
THE NEW PHENOMENON OF URBAN CRIME IN THE NORTHEAST: A FOCUS ON THE EMERGENCE OF ARMS GROUPS AND THE SPREAD OF FIREARMS

By

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Abstract

Half of the world's population now lives in metropolitan regions. This development has undesirable side effects, which are part of this study's focus. Urbanization, population expansion, the introduction of new crimes, and the proliferation of small guns have led to global communities' concern. The study focuses on the metropolitan regions of Borno and Yobe states in northeastern Nigeria. These locations have been hit by the Boko Haram conflict, which has spread small arms. Such a profusion of weaponry may have intensified urban crime. The study aims to understand the causes of violent crimes in northeastern Nigerian cities; the contributions of firearm proliferation to the emergence and expansion of urban crime; the implications of engaging civilians in supplementing security efforts in relation to small firearm proliferation and urban crime growth; and the necessary measures for crime control. Based on these objectives, researchers conducted survey research to answer research questions. Urban areas of Borno State (Jere, Konduga, Damboa) and Yobe State (Damaturu, Potiskum, and Geidam) where non-state armed groups increased urban crime were sampled. Some respondents were interviewed, while others were given questionnaires. We also interviewed important informants to learn more. SPSS was used to analyze the data.

Keywords: Armed Groups, Firearms, Northeast, Proliferation, Urban Crime.

1 Introduction

For the first time in human history, more than half of the world's population already resides in urban areas, and UNHABITAT (2007) projects that in the next 25 years, all future population growth will be absorbed in urban areas. This change presented metropolitan regions with a number of difficulties, including armed robbery, murder, and large-scale physical assault. The spread of small guns and light weapons, which fuel civil conflicts, organized criminal violence, insurgency, and terrorist activities while creating significant barriers to long-term security and development, is deemed to be the world's most pressing security concern (Malam, 2014). As a result, laws were required to limit the frequency of violent crimes in metropolitan areas. Due to the actions of non-state armed groups known as Boko Haram and ISWAP, the northeastern region of Nigeria is a region that is heavily saturated in armed conflict. Their actions have also contributed to the widespread possession of firearms, which is often harmful because these weapons end up in the hands of those who have little regard for human life. It is a well-known fact that with such weapons, violent crime would increase in our urban centers.

A National Task Force (NATFORCE) was created in 2019 to battle the illegal importation and smuggling of goods, small arms, ammunition, and light weapons due to worries over the widespread use of illicit weaponry across the nation and the northeastern region of Nigeria in particular. The organization agreed that the spread of small arms and light weapons is one of the biggest threats to security in Nigeria, Africa, and the world as a whole (Daily Trust, 2021).

The Nigerian Customs Service (NCS), in 2017, recorded the seizure of shipments of 2,761 pump action rifles and said all four shipments intercepted from Turkey were false declarations on the bills of landing, showing a case of smuggling. The government has been significantly seizing arms, but it has been on the rise in the last five years (Daily Trust, 2021). The majority of these weapons made their way into metropolitan areas, where they are employed by the criminal elements of society to conduct various types of crimes. Since most people from economically successful rural areas move to cities where security is at a decent level, it is necessary to investigate strategies for preventing crime in urban areas.

2 Statement of the Problem

The urban population has grown significantly over the past 50 years, and this expansion has also brought issues like armed robberies, murder, kidnappings, and other types of violent assaults against the populace. Therefore, it urges policy adjustments that will concentrate on the issues in order to stop further deterioration. Although there has always been crime in cities, the dynamics that have emerged in recent years—especially with the rise of non-state armed organizations, notably in the study area as a result of the abundance of firearms—are cause for concern. The issues of controlling the population have increased as people on the run have been moving to urban centers to escape attacks from non-state armed organizations, which is causing the urban areas to generally explode. Numerous people who migrated to metropolitan regions did so from various socio-cultural and economic backgrounds. They are completely dependent on donations from charitable groups, family members, and the government because they have no other means of support. Some people are compelled to join gangs that commit crimes in the cities as a result of their terrible condition.

3. The Study's Objectives

The main goal of the study is to find ways to cut down on crime in Nigeria's northeastern cities. It also has the following more specific goals:

1. To know the reasons behind violent crime in northeastern Nigeria's metropolitan areas
2. To investigate the effects of the widespread availability of firearms on the emergence and growth of urban crime.
3. Consider the effects of including people in supplemental security operations in light of the spread of small guns and the rise in urban crime.
4. Examine the steps that must be taken to control the dynamics of urban crime as they are now in the northeastern urban centers.

4. Study Questions

1. What are the reasons behind violent crimes in northeastern Nigeria's metropolitan areas?
2. What are the effects of the widespread use of firearms on the emergence and growth of urban crime?
3. What are the effects of including people in supplemental security operations in light of the spread of small guns and the rise of urban crime?
4. What steps are required to control the trends in urban crime that are now being seen in the Northeast's urban centers?

5. Research's Importance

The research is important and timely since it is anticipated to offer solutions to the present issues plaguing the region's urban areas. The federal government and the governments of the region's states should take this into account when developing and implementing policies.

Review of Literature

6. Violent Crime's Causes

Moser and McIlwaine (2004) highlighted that firearms and drugs have introduced another layer of danger to violence in metropolitan areas. There are several factors that drive people to commit violent crimes. Though not all metropolitan areas experience violence in the same way, it can vary greatly in intensity between different countries and urban centers. According to Moser and Moser (2003), it is crucial to distinguish between structural causations (connected to unequal power relations) and trigger causations. (Situational circumstances that can exacerbate the likelihood of violence occurring). Variations in violence levels within cities are correlated with neighborhood wealth, gender, and age. According to Gaviria et al. (1999), severe violence is typically concentrated in lower-income areas, notably in the marginal periphery, while violent crime in more affluent areas is typically property-related (Moser, 2004). But as vehicle robberies rise, so does the danger of getting killed in the process, which has made the richer community feel more uneasy (Moser, 2004). The majority of violent acts are most likely to be committed by or against young men (Moser, 2004).

7. The Spread of Small Arms

Assault rifles, pistols, sub-machine guns, and other light weapons, such as light machine guns and assault rifles, are included in the category of tiny firearms that refer to weapons made for combat (Department for International Development, 2002). According to Rana (1994), "small firearms" refer to any method of lethality other than the straightforward application of physical force. The United Nations panel of government experts on small arms came to the conclusion that small arms refers to weapons designed for personal use. It was also revealed that these small arms include revolvers, self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, submachine guns, assault rifles, and light machine guns, whereas light weapons include heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel, mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, and a host of other weapons. Thus, the government experts' panel stated in its 1997 report that "small arms" includes things like knives, sticks, stones, and other conventional weapons.

The Guardian (2020) stated that while the military forces and law enforcement are responsible for 586,600 weapons, there are an estimated 6,145,000 small arms in use in Nigeria that are in the hands of civilian non-state groups. Compared to other regions, north-eastern Nigeria experiences much less violence and small arms proliferation. The spread of weapons and violent crimes in the area are associated with non-state entities attempting to establish a Caliphate or sphere of influence. Within this axis, the terrorist organization Boko Haram operates.

When they reported that armed violence cost Africa \$18 billion a year and roughly \$300 billion between 1990 and 2005, the International Action Network on Small Arms, Safer World, and Oxfam International put it in context. During this time, Algeria, Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Republic of the Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, and Uganda all went to war.

Therefore, small arms proliferation implies the availability of unregulated small arms (Muggah, 2001). It has also been called the unchecked proliferation of small guns. This only means that the proliferation of arms is measured by the rate at which small arms increase in a region (Alimba, 2008). Small arms, especially conventional ones, are preferred by criminals in urban areas because they are relatively more affordable, dependable, and powerful than traditional weapons, as well as convenient to carry and move around with, easy to conceal, and exceedingly lethal (Alimba, 2004). According to Onuaha (2011), Nigeria's crude politics played a major role in the spread of SALWs in that country. Politicians in Nigeria define and view politics as a war-like situation, especially in electoral politics. Politicians in Nigeria are driven to extremes in their quest for elective seats because the stakes are so high. Because of this, many of them seek out and maintain political power by enlisting "specialists of violence" like cultists, gangs, and thugs (Onuaha, 2012:53).

8. Violent Crime Prevention

It is commonly acknowledged that there are no quick fixes or magic formulas for reducing violence (Moser, 2004). Different strategies have varying degrees of success and are better suited to certain environments than others. However, there are certain recurring themes essential to any strategy to lessen violence: Moser (2004) talks about CPTED (Crime

Prevention through Environmental Design)/urban renewal, citizen/public/community security, criminal justice, public health, conflict transformation/human rights, social capital, and policy approach.

9. Methodology

This research used both primary and secondary data sources. This is because, apart from the data directly collected on the field, the researchers used data from other works of others and data collected for different purposes by other writers, government agencies, or organizations. The methods employed for primary data collection in this research involved a questionnaire, an interview schedule, and a key informant interview, simply reflecting methodological triangulations.

As one of the instruments of research, questionnaires were distributed to the selected sample in the urban areas of Borno State (Jere, Konduga, and Damboa) and Yobe State (Damaturu, Potiskum, and Geidam). This is in order to acquire answers to the questions raised in the questionnaire. The questionnaire is comprised of both open and close-ended questions, which gives the respondents the chance to select from options provided and also allows them to give their own inputs regarding the situation.

The respondents here were selected through simple random sampling. Although a sample frame does not exist, the houses were numbered in order to give every household a chance of being selected in the areas chosen in the urban centres, which comprised the slum areas/ghettos and the elite residential areas. A total of 500 respondents were chosen from urban areas in Borno State (Jere, Konduga, and Damboa) and Yobe State (Damaturu, Potiskum, and Geidam). The projected population of the selected areas in total is 1,607,195.00.

The researchers adopted Slovin's formula for research sample selection, which is stated as follows:

The number of samples is denoted by N.

$N = \text{Population (1,607,195.00)}$.

Error = 2%

Table 1: Calculation of sample size

N	E	Ne	1+Ne	(1+Ne) ²	N/(1+Ne) ²	n	20%
1607195.00	0.02	27577.900	27578.900	760595725.210	0.0018129	2499.819	500

Based on this formula, the researchers arrived at an initial total sample size of 2,499.819 from the total population in the six locations, and 20% of it was used, which represents only the urban towns and not the entire local government areas for the research sample, which is 500 respondents. This is because the population represents the entire local government areas. Data collected in the process of this research was analyzed using descriptive statistics by employing the use of tabulations, frequencies, and percentages by employing the use of SPSS.

10. Results Presentation and Analysis

Out of the total number of the sample size of 500, only 480 questionnaires were filled and returned. The data presentation and analysis were therefore done based on the returned questionnaires of 480 by the respondents, taking into account the objectives of the research.

Table 2: Causes of Violent Crimes in Urban Areas

Understanding the causes of violent crimes in the urban areas of the northeastern part of Nigeria					
Question	Responses	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Do you think violent crimes are increasing in the urban areas of the northeast?	Yes	460	96	96	96
	No	20	4	4	100
Is poverty the cause of urban crime in the urban areas of the north-east?	Yes	470	98	98	98
	No	10	2	2	100
Is the rise in urban crimes a result of the problem of insurgency in the area?	Yes	478.0	99.6	99.6	99.6
	No	2	0.4	0.4	100

Based on the responses of the respondents, it can be seen in the table above that the number of violent crimes that are being committed in the urban areas of northeast Nigeria is growing. The majority, or 96%, hold that this viewpoint is correct, whilst a negligible percentage, 4%, do not. The table also reveals that poverty is a source of urban crime in the urban regions of northeastern Nigeria. This information can be found by looking at the table. The remaining 2% of respondents, which is practically insignificant, did not share this viewpoint, but the vast majority of them (98%) did. The very same data also demonstrated that the insurgency is to blame for the spike in the number of urban crimes that have occurred in the northeast. Additionally, 99.6% of those who responded believed that this was justified, but there were still 0.4% who did not agree with them.

Table 3: The Effects of Firearms Proliferation

Examining the effects of the proliferation of firearms on the emergence and expansion of urban crime.					
Question	Responses	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Are firearms on the increase in the area?	Yes	466	97	97	97
	No	14	3	3	100
Are these firearms locally produced or imported?	Yes	60	12.5	13	12.5
	No	420	87.5	88	100
Is the availability of firearms the major cause of urban crime in the area?	Yes	80	17	17	17
	No	400	83	83	100
Are these arms being used in the perpetuation of urban crime in the area?	Yes	450	94	94	94
	No	30	6	6	100

The spread of firearms in northeast Nigeria is analyzed in Table 3, which can be found here. As seen in the table, the majority of respondents (97%) believe that there has been an increase in the number of firearms in the area, while only 3% disagree. On the other hand, the same table showed that 12.5% of respondents think that the firearms were not created locally, which indicates that 87.5% of respondents are of the opinion that the firearms were imported. In the same vein as the previous point, the table demonstrated that the availability of firearms in the area is not the primary factor contributing to urban crime. This was accounted for by 83% of the respondents, of which 17% were of the opinion that the most significant reason for urban crimes in the area was the availability of firearms. Nevertheless, the table revealed that 94 percent of the respondents were of the opinion that guns were being used in the continuation of urban crimes in the area. This is despite the fact that the availability of firearms was not the primary cause of urban crime in the area.

Table 4: Implications of Engaging Civilians in Security.

Examining the implications of engaging civilians in supplementing security efforts in relation to the proliferation of small firearms and the growth of urban crime	Responses	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Question					
Do you support the arming of civilians to supplement the efforts of the government's security?	Yes	459	96	96	96
	No	21	4	4	100
Have the armed civilians helped in reducing the magnitude of urban crime in the area?	Yes	100	21	21	21
	No	380	79	79	100
Do you think that the armed civilians are playing according to the rules of the game?	Yes	120	25	25	25
	No	360	75	75	100
Do you think that armed civilians should be recruited into the government's security agencies?	Yes	111	23	23	23
	NO	369	77	77	100

An investigation into the implications of including civilians in the augmentation of security measures in light of the widespread availability of handguns and the rise in the rate of violent crime in metropolitan areas. As the table demonstrates, the majority of respondents (96%) hold the opinion that they are in favor of arming civilians in order to augment the efforts of the government security forces. Only 4% of respondents hold the opinion that they are not in favor of arming civilians. However, the same table revealed that the respondents considered that the armed citizens did not help in lessening the scale of urban crime in the area. This attested that 79% of the respondents believed this to be the case. In a similar manner, the table exposed the fact that the armed people were not playing the game in accordance with the established guidelines. 75% of the respondents were of the opinion that this was the case, whereas 17% were of the opinion that the armed citizens were playing by the rules of the game. According to the table, 77 percent of those who participated in the survey hold the opinion that armed civilians should not be recruited into government security agencies. This opinion is based on the strong belief that armed civilians do not play the game according to the rules.

Table 5: Measures Needed to Control Urban Crime

Exploring the necessary measures needed in the control of the current dynamics of urban crime in the urban centers of the northeast. Question	Responses	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Do you think recruiting more security is necessary to check the rise in urban crimes in the northeast?	YES	475	99	99	99
	NO	5	1	1	100
Are you sure the security agencies are taking the appropriate measures to control the situation?	Yes	469	98	98	98
	No	11	2	2	100
Do you think the security agencies need improvement in their condition of service?	Yes	473	99	99	99
	No	7	1	1	100
Do you think the allowances of the armed civilians are adequate in relation to their efforts?	Yes	79	16	16	16
	No	401	84	84	100

An investigation into the steps that must be taken in order to control the current dynamics of urban crime in the northeastern region's metropolitan centers. As shown in the table, 99% of respondents believe that increasing the number of security personnel should be a priority in preventing the spread of urban crime in the northeast. On the other hand, the same table revealed that the respondents believed that they were sure that the security services were taking necessary measures to regulate the situation, which was affirmed by 98% of the respondents. This was a significant finding. In the same line as the previous point, the table demonstrated that the respondents believed that the quality of service provided by the security agencies had to be improved. The respondents agreed with this assessment to a 99% level. The table reveals that 84% of respondents believe that the allowances given to armed civilians are grossly inadequate in comparison to the efforts that they put in. This strong belief comes from the fact that respondents strongly believe that the conditions of service for armed civilians need to be improved.

Table 6: Chi-Square Test

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	210.000 ^a	196	.234
Likelihood Ratio	81.242	196	1.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	14.000	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	15		

a. 225 cells (100.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 0.07.

H₀: Urban crimes in north-eastern Nigeria are not caused by the proliferation of small firearms and the activities of non-state armed groups.

H_a: Urban crimes in north-eastern Nigeria are caused by the proliferation of small firearms and the activities of non-state armed groups.

When the data was entered into SPSS, the χ^2 test revealed that the Pearson chi-square value was 0.234, which is greater than the alpha value of 0.05. Based on the findings, the null hypothesis is accepted, implying that urban crimes in north-eastern Nigeria are not caused by the proliferation of small firearms and the activities of non-state armed groups.

Conclusion

This study appraised the measures needed to prevent violent crimes in urban areas of the northeast region amidst the proliferation of small firearms, which can easily influence the situation. There is no doubt that such a situation is further aggravated by the activities of non-state actors and wide unsecured international borders. The diffusion of such small firearms into larger society paves the way for high levels of armed violence. Nigeria has in the past decades witnessed increased violence and small arms circulation. Today, its proliferation is attributed to the existence of electoral injustice, ethnic bigotry, and religious intolerance coupled with high levels of poverty and youth unemployment in the country. Although Nigeria's problem with small firearms is not new, its increasing availability in the last two decades has propelled a wave of insurgency, ethno-religious conflicts, banditry, kidnapping, terrorism, human trafficking, drugs, armed robbery, herders' and farmers' crises, and other violent crimes. This has significantly contributed to the breakdown of law and order.

Recommendations

1. According to the research, urban crime is on the rise, and it is therefore critical to make concerted efforts to address the problem.
2. Poverty has to be addressed by equipping the youth with technical skills through establishing skills acquisition centers to train the youth and provide them with resources for takeoff.
3. Even though arms are considered the major reason for the growth in urban crime, efforts should be made to control the spread of such arms.
4. Although the majority of the respondents were of the view that the civilian vigilantes should not be recruited into the government security agencies, the government should provide a sustainable means of giving them reasonable support in order to encourage them to retain the tempo.
5. More training is required by the security agencies in handling urban crime since its scenario differs from the fight against terrorism and insurgency.

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