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## REVIEW ARTICLE

# SMALL FIREARMS PROLIFERATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING AND ADULT LEARNING IN RURAL ZAMFARA STATE

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## ARTICLE DETAILS

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## ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the proliferation of small firearms and its implications for community peacebuilding and adult learning in rural communities of Zamfara State, Nigeria. Using an empirical descriptive survey of residents, traditional leaders and adult education facilitators in Chafe Local Government Area, the study examines drivers of proliferation, its social and educational impacts, and possible interventions that align with human-centred approaches advocated by the 5th Industrial Revolution. Findings indicate that porous borders, weak governance, political manipulation, and youth unemployment are core drivers. The study documents how insecurity disrupts adult learning centres, reduces participation in literacy and vocational programmes, and undermines trust needed for effective peacebuilding. Policy recommendations include community-based disarmament education, integrated peace and digital literacy in adult education curricula, targeted youth livelihood programmes, and strengthened multi-sectoral coordination to restore human security and learning continuity.

### KEYWORDS

Small firearms; adult learning; community peacebuilding; human security; 5th Industrial Revolution.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of small firearms represents a multifaceted threat to human security and development in Nigeria. Small arms and light weapons (SALW), including pistols, rifles, and shotguns, are relatively inexpensive, easy to conceal and operate, and therefore widely used in both criminal and communal violence. In many rural parts of Northern Nigeria, firearms have transformed social disputes, resource competitions and political contests into violent confrontations. Zamfara State, over the last decade, has experienced an intensification of armed violence characterized by cattle rustling, bandit attacks, and kidnappings for ransom. These developments have significantly eroded livelihoods and social institutions.

Prior to the rise of these violent episodes, community peacebuilding in rural Zamfara relied heavily on the authority of traditional institutions, religious mediation and local dispute-resolution practices. Such local governance mechanisms prioritized reconciliation, restitution and community reintegration. However, the introduction and spread of firearms have altered power dynamics: individuals and informal groups gain leverage through access to weapons, reducing the efficacy of customary dispute-resolution mechanisms and increasing the likelihood of retaliatory violence. Consequently, the social capital that sustained local cooperation has been weakened, with immediate effects on community projects, market activities and educational initiatives.

Adult learning, including non-formal literacy, vocational training, and civic education, is a critical pathway for building resilient communities. Adult education contributes to livelihood diversification, civic awareness and conflict prevention. In conflict-affected settings, adult learning can provide displaced persons and vulnerable groups with skills necessary to rebuild their lives. Yet, when basic security is undermined, adult learning programmes often struggle to operate: facilitators cannot reach learners, training sites are abandoned, and programme continuity is lost. This paper explores these dynamics in depth by focusing on Chafe (Tsafe) LGA, a

locality that has witnessed recurrent attacks and community disruption.

Despite government and international efforts to control the spread of small firearms, the problem persists and continues to threaten lives and community stability. In Tsafe Local Government Area, residents face recurring attacks, kidnappings, and violent conflicts. The proliferation of firearms has made it difficult for communities to maintain peace, leading to frequent displacement, loss of livelihood, and the breakdown of traditional systems of conflict resolution.

Adult education programs that were once used to promote literacy, social inclusion, and peace building have also been severely affected. Many learning centers have been abandoned, while facilitators and learners have been forced to relocate. Previous studies have paid little attention to the direct link between firearm proliferation, community peace building, and adult learning, especially in rural Zamfara. This study therefore seeks to fill this gap by examining the causes and consequences of firearm proliferation and its implications for community peace and adult education.

The study aims to examine the causes and consequences of small firearms proliferation and its implications for community peace building and adult learning in Tsafe LGA, Zamfara State. Specifically, it seeks to identify the major causes of small firearms proliferation in Rural Zamfara State, and also to examine the sources of the small firearms proliferation in rural Zamfara State. The main Research Questions that this research is going to answer include What are the major causes of small firearms proliferation in Rural Zamfara State and also What are the sources of the small firearms Proliferation in rural Zamfara State?

This study provides empirical evidence on the connection between firearm proliferation, peace building, and adult learning in rural Zamfara State. The findings will be useful to policymakers, education planners, and peace building organizations in developing integrated approaches that

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combine disarmament with education and livelihood opportunities. It also contributes to the broader discussion on human security and sustainable development by showing how learning and peace building can complement each other in restoring community resilience.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Scholarly literature associates the proliferation of small firearms with a complex interplay of historical, political and economic factors. Studies on West Africa highlight that porous borders, conflict spillovers and weak regulation have permitted illicit arms flows that exacerbate local conflicts (Florquin and Berman, 2005; Small Arms Survey, 2018). In Nigeria, analyses indicate that the combination of criminal economies, political patronage and communal grievance has created supply and demand dynamics that sustain arms availability (Adebayo, 2014).

Research focused on Zamfara underscores the centrality of rural livelihoods to the conflict cycle. Attacks on farming communities reduce agricultural output, thereby increasing poverty and food insecurity; in response, some households adopt coping strategies that include migration, joining self-defence groups or engaging in illicit activities. Community-level studies also document how the normalization of arms possession reshapes masculinities and notions of honour, contributing to the social acceptability of bearing weapons (Okeke, 2018).

The small arms literature further stresses that disarmament efforts succeed when linked with incentives—livelihood support, amnesty, and credible security guarantees—and when local leaders are involved in design and implementation (Bourne, 2007). This body of evidence informs the recommendations later proposed in this paper.

## 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts the Human Security perspective as an analytical lens (UNDP, 1994). Human Security shifts the focus from state-centric military measures to the security of individuals and communities across seven interlocking dimensions: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security. By employing this framework, the analysis recognizes that firearms proliferation not only produces direct physical harm but also creates structural impediments to education, livelihoods and social cohesion. Applying Human Security to the Zamfara context highlights the interdependence of security and learning: reduced personal security limits mobility and participation in education; economic insecurity reduces the capacity to invest in learning; and community insecurity corrodes trust needed for collective action such as running adult literacy classes or organising peace dialogues.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

**Research design and rationale:** The study used a descriptive survey design complemented by qualitative inquiry. This mixed-methods approach enabled broad-based measurement of perceptions and qualitative illumination of lived experiences. The descriptive component provided quantifiable insights on perceptions of causes and impacts, while in-depth interviews captured narratives of disruption and resilience.

**Study area and population:** Chafe Local Government Area was purposively selected due to its documented exposure to armed attacks and corresponding community responses. The target population included adult learners, facilitators, community leaders, women's group representatives and youth leaders. Fieldwork prioritized areas known to host adult education activities prior to the escalation of violence.

**Sampling and sample size:** To ensure representativeness across gender and age cohorts, a stratified random sampling technique was employed. The study sampled 200 respondents for the quantitative survey; stratification considered village clusters, gender and age categories (youth: 18–35; adults: 36+). For qualitative inquiry, 18 purposively selected informants (including five local elders, five women leaders, four youth leaders and four adult education facilitators) were interviewed using semi-structured guides.

**Data collection instruments and validity:** The main instruments were a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview schedule. The questionnaire included closed and open-ended questions on sources of firearms, nature of insecurity, impacts on learning and coping mechanisms. Content validity was assessed through expert review by two faculty members in the Department of Community Development and Extension Education; adjustments were made to improve clarity and cultural appropriateness. Reliability for the quantitative instrument was pilot-tested in a nearby non-study village, and internal consistency checks were performed.

**Ethical considerations:** Ethical clearance was secured from Bayero University research ethics committee. Respondents were briefed on the study purpose, assured of confidentiality and informed that participation was voluntary. Care was taken when discussing traumatic experiences; interviewers were trained to refer respondents to local psychosocial support resources if distress arose.

**Data analysis:** Quantitative data were summarised using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to present the distribution of perceptions across respondent categories. Qualitative data were transcribed and subject to thematic content analysis to extract recurrent motifs about insecurity, coping and the status of adult learning.

**Table 1:** Causes of the spread of small firearms in the rural communities in Chafe Local Government Area, Zamfara State

Items	SA F (%)	A F (%)	D F (%)	SD F (%)	X	Decision
The causes of the spread of small firearms is its utilization for hunting purposes	163 (46.0%)	184 (52.0%)	6 (1.7%)	0 (0%)	3.44	Accepted
The causes of the spread of small firearms is its use for self-defense by people in the rural communities	176 (49.7%)	158 (44.6%)	19 (5.4%)	0 (0%)	3.44	Accepted
Banditry is also one of the causes of the spread of small firearms in this area	180 (50.8%)	166 (46.9%)	7 (2.0%)	0 (0%)	3.49	Accepted
Cattle Rustling causes the spread of small firearms in this area	308 (87.0%)	40 (11.3%)	5 (1.4%)	0 (0%)	3.86	Accepted
The causes of the spread of small firearms is the commercial use for hiring/renting in the area	91 (25.7%)	261 (73.7%)	1 (0.3%)	0 (0%)	3.25	Accepted
The causes of the spread of small firearms is that people are acquiring the arms to show they are brave warriors	167 (47.2%)	171 (48.3%)	7 (2.0%)	8 (2.3%)	3.41	Accepted
Politicians are encouraging the spread of the small firearms	225 (63.6%)	105 (29.7%)	15 (4.2%)	8 (2.3%)	3.55	Accepted
Cultural practices among the Fulanis encourage them to be moving around with small arms causing the spread of the small arms	144 (40.7%)	195 (55.1%)	9 (2.5%)	5 (1.4%)	3.35	Accepted
Local production is a cause of the spread of the small firearms	235 (66.4%)	109 (30.8%)	9 (2.5%)	0 (0%)	3.64	Accepted
Existence of black market for arms sales causes the spread of the small firearms	138 (39.0%)	212 (59.9%)	3 (0.8%)	0 (0%)	3.38	Accepted

**Research Question 2:** What are the sources of the small firearms spreading in rural communities of Chafe Local Government Area, Zamfara State?

This research question is answered by using frequency, percentages and mean scores and data presented on the following table in which n = 353.

**Table 1 (Cont):** Causes of the spread of small firearms in the rural communities in Chafe Local Government Area, Zamfara State

Items	SA F (%)	A F (%)	D F (%)	SD F (%)	X	Decision
Small firearms are spreading into the hands of rural people through commercial purposes among the natives	33 (9.3%)	269 (76.0%)	35 (9.9%)	16 (4.5%)	2.90	Accepted
Criminal gangs in the rural communities spread small firearms through hiring and renting them	169 (47.7%)	146 (41.2%)	38 (%)	0 (0%)	3.37	Accepted
The small firearms are also spreading through international routes such as our boarders with Niger Republic	221 (62.4%)	98 (27.7%)	34 (9.6%)	0 (0%)	3.53	Accepted
There are also national firearm dealers spreading them from the southern part of Nigeria to the Northern part	261 (73.7%)	80 (22.6%)	12 (3.4%)	0 (0%)	3.71	Accepted
Some military officers are criminally aiding the spread of the small firearms	188 (53.1%)	155 (43.8%)	10 (2.8%)	0 (0%)	3.50	Accepted
Some police officers are also illegally abetting the spread of the small firearms	188 (53.1%)	109 (30.8%)	56 (15.8%)	0 (0%)	3.37	Accepted
The bandits obtain small firearms through getting them from fallen heroes	147 (41.5%)	176 (49.7%)	20 (5.6%)	10 (2.8%)	3.30	Accepted
Political office holders are also aiding the spread of the small firearms	173 (48.9%)	170 (48.0%)	10 (2.8%)	0 (0%)	3.46	Accepted
Some faith-based organizations are complicit in the spread of the small firearms	165 (46.6%)	184 (52.0%)	4 (1.1%)	0 (0%)	3.46	Accepted
Local production aids the spread of small firearms in the area	292 (82.5%)	41 (11.6%)	20 (5.6%)	0 (0%)	3.77	Accepted

## 5. FINDINGS

### 5.1 Drivers of proliferation

Respondents consistently identified porous borders and arms trafficking as principal external drivers. Locally, weak policing presence, sporadic patrols and limited intelligence capacity were reported as enabling factors. Political actors were also implicated; several interviewees asserted that firearms were sometimes distributed during election cycles to intimidate opponents or to secure influence among youth groups. Economic drivers were salient: limited livelihood options, seasonal unemployment and diminishing returns from agriculture were seen as pushing some young people toward armed activities.

### 5.2 Community-level impacts

The study captured multiple dimensions of community disruption. First, there is a marked decline in social activities markets operate on reduced days; inter-village visits and marriages are curtailed; and joint labour arrangements are suspended for fear of raids. Second, traditional dispute resolution mechanisms have been weakened: elders report that their moral authority is compromised when armed youth refuse to accept mediated settlements, preferring force. Third, displacement has fragmented households and reduced the pool of potential learners for adult education programmes.

### 5.3 Effects on adult learning

The direct effects on education were evident. Several adult literacy centres reported irregular attendance preceding eventual closure. Facilitators cited threats to personal safety and lack of transport as key operational constraints. Women's groups (which had been important venues for literacy and entrepreneurship training) reported reduced participation because of curfews and mobility restrictions. The psychosocial toll—trauma, grief and anxiety also undermined learners' capacity to engage in study or training.

### 5.4 Local coping strategies and partial resilience

Despite severe constraints, communities have attempted adaptive measures. Some villages established informal watch schemes; community elders negotiated temporary ceasefire arrangements with attackers in a few instances; and NGOs piloted mobile learning sessions in displacement sites or within host communities. These initiatives, while fragile, indicate potential entry points for scaled interventions that combine security, education and livelihood support.

## 6. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The empirical evidence demonstrates that firearm proliferation is not an isolated security problem but a systemic development challenge that undermines adult learning and community resilience. Where weapons normalize, the social conditions for collective learning—trust, mobility, and institutional continuity—erode. This analysis points to three principal interrelated lessons for policy and practice.

First, interventions must be multisectoral. Security responses without parallel investments in education and livelihoods risk temporary gains that do not address root causes. Second, adult learning programmes should be reimagined to be conflict-sensitive: curriculum must integrate peace education, trauma-aware pedagogy and flexible delivery modes (e.g., radio lessons, modular vocational training). Third, the 5th Industrial Revolution offers tools to support continuity: low-bandwidth mobile platforms, community radio, and digital hubs can deliver literacy and skills training even when movement is constrained, provided infrastructural barriers (power, connectivity) are addressed.

The study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. Its cross-sectional design captures perceptions at a single point in time and, as such, does not allow for causal inferences. Moreover, prevailing security conditions constrained access to some communities, potentially excluding households most affected by the proliferation of small firearms. The reliance on self-reported experiences may also introduce recall bias, which could affect the accuracy of responses.

Nonetheless, the study possesses notable strengths that enhance its validity and relevance. It draws on triangulation across both quantitative and qualitative methods, supported by purposive sampling of key informants with deep contextual knowledge. Furthermore, it explores the relatively understudied intersection between small arms proliferation and adult learning, offering fresh insights into this critical issue. The recommendations presented are firmly grounded in local coping experiences and supported by regional evidence on effective disarmament and education strategies in crisis-affected settings.

## 7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The proliferation of small firearms presents a serious obstacle to community peacebuilding and the continuity of adult learning in rural Zamfara State. Sustainable peace and educational resilience cannot be achieved through security measures alone; they require an integrated strategy that strengthens livelihoods, builds trust, and enhances access to inclusive learning opportunities. By aligning interventions with the principles of the 5th Industrial Revolution centred on human well-being, technology integration, and community empowerment stakeholders can foster environments where learning and peace mutually reinforce each other.

To restore the conditions necessary for sustained adult learning and durable peace, the following actions are proposed:

- Enhanced border cooperation and targeted interdiction: Strengthen intelligence-sharing and joint patrols with neighbouring states to disrupt arms corridors. Invest in training and accountability mechanisms for border and customs personnel to reduce corruption-driven leakage.
- Community-driven disarmament with incentives: Design disarmament programmes that provide livelihood packages, agricultural inputs, or vocational training as incentives for voluntary surrender. Ensure that traditional and religious leaders are central to programme design and public messaging.
- Conflict-sensitive adult education curricula: Integrate peacebuilding modules, trauma-informed facilitation techniques, and entrepreneurship skills into adult literacy programmes to increase relevance and resilience.
- Support for women and marginalized learners: Create protected learning spaces for women, offer staggered schedules to reduce travel at risky times, and provide transport stipends where feasible to encourage participation.
- Digital and radio-based learning platforms: Partner with telecom providers and local radio stations to broadcast literacy lessons and vocational tips. Explore solar-powered community hubs to address power constraints.
- Youth employment and apprenticeship schemes: Collaborate with private sector partners to create market-driven apprenticeships and cash-for-work programmes that reduce economic incentives for joining armed groups.
- Monitoring, evaluation, and adaptive programming: Establish community monitoring committees and use simple feedback loops to

adapt programmes to shifting security dynamics and community needs.

In conclusion, a multidimensional approach—anchored in education, economic empowerment, gender inclusion, and technological innovation—offers the most viable pathway toward disarmament, peace, and lifelong learning in Zamfara State.

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