SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS PROLIFERATIONS, THE YOUTH AND ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA: SOUTH EAST IN PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction
In his expository insight into electoral violence, Seymour and Frary (1918) aptly stated that the use of violence in elections is not peculiar to recent and emerging democracies in the developing world. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century England and America, there were 81 documented cases of electoral violence in which force and intimidation were used as a tactical means of winning elections. While this does not substantiate the wave of violence across the Third World and beyond, it more or else suggests that with time it is solvable but going by its current dimension, one is really apprehensive.

The trepidation is hinged on the fact that for most developing democracies of the Third World especially Nigeria, electoral violence is not only a recurrent decimal, its frequency, character and dimensions are quite frightening. It is now becoming a national character of the Nigerian state in such a way that both the Nigerian state and her citizens are held hostage by this smashing political reality in which both are unfortunate willing conspirators.

From independence to date, electoral violence in Nigeria has improved in sophistry and dimension as Nigerians seemingly prepare in advance, the form of violence to engage in at any approaching election just as they got prepared for potential violence therein. For instance, violence in the 2007 election was worse than those of 1999 and 2003. Impeccable reports had it that there were 967 incidents of electoral violence in that election. Cases of abduction and kidnapping, murder and killing, protest, disruption, intimidation and physical attack as well as poster defacing all featured in the incidents (IFES 2007). 300 people were killed on issues relating to 2007 elections. Deadly election-related and communal violence in Northern Nigeria following the April 2011 Presidential voting left more than 800 people dead (Human Rights Watch, 2011). In the light of the above, none was, therefore, surprised when, after a critical research, CLEEN Foundation, in its ‘Third Security Threat Assessment’ projected that electoral violence was most likely to occur in 15 Nigerian most volatile and high security risk states during the 2015 general elections (CLEEN in Ibe, 2014).

Interestingly, all the violence linked to elections is mostly perpetrated by the youth who are not only in the service of the politicians but financed by them so long as they do their biddings. With the benefits of their vigour, seeming lawlessness and lackadasical attitude to the Nigeria Project, the youth are willing ready-made weapons in the hands of the political leaders who think less of the development of the state and more of their parochial interests. Little wonder why the recurrent destruction of the state through electoral violence is of less concern to them.

It is stating the obvious that the high incidence of electoral violence by the youth in Nigeria may not be entirely divorced from the proliferation and availability of weapons of violence of which Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) are front runners. While it is true that the illicit proliferation of SALW can fuel and prolong armed violence and support illegal activities and the emergence of violent groups (NATO, 2014),
one agrees with Ero and Ndinga-Muvumba (2004:224) that small arms and light weapons do not, of course, cause conflicts, but soon become part of the conflict equation by fuelling and exacerbating underlying tension, generating more insecurity and adding to the number of casualties”. These include Rifles, Pistols, light Machine Guns, Sub-machine Guns etc meant for use by an individual or more serving as a crew, etc but less than 100 mm in caliber.

This paper, therefore aims at a critical discourse on the linkage between electoral violence by Nigerian youth and the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons with the South East in Focus.

1. Conceptual Clarifications
   a. Electoral Violence

       Electoral violence, in the words of Ogundiya (2003) are all sorts of riots, demonstrations, party clashes, political assassinations, looting, arson, thuggery, kidnapping, etc., spontaneous or not, which occur before, during and after elections. It could be regarded as elections motivated crisis employed to alter, change or influence by force or coercion, the electoral behaviour of voters or voting patterns or possibly reverse electoral decision in favour of particular individual, groups or political party. Albert sees it as all forms of organised acts or threats, physical, psychological, and structural aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing a political stakeholder before, during and after an election with a view to determining, delaying, or otherwise influencing an electoral process (Albert quoted by Nwolise in Adele, 2012). It could be seen as any violence (harm) or threat of violence (harm) that is aimed at any person or property involved in the election process, or at disrupting any part of the electoral or political process during the election period” (International Foundation for Election Systems, 2011). Electoral violence could be before the election, thus involving all such activities that conflict any form of injury to the democratic system and its constituent and could be during voter registrations, campaigns and actual voting. Such violence could also be a post-election phenomenon which comes consequent on the manipulation of election result, rejection of result etc. In what they called the ‘Current Incentives to Electoral Violence in Nigeria’, Inokoba and Maliki (2011) summarised their conclusion on causes of violence in Nigeria and the factors that sustain them thus:

       - State institutions promote violence
       - There is a culture of impunity in Nigerian society
       - Political leaders at all levels perpetrate electoral violence with impunity
       - The absence of institutional and legal solutions against electoral violence
       - Inadequate documented and public knowledge of electoral system and violence
       - Prebendal politics as a basis for electoral violence

   It could be added that desperation of the political class to ascend power through the manipulation of the electoral process is the most prevalent instigator of this miasma. President Gbagbo tried it in Cote D’Ivoire, Gnassingbe Eyadema engaged in it in Togo, Mugabe of Zimbabwe is a culprit; Obasanjo tried it unsuccessfully in Nigeria, etc.

   b. The Youth

       There are raging debates on the true meaning of ‘Youth’. Some use age brackets while others use attitude of the mind in their categorisations. Some argue that so long as one is young at heart his/her youthfulness is never in doubt. To some, one is as young as he feels. It was the legendary Zik of Africa who in a reply to somebody who tried to deride him as an old man said that the difference between the two was that while the other was an old-young-man at 50, he, Zik was merely a young-old-man at 70. Both of them were at the same time, young and old (Nwana, 2004:3-4). However, the UN General Assembly says youth are those “between the ages of 15 and 24 years...”. The World Bank pegs the age of youth between the ages of 15 and 25. The United States Government is more generous. It considers everyone under the age of 21 years to be a youth (Agbese in Inokoba and Maliki, 2011). In African Youth Charter, “youth” means “every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years. Imperatively, UNESCO’s (2014) definition is more appropriate for this study as it states that the ‘Youth’ is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. Youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age-group. “youth” is often indicated as a person between the age where he/she may leave compulsory education, and the age at which he/she finds his/her first employment. This latter age limit has been increasing, as higher levels of unemployment and the cost of setting up an independent household puts many young people into a prolonged period of dependency. Generally, youth are those young men and women who are in-between the stage of childhood and adulthood.
and at the fullness of human vitality and potentials. Hence, Okpalike (2004) concludes that vigour, vivacity, vitality, vim are the hallmark of youth.

c. Small Arms and Light Weapons
The International Tracing Instrument (ITI) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 8 December 2005, defines Small Arms and Light Weapons as:

any man-portable lethal weapon that expels or launches, is designed to expel or launch, or may be readily converted to expel or launch a shot, bullet or projectile by the action of an explosive, excluding antique small arms and light weapons or their replicas. Antique small arms and light weapons and their replicas will be defined in accordance with domestic law. In no case will antique small arms and light weapons include those manufactured after 1899:

"Small Arms” are, broadly speaking, weapons designed for individual use. They include, inter alia, revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns. On its part, “Light weapons” are, weapons designed for use by two or three persons serving as a crew, although some may be carried and used by a single person. They include, among others, general purpose or universal machine guns, medium machine guns, heavy machine guns, rifle grenades, under-barrel grenade launchers and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles, man portable launchers of anti-tank missile and rocket systems, man portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems, and mortars of a calibre of less than 100 millimeters (UNODA, 2013).

Worldwatch Institute (2004) argues that new arms production is one source of this proliferation, but the trade in second-hand arms flourishes. Excess equipment from United States, Russian, and European armies is routinely given away or sold cheaply to other countries. For example, Turkey has received 300,000 Kalashnikov rifles from the former East Germany. Weapons left over after civil wars often enter the black market and resurface at other hotspots, or find their way to drug cartels and other organized crime groups. Thus:

Giving away surplus arms may appear to be the cheapest way to dispose of them, but when these same weapons are turned against soldiers or civilians of the selling countries, or destabilize what could be a strong market for its businesses, such accounting is revealed to be short-sighted. Given a multitude of suppliers and supply networks-ranging from government agencies, arms manufacturers, and licensed firearms dealers to smugglers, organized crime groups and armed insurgents-there is no telling where such weapons end up. The line between legitimate and illicit transfers is often blurred.

Small Arms control was first broached by UN Resolution A/RES/46/36 (December 1991), which was expanded upon by A/RES/50/70 (January 1996). This latter resolution mandated a panel of experts to research the type of small arms and light weapons being used in the world’s conflicts and to study which weapons might apply to fall under an arms control regime. The recommendations of expert reports returned to the General Assembly, A/52/298 (1997) and A/54/258 (1999) led to a July 2001 United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms, with a follow-up in July 2006. On 26 September 2013 the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2117, which urged nations to remain committed to Small Arms embargoes and SALW control protocols (UN SALW Control Efforts in Wikipedia, 2014).

In their classical submissions, Ukiwo and Chukwuma (2012) noted, among others, the following factors as sort of motivations for the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in volatile states like Nigeria:

- Use of thugs for political violence
- Rising rates of youth unemployment
- Economic hardship and inequality
- Exposure to criminal violence through the media and;
- The prevalence of the culture of materialism

Proliferation of small arms and light weapons is already problematic as every cranny in Nigeria is littered with one form of arms or the other. From the East to the West, North and South, this trend no doubt, has exacerbated conflicts around the country.

2. Incidence of Electoral Violence in South East Nigeria
Like every other geographical zone in Nigeria, the South East is not alien to electoral violence. While electoral violence in the First Republic in the area could be seen as relatively moderate, subsequent realities showcases a zone in irredeemable hostage.

The Second Republic of our civil democracy saw plethora of electoral violence in the South East. Lives were lost and hundreds injured in what could be regarded as unquenchable inferno that caught almost everyone
by surprise. In the early 80s, the old Anambra State, made up of the present Anambra, Imo, Enugu, Abia and Ebonyi states became a hell of a mess with the return to the country of the former Biafran leader, Chief Emeka Odimegwu Ojukwu, the Ikemba Nnewi and the subsequent efforts by the ruling NPN to recapture the state from its ruling PNP. Jim Nwobodo was the state governor while Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe was the party’s National Leader and Presidential Candidate. First, it became a war of words but later degenerated into indescribable battles:

Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe was taunted by the Dr. Alex Ekwueme’s cohorts in the NTA (Nigerian Television Authority), a federally owned news media that in other climes should cater for the well-being of generality of its citizens irrespective of political affiliations. Governor Jim Nwobodo was also taunted as “Ochomma I of Igbo land” -number one fashion governor of Igbo land. Not to be outdone, Chief Nwobodo created the Anambra State Broadcasting Service (ABS) and used it to fire back at his opponents. Chief Christian Onoh was called “ono okpa” and Chief Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu was called “edi afu onu”, due to his beard. The politics of 2nd Republic in the old Anambra state was very nasty and full of all kinds of vulgarity. Physical and verbal attacks were the other of the day... Nwobodo’s status as a divorcee was made a campaign issue. His adversaries were saying that “if he cannot rule his family, how can he rule a state” even when Nwobodo has demonstrated in the first term that he could effectively rule the state (Nwokoye, 2009: 3).

With the formation of Jim Vanguard and Ikemba Front, the battle became more violent as mayhem was visited on the state and its people, prominent of which was the famous battle at Nkpor Junction in which lives were lost, people injured and property destroyed. As a small boy then, one could remember vividly one occasion in Awka when both sides met on the present Zik Avenue. None accepted to give way to the other as claims to superiority between the followers of Ojukwu and Nwobodo took over whatever was left of their sense of reasoning even though Nwobodo was a serving governor. Gun shots were fired and offensive weapons brazenly used.

One is not unmindful of the deadly confrontations between the erstwhile Anambra Peoples Forum (APF) led by the multibillionaire politician, Sir Emeka Offor and the government of Dr Chinweoke Mbadinuju of Anambra State. Different violent confrontations and clashes were recorded, as the government was almost grounded. Rallies and the government’s programmes were disrupted by the APF which almost ran a parallel government. All efforts by Dr Mbadinuju to secure a return ticket were violently punctuated and dangerous weapons indiscriminately brandished and used.

The mayhem unleashed by political thugs on Anambra State following the 2003 elections in which Dr Chris Ngige, a serving governor was confronted and engaged to the extent of being kidnapped in an unprecedented political fisticuffs that set the entire state ablaze is still evergreen. Weapons were randomly used without qualms. Subsequently and in broad day light, political thugs invaded Awka, Onitsha and Nnewi destroying whatever was in sight. According to Vanguard (in Edike, Ojeifo and Anayo Okoli, 2004:1), a band of youths touched and bombed public buildings including parts of the state governor's office and the deputy governor's office. Also burnt were the three-storey building housing the State Independent Electoral Commission (ANSIEC), two transmitters of the Anambra Broadcasting Service (ABS) in Onitsha and Enugwu-Ukwu, the building housing the State Education Commission in addition to several cars, etc.

In 2012, two commissioners and an Advisor to Ebonyi State’s governor barely escaped an assassination attempt when they were attacked at a petrol station by gunmen; a bystander was not so lucky and was killed in the gunfire (AOAV & NWGAV, 2013). Sobechi (in Adele, 2011) aptly reported that in Izzi Local Government of Ebonyi State suspected thugs loyal to a political party unleashed terror on St. Stephen’s Catholic Church, Iziogo in the local council. What however snowballed into the violence was that an ANPP Chieftain and the Senatorial Candidate for Ebonyi North Senatorial District, Fidelis Nwankwo went to St. Catholic Church, Iziogo in the local council. What however snowballed into the violence was that an ANPP Chieftain and the Senatorial Candidate for Ebonyi North Senatorial District, Fidelis Nwankwo went to St. Stephen’s Catholic Church on that Sunday in company of his colleagues, Senator Ucha, the ANPP governorship candidate and Emma Uguru, the House of Representatives candidate for Izi/Abakaliki Federal Constituency. The thugs broke into the home of the Catechist, burnt his motor cycle, destroyed the yam barn and inflicted cuts on one person. In all, five motorcycles were burnt (Sobechi, 2011). Enugu witnessed attacks targeted at opponents of the state government. Such attacks by members ranged from disruption of meetings and gatherings, destruction of posters and billboards of aspirants. Former aspirant to Enugu West Senatorial Zone of the PDP, O. A. U Onyema and Chief Anayo Onwuegbu severely had their Billboards and posters destroyed by their opponents. In another development, in the build-up to the battle to control the soul of the PDP between Chime and his opponents, former Military Administrator of old Imo state, Commodore Anthony Ogugu and former Adviser on Local Government Affairs to Chimaroke
Nnamani, Chief Sam Ejiofor had their homes invaded by political thugs. In Abia State, the entire campaign process was defined by sheer hostility. In fact, this was described as the battle front. An event organised by the Ihiala leaders of thought was disrupted when gunmen suddenly stormed the venue brandishing dangerous weapons, and started shooting. (Adele, 2011).

3. Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation, the Youth and Electoral Violence in the South East of Nigeria

It is stating the obvious that over 90 percent of electoral violence committed in the South East of Nigeria were perpetrated by the youth and that the motivation and ability of this group in the perpetration of this ugly situation is the almost unrestricted availability and circulation of small arms and light weapons that are readily at the beck and call of this group which has the vigour to use them without qualms. This is not unconnected to the multiplicity of means through which these weapons get into the country. According to Alimika and Chukwuma (2005), sources of small arms in Nigeria include war-torn West African countries, smuggling, local manufacturing, defence industries, security agents who sell arms to criminals, Multinational Corporations and the loss of arms by security agents to the criminals. Between 1990 and 1999, police record show that 12,000 people who were arrested in different parts of the country were arrested for illegal possession of prohibited firearms.

Approached from whichever perspective, small arms and light weapons proliferations are dangerous to humanity bearing in mind the precarious nature of the present generation. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2015) adds that small arms and light weapons and their ammunition are involved in more violent, conflict related deaths each year than any other type of weapon system. SALW are typically used in all the world's armed conflicts and insurgencies and non-combatant or civilian fatality rates are an important factor in global conflict mortality figures. SALW are also used to target civilians using other forms of violence, such as systemic rape and forced displacement.

One’s argument here is very simple: while it could be said that small arms and light weapons proliferations do not cause violence, it will be out of place to conclude that it does not exacerbate it. Global Policy (2015) concurs to the effect that small arms and light weapons fuel civil wars and other conflicts, causing harm to millions of people, particularly in Africa. These small weapons are only part of a larger trade that includes heavier and more lethal weaponry. This is collaborated by the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) which argues that the illicit trade in small arms, light weapons and ammunition wreaks havoc everywhere: mobs terrorizing neighbourhoods; rebels attacking civilians or peacekeepers; drug lords randomly kill law enforcers or anyone else interfering with their illegal businesses; bandits hijacking humanitarian aid convoys. In all continents, uncontrolled small arms form a persisting problem. The preference for small arms and light weapons is also very easy to understand. UNODA (2015) therefore summarises the peculiarity of small arms and light weapons thus:

a. Weapons of Choice

It is light, easy to handle and conceal; leads to greater demands for weapons. Most present-day conflicts are fought mainly with small arms, which are broadly used in inter-State conflicts. They are the weapons of choice in civil wars and for terrorism, organized crime and gang warfare.

b. Taking their Toll, Violating Rights:

The majority of conflict deaths are caused by the use of small arms, and civilian populations bear the brunt of armed conflict more than ever. Also, small arms are the dominant tools of criminal violence. The rate of firearms-related homicides in post-conflict societies often outnumbers battlefield deaths.

c. Small Arms Facilitate a Vast Spectrum of Human Rights Violations

The human rights violations associated with arms-availability-induced conflicts include killing, maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, enforced disappearance, torture, and forced recruitment of children by armed groups. More human rights abuses are committed with small arms than with any other weapon. Furthermore, where the use of armed violence becomes a means for resolving grievances and conflicts, legal and peaceful dispute resolution suffers and the rule of law cannot be upheld.

d. Development Denied

Contemporary armed conflict is the main cause of people fleeing their homes, and is now the most common cause of food insecurity. Armed violence can aggravate poverty, inhibit access to social services and divert energy and resources away from efforts to improve human development. Countries plagued by armed violence are behind in attaining the Millennium Development Goals. High levels
of armed violence impede economic growth. According to the World Bank, nothing undermines investment climates as much as armed insecurity.

e. **Less Information on Small Arms than on Nuclear Weapons**

Reliable data sets on small arms can only be built if countries provide information on production, holdings, trade, legislation and use. But of all transparency measures on weapons systems, those on small arms are the least developed. According to the Small Arms Survey, "more is known about the number of nuclear warheads, stocks of chemical weapons and transfers of major conventional weapons than about small arms". There are no accurate figures for the number of small arms and light weapons currently in circulation globally. Sources estimate the total to be at least 875 million. The majority of small arms - generally the only category of weapons not falling under Government monopoly of possession and use - are in private hands.

Obviously, every nook and cranny of South East Nigeria is littered with arms. In September, 2012, in just three raids, the State Security Services (SSS) captured around 30 AK-47 assault rifles, more than 16,000 rounds of ammunition, rocket launchers, grenades and assorted pistols and other rifles. The Awka axis of Anambra is known for producing blacksmiths who are alleged to produce locally made guns (AOAV & NWGAV, 2013). For example, in one clean swoop, Imo Police uncovered an Arm Depot in Udume Ogwa in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State owned by Donatus and Okechukwu. Over 13 pump action rifles; other assorted rifles seven hundred and fifty (750) live cartridges; one carton of security torchlight and a bullet proof jacket with the inscription, "Nigeria Police" and bearing the initials of the Imo State Police Commissioner. The Commissioner of Police, Mr. Mohammed Katsina, told *Crime Watch* that the prime suspect, Donatus, brought the illegal arms and ammunition from Turkey and that though they were licensed, the license of the arms had been revoked since 1982 (Uwujare, 2013). That is not all. In an underground Armoury at the home of Olisa Ifedika at Oraifite, 27 AK-47 rifles, one K2 rifle, two 06 rifles, one general purpose machine gun, one rocket launcher, 17 rockets, 13 rocket grenades, six pump action guns, three locally-manufactured guns and one Berretta pistol and a total of 14,425 rounds of live ammunition were also recovered by the Police. The police described the recovered weapons as ‘arms that can defeat a small army’ (Obe, 2012).

An insight into all the electoral violence show that over 90 percent of electoral violence in the South East was committed with the use of one form of small arms and light weapons. The shootings at Nkpor Junction in 1983 between the Jim Vanguard and Ikemba Front were not done with bare hands but illegal arms purchased by the politicians, Jim Nwobodo and Emeka Ojukwu etc, and handed over to the youth for their self-destruction.

The inability to trace these illegal weapons also motivates the youth into making use of them without fear of being caught through weapon traces. The killing of Barr Igwe and his wife, Chairman of Nigeria Bar Association, Onitsha Branch during the days of Chineke Mbaadinju as governor of Anambra state was perfected with hitherto untraceable rifles. Political assassinations become easier and safer with guns than anything else. Ordinarily, it would have been difficult to seal up the assignment the way it was if other objects outside the definition of small arms and light weapons were not used for the murder.

Weapons availability also gives the youth the courage to engage in violent political activities and intimidations. Arms instill fear in the people who should have challenged the user. This is because there is always a kind of courage that goes with the possession of arms especially, against the unarmed members of the society. It was that kind of courage that those youth numbering about 200 invaded Awka and burnt down whatever was a major government establishment in Anambra State in the full glares of the people. Anambrians watched helplessly as those hoodlums unleashed mayhem without being challenged. This is why the political thugs could go into the polling stations and take away ballot boxes. Obviously, it wouldn’t have been possible if they were not armed with small arms and light weapons. People would have challenged them.

The cheapness of arms in this Geo-Political Zone does not help matters. In some areas, automatic weapons are so cheap they can be bought in exchange for a chicken or a few pounds of rice (Global Policy, 2015). When these weapons are easily possessed at little price, every Dick and Harry is in possession of them including the young people who now feel belonged with the presence of arms by their side. They therefore become willing tools in the hands of politicians who prefer already armed youth for political thugs than the unarmed.

There is no doubt that youth unemployment in the South East is not helping matters as the unemployed are easily recruited and armed. Some come in the form of students associations, cult groups and other illegal
formations. Among such groups, ‘Man Must Eat’ becomes their organizing principles. According to police, cults, and other sources, after the PDP primaries in Anambra State, Nwoye began channeling funds into the hands of members of his own Black Axe cult to the exclusion of other cult groups in the state. Several cult groups including the Vikings and the Buccaneers saw this as deeply unfair and reacted violently. Some also complained that they were not paid in full for working on behalf of Andy Uba’s campaign during the primaries. Human Rights Watch interviewed several cult members in Anambra in February 2007, two months before the April elections. According to the then Police Commissioner, Haruna John and cult members themselves, at least seven people were killed in series of tit-for-tat assassinations between Black Axe and other cult members in the week prior to those interviews alone. Several of those killed had been gunned down in the streets of Awka, and the violence had the effect of terrorizing local residents. That is not all.

The encouragement given to cult activities in Awka by weapons availability is outrageous: over 20 bodies were reportedly recovered from cult war in Awka (Onu, 2008); Cult killings in Awka, the Anambra State capital, rose to seven. In 2010, four youths were murdered in cultist’ rampage in Awka. While part of Imo-Awka celebration was being observed, a young man and his girlfriend were said to have been killed by some cultists at a drinking joint around Amenyi and a young man, Kene, a youth Corper was already gunned down earlier on (Anyanwu, 2010); Anene Eze’s head was crushed with stone in October 2011(Ozor, 2011). In July 2012, Chukwunonso Ozo was shot dead in Ifite Awka (Emmanuel, 2012). The story can go on and on.

4. Conclusion

Although it is said that small arms and light weapons proliferations do not cause conflict but may escalate it, one is tempted to argue that with the way the business is going in the South East of Nigeria that proliferations in SALWs is really causing conflicts of which electoral violence is one. This is because whoever has a weapon will be tempted to use it, and whoever has a stockpile of them would not only be tempted to use them but may wish to ignite a crisis that would necessitate the use. It is just like the logic in global demonstration of power otherwise known as Politics of Prestige. One should not forget the proverbial case of women in new clothes among the church congregation. She must surely show off at least once before the end of the homily. So it is with possessors of weapons of conflict.

Without being too academic, one thinks that the laws, conventions, treaties etc on SALW proliferations are just strong in content but too weak at the point of implementation. The situation is so bad to the extent that anyone with money can always buy arms even in the comfort of his home. The situation becomes so problematic when it is borne in mind that ‘almost everyone in the South East is not hungry’. Thus, these laws should be revisited with the aim of strengthening their implementations as a way minimizing weapon proliferation.

One thinks that the government must engage in another arms recovery strategy in which available arms could be traded with mouth-watering incentives that may not necessarily mean finance. Development option could be the magic. Thus, the communities should be involved since any arm recovered could be paid for with a community project. With this, the communities would automatically partner with government in this direction. This will help reduce arms availability especially, those in wrong hands as well as those in the know of the communities.

Our politics must be made to be clean and elections free and fair. Electoral violence must continue so long as there is manipulated electoral system. Thus, politicians who hire or sponsor electoral violence must be punished alongside the perpetrators.

The security forces must be re-equipped and retrained to face the challenges of arms proliferations. Obviously, the uncoordinated arming of Vigilante Groups in the South East is really becoming a problem. More local jobless men are now badly trained and armed in the name of Vigilante. This is not the best way to ensure community security or policing because experience shows that in some situations, the same trained local elements were involved in criminal activities such as kidnapping, armed robberies, etc. With time, these people would become a threat if they are not already one.
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