

---

**SMALL ARMS PROLIFERATION AND INTERCOMMUNAL CONFLICT IN CROSS  
RIVER STATE (2015-2022)**

**COLLINS MATHIAS OKPE**

Department of Political Science  
Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna

**SANUSI MUHAMMAD LAWAL, PhD**

Department of Political Science  
Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna

---

**Abstract**

The proliferation of small arms can be seen as one the major instigator and motivations of conflict in almost all societies in the world. Small arms have been used indiscriminately in various conflicts in Nigeria and specifically intercommunal conflicts. Intercommunal conflicts have seriously graduated from the use of sticks, spears, cutlasses, bows and arrows to the use of various small arms which includes, pistols, pump actions, Ak47's, Bazooka, double barrel weapons and others. This intercommunal conflicts in Cross River State has led to loss of lives, properties and internal displacements. This research discusses the issues surrounding the proliferation of Small arms and how it has had an impact on the intercommunal conflicts in Cross River State. The study is adopted the realistic group theory and the frustration aggression theory for the study. The study adopted the hybrid method of data collection which entailed that data was collected from 380 questionnaire respondents who represented the entire population. The study arrived at the findings that that there is the presence of Small Arms in Abi, Ikom and Obubura local government. The study also arrived at the findings that most of the respondents affirmed that the major source of Small Arms proliferation in the local governments is through cross border movement. The study also discovered that most of the respondents affirmed that there has been an enormous utilization of Small arms in the intercommunal conflict in the three local governments in Cross River State. The study concluded that the surplus presence of Small Arms in the three local government has increased the lethality and disastrousness of the conflict which has led to so much damage to people residing in this communities. Thriving communities have also be left as waste lands sometimes because of the fear that these conflicts might reoccur thereby affecting agricultural and livestock production. The study recommends that there should be involvement of the traditional rulers in this various communities in the conflict resolution process. This is necessary because of the reverence and respect this community leaders wield within the community and the people. And also, there should be proper poverty alleviation programmes which will ensure that youths who are main participants of this intercommunal conflicts are gainfully employed.

**Key Words: Intercommunal Conflict, Arms Proliferation, Small Arms, Conflict**

## **Introduction**

Nigeria represents a vast market for domestic, regional, and international arms dealers and syndicates; it serves as a primary destination for the flow of illicit small arms and is a hub for illegal trafficking. Due to the government's inability to ensure security for its citizens in certain areas, many individuals have resorted to taking up arms (Ohene-Asare, Aklavon, Moussou & Ikelegbe, 2017). According to Ohene-Asare et al. (2017), it is estimated that 1 in 50 Nigerians possesses illicit arms, predominantly among young males from the middle and upper classes, with the number of illicit small arms having more than doubled from 2000 to 2023. The spread of small arms presents a significant security challenge in Nigeria. Such issues encompass terrorism and human trafficking on a global scale, which obstructs the establishment of stable peace and security. Undoubtedly, minor internal crises can escalate into larger civil wars, potentially destabilizing the entire nation (Okafor & Chinonyelum, 2021). Nigeria exemplifies this phenomenon, which can be attributed to the fragility and weakness of the state, along with the consequent failure to deliver effective governance.

Communal clashes represent a major violent occurrence that threatens national security. Between June 2020 and December 2024, a total of 80 communal clashes resulting in 371 fatalities were documented across the nation. Nevertheless, the data indicates a declining trend during this period. The number of communal clashes and related casualties peaked in 2022 but has shown a consistent decline since 2023. Land disputes have remained a significant catalyst for communal clashes throughout Nigeria. The notable reduction in both the frequency and casualties of communal clashes is linked to the efforts of peace committees and various peace initiatives, as well as the deployment of security forces to certain troubled areas (Nextier's Nigeria Violent Conflicts Database, 2025).

Cross River State is recognized as one of the diverse states in Nigeria that continues to face violent inter-communal conflicts, which have significantly hindered the socio-economic development of the region (Nwobo, 2015:1). Inter-communal conflicts represent one of the primary persistent issues that have plagued Cross River State over the last thirty years. During this period, numerous violent inter-communal conflicts have erupted across the three senatorial zones of the state. These conflicts have a long-standing history, resulting in the emergence of various trouble spots within the state. Notable conflict-prone areas include the Ebom-Ebijakara conflict in Abi LGA (2005), the Boje and Esobendeghe conflict in Boki LGA (2004), the Abebene and Ovokwa conflict in

Obubra LGA (2012), the Mbock and Nkonfab conflict in Ogoja and Ikom LGA (2013), the Oyoba and Ukele conflict in Abi (2016), the New Netim Chieftaincy crisis in Odukpani LGA (2016), the Ajassor and Erana conflict in Etung LGA (2012), and the Ediba and Usumutong conflict in Abi LGA (2014). Various factors contribute to these conflicts, including economic land issues, political and social tensions, as well as disputes over chieftaincy and political representation at both local and national levels (Emmanuel & Sunny, 2019).

The spread of small arms and light weapons (Small Arms) in Cross River State, Nigeria, has emerged as a critical security issue. Situated along Nigeria's southeastern border with Cameroon, Cross River State encounters challenges such as porous borders, inadequate law enforcement, political interference, a burgeoning youth population, and economic decline, all of which facilitate the illegal distribution of firearms. Cross River State shares an extensive, poorly monitored border with Cameroon, rendering it a focal point for arms smuggling activities. The absence of sufficient border security infrastructure enables traffickers to transport weapons with minimal resistance (Okoli & Ogayi, 2018). Security agencies, including the Nigeria Customs Service and Immigration, are hampered by a lack of adequate personnel and technological surveillance, which undermines their ability to effectively monitor these borders (Eze, 2020). Moreover, corruption within law enforcement agencies intensifies the issue, as certain officials collaborate with arms traffickers for monetary benefits (Nwagboso, 2019).

Political figures in Cross River State have been implicated in facilitating arms proliferation by equipping youth groups for electoral violence and political thuggery (Albert, 2021). During election periods, politicians frequently distribute weapons to their supporters to intimidate rivals and influence voting results. This behavior not only heightens the availability of illegal firearms but also empowers criminal factions who retain these weapons post-elections (Ukiwo, 2017). Cross River State has a significant youth demographic, many of whom are unemployed or underemployed. Economic difficulties drive young individuals towards criminal activities, such as armed robbery and kidnapping, where access to small arms is essential (Adekola et al., 2022). The absence of viable job opportunities renders the illicit arms trade and violent crime appealing options for survival (Oshodi, 2020).

The economic decline in Nigeria has exacerbated living conditions, leading to an increased demand for small arms for personal protection and criminal activities. The black market for firearms flourishes in Cross River State due to the high demand from vigilante groups, militants,

and community militias (Onuoha, 2019). Furthermore, the influx of refugees from the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon has further strained resources and heightened competition for arms (International Crisis Group, 2021).

The Obudu-Abi intercommunal conflict in Cross River State stands as one of Nigeria's most enduring and violent communal disputes, significantly worsened by the spread of small arms and light weapons (Small Arms). What initially started as traditional land disputes between the Obudu and Abi communities has escalated into lethal confrontations driven by easy access to firearms, political manipulation, and economic desperation (Eze & Ndifon, 2022). This conflict between the Abi (Igede-speaking) and Ukelle (Kukele-speaking) communities demonstrates how the availability of modern firearms has transformed traditional boundary disputes into protracted violent confrontations.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Intercommunal conflicts in Cross River State, Nigeria, have increasingly escalated in violence due to the widespread proliferation and utilization of Small Arms. These conflicts, frequently fueled by disagreements over land, resources, and political power, have been intensified by the ready availability of firearms. The extensive use of small arms has resulted in a rise in casualties, extended hostilities, and destabilized communities.

The spread of small arms in Obubra, Abi, and Ikom Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Cross River State has transformed intercommunal conflicts from manageable disputes into ongoing security crises. What were once conflicts resolved through customary institutions have evolved into lethal confrontations, with firearm-related deaths increasing by 240% from 2015 to 2023 (Cross River State Security Council [CRSSC], 2023). This violence, fueled by arms, undermines socioeconomic development, displaces populations, and poses a threat to regional stability.

The communities' closeness to the conflict zones in Cameroon and the Benue waterway facilitates an illicit arms pipeline. Recent ballistic analyses indicate that 58% of recovered weapons originated from conflict zones in Central Africa (Small Arms Survey, 2023). Local manufacturing further supports this influx, with 37 identified underground workshops producing "Ogbunigwe" shotguns in Ikom alone (Nigeria Police Force [NPF], 2022). Political figures worsen the situation by supplying youth groups with arms during elections, with 72% of post-election violence linked to these weapons (Albert, 2022). Casualty rates per incident have surged from 3-5 (pre-2010) to 12-25 (post-2020) (Eze & Ndifon, 2023), and the duration of conflicts has extended from days to

months, exemplified by the Obubra-Abi clash that lasted 11 consecutive months in 2022 (CRSSC, 2023). Additionally, 28 schools and 7 health centers have been closed indefinitely across the three LGAs (UNICEF, 2023).

743 conflict-related deaths have been recorded between 2020-2023, with 68% caused by small arms (CRS Ministry of Health, 2023). 2,189 firearm injury cases overwhelmed local health facilities, with 43% developing permanent disabilities (WHO, 2023). 17% of combatants are adolescents aged 12-17, indoctrinated into violence (UNICEF, 2023). 294 documented cases of conflict-related sexual violence (Amnesty International, 2023). 38,700 persons displaced across 47 camps, with 61% housed in schools (IOM, 2023). 12,400 refugees fled to Cameroon, creating cross-border protection gaps (UNHCR, 2023). 89 settlements completely deserted, including 32 ancestral communities (CRS Planning Commission, 2023). 94 schools closed, denying 27,000 children access to education (SUBEB, 2023). 62% decline in cocoa production (₦9.2 billion loss) in formerly productive zones (CRS Agric Report, 2023). 38 markets permanently closed, disrupting regional supply chains (NBS, 2023). 217km of roads rendered impassable, isolating communities (Ministry of Works, 2023).

### **Research Questions**

- i. What is the relationship between the proliferation of Small Arms and inter-communal conflict in Nigeria?
- ii. How has the proliferation of Small arms affected inter-communal conflict in Cross River State?
- iii. What are the major causes of the inter-communal conflict in Cross River State?

### **Objectives of the Study**

- i. To examine the relationship between the proliferation of Small Arms and inter-communal conflict in Nigeria.
- ii. To explain how the proliferation of Small Arms affected communal conflict in Cross River State.
- iii. To examine the major causes of the inter-communal conflict in Cross River State.

## **Conceptual Review**

### **Concept of Small Arms Proliferation**

Arms denote weaponry that can be wielded by a single individual, encompassing firearms and various destructive devices such as explosive bombs, incendiary bombs, gas bombs, grenades, rocket launchers, missiles, as well as automatic-loading revolvers and pistols, rifles, carbines, machine guns, assault rifles, and light machine guns (Malam, 2014; Gofwan, Ishaya & Danjuma, 2019).

Small arms are characterized as compact weapons that can be operated by one person. These armaments are specifically designed for individual use and include firearms and other destructive devices such as explosive bombs, incendiary bombs, or gas bombs. Small arms comprise auto-loading revolvers and pistols, rifles, carbines, machine guns, assault rifles, light machine guns, and various destructive devices, including explosive bombs, incendiary bombs, gas bombs, grenades, rocket launchers, missiles, missile systems, and landmines. Other firearms include revolvers, automatic-loading pistols, rifles, carbines, machine guns, assault rifles, and light machine guns (ECOWAS Convention, 2006) as cited by (Adeniyi, 2024).

Small arms are defined as weapons utilized by a single individual, which include firearms and other destructive devices such as explosive bombs, incendiary bombs, gas bombs, grenades, rocket launchers, missiles, automatic-loading revolvers and pistols, rifles, carbines, machine guns, assault rifles, and light machine guns (Gofwan et al., 2019). According to Muoemenam and Okafor (2022), small arms are evidently widespread in Nigeria. They have transcended their use by government security forces, assassins, armed robbers, and others, becoming significant instruments for aggression and control by specific factions within Nigeria.

As noted by Samuel (2021) and Isa, Luka, and Philip (2024), the term 'small arms' is also utilized by armed forces to refer to the infantry weapons that an individual soldier may carry. This classification typically encompasses revolvers, pistols, sub-machine guns, carbines, assault rifles, battle rifles, multiple-barrel firearms, rifles, squad automatic weapons, light machine guns, and occasionally hand grenades. Shotguns, general-purpose machine guns, medium machine guns, and grenade launchers may be categorized as small arms or as support weapons, depending on the specific military organization. In the United States, small arms generally exclude infantry support weapons; they refer to handguns or other firearms with a caliber of less than 20mm, including heavy machine guns typically of 50mm caliber or 12.2mm in U.S. service.

According to Jibrin (2018), small arms denote weapons utilized by a single individual, which encompass firearms and other destructive devices such as explosive bombs, incendiary bombs or gases, grenades, rocket launchers, missile systems, or landmines, as well as revolvers, automatic-loading pistols, rifles, machine guns, and landmines. The United Nations' "Report of Government Experts on Small Arms," as cited by Soetan (2017), defines small arms to include revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles, and light machine guns. Light weapons are characterized by heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers for anti-aircraft missile systems, and mortars with calibers less than 100mm.

As stated by Ogwuda (2018:71), proliferation denotes a "swift increase in the quantity or volume of something, encompassing growth, multiplication, dissemination, escalation, expansion, or excessive spread. In the realm of small arms and light weapons, proliferation refers to the rapid increase, multiplication, or dissemination of biochemical, nuclear, and other weapons of mass destruction to nations that were not originally involved in their development."

According to Ocholi and Eze (2023), proliferation signifies rapid expansion, abundance, or multiplication. In the context of Small Arms, arms proliferation generally refers to the transfer of weapons from one nation to another or from one group to another. The concept of proliferation may hold varying meanings for different individuals, contingent upon the context in which it is applied. Proliferation can be utilized in numerous contexts; however, regardless of its application, it conveys the notion of rapid expansion, multiplication, or abundance.

### **Concept of Conflict**

As individuals must interact with others in their surroundings, conflicts will inevitably arise due to differing interests that clash and lead to disagreements or confrontations (Folarin 2013). Additionally, whenever one individual attempts to outmaneuver others, conflict is likely to ensue. Therefore, conflict has become an unavoidable aspect of every society (Adegbam 2020). It has been identified as a significant barrier to development, whereas peace serves as a crucial element that can promote substantial development within a society (Federal Government of Germany, 2017). Defining the term conflict is complex. Scholars hold varying views on its interpretation. Consequently, the phenomenon is described as the presence of incompatibility or disagreements between two parties (individuals, groups, organizations, or nations) during their interactions regarding interests, values, beliefs, emotions, goals, space, positions, and limited resources

(Egobueze, 2016, p. 18). Conflict primarily arises when two or more individuals, despite initial attempts to reach an agreement, fail to do so due to their conflicting values, perspectives, and opinions (Egobueze, 2016).

Lewis (1990) in Omah (2013) asserts that conflict “is pervasive and inevitable because whenever people interact, there is always the possibility of the emergence or manifestation of conflicts.” In other words, “a constant factor about conflict is that it is an ever-present phenomenon in social relations” (Alimba, 2014:180). According to Wilmot and Hocker (2011:11), conflict is defined as a “felt struggle between two or more independent individuals over perceived incompatible differences in beliefs, values, and goals, or differences in desire for esteem, control, and connectedness.” In another definition, “conflict refers to contradictions arising from differences in the interests, ideas, ideologies, orientations, and precipitous tendencies of the individuals involved” (Onwe et al., 2015:78). According to Hussein and Al-Mamary (2019), conflict occurs when individuals or groups within a defined environment pursue differing goals, interests, and ambitions, particularly when there is a shift in the social environment. For example, the discovery of new resources due to developments in the physical environment creates a fertile ground for conflict. The resulting conflict typically involves individuals and groups who are eager to utilize the new resources to fulfill their objectives. Karl Marx (1818-1883) viewed conflict as the presence of conflicting interests within a group or as a consequence of each group or class striving to pursue its own interests, which leads to confrontations and the emergence of conflict (Tayo and Charles, 2007).

### **Concept of Intercommunal Conflict**

Ibeanu (2019) posits that communal conflicts, especially in regions divided by ethnicity or religion, foster an environment of insecurity, prompting civilians and local militia groups to acquire arms for their protection. This phenomenon, termed the “security dilemma,” instigates an arms race within communities, as each group fears becoming vulnerable if violence escalates. Concurrently, Schultze-Kraft (2021) points out that competition for resources, particularly in agrarian societies, heightens the demand for arms, as access to weaponry is linked to both defense and power. These insights demonstrate that communal conflict not only exacerbates violence but also sustains the proliferation of small arms due to increasing distrust and perceived threats.

Communal conflict, as defined by Azuonwu (2002) and referenced in James and Muhammad (2019), occurs between two or more communities. Oboh and Hyande (2006), also cited in James and Muhammad (2019), characterize communal conflict as a disagreement or violent engagement between two or more communities over issues such as land ownership claims, religious beliefs, and political differences, resulting in loss of life and property destruction. Similarly, Dzurgba (2006), as cited in James and Muhammad (2019), describes communal conflict as a dispute between two or more communities over territorial land, farmland, and fishing waters.

Coser (1956), as referenced in Sunday and Piate (2019), asserts that inter-communal conflict is an ongoing struggle over land, traditional status, political power, and limited resources, where the opposing groups aim to harm and destroy each other. Brosche and Elfversson (2012:35), as cited in Amalu, define communal conflict as "violent conflict between non-state groups organized around a shared communal identity." They further elaborate that violent conflict entails the use of lethal force by the parties to gain control over disputed and perceived indivisible resources, such as land or local political power.

### **Small Arms Proliferation and Intercommunal Conflict**

The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (Small Arms) in Nigeria has significantly exacerbated armed violence, leading to a marked increase in various forms of violent crimes and conflicts. This widespread availability of weapons has emboldened criminal elements and intensified existing tensions across different regions of the country. In the North Central region, particularly in states like Benue, Plateau, and Nasarawa, the proliferation of Small Arms has escalated farmer-herder conflicts. A report by the International Crisis Group (2023) revealed that between 2020 and 2022, there was a 60% increase in casualties from these conflicts, with over 3,000 deaths recorded. The report attributes this surge to the easy availability of assault rifles and other small weapons among both farming and herding communities.

The Sahel region of Africa has been a focal point of intercommunal conflict in recent years, with small arms proliferation playing a central role in exacerbating violence between ethnic groups. Since 2019, the region has witnessed an alarming rise in violent attacks by militant groups and armed militias. In countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, small arms have enabled non-state actors to engage in violent skirmishes, exacerbating the existing ethnic and religious divides (Chinonso, 2021).

In Mali, the proliferation of small arms has been a key driver of intercommunal violence, particularly between the Tuareg and Arab communities in the north, and between various ethnic groups in the central regions. According to the United Nations (2021), the number of civilian deaths in Mali related to small arms violence increased sharply between 2019 and 2021, with armed groups using small arms to carry out targeted killings, kidnappings, and massacres. These weapons have facilitated large-scale intercommunal violence, especially when mixed with the rise of jihadist insurgents in the region. In Burkina Faso, the conflict has escalated since 2019, with small arms being used by both local militias and Islamist insurgents. The widespread availability of small arms has enabled these armed groups to conduct ambushes and raids on villages, further deepening the division between ethnic communities and fueling the violence (ICG, 2020). As of 2021, over 1 million people had been displaced due to violence involving small arms, marking a significant humanitarian crisis in the region.

The proliferation of small arms has made peace efforts difficult, as disarmament programs have failed due to the deepening ethnic and sectarian divisions in the country. The increasing reliance on small arms by both local militias and jihadist groups further complicates the political and security situation, making it challenging for international peacekeeping forces and the Malian government to restore stability. Inter-communal violence is still a major worry in Nigeria, where illegal Small Arms are used practically everywhere. The presence of firearms during a fight can quickly escalate the level of violence, resulting in fatalities, and can push certain robbers to commit crimes that could have been avoided. According to a 2019 research by Human Rights Watch, competing claims to land and other resources in Nigeria contribute to recurring violence between groups (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Small arms proliferation the widespread availability of weapons such as rifles, pistols, submachine guns, and grenades has emerged as one of the most significant factors exacerbating intercommunal conflicts worldwide. These conflicts, typically rooted in ethnic tensions, religious divisions, competition over land and resources, or political marginalization, often begin as localized disputes but rapidly escalate into sustained violence when armed groups and civilians gain easy access to lethal weapons. The relationship between small arms proliferation and intercommunal violence is deeply cyclical: the availability of weapons intensifies conflicts, while prolonged conflicts create greater demand for arms, fueling a self-perpetuating cycle of violence (Alusala, 2017).

The widespread circulation of small arms dramatically lowers the threshold for violence, transforming what might have been manageable disputes into deadly, large-scale confrontations. Unlike traditional intercommunal conflicts, which may have been fought with rudimentary weapons such as machetes or spears, the introduction of automatic rifles, handguns, and grenades has exponentially increased the lethality of these clashes. In Nigeria, for example, long-standing tensions between herders and farmers over grazing rights, water access, and land use have escalated into brutal massacres due to the increasing availability of AK-47s and other military-grade weapons (Adetula et al., 2022). A 2021 report by the Small Arms Survey found that over 70% of violent conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa involve small arms, with communal violence accounting for a significant proportion of these incidents.

### **Small Arms Proliferation in Nigeria**

The proliferation of Small Arms has profound implications for regional security in West Africa, particularly in Nigeria. The proliferation of Small Arms in Nigeria has significantly exacerbated armed violence, leading to a marked increase in various forms of violent crimes and conflicts. This widespread availability of weapons has emboldened criminal elements and intensified existing tensions across different regions of the country. In the North Central region, particularly in states like Benue, Plateau, and Nasarawa, the proliferation of Small Arms has escalated farmer-herder conflicts. A report by the International Crisis Group (2023) revealed that between 2020 and 2022, there was a 60% increase in casualties from these conflicts, with over 3,000 deaths recorded. The report attributes this surge to the easy availability of assault rifles and other light weapons among both farming and herding communities.

According to a study by Onapajo and Ozden (2024), there has been a resurgence of militant activities in the region, with over 200 incidents of armed confrontations between militant groups and security forces recorded between 2021 and 2023. The study estimates that these groups possess an arsenal of approximately 10,000 assorted weapons, ranging from pistols to rocket-propelled grenades. In urban areas, the proliferation of Small Arms has led to a surge in armed robberies and kidnappings. The Nigeria Police Force reported a 40% increase in armed robbery cases in major cities like Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt between 2020 and 2022. In a particularly alarming incident in 2023, a gang armed with assault rifles attacked a shopping mall in Lagos, resulting in 15 casualties and significant property damage (Nigeria Police Force Annual Report, 2023).

Small Arms proliferation has played a crucial role in fueling insurgency and terrorism in Nigeria, providing armed groups with the means to challenge state authority and perpetrate violence on a large scale. The Boko Haram insurgency in northeastern Nigeria remains the most prominent example of how SALW proliferation fuels terrorism. According to a comprehensive report by the Institute for Security Studies (2024), Boko Haram and its offshoots have acquired an estimated 50,000 weapons since 2009, ranging from AK-47 rifles to anti-aircraft guns. The report details how these weapons have enabled the group to conduct complex attacks, such as the January 2022 assault on a military base in Borno State, which resulted in over 100 casualties among security forces.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported in 2023 that the Boko Haram insurgency has led to over 40,000 deaths and the displacement of nearly 3 million people in the Lake Chad Basin region. The report highlights how the group's access to sophisticated weapons, including vehicle mounted heavy machine guns and mortars, has allowed it to overrun towns and villages, leading to mass displacements (OCHA, 2023). In the Northwest region, banditry has evolved into a form of organized insurgency, largely due to the proliferation of Small Arms.

A study by Rufa'i (2023) revealed that bandits in states like Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna possess an arsenal estimated at 30,000 weapons. The study documented over 1,000 incidents of mass atrocities committed by these groups between 2021 and 2023, including the kidnapping of over 5,000 people for ransom. The impact of SALW proliferation on terrorism is also evident in the activities of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), a Boko Haram offshoot. In 2022, ISWAP conducted a series of sophisticated attacks in Borno and Yobe states, utilizing weaponry such as rocket-propelled grenades and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices. These attacks resulted in over 200 civilian casualties and the temporary displacement of approximately 50,000 people (UN Security Council Report, 2023).

### **Intercommunal Conflict in Nigeria**

Inter-communal conflicts have been in existence in the trouble conflicts prone areas in Africa, especially such countries like Nigeria, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d'ivoire, South Africa, Kenya and Cameroon (Taylor, 2008). Africa continent are multiethnic nations and are profoundly divided along religious, cultural, linguistically and ethnic lines. Such divisions they are virtually made up of separate sub-societies each which operate as an interest group that can

result into violent conflicts with any opposing groups (Lijiphart, 1984). Today in Nigeria we have witnessed severe cases of inter-communal conflicts that have destroyed many lives and displaced hundreds of people from their communities as a result of political, social and economic interest (Alimba, 2014).

Conflict-torn communities and states have over time been said to have experienced harsh social conditions, economic underdevelopment, and political quagmire. Such communities also experience unparalleled deprivations, hunger, and abject penury (Olagbaju & Awosusi, 2019). Such deplorable conditions are indeed a serious concern as the immediate and remote causes of these conflicts; however, they cannot be equated with the harsh outcome of these problems. According to Faleti (2005), in some cases where conflict has degenerated into the point of crisis, it is common that those involved will even find it difficult to remember what led to the initial disagreement. Starvation, famine, and eventual death are often more effects of conflict.

Studies have established a direct connection between communal conflict and socio-economic development in different parts of the African continent. For instance, Oladimeji, Ayuba, and Ayodele, (2019) reported a reduction in agricultural output, loss of revenue through market closure, loss of revenue through non-collection of tax and reduction in the per-capita income as some of the direct economic effects of communal conflict. Oladimeji, et al (2019) also found that loss of life, lack of trust within the communities in conflict, increased unemployment, increase in nefarious activities by youths and even adults and loss of property were some of the social effects of communal conflict.

In Nigeria, intra and inter communal conflicts stemming from land resource disputes, especially territorial contests that often defile amicable resolutions have become common in the last three decades (Oladimeji, 2019). Examples of such include Ife/Modakeke, Aguleri/Umuleri, Bauchi, Jos, Kafanchan, Hausa/Yoruba in Sagamu, Eleme/Okirika, Tiv/Jukun in Wukari, Ogoni/Adoni in River State, Chamba/Kuteb in Taraba, Ijaw/Itsekiri in Delta State, Ijaw/Ilaje in Ondo State, Basa/Egbura in Nassarawa, Hausa/Fulani in Bauchi, Erin-Ile/Offa in Kwara State, Ife/Hausa conflict, Jos conflict and recently farmer/herders conflict in North-Central Nigeria, especially in Benue State among many others that are not reported (Oladimeji, 2019).

Communal conflict has manifested itself as the most pandemic issue next to ethno-religious conflict in the democratic era in the country. Onwudiwe (2004) asserted that while democracy has not been economically kind to many Nigerians, the prevalence of communal violence since 1999

when Nigeria returned to civil rule ranks among its most bitter disappointments. Communal conflict exists in all the geopolitical zones of the country though the character of the conflicts may differ between geopolitical zones. In Northern Nigeria for instance, the character of the conflict is religious, though it occurs either in pure form and sometimes colored with ethnicity. It is characterized by reprisal attack.

Higazi (2011) stated that religious violence in its contemporary expression became a problem in the north from the 1980s, continuing through the 1990s and after 2000 (Yake 2013, Presler 2011) Indeed communal conflicts are reoccurring decimal to the extent that their occurrences have imposed insecurity in communities where they exist. For instance States such as Plateau, Benue, Nassarawa, Bauchi, Adamawa, Kaduna, and Taraba states are eloquent and pitiable testimonies to this act. The avalanche of conflicts, violence and terror that has rocked Jos Plateau, the uprising over Nigeria's membership of the organization of Islamic countries (OIC) pro and anti-Sharia conflicts in Kano, Bauchi, Kaduna, the Tiv - Jukun, ChambaKuteb, Zango-Kataf, the Yandabas in the north, the Yobe Taliban, and most disturbing is the ongoing Boko Haram (Western education is sin) terror in the northern part of the country which not only threaten the nation's security and overall corporate existence as a single indivisible entity but has exposed the fragility of the nation.

A number of factors have been identified by scholars as responsible for communal conflict in Nigeria. But land has been linked with most of the inter-communal conflicts in the country. Yecho (2006) indicated that the causes of communal conflicts are not static but rather dynamic and varied in nature depending on the socio-economic and geopolitical circumstances at the time. Onwudiwe (2004) listed social conditions as population explosion, economic migration, and the anti-poor policies of the government as triggers of communal friction. Horowitz (1990) pinned down communal conflict to revolve around politics, politicians, and their pursuit of group advantage. Albert (2001) identified indigene/settler problem, religious differences, ownership of land and its resources, goals and aspirations of people as some of the factors that can ignite communal conflict in the country. Hembe (2000) indicated that political struggle and colonization, while Lyam (2000) mentioned loss of soil fertility, soil erosion, deforestation, bush burning and flooding as some of the causes of communal conflict. Yecho (2006) pointed out that the fundamental causes of communal conflict are poor economic conditions, high level of illiteracy, the quest for, and fear of rival group domination.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The application of a theoretical framework is relevant to every phenomenon, be it social, political, or governmental. Theoretical framework sheds light on and clarifies phenomena (Gaubu 2003:216). A theory, according to Obasi (1999), is a device or technique for adopting or implementing a theory's assumptions, hypotheses, and principles in the description and analysis of a research problem. It describes occurrences, allowing for a better comprehension of current events in society. It also acts as a compass for researchers seeking facts and figures, guiding them from the unknown to the accepted truth.

The theory to be adopted in this study is the realistic group theory.

## **Realistic Group Conflict Theory**

Conflict is an inevitable result of human interaction, and learning how to reduce or prevent destructive disputes is vitally important. Developed by Muzafer Sherif and his colleagues in the 1950s Few theorists have contributed to the field to the extent of Muzafer Sherif, whose realistic conflict theory states that contradictory goals lead to group conflict and cooperation-requiring superordinate goals reduce it (Sherif, 1958). Blending psychological and sociological frameworks, his Robbers Cave experiment (which would form the basis of realistic conflict theory) remains influential. Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, and Sherif (1954/1988) postulated that intergroup conflict arises as a result of situational variables, personality characteristics, interindividual differences, and group psychology.

Realistic conflict theory is a social psychological model of intergroup conflict that was termed by Donald Campbell (1965). Realistic Conflict theory assumes that intergroup conflict occurs when there is competition for scarce resources and accordingly, positive relations can only be achieved if superordinate goals are in place (Campbell, 1965). Therefore, the severity and length of conflict is dependent upon the perceived value and scarcity of the given resource (Mcleod, 2008). Brewer (1979) stated that the primary hypothesis of Realistic Conflict perspective is that intergroup discrimination and competition occurs whenever economic resources are scarce. This theory stipulates that favouritism may emerge in competitive situations over resources in which a win for one group entails a corresponding loss for the other group (Brown, 1988).

The hypothesis of Realistic Conflict theory directly translates into the notion that competition exists when the outcomes are monetary due to the fact that money has an economic value therefore

groups/individuals will compete to acquire the maximum value. Realistic Conflict theory was largely generated from the outcomes of Sherif and colleagues Robbers' Cave experiments. Understanding the Robber's cave experiment is necessary as it informs the theoretical basis of the present study. The Robbers's Cave experiment gives a detailed explanation of group formation process according to Sherif and colleagues (1954). Furthermore, the Robber's Cave study illustrated the power of competition for the increase of in-group favouritism and group cohesion and as a result Realistic Conflict theory was formulated.

This theory is important to this study because it shows that scarcity of resources in Cross River State has led to the various intercommunal conflict in this various communities. This is so because various communities are in constant competition among themselves to ensure resources and economic achievements are meet by this communities at any cost.

Also, the theory shows that disputes over land ownership have led to violent clashes between farming communities and landowners. These conflicts are often rooted in perceptions of inequality and injustice, where one group feels marginalized and believes that it has been denied access to vital resources.

### **Research Methodology**

The overall approaches and perspectives to the research process as a whole are referred to as methodology (Collis & Hussy, 2003). It is concerned with both the specific research methods used to collect data and the broader philosophies that underpin data collection and analysis.

The survey research design was used in this study. A survey design is a method of gathering information about a population by interacting with a subset of that population (Alubo, 2012). Because of its emphasis on objectivity and use of systematic procedures to measure human behavior by using formal structured instruments to collect data from respondents, a quantitative research approach will be used for this study (Brink, 2006). On the other hand, qualitative research, according to Greenstein (2006), can be used when exploring new territory or new perspectives on a familiar topic. As a result of the qualitative approach, the researcher will be able to generate data that is holistic, contextual, descriptive, in-depth, and rich in detail (Neumann, 2000).

### **Sampling Technique**

The study used both simple random and purposive sampling. The distribution of questionnaires was done using simple random sampling, while the in-depth interviews were done with purposive

sampling. Purposeful selection, by definition, is a selection technique in which specific settings or people are chosen on purpose in order to provide information that cannot be obtained as effectively from other options (Maxwell 2005). As a result, the participants chosen to be interviewed for this study were chosen with the intention of contributing to the answers to the research questions posed by this study.

**Data Analysis**

The answers obtained from respondents was analyzed using both the descriptive and the narrative analysis. The study also utilized tables, frequency and percentages in the analysis of data.

**Socio-Demographic Distribution of the Respondents**

**Table 1: Distribution of respondents based on age**

<b>Age Distribution</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>18-24years</b>	90	23.7
<b>25-31years</b>	134	35.3
<b>32-38years</b>	-	-
<b>39-45years</b>	65	17.1
<b>46years and above</b>	91	23.9
<b>Total</b>	380	100.0

**Source:** Field Survey, 2024.

The table 5.1 above shows the distribution based on the age of the respondents. As showed in the above table those between the age of 18-24 years were 90, representing 23.7%; 25-31 years were 134, representing 35.3%; 32-38 years were nil, representing 0.0%; 39-45 years were 65, representing 17.1%; while the 46years and above were 91, representing 23.9%. Means therefore that the researcher had more respondents between the age of 25-31 years.

**Table 2: Distribution of respondents based on sex**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Male</b>	249	65.5
<b>Female</b>	131	34.5
<b>Total</b>	380	100.0

**Source:** Field Survey, 2024.

The table 5.2 above shows the distribution based on the category of persons that participated in the research process. The respondents to the questionnaires were males and females in terms of sex status or gender. Thus, it was gathered that the males were 249 in number representing 65.5% and the females were 131 in number representing 34.5%. This shows therefore that the researcher had more male respondents than female respondents.

**Table 3: Is there a presence of illicit weapons in your local government?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	360	94.7
<b>No</b>	-	-
<b>Undecided</b>	20	5.3
<b>Total</b>	380	100.0

**Source:** Field Survey, 2024.

The table 5.7 above showed that those persons who strongly agree that there is a presence of illicit weapons in Ikom, Obubura and Abi local government in Cross River State were 360, representing 94.7% and those who affirmed that there was no presence of Small Arms in Ikom, Obubura and Abi local government in Cross River State were nil, representing 0.0%; while persons who were undecided were also 20, representing 5.3%.

**Table 4: Has there been massive use of small arms in Intercommunal Conflict in the Obubura, Abi and Ikom local governments?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	314	82.6
<b>No</b>	66	17.4
<b>Undecided</b>	-	-
<b>Total</b>	380	100.0

**Source:** Field Survey, 2024.

From the above table, 314 people who represented 82.6% said yes to the above notion that there has been massive use of small arms and light weapons in Intercommunal Conflict in their local governments, and 66 people, representing 17.4% said no to the assertion, while nil persons that represented 0.0% was undecided.

**Table 5: There exist an undeniable relationship between Small Arms Proliferation and Intercommunal conflict in Abi, Ikom and Obubura Local Government.**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	300	78.9
<b>No</b>	50	13.2
<b>May be</b>	30	7.9
<b>Total</b>	380	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The table shows the distribution based on if there exist an undeniable relationship between Small Arms Proliferation and Intercommunal conflict in Abi, Ikom and Obubura Local Government. The table shows that 300(78.9%) of the respondents agree that there exist an undeniable relationship between Small Arms Proliferation and Intercommunal conflict in Abi, Ikom and Obubura Local Government. Also, 50(13.2%) of the respondents did not agree that there exist an undeniable relationship between Small Arms Proliferation and Intercommunal conflict in Abi, Ikom and Obubura Local Government. While 30(7.9%) of the respondents are not sure if there exist an undeniable relationship between Small Arms Proliferation and Intercommunal conflict in Abi, Ikom and Obubura Local Government. This therefore means that most of the respondents are of the opinion that there exists an undeniable relationship between Small Arms Proliferation and Intercommunal conflict in Abi, Ikom and Obubura Local Government.

### **Discussion of Findings**

1. The study found out that most of the respondents affirmed that there is the presence of Small Arms in Abi, Ikom and Obubura local government. This means therefore that these weapons can be found in large numbers in this local governments. Also, the study arrived at the findings that most of the respondents affirmed that the major source of Small Arms proliferation in the local governments is through cross border movement. This means that this Small Arms find their way into the state from other neighboring states or from Cameroon through Bakassi peninsula.
2. Also, the study arrived at the finding that majority of the respondents indicated that the uncontrollable presence of Small Arms in the local governments ensures a high tendency of violence and conflict in the various local governments. This means that the presence of

this Small Arms makes it relatively easy for any form of uprising since warring parties are most times in possession of this weapons. The study also discovered that most of the respondents affirmed that there has been an enormous utilization of Small arms in the intercommunal conflict in the three local governments in Cross River State.

3. Furthermore, this study also confirmed that most of the respondents affirmed that the main weapon used in the various intercommunal conflicts in Ikom, Abi and Obubura local government is Den guns. This means that thou sophisticated weapons exist it is not mostly used during the intercommunal conflicts in the various local governments. Also, the researcher arrived at the findings that majority of the respondents affirmed that the casualties of this conflicts have increased over time as a result of the presence of Small Arms in the various conflicts.

### **Conclusion**

The multiplication and uncontrollable availability of small arms in a nation fuels various conflicts in all part of the world. Small Arms availability has been seen as one of the reasons for the continuous presence of various conflicts that leads to loss of lives, properties and displacements of people from their natural place of residents. The various intercommunal conflicts that has taken place in Abi, Ikom and Obubura local government have caused untold hardship led to deaths and damaged properties running into millions of Naira.

Intercommunal conflicts in these local governments have been caused by plethora of factors, one of the main reasons will be ascribed to the competition or contestation for lands between and among various communities in the local government. Most of the contestations for these lands is as a result of the economic benefits of these lands. The surplus presence of Small Arms in the three local government has increased the lethality and disastrousness of the conflict which has led to so much damage to people residing in this communities. Thriving communities have also be left as waste lands sometimes because of the fear that these conflicts might reoccur thereby affecting agricultural and livestock production.

### **Recommendations**

1. The borders between Cross River specifically Bakassi Penninsula and Cameroon should be given serious attention by security personnel's as most of the movement from other

countries takes this route as a result of the corrupt nature of the security operatives in effectively checkmating passage of goods and services across these borders.

2. There should be involvement of the traditional rulers in this various communities in the conflict resolution process. This is necessary because of the reverence and respect this community leaders wield within the community and the people.
3. There should be proper poverty alleviation programmes which will ensure that youths who are main participants of this intercommunal conflicts are gainfully employed.
4. The state government should state clearly boundaries which are existing between communities thereby limiting these intercommunal conflicts existing between communities in the affected local governments.
5. There should be a general awareness and sensitization by the state and local governments on the importance of tolerance and consequences of conflict among communities in the state.

## **REFERENCES**

- Adebayo, A. (2017). *Small Arms Proliferation and Insecurity in Nigeria*. Lagos: University of Lagos Press.
- Adekola, P., et al. (2022). Youth Unemployment and Criminality in Cross River State. *Journal of African Security Studies*, 15(2), 45-60.
- Adetula, V., et al. (2022). Farmer-Herder Conflicts and Small Arms in Nigeria. *African Security Review*, 31(1), 78-94.
- Albert, I. (2001). *Introduction to Third Party Intervention in Community Conflicts*. Ibadan: John Archers Publishers.
- Albert, I. (2021). Political Violence and Small Arms in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Political Science*, 12(3), 112-130.
- Alimba, C. (2014). *The Dynamics of Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Nigeria*. Enugu: Jones Communications.
- Alusala, N. (2017). *Small Arms and Light Weapons in Africa: A Toolkit for Policy Makers*. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.
- Amnesty International. (2023). *Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Nigeria*. London: Amnesty International Reports.

- Brosche, J., & Elfversson, E. (2012). Communal Conflict and Small Arms Proliferation in Africa." *Journal of Peace Research*, 49(4), 473-487.
- Campbell, D. (1965). Ethnocentrism and Intergroup Relations. *Psychological Review*, 72(1), 82-92.
- Cross River State Security Council (CRSSC). (2023). Annual Security Report. Calabar: CRSSC Publications.
- Egobueze, A. (2016). *Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding in Nigeria*. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press.
- Emmanuel, O., & Sunny, U. (2019). Intercommunal Conflicts in Cross River State." *African Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 19(1), 67-82.
- Eze, C. (2020). *Border Security and Small Arms Proliferation in Nigeria*. Enugu: Rhyce Kerex Publishers.
- Human Rights Watch. (2019). *Nigeria: Violence and Small Arms Proliferation*. New York: HRW Reports.
- International Crisis Group (ICG). (2020). *The Sahel: Small Arms and Intercommunal Violence*. Brussels: ICG Reports.
- International Crisis Group (ICG). (2023). *Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Nigeria*. Brussels: ICG Reports.
- Malam, B. (2014). *Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria*. Kaduna: Baraka Press.
- Nextier's Nigeria Violent Conflicts Database. (2025). *Communal Clashes in Nigeria: Trends and Analysis*. Abuja: Nextier SPD.
- Nwagboso, C. (2019). Corruption and Arms Trafficking in Nigeria. *Journal of African Governance*, 10(2), 34-50.
- Nwobo, T. (2015). *Intercommunal Conflicts in Cross River State*. Calabar: University of Calabar Press.
- Okafor, J., & Chinonyelum, K. (2021). Small Arms and National Security in Nigeria." *African Security Review*, 30(2), 89-104.
- Okoli, A., & Ogayi, C. (2018). Border Security and Arms Proliferation in Nigeria. *Journal of Borderland Studies*, 33(1), 56-72.
- Oladimeji, A. (2019). *Communal Conflicts and Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria*. Ibadan: University Press.

- Onapajo, H., & Ozden, K. (2024). Militancy and Small Arms in the Niger Delta. *Journal of Terrorism Research*, 15(1), 23-40.
- Onuoha, F. (2019). *The Black Market for Firearms in Nigeria*. Abuja: National Defence College.
- Sherif, M. (1958). *The Robbers Cave Experiment: Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Small Arms Survey. (2017). *Global Small Arms Trade*. Geneva: Small Arms Survey Reports.
- Small Arms Survey. (2023). *Ballistic Analysis of Recovered Weapons in Nigeria*. Geneva: Small Arms Survey Reports.
- United Nations. (2021). *Small Arms and Intercommunal Violence in Mali*. New York: UN Reports.
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2023). *Displacement and Small Arms in the Lake Chad Basin*. New York: OCHA Reports.
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2023). *Firearm Injuries in Nigeria*. Geneva: WHO Reports.