authority is saturated by non-state actors. It is through this theoretical spectacle that the study is able to view

uncontrollable spaces not only as geographical spaces but as structural spaces that arise out of institutions failure, to which SALWs are used as a means of insecurity.

Ungoverned Spaces and The Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation

The views of academics regarding ungoverned space are disputable. Other scholars are dubious of the existence of any completely uncontrollable territories and claim that so-called uncontrollable spaces are actually controlled by other forms of authority (Igboin, 2021). The idea has been used extensively in counter terrorism speechmaking, especially to refer to weak states or regions that are viewed as possible havens of extremist groups (Arsenault and Bacon, 2015). The terms are not new, but it has found a new sense in the current environment of the twenty first century security dilemmas. To perceive uncontrollable spaces, it is necessary to perceive uncontrollability. Ungovernability is the failure, reluctance, and/or inefficiency of the state to carry out the primary functions within a specific territory. According to Raleigh and Dowd (2013), ungoverned spaces are defined as spaces where there are no efficient state sovereignty and state control both physically and non physically. This lack does not imply complete withdrawal of the state but only the milder inability to control, impose laws and uphold authority. According to Olaniyan and Akinyele (2016), most of these territories are not fully controlled, but they are partially controlled or, at least, without an authority. On the same note, Forest (2010) defines ungoverned space as loss of state capacity to establish effective control over a geographical territory. He also brings the concept of zones of competing governance or areas where governance structures are parallel to each other, whereby non state actors are in high levels of power. According to Sackflame and Omitola (2022), such governance failures may enable the emergence of war and other types of insecurity. Combined, the literature would indicate that ungoverned spaces should be viewed not as anarchy, but as space of weakened or challenged state authority.

Small arms refer to handheld guns that are used personally. SAS (2019) defines them as small arms that are used personally and are intended to be carried around. These are hand guns, rifles, shotguns and sub machine guns. Their light weight and ability to be hidden easily use them in the most flexible way both during civilian and military purposes. Jones (2020) outlines their primary role in infantry, and asymmetrical warfare, whereas Smith (2021) mentions the technology development of the technology, which has made it more reliable, more useful, and lethal. Light weapons on the other hand are used by small groups of people and not by individuals. According to the UN (2005), light weapons refer to portable weapons that include heavy machine guns, portable grenade launchers, anti aircraft and anti tank weapons, recoilless rifles, missile launchers and mortars which have caliber measures of less than 100 millimetres. A similar classification is taken in the ECOWAS (2006). They are especially compatible with irregular warfare and armies with higher destructive capabilities because they are lightweight and have a higher destructive potential. According to Aisedion (2022), they have a tendency to stay in conflict zones because of their high levels of durability and the low cost involved in their maintenance. Although these definitions help understand the technical difference between small arms and light weaponry, their inherent portability, endurance and the ability to be used easily predetermines their high vulnerability to black market distribution, in particular situations of lax regulatory controls. The current literature names a variety of causes of SALW proliferation, such as porous borders, weak enforcement systems, large demand in conflict prone countries,

and illegal trafficking networks (Sule and Deribe, 2020). These arguments have paid much attention to the operational weaknesses and market dynamics. Nonetheless, the relation between the territorial governance and the perpetuated arms circulation has not been fully incorporated in the literature.

Even though there is a literature that recognizes weak enforcement and limited state capacity as factors contributing to illicit flows, less analysis has been done in systematic analysis of the role of regions with fragmented or rival authoritative structures in providing structural conditions that legitimize and maintain arms proliferation. In the conditions where regulatory bodies are not effective in terms of penetration of territory, the existence of illegal markets without a significant disruption and the consolidation of coercive power by non state actors occur. Thus, notwithstanding the fact that the literature is very insightful in terms of defining and operational drivers, it has an analytical gap in terms of the structural contribution of ungoverned or partially governed space to supply, circulation, and entrenchment of Small Arms and Light Weapons. In this study, the gap will be filled with an analysis of the role of governance vacuums as not just a context of insecurity, but also structural processes that promote proliferation of arms on a long-term basis.

Materials and Methods

The research design that will be embraced in this study is qualitative research. The qualitative approach is thought to be suitable since the research will enable the study of the complex nature of governance and security nexus, especially when institutional instability and unofficial systems of power determine social realities. Since the aim of the study is to investigate the ungoverned spaces as the structural actors of proliferation of the Small Arms and Light Weapons, the qualitative inquiry will be suitable to offer the flexibility needed to be able to capture the perceptions, experiences, and contextual nuances that cannot be ascertained with quantitative measurements. Participants who were sampled using purposive sampling had direct knowledge on security dynamics and movement of arms within the sampled locations. The theoretical logic that was used to determine the sample size was the logic of theoretical saturation advanced by Glaser and Strauss (2017) who propose that the data collection process should continue until there is no substantially new information. Overall, fifteen Key Informant Interviews were carried out from Mac until June 2025. The research was conducted in three Northwestern Nigeria states namely, Sokoto, Katsina and Jigawa. One local government area and one community at each state were selected on the basis of their strategic significance to the study. The three local government areas chosen were; Sabon Birni, Sokoto State, Jibya, Katsina State, and Maigatari, Jigawa State. These are regions of borderland location with its closeness to international boundaries, a high degree of cross border traffic and an incidence of difficulty in law enforcement penetration. They have often been cited in the literature that has existed as hotspots in illicit transnational practices such as proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons since they result in permeable borders and lack of state presence.

Five key informants have been interviewed at every location making the number of respondents fifteen. The sample of participants was chosen according to their topicality to the research topic, their ability to offer informed information regarding the security and the governance situation, and their knowledge of local dynamics. This was meant to achieve a balanced representation of the conflict affected areas but due more emphasis

on the depth rather than breadth of information. Data were gathered by the use of a Key Informant Interviews, field observation and documentary analysis. The secondary data was collected in form of government reports, academic journals, textbooks, newspapers and other academic publications that were pertinent to the issue of arms proliferation and the governance of the region. Thematic analysis was used in the analysis of the collected data. The NVivo 15 software was used to support a systematization of the coding and pattern detection of the interview transcripts. The interviews were done in English and Hausa. Before coding, verbatim transcription of audio recordings was done. The data were inductively coded into thematic categories, which made it possible to recognize patterns that occur repeatedly and are related to the lack of governance, territorial dominance, and circulation of arms.

Results and Discussion

Governance deficit

The results indicate that the ungoverned spaces are rampant in Northwestern Nigeria especially in Sokoto, Jigawa and Katsina states. These regions are not easily reachable by formal security forces, which forms safe havens to armed groups and criminal networks. Lack of good state control does not only weaken the enforcement of the law but also exposes the community to violence, coercion and even displacement. One key informant explained: “The lack of state security agencies in areas that are not under control exposes the local communities to the risks of armed groups and criminal groups” (Inf45). This result corresponds to Jamiu et al. (2024), who stress that systematic state inattention or absence of desire to take dominion over the territory is a direct cause of the emergence of armed banditry and the spread of SALWs. The lawless situation allows non-state actors to create parallel systems of governance that strengthen insecurity and crime cycles. Besides an overall absence of the presence of government, numerous unmanaged locations exhibit close to a complete absence of official security personnel. According to the informants, “the local communities depend on informal justice systems, self-defence militia or vigilante groups that can unwillingly intensify violence” (Inf21). According to Adeniyi et al. (2023), this impunity of criminal networks and armed groups is possible due to the absence of security deployment, which only makes insecurity deeper and allows the spread of SALW. The evidence highlights the structural correlation between lapses in governance and the spread of arms which demonstrates how the absence of states presents both a chance and rationale to employ armed self-help and the accumulation of illegal weapons.

The research concluded that uncontrolled areas act as focal points of organized crime, and SALWs are used to perpetrate violence and blackmail. Informants pointed at the prevalence of firearms, as the means of controlling communities, as well as taking part in kidnappings and robbing: “The access to SALWs has led to many cases and trends of violence, such as kidnapping, high-profile individuals, robbery, and violence toward travellers” (Inf43, Inf36). Targeting porous borders, lack of institutional presence, and lack of state control, Caleb (2021) agrees with the fact that these conditions are perfect to engage in arms trafficking, organized crime, and insurgency. The evidence reveals that there is a strong feedback mechanism: that poor governance allows criminals to thrive and that criminality contributes to the further development of weapons. The results also show that the attacks in ungoverned territories are recurrent, organized, and even more violent. There are systematic cattle rustling, lootings and

kidnappings by armed groups. According to informants, porous borders along with lax enforcement by the states allow easy movement and carrying of weapons: “It has also resulted in kidnappings and cattle stealing in these regions...some of the security agencies deployed in these regions are either working together or doing nothing at the ground” (Inf17). Adegoke (2020) points out that what previously seemed to be the isolated cases of banditry has now transformed into a multi-layered regional security issue, and this proves the systematic effects of SALW spreading without state control. The study also points out the fact that kidnapping of ransom has become a mainstream and profitable practice which serves to fortify the ability of criminal groups to procure weapons. Informants explained the magnitude and frequency of ransom activities: “Armed gangs attack tourists, residents of the village and steals livestock, taking ransoms and money” (Inf41, Inf43). According to Okoli and Abubakar (2021), deep-rooted armed actors are opposed to the intervention of the state that lead to self-sustaining processes of violence. The statistics show that profit motives based on ransom lead directly to acquiring and selling SALWs, thus, proving the structural connection between economic factors and the growth of uncontrolled areas as areas of weapons proliferation.

Ungoverned spaces socio-economic effects

Insecure infrastructures, such as roads, schools, health institutions, and communication systems, contribute to worsening insecurity in uncontrollable areas. According to informants, the lack of proper infrastructure restricts the visibility of states so that criminal actors can gain control: “The key factors of insecurity are lack of good infrastructure and negligence of the government towards the welfare of the people” (Inf10). Anikwudike and Agabi (2024) note that the lack of social amenities will enable the formation of parallel forms of governance by non-state actors, which will enable illicit activities to thrive. This implies that not only does ungoverned space promote criminality, but it also instills socio-economic marginalization. Uncontrolled violence has led to the massive displacement of populations in uncontrollable areas leading to humanitarian disasters of food insecurity, disease and malnutrition. The fact that Boko Haram has taken control of certain places further limits governance and economic activities and this continues to maintain poverty and violence in a circle. Informants accentuated the extent of displacement and its effects: “Deportations and killings in tens of thousands of people were witnessed in whole communities. Without the security of the state, it became hard to give humanitarian aid resulting in severe insecurity in food, epidemics, and malnutrition” (Inf43). Abbani (2021) indicate that these results correspond to the fact that women and children are disproportionately affected by displacement-related vulnerabilities.

SALWs spread has a direct impact on the trade, agriculture and social integration, and many have to survive on the black economies. Informants explained the correlation between insecurity and financial dependence on arms: “The economy is declining, and thus leads to the high dependence of arms” (Inf42). Agriculture which is the major source of livelihood in the Northwest has been drastically reduced. About 80 percent of the farmers give up on their farms in fear of attacks and produce less food thus increasing the level of insecurity. The clashes of control over the resources which are often aggravated by the presence of illegal weapons deter investment and destroy the development of the region (Awotayo and Akinrinde, 2022). The level of insecurity has had a tremendous impact on the food production and local markets. Militants with

weapons attack animals and agricultural crops directly affecting food security and livelihoods (Inf32). According to Adeniyi et al. (2023), these disruptions are aggravated by herder-farmer conflicts, which are caused by the circulation of SALW. These results are proof that uncontrollable spaces can be structural facilitators of social instability and stagnation of economies.

Uncontrollable territories are full of drug trafficking and use. These groups offer financial and operational assistance to military organizations and enhance the involvement of young people in the area in crimes: “In these places, the sale of illicit drugs, theft, and kidnapping are mostly common” (Inf32, Inf30). Non-state actors impose taxes on the communities, which consolidate their authority even more and enable the acquisition of weapons. Informants reported: “Armed bandits are now fond of imposing illegal taxes on vulnerable communities” (Inf46, Inf34). These practices exacerbate poverty, unemployment, and food insecurity, while reinforcing the circulation of SALWs and the power of non-state actors. Altogether, the results support the idea that the uncontrolled areas in Northwestern Nigeria are structural forces of SALW proliferation. Instead, weak governance, lack of security agencies, ineffective infrastructure and social-economic marginalization pave way to the flourishing of criminal networks and armed forces. This study shows that SALWs are the means and the results of uncontrolled spaces: they allow non-state actors to centralize authority, conduct crimes, and maintain an economic advantage because of ransom and unlawful taxation. The study also brings out the cyclical nature of the relationship: the absence of states contributes to proliferation of arms, and in its turn to the state of insecurity, displacement and disruption of economies. This relationship confirms the theoretical implementation of Failed State Theory in which incapacity by the state and neglect of territories permit ungoverned spaces to become breeding grounds of armed conflict and criminality. The study makes us see the significance of structural governance deficits in fragile areas as it relates SALW proliferation to a lack of socio-economic governance.

Conclusion

This study reveals that in Northwestern Nigeria, uncontrolled spaces are the major structural factors that have contributed to the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). The resultant findings indicate that the lack of effective government presence, ineffective enforcement of laws and lack of sound socio-economic infrastructure has led to an environment where armed groups and criminal networks exist. It is a porous border with limited state control, thus these areas have become havens of illegal activities which include arms traffic, ransom kidnapping, cattle rustling, drugs, and informal taxation. The easy accessibility of SALWs has increased violence, interfered with economic operations, displaced population, and increased social and humanitarian susceptibilities. The study emphasizes the fact that SALWs are a symptom and a trigger of deficits in governance. They thrive on a combination of poor institutional capacity, socio-economic deprivation, and poor law enforcement and at the same time become a cyclical source of insecurity, lawlessness, and social dislocation. The use of the Failed State Theory highlights how in the event whereby the state is unable to provide basic forms of public good, including security, government, and basic services, uncontrolled spaces are created as lawless, predatory, and battlefields. The study also highlights that response to SALW proliferation can not be done on the basis of reactive security measures only. Strategic measures relying on enhancing the state

presence, socio-economic status, community engagement, the implementation of regulatory institutions, and the development of a regional cooperation are necessary. In the absence of such combined efforts, uncontrolled zones will still be used to spread arms proliferation and perpetuate insecurity, not only to the development but also to peace in the region.

Finally, the results do indeed present a strong argument of a multi-dimensional concept that would incorporate a solution to governance shortfalls, socio-economic shocks, and the issue of security. The recommendations provided addressed the increase in state presence, socio-economic development, community involvement, law enforcement, and regional collaboration provide a strategic framework of decreasing SALW spread and the overall effects of insecurity. A powerful solution can be to ensure that these measures are effectively implemented so that ungoverned spaces are no longer seen as areas of lawlessness but rather of stability, safety and socio-economic opportunities. The government must focus on increasing its administrative and security presence in the uncontrollable spaces in Northwestern Nigeria. This is the use of trained and well-equipped security personnel, placing fixed outposts in isolated locations and community policing strategies that will enhance the use of intelligence and quick response. The border control should intensify by using technology, joint patrols, and sharing intelligence with the neighboring states to bar the movement of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) across the borders. Increasing state presence does not only serve to eliminate criminal players but also instills confidence in the local communities, which becomes the basis of law enforcement agencies to perform efficiently. It is important to combat socio-economic causes of insecurity. Infrastructure investment such as roads, schools, health facilities and communication networks can go a long way in lowering vulnerability of communities to armed groups. The development programs are supposed to encourage other livelihoods particularly to the populations involved in illegal economic activities because of poverty or opportunity. The state can make SALW proliferation and criminal businesses less appealing, and stabilize and establish sustainable communities to the impacted ones, by making basic services and economic opportunities more accessible to them.

The local communities should be brought to participate in the governance and security programs. The communities can be empowered through participatory strategies like early warning systems, dialogue platforms and local governance councils to avoid depending on self-help militias or criminal networks. Intervention measures that are sensitive to ethnicity, communal and herder-farmer conflicts are also necessary to minimize the likelihood of the SALW-driven violence. Involving communities in decision-making as well as preventive action would make the security strategies culturally sensitive, locally endorsed, and tend to be more effective in the reduction of insecurity. The arms control laws and regulations should be made stronger and stricter. This involves putting in place tough punitive measures on illegal possession, trafficking, as well as use of SALWs. The mining, livestock trade and cross-border trade are high-risk areas which should be put under close regulation to ensure that armed forces do not exploit them. These structures also need the resources, law enforcement staff training, and accountability mechanisms that will reinforce these structures and make sure that the laws are enforced effectively and consistently across the areas. It should institutionalize continuous monitoring and evaluation of ungoverned spaces, the proliferation of arms, and criminal activities, and this will help to support evidence-based policy interventions. Awareness campaigns should be done in the society to make

people understand the hazards of SALWs and the need to avoid involvement in unlawful acts. Also, the regional collaboration with the neighbors and other entities like the ECOWAS should be enhanced to align the legislations, organize the implementation process and combat inter-country arms smuggling. Local, national, and regional cooperation is needed to achieve a sustainable curtailment of SALW proliferation and other insecurity issues.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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