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Factors Driving Weapons Holding in the North East of Nigeria

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This Findings Report, and the research that supported it, were undertaken as part of UNIDIR's Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) project. MEAC is a multi-donor, multi-partner initiative to develop a unified, rigorous approach to examining how and why individuals exit armed conflict and evaluating the efficacy of interventions meant to support their transitions. While the Findings Report benefited from feedback from MEAC's donors and institutional partners, it does not necessarily represent their official policies or positions.

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Key findings

- Civilian weapons possession across the North East of Nigeria is unexpectedly low given the decade plus long Boko Haram conflict there (and in light of national and other regional weapons holding rates). Very few people report having firearms, and most weapons holders carry cruder weapons like clubs, bladed weapons, and bows and arrows.
- Several conflict-related factors appear to influence weapons holding in the region, including prior (and understandably current) involvement in a community security group like the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF).
- Contrary to concerns, prior association with Boko Haram does *not* appear to be correlated with any greater likelihood of holding weapons. Former Boko Haram associates hold weapons at a slightly lower rate than unaffiliated community members.
- Victimization and conflict violence exposure (e.g., having a family member targeted in a banditry attack or knowing someone who was the victim of sexual violence) is associated with an increased likelihood of weapons holding.
- Contrary to previous research, a lack of trust in security providers does *not* appear to be driving weapons holding for protection.
- Weapons holding is also correlated with certain norms around violence justification and preparedness.

Background

About MEAC

How and why do individuals exit armed groups, and how do they do so sustainably without falling back into conflict cycles? These questions are at the core of UNIDIR's Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) initiative. MEAC is a multi-year, multi-partner collaboration that aims to develop a unified, rigorous approach to examining how and why individuals exit armed conflict and evaluating the efficacy of interventions meant to support their transition to civilian life. MEAC seeks to inform evidence-based programme design and implementation in real time to improve efficacy. At the strategic level, the cross-programme, cross-agency lessons that will emerge from the growing MEAC evidence base will support more effective conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. The MEAC project benefits from generous support by the German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO); Global Affairs Canada (GAC); the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA); and the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs; and is run in partnership with UNICEF; and the International Organization for Migration (IOM); the UN Development Programme (UNDP); UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO); the World Bank; the Secretariat of the Regional Strategy for Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience in the Lake Chad Basin; and United Nations University Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR).

About this Series

The MEAC findings report series seeks to put evidence about conflict transitions and related programming into the hands of policymakers and practitioners in real time. The reports present short overviews of findings (or emerging findings) across a wide range of thematic areas and include analyses of their political or practical implications for the UN and its partners.

About this Report

This report is based on quantitative data collected from February 2022 to November 2023, as part of three surveys conducted in North East Nigeria. These include:

- A 1,341-person survey was conducted in Borno State, Nigeria from February 2022 to February 2023. This survey served as a midline survey in a three-part panel series. The sample focuses largely on a sub-sample of individuals who were formerly engaged with different armed groups operating in the region, including ex-associates of different factions of Boko Haram such as Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād (JAS) and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and ex-affiliates of various CSAs (e.g., Civilian Joint

Task Force (CJTF), vigilante groups) who were part of the larger three-part survey panel in the region.¹ There is also a sizeable number of respondents who identified as current affiliates of the various CSAs.

- A community perceptions survey included 3,259 respondents, who were recruited by a randomised MEAC recruitment campaign. The respondents were recruited between September and December 2022 in and around Maiduguri, Konduga, Jere Bama, and Gwoza, in Borno State; Mubi North, Mubi South, and Michika in Adamawa; and Damaturu and Buni Yadi in Yobe State.
- A 2,571-person survey was conducted in Borno State Nigeria from August 2023 to November 2023. This survey served as an endline survey in a three-part panel series and follows the midline survey above. The sample once again focuses on a sub-sample of ex-associates from different armed groups and current and ex-affiliates of CSAs in the region.

This MEAC findings report aims to enhance the understanding of factors driving weapons holding in the North East of Nigeria and determine if former associates of Boko Haram and community security groups are retaining their weapons (or rearming later), in order to strengthen disarmament efforts and reduce armed violence in the region. This report's findings highlight a range of social, civic and victimization factors related to weapons holding, which may be of use when designing conflict prevention and disarmament strategies in the North East of Nigeria. This is a joint report containing original data and analysis from MEAC, as well as contributions based on previous work conducted by UNIDIR's Conventional Arms and Ammunition Programme and drawing on additional expertise from UNIDIR's Gender and Disarmament Programme. Approaching such research through various perspectives and expertise is essential in developing a holistic and nuanced understanding of how and why different populations arm themselves and when they are willing to lay aside their weapons, questions which have significant implications for the safety and peacebuilding prospects of a region that has long suffered from insurgent violence.

¹ This report oscillates between discussing **ex-associates** - those who had been with Boko Haram and/or one of its factions and **ex-affiliates** - those who have been with other groups, like the CJTF, Yan Gora, Hunters and Charmers. The use of these different terms should not be interpreted as suggesting that these individuals represent fundamentally different categories of analysis, but rather they are employed to try to provide clarity for the reader as the text goes back and forth between analyzing weapons holding trends for the different populations.

Weapons and Violence in Nigeria

In the last two years, following the death of Abubakar Shekau, infighting between Boko Haram's factions, and the mass exits of more than 160,000 people who had lived in areas under the control of the groups or been associated with them², many Nigerians in the North East came to believe that they had an opportunity to finally end the conflict in the region and begin to build peace. To lay the groundwork for sustainable peace, however, it is necessary to address not only the drivers of conflict but also the potential legacies of war. This is especially true when it comes to the weapons that have flooded conflict zones, which endure long after the fighting stops and can be used to perpetuate crime and other types of violence in peacetime as well as be trafficked illicitly, thus undermining security and development in the country that was initially conflict-affected and potentially beyond. The following report examines weapons holding in the North East of Nigeria in an effort to assist policymakers and practitioners working to prevent and respond to conflict in the region, specifically with regard to thinking through nuanced ways to address weapons holding and potential weapons retention as parties to conflict stand down.

I. National Landscape of Firearms Holding

The widespread availability of weapons correlates to higher incidences of armed violence and armed conflict. It is estimated that there are 6.2 million civilian-held firearms in Nigeria, while estimates for military and law enforcement are placed at approximately 224,200 and 362,400 firearms respectively.³ Civilian-held firearms outweigh their military counterparts by a ratio of 28 to one. This far exceeded the estimated global ratio, which places civilian-held firearms at an approximate ratio of 6 to one.⁴ While weapons themselves do not cause the conflicts in which they are used, their proliferation and ease of access exacerbate the degree and prevalence of conflict violence which can then spill over into all levels of society. Indeed, violence of all types affects the lives of an estimated 8 million Nigerians annually.⁵ As elaborated in the National Small Arms and Light Weapons Survey (NSALWS) "violence [in Nigeria] typically involves threats and intimidation, often occurs in the home, and in the vast

² Ndahi Marama, "[Over 160,000 Boko Haram terrorists have laid down arms – Gov Zulum](#)", *Vanguard*, 28 November 2023.

³ Aaron Karp, [Estimating Global Military-Owned Firearms Numbers](#), (Geneva, Small Arms Survey, June 2018).

⁴ Aaron Karp, [Estimating Global Civilian-Held Firearms Numbers](#) (Geneva, Small Arms Survey, June 2018). Civilian, law enforcement and military weapons holdings must be understood as estimates. As the same scholars remark, such data needs further improvements.

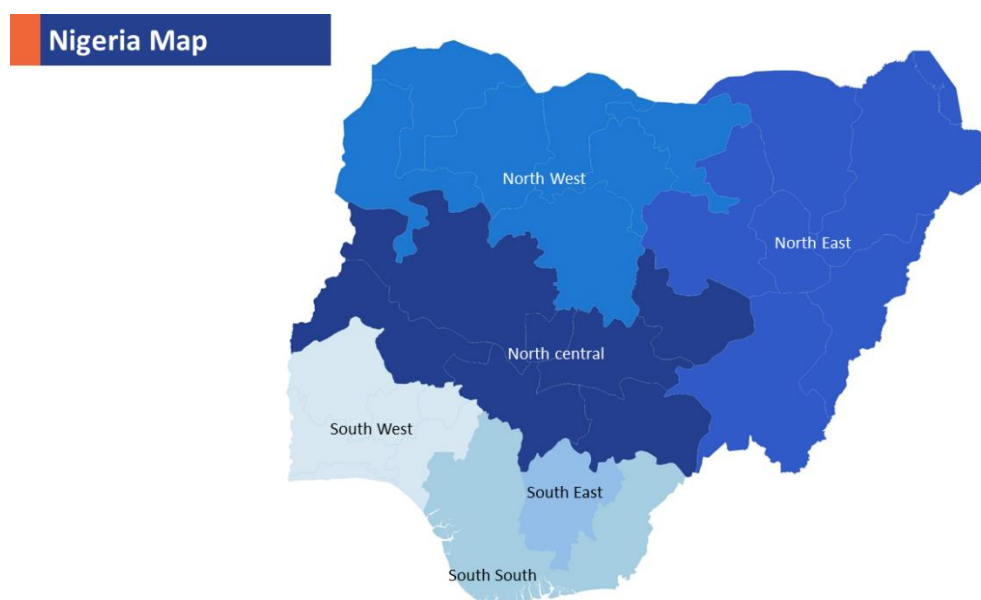
⁵ A National Small Arms and Light Weapons Survey (NSALWS) was conducted in 2016 and published in 2021 in partnership between Nigeria's Presidential Committee on Small Arms and Light Weapons (PRESCOM) and the Geneva-based Small Arms Survey (SAS), henceforth cited as SAS, "[Nigeria National Small Arms and Light Weapons Survey](#)", (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, August 2021).

majority of cases involves a weapon. The presence of a firearm in the home proves to be a significant risk factor in people’s becoming victims of violence and often results in death.”⁶

II. Regional Patterns of Violence

Conflict and violence in Nigeria are fueled by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW). Overall, 17 per cent of survey respondents from the NSALWS agreed that firearms had caused “many deaths” in their area, whilst 19 per cent felt that firearms facilitated conflict in their community.⁷ Other findings demonstrate that some regions and communities are more affected by armed violence than others.⁸ The section below explores the dynamics of armed violence across Nigeria’s geopolitical zones, and regional experiences with and perceptions of armed violence, and firearms ownership and use.

FIGURE 1 – MAP OF NIGERIA’S SIX GEOPOLITICAL ZONES



The topography of conflict and violence varies significantly across Nigeria’s six geopolitical zones. In Nigeria’s southern geopolitical zones, escalating armed violence occurs amidst a growing campaign for Biafran separatism in the **South East**. The conflict between the government and armed separatists, such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)’s military arm, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), spurred the rise of government-backed vigilante groups. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the region dates back to the Nigeria-Biafra civil war and is sustained by the rise of government-backed vigilante groups and

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ National Working Group on Armed Violence and Action on Armed Violence, [The Violent Road: An Overview of Armed Violence in Nigeria](#), 2013; Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIK), [Conflict Barometer](#), 2022.

inter-communal conflicts.⁹ Indeed, the South East was found to be the region reporting the highest level of civilian firearms possession (38 per cent) compared to 14 per cent at the national level.¹⁰ The accessibility of arms has facilitated the escalation of these conflicts and is correlated with high perceptions of insecurity. For example, 42 per cent of respondents in the South East felt that owning weapons was a necessity.¹¹

Militancy in the Niger Delta continues to drive violence in the **South South zone**. The conflict over natural resources and the autonomy of the Niger Delta initially pit several Ijaw groups and militias against the government and multinational oil companies.¹² The trajectory of violence has expanded in recent years to include maritime piracy, kidnappings for ransom and organized and riverine criminal activities.¹³ In 2016, the South South was the region with the highest reported rates of firearms violence.¹⁴ Perceptions of security were closely linked to the presence of firearms: conflict facilitated by firearms was identified as a security concern for 58 per cent of respondents in the South South, whilst this was only 19 per cent nationwide.¹⁵ The firearms trade was viewed as more of a predominant driver of insecurity in the South South than in the rest of the country¹⁶ - 71 per cent of respondents felt that the trade of firearms still persists in their community, compared to only 18 per cent at the national level.¹⁷

Currently, conflicts in the **North West, parts of the North Central, and most recently in the South West** zone between predominantly Christian farmers and largely Muslim Fulani pastoralists pose a grave threat to Nigerian stability.¹⁸ What began fundamentally as a conflict over land use has adopted divisive ethno-religious dimensions and has now become synonymous with armed banditry. Indeed, bandits have grown out of these tensions and/or instrumentalized them to recruit from aggrieved communities and entrench themselves in the area. Banditry is a catch-all term comprising a loose collection of rural armed criminal groups who have engaged in “organized crime that includes kidnapping, armed robbery, murder, rape, cattle-rustling, and the exploitation of environmental resources”.¹⁹ Banditry today is thought to be motivated primarily by financial interest, but has been connected to the ongoing farmer-

⁹ National Working Group on Armed Violence and Action on Armed Violence, [The Violent Road: An Overview of Armed Violence in Nigeria](#), (2013).

¹⁰ SAS, [Nigeria National Small Arms and Light Weapons Survey](#) (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, August 2021).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIIC), [Conflict Barometer](#), 2022.

¹³ International Crisis Group, ["Managing Vigilantism in Nigeria: A Near-term Necessity"](#), Africa Report, No. 308 (Brussels, 21 April 2022); Katja Lindskov Jacobsen, ["Pirates of the Niger Delta: Between Brown and Blue Waters"](#), (Vienna: UNODC, 2021).

¹⁴ SAS, [Nigeria: National Small Arms and Light Weapons Survey | Small Arms Survey](#), (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, August 2021).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ As this national aggregate statistic includes the high figures from the South South, the figures for the rest of Nigeria are likely even lower than indicated.

¹⁸ Evelyn Usman, ["Bandits now in full force in South West, turn the heat on Lagos – Ibadan Expressway," Vanguard](#), 19 November 2022.

¹⁹ Claire Brenner, ["Combating Banditry in Northwest Nigeria"](#), American Security Project, March 19, 2021.

herder conflict in the North West²⁰ and may have links to the insurgency in the North East and other armed groups.²¹

Attacks by bandits have increased by 731 per cent between 2018 and 2022, and are one of the most predominant sources of insecurity in Nigeria, and in the North West.²² Their operations, ranging from raids, kidnapping for ransom and cattle rustling, as well as violent clashes against government security forces resulted in 3,736 fatalities and at least 1,064 kidnappings in 2022.²³ Deaths associated with banditry have at some points outweighed fatalities associated with Boko Haram in Nigeria, with bandits responsible for almost half of all deaths at the hands of violent groups in the country in 2019.²⁴ Operating in a region where governance is contested and there are porous borders, bandits have expanded their operations into southwestern Niger, where there is a growing presence of jihadist groups. Boko Haram factions, Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS), the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and most recently Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan (Ansaru) have forged alliances with some bandit groups, ranging from capacity building to logistical cooperation, particularly in the field of arms trafficking.²⁵ The merger between jihadist and criminal groups could potentially create a "land bridge linking militants in the North East around Lake Chad to those operating in western Niger"²⁶ and the rest of the Sahel, which could further destabilize an already fragile region.²⁷ There is the potential that increased banditry will influence the perceived need to own weapons. In 2016, as banditry was on the rise, already 46 per cent of respondents in the North West felt that owning a weapon may be necessary – the highest rate across the six geopolitical zones.²⁸

In the North East, the 13-year Boko Haram conflict has caused more than 40,000 direct deaths and indirectly led to an additional 314,000 deaths in Nigeria alone.²⁹ The humanitarian

²⁰ International Crisis Group, "[Ending Nigeria's Herder-Farmer Crisis: The Livestock Reform Plan](#)", Africa Report, No. 301 (Brussels, 4 May 2021); Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, "[Nigeria](#)", May 31, 2023.

²¹ John Sunday Ojo, Samuel Oyewole, and Folahanmi Aina, "[Forces of Terror: Armed Banditry and Insecurity in North-west Nigeria](#)", Democracy and Security, 19:4, 319-346, 2023; Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIK), "[Conflict Barometer](#)", 2022; James Barnett, Murtala Ahmed Rufa'i, and Abdulaziz Abdulaziz, "[Northwestern Nigeria: A Jihadization of Banditry, or a 'Banditization' of Jihad?](#)", CTC Sentinel, Volume 15, Issue 1, January 2022.

²² Oluwale Ojewale and Mahmud Malami Sadiq, "[Why Nigeria's bandits are recruiting women for gunrunning](#)," *Institute for Security Studies*, 14 August 2023.

²³ HIK, "[Conflict Barometer](#)", 2022.

²⁴ Fidelis Mac-Leva & Haruna Ibrahim, "[Bandits Kill More Nigerians Than Boko Haram, Robbers, Kidnappers, Cultists, Others](#)," *Daily Trust*, 22 September 2019.

²⁵ ISS Regional Office for West Africa, The Sahel and The Lake Chad Basin, "[Ansaru's comeback in Nigeria deepens the terror threat](#)," *Institute for Security Studies*, 1 June 2022; HIK, "[Conflict Barometer](#)", 2022; International Crisis Group, "[Violence in Nigeria's North West: Rolling Back the Mayhem](#)", Africa Report, No. 288 (Brussels, 18 May 2020).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ UNDP, "[Conflict Analysis in the Lake Chad Basin 2020-2021: Trends, Developments and Implications for Peace and Stability](#)", (N'Djamena, Chad: UNDP, 2022).

²⁸ SAS, "[Nigeria National Small Arms and Light Weapons Survey](#)" (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, August 2021).

²⁹ Taylor Hanna, David K. Bohl, Mickey Rafa, Jonathan D. Moyer, "[Assessing the Impact of Conflict on Development in North-East Nigeria](#)", (Abuja: UNDP, 2020)

consequences of this conflict have been devastating: some 2,295,000 individuals in the North East of Nigeria have been displaced and at least 12,000,000 people are in need of humanitarian assistance.³⁰ The conflict has long since spread to the other Lake Chad Basin countries – Cameroon, Chad, and Niger – as Boko Haram’s warring factions – JAS and its splinter the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) – continue to clash for territory and influence. Within Nigeria, Borno remains the most violent state, with 2,265 violent deaths registered between July 2022 and July 2023.³¹ Yet, despite the ongoing insurgency in the North East, the region is the most difficult in terms of access to firearms, with only 11 per cent of respondents of the National Small Arms Survey there feeling it was either “fairly easy” or “complicated but possible” to obtain a firearm.³² Despite the difficulties cited in acquiring firearms, they appear to play a large role in the perpetuation of violent incidents in the North East: 62 per cent of victims reported their presence during the incident.³³

Measures to Regulate Weapons and Ammunition, and Mapping the Sources of SALW in Nigeria

Reducing weapons-related conflict violence begins with comprehensive legal frameworks and policies aimed at addressing their proliferation and misuse. The section below outlines key relevant frameworks for arms control and provides an analysis of some of the key drivers of illicit arms trafficking in the Nigerian context, namely diversion from national stockpiles, porosity of national borders, and craft production.

I. International, Regional and National Instruments for Arms Control

In contrast to many of its regional counterparts, Nigeria has a long history of committing to legally binding international and regional small arms control instruments, which serve to limit the proliferation and impact of SALW. At the international level, Nigeria has signed (13 November 2001) and ratified (3 March 2006) the legally binding *UN Protocol against the Illicit*

³⁰ UNHCR, [Nigeria: All Population Snapshot - September 2023](#), (23 October 2023)

³¹ Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), [Nigeria Security Tracker](#), (Last updated July 1, 2023)

³² SAS, [Nigeria National Small Arms and Light Weapons Survey](#) (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, August 2021).

³³ Small Arms Survey, [Nigeria: National Small Arms and Light Weapons Survey](#), (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2021).

Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition (“UN Firearms Protocol”), which sees states agreeing to adopt and implement the strongest possible legislation to prevent, investigate, and prosecute offences related to the illicit manufacturing and trafficking of firearms and ammunition.³⁴ Nigeria was the continental leader and remained actively involved in negotiations for the adoption of the legally binding *Arms Trade Treaty* in 2013, becoming the third State to ratify the treaty on 12 August 2013.³⁵ Along with all other UN Member States, Nigeria also adopted the *UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (2001)* and the associated 2005 *International Tracing Instrument* and has since provided reports on their national implementation. At the regional level, Nigeria is a state party to the legally binding *ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunition and Other Related Materials*, which seeks, *inter alia*, to prevent and combat the excessive and destabilizing accumulation of weapons through a comprehensive ban on the transfer of SALW within ECOWAS member states.³⁶

The current basis of Nigeria’s national legal and regulatory framework for conventional arms control is the Firearms Act of 1959, and subsidiary laws adopted in 1984, 1990 and 2004. The present legal framework includes provisions for civilian possession, manufacture, licensing, use and transfer of arms and ammunition. The law sets out that individuals may possess firearms for personal use if they secure a license from the inspector general of police.³⁷ In 2023, however, there were reports that the police have announced that they have stopped licensing firearms in order to curb further proliferation.³⁸ It remains unclear if licensing has since resumed. While the 1959 Firearms Act and subsidiary laws provide an important basis for regulation, they are outdated, as has been acknowledged by the Federal Government of Nigeria.³⁹ A 2016 baseline assessment conducted by UNIDIR in collaboration with the Federal Government of Nigeria as well as the Bonn International Center for Conflict Studies (BICC) and Conflict Armament Research (CAR) concluded amongst other things, that gaps remain in Nigeria's legal and regulatory framework with regards to fully domesticating international instruments such as the *Arms Trade Treaty* and the *ECOWAS Convention*.⁴⁰

³⁴ United Nations Department of Peace Operations (DPO), United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (ODA) & Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), *Weapons and Ammunition Dynamics in the Lake Chad Basin*, (New York: United Nations, 2022)

³⁵ United Nations, *Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*, (New York, 31 May 2001)

³⁶ Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, *In brief: The ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Ammunition and other related materials, Information Kit: Small Arms Control*, (Abuja: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2010).

³⁷ Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Firearms Act. L.N. 32 of 1959*, 1 February, Abuja (1959)

³⁸ Abiodun Sanusi, “Why police stopped issuance of gun licence- IGP”, *Punch*, 8 August 2023; Sikiru Obarayese, “Police ask illegal gun owners to voluntarily surrender them”, *Nigerian Tribune*, 20 September 2023.

³⁹ UNIDIR, *Towards a National Framework on Weapons and Ammunition Management in the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (Geneva: November 2016).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

II. Current Sources of Weapons in Nigeria

The state of the arms control regime in Nigeria has influenced the sources and availability of weapons used in the country. Illicit stocks of arms and ammunition held by armed groups, criminal groups, and civilians in Nigeria have historically come from at least five key sources:

- 1) pillage and theft from national security service stockpiles;
- 2) deliberate diversion from these stocks, abetted by serving or former personnel;
- 3) unlicensed craft production;
- 4) illicit trafficking of both factory-manufactured and craft produced weapons, in particular through Nigeria's northern and eastern borders; and
- 5) maritime smuggling.⁴¹

For the purpose of this report, three sources – illicit arms trafficking, diversion from national stockpiles, and craft production – will be examined with relevance to the situation in the North East of Nigeria.

- a. **Illicit Arms Trafficking:** With its strategic location at the crossroads between the Sahel and Central Africa, Nigeria is particularly exposed to illicit arms trafficking. The North East border with Niger and Chad has been identified in earlier studies as one of three key arms smuggling entry points in Nigeria.⁴² Weapons from other conflicts on the African continent have passed through these routes and made their way to the North East. In 2012, the UN warned that “looted firearms” from Libya may end up in the hands of Boko Haram.⁴³ Field investigations between 2017 and 2018, similarly found that weapons in Nigeria could have possibly originated from Libyan national stockpiles.⁴⁴ Intercepting weapons that flow from the Sahel (and elsewhere) across this porous and largely unstaffed border area is particularly difficult in light of the “well over 250 footpaths from Damaturu/Maiduguri axis that leads to Cameroon, Chad or Niger Republic” (considered a conservative estimate) along which the weapons are thought to be trafficked.⁴⁵ Other cross-border trafficking hubs are thought to be the border with Benin and some weapons intercepted in Nigeria have also been traced back to Ivorian stockpiles.⁴⁶
- b. **Diversion from National Stockpiles:** Diversion from national stockpiles is among the more important sources for illicit weapons and ammunition in Nigeria. For example, a

⁴¹ [Ibid.](#)

⁴² See for example, Jennifer M. Hazen and Jonas Horner, [Small Arms, Armed Violence, and Insecurity in Nigeria: The Niger Delta in Perspective](#), (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2007), p. 35.

⁴³ UN Security Council, [“Report of the assessment mission on the impact of the Libyan crisis on the Sahel region”](#), United Nations, 18 January 2012, S/2012/42.

⁴⁴ Conflict Armament Research Ltd., [“Nigeria's Herder–Farmer Conflict”](#), (London: CAR, 2020).

⁴⁵ Roosevelt O. Idehen and Alexander A. B. Subair, “The Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons: A Re-emerging Threat on Nigeria's National Security,” *International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace and Conflict Studies* (IJMSSPCS), Vol.4 No.2 (2021).

⁴⁶ Fiona Mangan and Matthias Nowak, *The West Africa–Sahel-Connection, Mapping Cross-border Arms Trafficking*, (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2019), p.5.

substantial share of Boko Haram's weapons and ammunition are thought to have been diverted from national stockpiles in Nigeria.⁴⁷ While attacks by armed groups such as Boko Haram have resulted in significant diversion of material (see the section below), losses from national stockpiles also occur through deliberate or organized diversion. Within the weapons and ammunition management life cycle, procurement and distribution after import are particularly vulnerable to corruption at all levels. Several legal processes have generated allegations of corruption against senior government officials for fraudulent arms procurement deals, amounting to over USD 17 million from 2011 to 2016.⁴⁸ A 2019 report from the Auditor General of Nigeria uncovered that within the police alone, 178,459 firearms were unaccounted for, including some 88,000 Kalashnikov-pattern rifles.⁴⁹ Instances of corruption and diversion similarly occur at the micro-level, although they are more difficult to quantify and often go unreported. In September 2016, six members of the Nigerian Army were court-martialled for alleged misconduct, including allegations of having sold arms and ammunition to Boko Haram.⁵⁰ Improvements of Nigeria's national weapons and ammunition (WAM)⁵¹ system⁵² and the establishment of a centralized and mandated National Commission on SALW⁵³ would contribute to an effective and unified approach to WAM across 15 arms-bearing agencies⁵⁴ including on diversion of SALW and other materials.⁵⁵

- c. **Craft Production:** Craft production constitutes an important source of illicit weapons in Nigeria. The craft production of weapons is not entirely illegal in Nigeria, as only the transfer of non-marked, craft produced weapons is prohibited.⁵⁶ Craft producers require a license to produce firearms and must ensure these weapons are accordingly marked. However, the majority of craft produced weapons in Nigeria are manufactured

⁴⁷ UNIDIR, [Towards a National Framework on Weapons and Ammunition Management in the Federal Republic of Nigeria](#) (Geneva: November 2016), p.10.

⁴⁸ Reuters, ["Nigeria's vice president says \\$15 bln stolen in arms procurement fraud,"](#) 03 May 2016; Al Jazeera, ["Nigeria orders arrest of ex-adviser over \\$2bn arms deal,"](#) 18 Nov 2015.

⁴⁹ Office of the Auditor General for the Federation, [Auditor General's annual report – Non compliance for 2019.](#) At the time of writing this report, no further news was available on the status of these weapons.

⁵⁰ Voice of America (VOA), ["Nigerian Military: Some Officers Selling Arms to Boko Haram,"](#) 4 September 2016.

⁵¹ Weapons and ammunition management (WAM) is the oversight, accountability and governance of arms and ammunition throughout their management cycle, including the establishment of relevant national frameworks, processes and practices for safe and secure materiel acquisition, stockpiling, transfers, end use control, tracing and disposal. WAM does not focus on small arms and light weapons only, but on a broader range of conventional weapons, related systems, and ammunition.

⁵² UNIDIR, in collaboration with the Federal Government of Nigeria as well as the Bonn International Center for Conflict Studies (BICC) and Conflict Armament Research (CAR) undertook a WAM baseline assessment in Nigeria in 2016, which highlighted several potential improvements. For more information about the assessment see: UNIDIR, [Towards a National Framework on Weapons and Ammunition Management in the Federal Republic of Nigeria](#) (Geneva: November 2016).

⁵³ At present, the [National Centre for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons \(NCCSALW\)](#) acts as the institutional mechanism for policy guidance, research and monitoring of all aspects of SALW in Nigeria, but does not hold the same legal status as a fully-fledged National Commission, as required by Article 24 of the ECOWAS Convention.

⁵⁴ DPO, UNODA and LCBC., [Weapons and Ammunition Dynamics in the Lake Chad Basin](#) (2022)

⁵⁵ UNIDIR, [Towards a National Framework on Weapons and Ammunition Management in the Federal Republic of Nigeria](#) (Geneva: November 2016).

⁵⁶ Federal Republic of Nigeria. [Firearms Act. L.N. 32 of 1959.](#) 1 February, Abuja (1959).

and produced without licenses given the difficulties in obtaining such a licence.⁵⁷ Craft production in Nigeria was identified as a growing problem in four different states across the North East, North Central and South East zones, with the country being an important centre of production in Central and West Africa.⁵⁸ The type and sophistication of craft produced weapons vary greatly, ranging from single-shot muzzle loading weapons such as ‘Dane-guns’ to semi-automatic pistols, assault rifles, and sub-machine guns.⁵⁹ The relative ease of access and affordability of these weapons have made them particularly attractive as an alternative to industrially-produced weapons.⁶⁰ Indeed, craft production in Nigeria is mostly demand-driven, with insecurity and socio-cultural factors having been identified as key factors influencing demand.⁶¹ Craft production is also deeply rooted in culture, tradition, and status. Production of craft weapons is a highly respected inter-generational trade, and there is still a strong cultural attachment to the types of weapons produced, with many still used in hunting, traditional ceremonies, and cultural festivities.⁶² Past research in Nigeria has identified the main intended purpose of craft weapons as individual and community self-defence and protection (42 per cent), hunting (22 per cent), followed by crime, traditional use, festivities and ceremonies (both at 10 per cent).⁶³ The craft production of weapons is of particular relevance to the North East of Nigeria, where various community security actors utilize craft-produced weapons.

Boko Haram Insurgency and Weapons in the North East

I. History of the Insurgency and the Armed Actors Involved

The outbreak of the Boko Haram insurgency in 2009 led to a proliferation of armed actors and contributed to the craft manufacture and influx of weapons into the North East, which have implications for long-term stability and peacebuilding prospects. While the national military,

⁵⁷ Augustine Ikelegbe, "The Situation in Nigeria," in Simon Asoba and Rodger Glokpor, eds., *Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in West Africa: Roots and Illegal Arms Caches between Ghana, Togo, Benin and Nigeria* (Abuja: UNREC and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2014), pp. 91–134; Matthias Nowak and André Gsell, *Handmade and Deadly: Craft Production of Small Arms in Nigeria*, Briefing Paper, (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2018), p.15.

⁵⁸ Matthias Nowak and André Gsell, *Handmade and Deadly: Craft Production of Small Arms in Nigeria*, Briefing Paper, (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2018). Ongoing communication between UNIDIR, national authorities and ECOWAS indicate that the scale of the problem continues to increase.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Small Arms Survey and the African Union (AU) Commission, *Weapons Compass: Mapping Illicit Small Arms Flows in Africa*, (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2019)

⁶¹ Matthias Nowak and André Gsell, *Handmade and Deadly: Craft Production of Small Arms in Nigeria*, (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, June 2018)

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

police, and international forces operating in the region are key for understanding the full landscape of violence and availability of weapons in the region, for the purposes of this report, the focus is on the non-state actors involved, including those community security groups that are part of the effort to repel and defeat Boko Haram.

Boko Haram

The rise of Boko Haram can be traced back to 2002, when a young preacher in Maiduguri named Mohammed Yusuf began preaching against state corruption, political elites, and Western ways – a platform that echoed elements of other anti-state agitations and Salafi youth movements in the region. Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad (Arabic for “People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad”) is thought to have been founded by Yusuf around this time. The group is often called “Boko Haram” which means “Western education is forbidden [in Islam]” in Hausa. In the summer of 2009, Yusuf – who for several years was an influential voice with the Borno establishment – began to clash with the Governor and state security services. In July of that year, Yusuf and his followers launched a series of attacks against police and government installations that led to 1,100 deaths and Yusuf in police custody.⁶⁴ Soon after, under the direction of its new leader Abubakar Shekau, the group went underground and launched a wider campaign of violence targeting communities, schools, security services, and other symbols of the State as well as the UN.

The group has continued to expand its influence. In 2014, JAS extended into Cameroon, then later into Niger and Chad, where it also began to conduct attacks. At the peak of its power and reach, Boko Haram was the deadliest armed group globally, responsible for over 6,000 deaths in 2014 alone.⁶⁵ In March 2015, the group pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, becoming its official affiliate in the Lake Chad basin. This allegiance led the group to re-brand itself as Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP). However, the rebranding of the group did not last. Internal disagreements over the group’s approach – primarily over the indiscriminate violence against fellow Muslims – led to a splintering of the group into two factions. As of 2016, Abu Musab al-Barnawi continued to head the faction known as ISWAP, while Shekau continued to lead the faction that operated as JAS. Intra-factional fighting culminated with the death of Shekau in May 2021, after which, more than 160,000 people left the largely JAS-controlled Sambisa Forest to surrender to the Nigerian Government. Although reduced in size, Shekau’s followers continue to operate, led by Bakura Doro, and inter-factional fighting continues.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Alex Thurston, [“The disease is unbelief: Boko Haram’s religious and political worldview”](#), Brookings, Analysis Paper, No. 22, January 2016.

⁶⁵ Institute for Economics and Peace, [“Global Terrorism Index”](#), 2015, p.4.

⁶⁶ Sophie Huvé, Dr Siobhan O’Neil, Dr Remadji Hoinathy, Kato Van Broeckhoven With Mohammed Bukar, Fatima Yetcha, Ajimi Badu, Teniola Tayo, Jessica Caus, and Adja Faye, [“Preventing Recruitment and Ensuring Effective Reintegration Efforts: Evidence from Across the Lake Chad Basin to Inform Policy and Practice”](#), MEAC Lake Chad Basin Case Study Report, United Nations University, New York, 2022.

Community Security Actors (CSAs)

Since the beginning of the insurgency in the North East of Nigeria, communities have formed (or bolstered pre-existing) vigilante committees and self-defence groups. Likewise, other professions such as hunters or organizations were repurposed to protect communities and contribute to curbing Boko Haram's impact. Local community security actors in the region vary significantly, especially when it comes to their degree of formalization and relationship with the government.⁶⁷ This report references three rough categories of CSAs:

- **The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF)** is the most formalized CSA in the North East, characterized by their uniforms, membership cards, and constitution. The CJTF has a clear leadership structure, and the government provides salaries or stipends for some CJTF affiliates.
- **The Yan Gora** are a broader umbrella group of more informal vigilante actors. Some Yan Gora affiliates were recruited into the CJTF, and in local languages the term is often conflated with the CJTF. The Yan Gora lack standardized uniforms and are often unsalaried.
- **The Hunters and Charmers** preceded the insurgency and took on new roles to use their hunting skills or traditional charms and practices to defend communities against Boko Haram and from thieves, particularly in rural areas.

Oftentimes, the distinction between these categories is not clear-cut and there is confusion – and disagreement – about the categorization of community security actors. The three categories presented above should be understood as overlapping armed (and at times partially unarmed) groups that intermittently work together and/or with or towards some of the same aims as the Nigerian security forces.⁶⁸

II. Boko Haram Attacks and Weapons

As mentioned above, attacks perpetrated by Boko Haram in its early days targeted the symbols of the Nigerian state. Attacks on police stations and military barracks were both driven by a desire to avenge the killing of Yusuf and other comrades, as well as the need to loot stockpiles of arms.⁶⁹ Boko Haram gradually expanded its attacks to include attacks on Christians and

⁶⁷ Kato Van Broeckhoven, Zoe Marks, Siobhan O'Neil, Mohammed Bukar, and Fatima Yetcha Ajimi Badu, "[Community Security Actors and the Prospects for Demobilization in the North East of Nigeria](#)," *MEAC Findings Report 18* (New York: United Nations University, 2022).

⁶⁸ Kato Van Broeckhoven, Zoe Marks, Siobhan O'Neil, Mohammed Bukar, and Fatima Yetcha Ajimi Badu, "[Community Security Actors and the Prospects for Demobilization in the North East of Nigeria](#)," *MEAC Findings Report 18* (New York: United Nations University, 2022).

⁶⁹ International Crisis Group, "[Curbing Violence in Nigeria \(II\): The Boko Haram Insurgency](#)," *Africa Report*, No. 216 (Brussels, 03 April 2014).

Muslims who had been critical of the group (including religious leaders), traditional leaders, secular schools, and UN agencies. These early attacks were predominantly shootings. However, in response to increased efforts from the Nigerian security forces, including the hardening of many targets, attacks became increasingly sophisticated. From 2010, the group shifted to the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and notoriously began using women and girls as suicide bombers.⁷⁰

Knowledge of weapons and ammunition stockpiles of the factions of Boko Haram is limited, with only anecdotal evidence available for Nigeria. There are indications that the weapons held by the group mirror those held by security personnel, suggesting that a significant portion of the group's arsenal likely comes from the stockpile raids and diversion. Research conducted in the region appears to confirm this trend: previous research documenting sources of JAS and ISWAP arsenals in southern Niger near the Nigerian border indicates that both factions appear to acquire a significant proportion of their weapons through battlefield capture and raids on military and security outposts.⁷¹ The materiel looted suggests a preference for weaponry which the group was already familiar with, namely small arms and small- to heavy-calibre ammunition.⁷² It is noteworthy that Boko Haram has in some instances also looted heavy weapons such as armoured personal carriers and artillery pieces. However, while the capture of heavy material can be a symbolic feat and may serve to dampen the morale of security forces, Boko Haram does not appear to have the capacity to move, maintain, and use this weaponry. It appears to prefer lighter, more mobile, and easy to use weapons which has led them to often abandon or destroy such heavier material.⁷³ Notably, ammunition retrieved from the group was found to be similar to that used by civilians, including armed bandits and pastoralists, raising the possibility that these actors may trade or seize material among themselves, or procure weapons through the same illicit supply routes.⁷⁴

III. CSA Posture and Weapons

Initially, the weapons held by CSAs in the North East were indicative of their grassroots, hyper-local, civilian-led origins. CSAs drew from traditional technologies of hunting and self-defence widespread in northern Nigeria and were armed with basic forms of weapons such as sticks, knives, cutlasses, machetes, other bladed weapons and bows and arrows.⁷⁵ Indeed, the term “Yan Gora” translates to “boys with sticks” in Hausa.

⁷⁰ Ibid., Warner Jason, and Hilary Matfess. “[Boko Haram’s Demographic Profile in Suicide Bombing](#)” in *Exploding Stereotypes: The Unexpected Operational and Demographic Characteristics of Boko Haram’s Suicide Bombers*. Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point, (2017).

⁷¹ SAS, [At the Crossroads of Sahelian Conflict](#) (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2018); Conflict Armament Research, [Weapons Supplies Fueling Terrorism in the Lake Chad Crisis](#), (2022).

⁷² SAS, [At the Crossroads of Sahelian Conflict](#) (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2018)

⁷³ DPO, UNODA and LCBC., [Weapons and Ammunition Dynamics in the Lake Chad Basin](#) (2022).

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Daniel E. Agbiboa and Chika Charles Aniekwe, [Understanding and Managing Vigilante Groups in the Lake Chad Basin Region](#) (N’Djamena, Chad: UNDP, 2023).

Communities in Borno recognized that the Nigerian military was unable to protect them and indeed, often perpetuated harm against them in their effort to root out JAS.⁷⁶ Reports highlight an incident where a man named Ba'a Lawan spontaneously detained a Boko Haram attacker until state security forces could arrest him as a tipping point in the creation of the Yan Gora, the precursor to the subset of the widely known CJTF.⁷⁷ First armed with nothing or just sticks, the Yan Gora began seeking more sophisticated weapons and ammunition.⁷⁸ Initially, the government resisted providing more sophisticated weaponry, but this hesitance was negated by tactical necessity. As Boko Haram was pushed out of Maiduguri, the military provided Yan Gora with firearms to allow them to fight insurgents in the surrounding bush.⁷⁹ With time, select components of the Yan Gora were vetted, trained, armed, and became known as the **CJTF**.⁸⁰

Selection as a CJTF member allowed members to use traditional craft-produced Dane guns in daily operations and the military gave them assault rifles for specific operations.⁸¹ Frustration among members who were not given weapons was reportedly widespread, with indications that some of these members were illegally purchasing weapons, taking them from defeated Boko Haram fighters during operations and acquiring them through supporters in the military.⁸² A significant portion have also turned to illegally obtaining locally produced craft weapons, including Dane guns and hunting rifles, amongst others.⁸³ With time, the government has armed and formalized more of the CJTF, in contrast to the relationship with the more informal, wider umbrella of Yan Gora.

As previously noted, it is hard to disentangle the CJTF from the wider **Yan Gora** from which it grew. A combined estimate suggests “the CJTF, locally known as the Yan Gora, counts more than 26,000 among its ranks in Borno state alone.”⁸⁴ Previous MEAC research suggests that the government formalized parts of existing Yan Gora into the CJTF. One focus group participant explained, “During the time of conflict, almost everybody in my community joined

⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch, [Nigeria: Erroneous Military Airstrike](#), Abuja, 7 December 2023; HRC, [Violations and abuses committed by Boko Haram and the impact on human rights in the countries affected - Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), A/HRC/30/67, 9 December 2015, p.12 f.

⁷⁷ see Center for Civilians in Conflict, [Civilian Perceptions of the Yan Gora \(CJTF\) in Borno State, Nigeria](#), 2018.

⁷⁸ DPO, UNODA and LCBC., [Weapons and Ammunition Dynamics in the Lake Chad Basin](#) (2022).

⁷⁹ Daniel E. Agbiboa and Chika Charles Aniekwe, [Understanding and Managing Vigilante Groups in the Lake Chad Basin Region](#) (N'Djamena, Chad: UNDP, 2023).

⁸⁰ The name *Civilian Joint Task Force* (CJTF) is meant to align with the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), the joint military operation against Boko Haram fought by the militaries of Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria. It is unclear if the name was first used by some in the Yan Gora to signal loyalty and/or purpose, came about as a nick name from the community, and/or was chosen by the Military that increasingly worked with parts of the Yan Gora.

⁸¹ International Crisis Group, "[Watchmen of Lake Chad: Vigilante Groups Fighting Boko Haram](#)", Africa Report, No. 244 (Brussels, 23 February 2017).

⁸² Ibid., and Drew Hinshaw, "[Nigerian Violence Spawns Homemade Responses](#)," *The Wall Street Journal*, 25 June 2014.

⁸³ Matthias Nowak and André Gsell, [Handmade and Deadly: Craft Production of Small Arms in Nigeria](#), Briefing Paper, (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2018).

⁸⁴ Center for Civilians in Conflict, [Nigerian Community Militias: Toward A Solution](#) (November 2019)

Yan Gora to protect our community, then the government came to us and selected some people among us and converted them into CJTF, so I was not opportuned to be among the selected people - then, I left Yan Gora.”⁸⁵ The Yan Gora have a greater degree of flexibility, without formal entry or exit procedures, but often lamented not being paid or armed in the same way as the CJTF.⁸⁶

Despite recent rhetorical support from the state, **Hunters and Charmers** remain informal allies in the counterinsurgency campaign against Boko Haram. Hunters and Charmers have generally been present in remote regions and their existence long preceded the conflict. Historically, Hunters and Charmers are considered to be protected by magic, with their bodies fortified with charms to make them immune to gunshots. Hunters are renowned for being able to hunt with and without weapons.⁸⁷ These roles are often conflated with ethnic identities and passed down by birthright. As the gravity of the threat of Boko Haram became clear, many Hunters and Charmers began to carry locally produced craft weapons such as hunting rifles and Dane weapons, which hold cultural significance to the group. There are some reports that Hunters and Charmers were given ammunition and additional weapons by local authorities to further bolster their existing arsenals.⁸⁸ During the course of the conflict, Hunters and Charmers have served as valuable guides to both state armed forces and other CSAs.⁸⁹

If and when the conflict winds down, the fluid nature of association with CSA groups and the existence of various Boko Haram stockpiles across factions present a series of challenges in managing weapons in order to ensure long-term peace and stability in the region. The next section of the report details findings from original research in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states, which highlight the potential for conflict violence to spill over, particularly with regard to legacy weapons which could be used and thus perpetuate violence – interpersonal, criminal, or political in nature – in Nigeria or beyond.

⁸⁵ MEAC, *Nigeria Midline Survey* (Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria, January–August 2022).

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Kato Van Broeckhoven, Zoe Marks, Siobhan O’Neil, Mohammed Bukar, and Fatima Yetcha Ajimi Badu, ["Community Security Actors and the Prospects for Demobilization in the North East of Nigeria,"](#) *MEAC Findings Report 18* (New York: United Nations University, 2022).

⁸⁸ International Crisis Group, ["Watchmen of Lake Chad: Vigilante Groups Fighting Boko Haram"](#), Africa Report, No. 244 (Brussels, 23 February 2017).

⁸⁹ Kato Van Broeckhoven, Zoe Marks, Siobhan O’Neil, Mohammed Bukar, and Fatima Yetcha Ajimi Badu, ["Community Security Actors and the Prospects for Demobilization in the North East of Nigeria,"](#) *MEAC Findings Report 18* (New York: United Nations University, 2022).

Methodology

About the Sample

The data examined in this report stems from three different surveys administered by MEAC in the North East of Nigeria as part of a large-scale, multi-year study of conflict trajectories into and out of armed groups in the region.

The report relies most heavily on two surveys, the first being a **midline survey** which was conducted over the phone with 1,341 respondents between February 2022-February 2023, as part of a longitudinal study in Borno State, Nigeria.⁹⁰ This survey took a year to complete because of the difficulty in following up with former associates and the value of pursuing this hard to reach population, even if their responses came across a longer than optimal time period. The survey has a sample of convenience, focused largely on ex-associates and ex-affiliates from different armed groups operating in the region. It draws from participant referrals of UN-funded reintegration programmes (66 per cent),⁹¹ as well as participants who were recruited by MEAC in and around the Maiduguri metropolitan area and self-identified as former or current affiliates in the MEAC surveys (34 per cent). The 1,341 sample comprises 348 former Boko Haram associates, 37 former and 228 current CJTF affiliates, 137 former and 50 current Yan Gora affiliates as well as 17 former and 104 current Hunters and Charmers. Twenty-five per cent of respondents mentioned no former association with any group and were referred as part of programming, which while targeted at former armed group associates/affiliates also included vulnerable, unaffiliated community members.

The report also draws heavily from a second **community perceptions survey** which was administered via phone⁹² between September and December 2022 in and around Maiduguri, Konduga, Jere Bama, and Gwoza, in Borno State; Mubi North, Mubi South, and Michika in Adamawa; and Damaturu and Buni Yadi in Yobe State. A key feature of this sample is that the individuals were recruited by a randomized MEAC participant recruitment campaign and were not referred beneficiaries and ex-affiliates. The community perceptions survey data captures responses from a total sample of 3,259 individuals, including 11 per cent children and 89 per cent adult respondents. Women and girl respondents accounted for 52 per cent and men and

⁹⁰ The midline survey is part of a three-part panel survey, consisting of a baseline, midline and an ongoing endline survey run between May 2021 to early June 2022, February 2022 to February 2023, and August 2023 to November 2023, respectively. The baseline and endline were administered with a larger sample of randomly selected community members.

⁹¹ It is important to note that the programmes usually target ex-associates, ex-affiliates, and vulnerable community members.

⁹² This survey was a follow up to an earlier phone survey conducted in 2020 in Borno State; it repeated a number of the same questions contained in that earlier survey but added additional questions on weapons.

boy respondents for 48 per cent. In contrast to the 2022-2023 midline survey, the community perceptions survey sample includes a lower share of ex-affiliates, namely 4 per cent for CSAs and 5 per cent for Boko Haram ex-associates. Hence, a noteworthy difference between the 2022-2023 midline and 2022 community perceptions surveys is that the midline survey sample includes a larger share of both former and current affiliates of different armed community security actors.⁹³

Lastly, the report draws from an August 2023 – December 2023 **endline survey** that followed up with the ex-associates, ex-affiliates, and programme participants interviewed in the baseline and midline, as well as the same randomly recruited respondents from the (2021/2022) baseline survey. The endline survey was administered by phone and the total sample was 2,571 respondents. When disaggregated by gender, the survey is made up of 47 per cent women and girls, and 53 per cent men and boys. The sample includes 378 former Boko Haram associates, 36 former and 183 current CJTF affiliates, 147 former and 29 current Yan Gora affiliates as well as 11 former and 96 current Hunters and Charmers. In all the aforementioned surveys, questions about weapons holding, weapons use, and the availability of weapons and ammunition were asked. There are differences in the two surveys – location, time period, and respondent makeup (namely the percentage of current and former armed group associates/affiliates in each sample⁹⁴) – which limit direct comparison between some of the summary statistics (although the midline vs. endline comparisons can be made). However, taken altogether the surveys provide a rich set of complimentary data points on weapons holding and use in the region. The involvement of current and former armed group associates/affiliates also provides insights for a hard-to-reach population. Altogether, the data presented herein provides a unique insight into factors that drive weapons holding across various populations and how these vary based on their past and current association with armed groups.

All surveys were administered via phone. Although many of the contained questions (e.g., on victimization, particularly sexual violence, association with armed groups and weapons possession) might be of sensitive nature for respondents, recent MEAC findings demonstrate that at least the way surveys are administered (phone vs. in-person) does not seem to influence reticence or openness to share information.⁹⁵

⁹³ 44 per cent amongst male adult respondents, 5 per cent amongst female adult respondents, and close to no children identifying as current CSA affiliates. It is important to take into consideration that CSAs are active across the North East (and beyond), and the experiences of those who are affiliated with these groups might be different and vary according to location.

⁹⁴ MEAC, *Nigeria Midline Survey* (Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria, February 2022– February 2023); MEAC, *Community Perceptions Phone survey* (September to December 2022) - 4.1 per cent of respondents said they were current/former/current and former affiliates of community security groups like the CJTF or Yan Gora and 5.3 per cent of the respondents were former Boko Haram associates.

⁹⁵ Juan Armando Torres Munguía, Mohammed Bukar, Fatima Yetcha Ajimi Badu, Siobhan O'Neil, and Kato Van Broeckhoven, "[The Prospects for Remote Assessment: A Comparison of Phone vs In-person Interviews in Nigeria](#)," Findings Report 29, UNIDIR, Geneva, 2023.

Findings

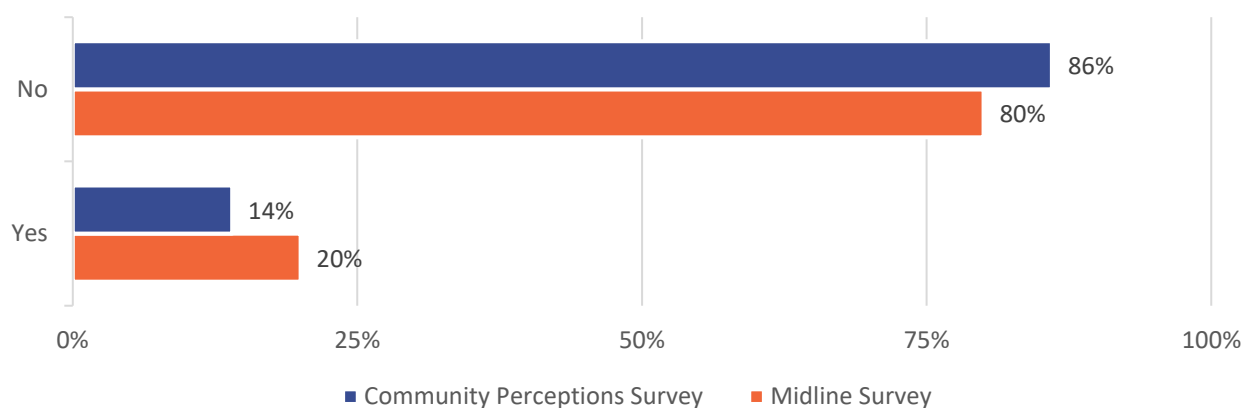
This section is informed by both the original data collected by MEAC and complemented and contrasted with previous research on factors that drive civilian weapons holdings. This section demonstrates that despite more than a decade of conflict, and in light of the national and other regional weapons holding rates, weapons holding in the North East is surprisingly low. That said, several conflict-related factors appear to influence weapons holding – prior (and understandably current) involvement in a community security group like the CJTF or working as a hunter or charmer. Contrary to concerns, prior association with Boko Haram does not appear to be correlated with any greater likelihood of holding weapons. Conflict violence exposure, in particular having a family member targeted in a banditry attack or knowing someone who was the victim of sexual violence, does appear to be associated with an increased likelihood of weapons holding. Contrary to previous research findings,⁹⁶ a lack of trust in security providers does not appear to be driving weapons holding for protection. In fact, amongst individuals with higher levels of trust in institutions weapons bearing is more widespread. Weapons holding is also correlated with a hypothetical readiness to use violence and its justification in the name of defending the community or promoting a just or social cause.

The Prevalence of Holding Weapons in the North East

Overall, the MEAC data examined in both the midline and community perceptions surveys show that weapons holding is surprisingly low in the North East of Nigeria. In both surveys, respondents were asked the question: “Do you carry a weapon for your protection?” As seen in Figure 2, 14 per cent of respondents in the 2022 community perceptions survey and 20 per cent of respondents in the 2022-2023 midline survey said they currently carry a weapon for their protection. From the midline to the endline survey (the latter is not covered in Figure 2), this drops from 20 to 11 per cent, as expected given the additions to the sample.

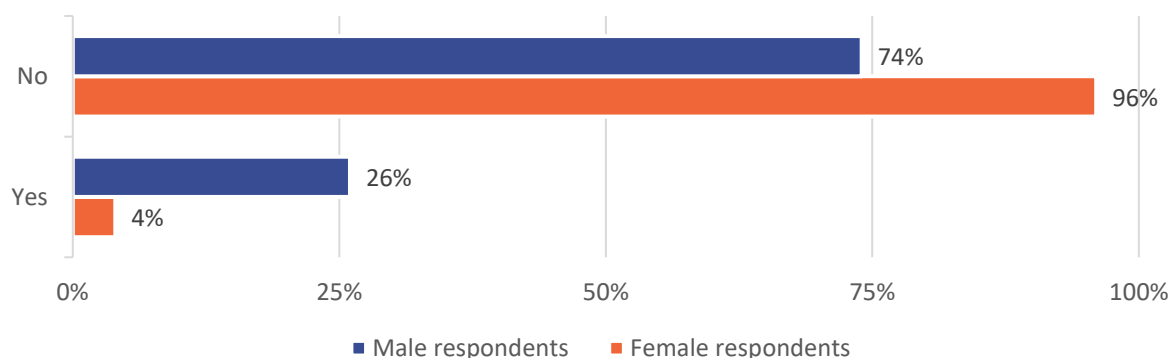
⁹⁶ Bolaji Omitola and Goke Awotayo, “[Arms Proliferation and Challenges of National Security and Sustainable Development in Nigeria](#),” in *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* Vol. 18 No. 2 (2016).

FIGURE 2 – DO YOU CARRY A WEAPON FOR YOUR PROTECTION?



When the data is disaggregated, it is clear that women and girls are far less likely to hold weapons than men. In the 2022 community perceptions survey, three per cent of women and girl respondents said they carried a weapon compared to more than 25 per cent of men and boy respondents. While children were less likely to carry weapons, it is concerning that more than 7 per cent of the under-18-year-olds interviewed in the survey said they carried a weapon (compared to 15 per cent of adults).

FIGURE 3 – GENDER DISAGGREGATION FOR “DO YOU CARRY A WEAPON FOR YOUR PROTECTION?” (2022 COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS SURVEY)



Weapons holding is higher in the 2022-2023 midline survey than in the 2022 community perceptions survey, which is to be expected given there was a much higher percentage of ex- and current CSA affiliates in the sample. The data suggests that 20 per cent of respondents carry a weapon for protection. When disaggregated by gender, the data indicates that almost 19 per cent of men and boys respondents and only one per cent of women and girl respondents carry a weapon.⁹⁷ Weapons holding follows traditional gender norms in Nigeria which see men as the primary provider of security in both the family, and at the community level. Local social

⁹⁷ Regression analysis confirms that gender is statistically significant for carrying a weapon.

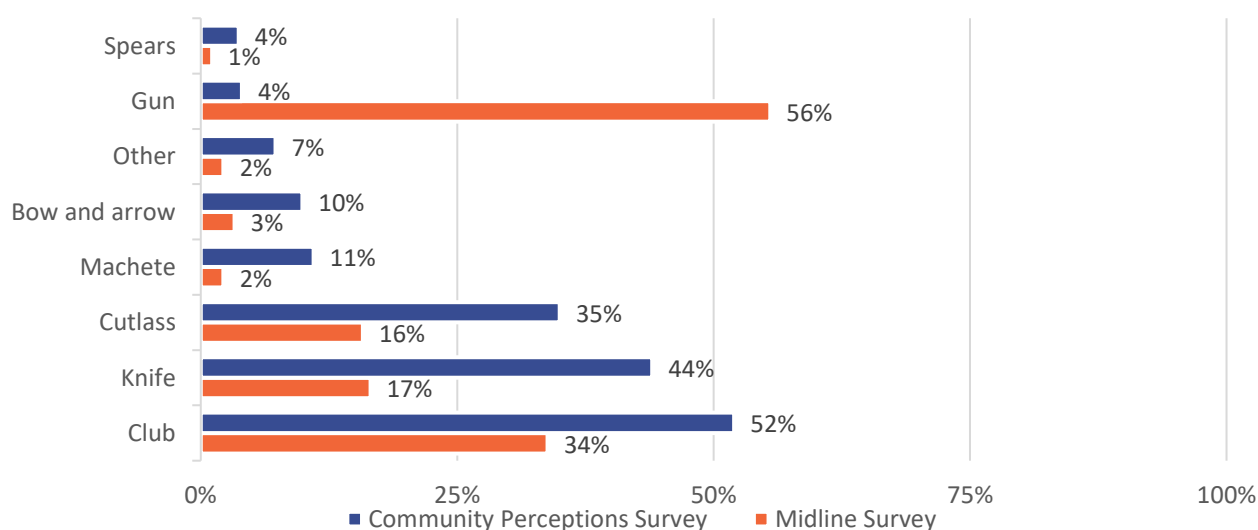
constructs around masculinities and femininities, among other factors including personal and collective safety and security perceptions, are known to mediate the use, misuse, and possession of SALW. Gender norms that link masculinities with weapons possession may be further polarized in a conflict, with men expected to take part in hostilities while women are left with caring duties.

Overall, weapons holding is low in the North East in light of national weapons data, and when compared to regional data from other conflict-affected regions in Nigeria. For example, in the Southeast region, 38 per cent of civilians are believed to hold firearms,⁹⁸ but weapons holding more broadly is likely even higher. Nationwide, firearms possession in households is at 14 per cent.⁹⁹ Despite the decade-long insurgency in Nigeria’s North East, arming of civilian community security actors and widespread illicit cross-border trafficking, reported weapons holding is considerably lower than expected (11-20 per cent depending on the survey) but follows the gendered patterns highlighted in previous research.

Types of Weapons

As the regional comparison above makes clear, it is important to understand what types of weapons are held in the North East. In both the community perceptions and midline surveys, those who responded affirmatively to the weapons question were then prompted to specify the kind of weapon they carry. Respondents had the opportunity to select: “Gun,” “Bow and Arrow,” “Club,” “Cutlass,” “Knife,” “Machete,” “Spears,” “Other,” or could refuse to answer.

FIGURE 4 – TYPE OF WEAPONS CARRIED



⁹⁸ SAS, *Nigeria National Small Arms and Light Weapons Survey* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, August 2021).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

In the community perceptions survey, of the weapons carried amongst respondents, very few of them appear to be guns. Only 4 per cent of respondents who carry a weapon, said they carried a gun. Rather, the majority of respondents to this survey carried cruder forms of weaponry, particularly clubs (52 per cent) and bladed weapons like knives (44 per cent) and cutlasses (35 per cent), followed by machetes (11 per cent) and bows and arrows (10 per cent), spears (4 per cent). For unaffiliated community members (who have never been part of an armed group such as CJTF or Boko Haram), access to firearms is likely more difficult than acquiring the more affordable, simpler, bladed weapons that had traditionally already been used for hunting,¹⁰⁰ as well as for slaughtering animals, cooking, or farming.¹⁰¹

In the 2022-2023 midline survey, the largest share (56 per cent) of those who mentioned carrying a weapon indicated that they carried a gun. This spike in gun-holding is expected given the sample makeup which includes many former and *current* affiliates of community security actors. Indeed, disaggregating the data shows that gun holding in this survey is driven mainly by current CJTF affiliates and current Hunters and Charmers. Of current CJTF and Hunters and Charmers who carry weapons, 62 and 83 per cent respectively mentioned this was a gun. Not a single former Boko Haram member mentioned carrying a gun in this survey. Across all respondents in the survey, clubs, knives, and cutlasses also were carried at notable rates. Bow and arrow, machetes, and spears were less frequently mentioned (in descending order of their frequency). The general weapon distribution pattern generally holds across both surveys, with the exception of the gun holding spike in the midline survey, which appears to displace reliance on other cruder weapons amongst current CJTF and Hunter and Charmer respondents – a difference further explained below.

The fact that firearms seem to be less prevalent amongst respondents of the 2022 community perceptions survey when compared to more traditional forms of weaponry, corresponds with previous research on the typology of weapons held in Nigeria. Despite bladed weapons being more widely available, previous research indicated that violent encounters are more likely to involve firearms than bladed weapons (43 per cent vs 36 per cent).¹⁰² This suggests that the presence and availability of certain types of weapons do not necessarily translate into violence. Indeed, while past conflict evidence has shown that mass violence can be committed using cruder forms of weapons such as machetes and other bladed weapons, data from the North East suggest that crude weapons are not driving violence in the region, but rather, firearms – while rarer – have an outsized impact on the conflict-related violence above all other types of weaponry.

¹⁰⁰ Daniel E. Agbibo and Chika Charles Aniekwe, [Understanding and Managing Vigilante Groups in the Lake Chad Basin Region](#) (N'Djamena, Chad: UNDP, 2023).

¹⁰¹ Day, Adam, Vanda Felbab-Brown and Haddad, Fanar, [Hybrid Conflict, Hybrid Peace: How Militias and Paramilitary Groups Shape Post-Conflict Transitions](#), ed. Day, Adam (New York: United Nations University, 2020).

¹⁰² SAS, [Nigeria National Small Arms and Light Weapons Survey](#) (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, August 2021).

Similarly, at the household level, only 2 per cent of the 2022 community perceptions survey respondents indicated that there was a gun in their household. This is a surprisingly low figure, provided that the National Small Arms Survey, conducted some years prior and albeit with a much smaller sample, found the share of respondents reporting firearms possession in the household to be nearly as high as 15 per cent in the North East.¹⁰³ Given that unlicensed possession of firearms in Nigeria is punished with a minimum sentence of ten years,¹⁰⁴ those respondents being in illegal possession of a firearm might show significant reticence to share information about weapons in their household, although any resulting bias would have impacted reporting rates across both surveys, and thus does not explain the differences across them.

Who Holds Weapons in the North East?

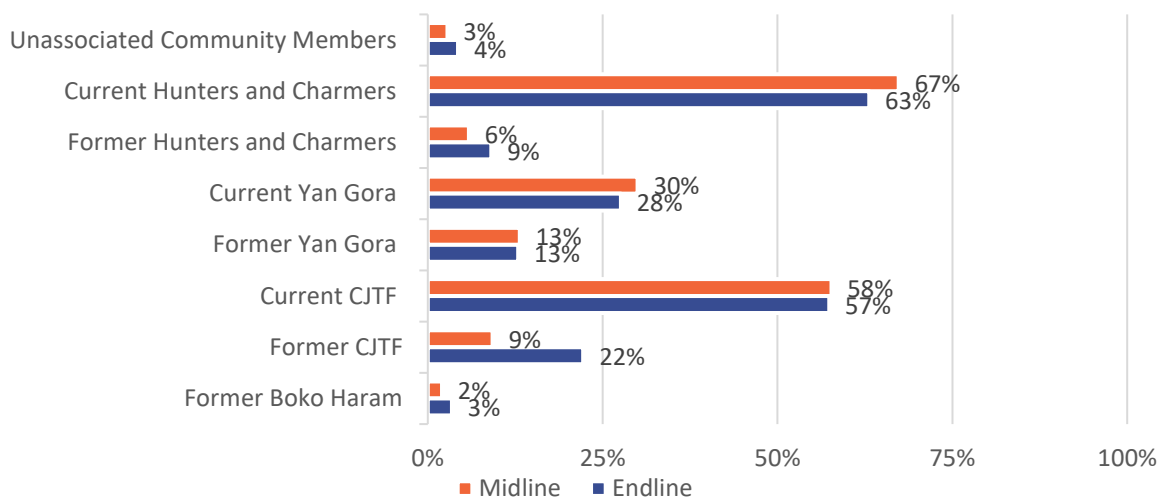
In examining the implications of weapons holding and availability in the North East for the region's long-term peace and security prospects, there is a particular interest in *who* holds weapons. There are concerns that former associates of Boko Haram will retain (or re-acquire) weapons after demobilizing and that they could use them to perpetrate criminal or interpersonal violence. As such, MEAC asked current and former CSA affiliates (e.g., CJTF), former Boko Haram associates, and unaffiliated community members about whether they carried a weapon for protection.

The concern about the retention or rearming of Boko Haram ex-associates is not borne out in the self-reported weapons data in the February 2022 to February 2023 midline survey and the August-November 2023 endline. As seen in Figure 5, very few former Boko Haram associates said they carried weapons: Only 2 per cent of 348 former Boko Haram associates in the midline survey, and 3 per cent of the 378 surveyed in the endline, admitted to carrying weapons. Indeed, it appears that former Boko Haram associates are no more likely to carry a weapon than the general public in and around Maiduguri, of which only three per cent in the midline and four per cent in the endline reported holding weapons.

¹⁰³ [Ibid.](#)

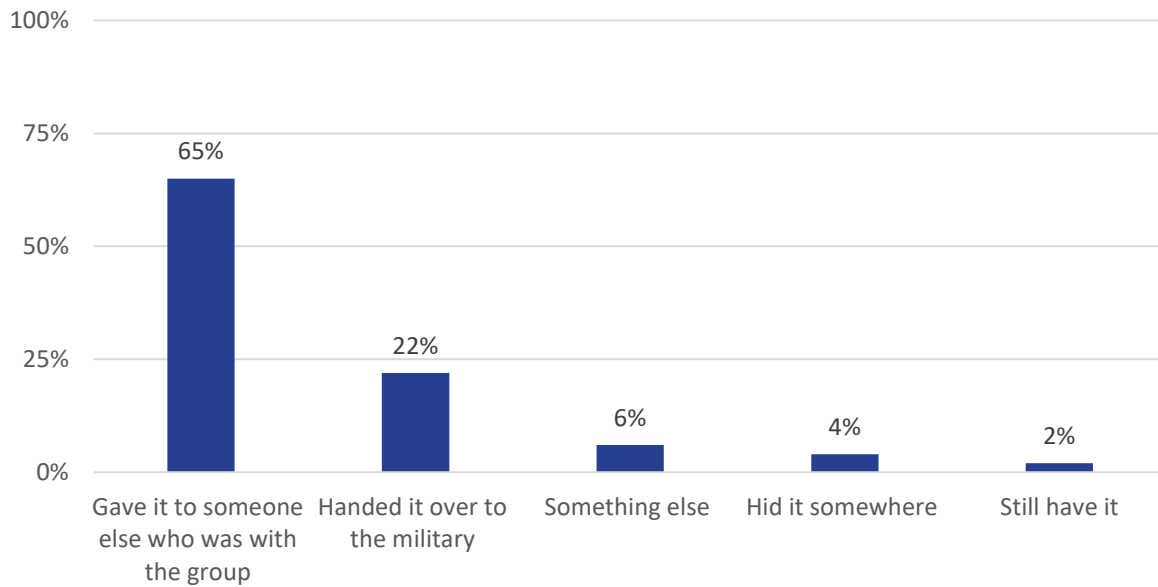
¹⁰⁴ Federal Republic of Nigeria, [Firearms Act. L.N. 32 of 1959](#), 1 February, Abuja (1959)

FIGURE 5 – DO YOU CARRY A WEAPON FOR YOUR PROTECTION?



This is particularly interesting given that many men and boys who had been with Boko Haram had carried guns. Just over a third of men and boys who left Boko Haram said they had a weapon – mostly guns – while with the group. Overwhelmingly, women and girls who had been with the group never had access to weapons. In the endline survey, former Boko Haram associates were asked if they took the weapon when they separated from the group. Twenty per cent of male former associates who had been armed said they took the weapon with them (which translates into a 7 per cent weapon retention rate for the larger sample of men and boys who left the group, a percentage that would go down if women and girls were included). Their retention of weapons, however, may not have lasted long. When all formerly armed Boko Haram associate respondents were asked what they did with the weapon, the responses suggested very few have the weapon today. As seen in Figure 6, most gave it to someone else in the group, handed it over to the military, or hid it, while only one respondent said they still had the weapon. Even those who chose the “other” answer options provided details that suggested they no longer had the weapon with them: *“I left it in the bush where we used to stay,” “I threw the weapon away on the way to surrender,” and “The leaders of Boko Haram chased us, and we threw away all our weapons.”*

FIGURE 6 – WHAT DID YOU DO WITH THE WEAPON? (ASKED OF THOSE WHO ADMITTED HAVING ONE WHILE WITH BOKO HARAM)



Weapons holding among current and former CSAs, however, is a very different matter. First, the endline survey shows that most former CSA affiliates said they were armed while in their group (71 per cent). This is a much higher rate of weapons holding than within Boko Haram, but the type of weapons held differs. Of those that were armed, only 8 per cent of former male CSA affiliates across the CJTF, Yan Gora, and Hunter and Charmers said they had a gun while with the group. More frequently people said they had clubs (62 per cent) or cutlasses (17 percent). It is important to highlight that guns are difficult to procure in the North East and not all CSAs in the region have been armed at the same rates. Over time, the CJTF has received support and weaponry from the government, but it does not appear that the Yan Gora or Hunters and Charmers have been similarly armed. Indeed, across the midline and endline surveys, between 28 to 63 per cent of current CSA affiliates are armed depending on the group (and survey).

Weapons holding goes down only moderately when respondents “exit” CSAs. Former affiliates of these groups still retain weapons at a high rate (between 6 and 22 per cent depending on the group). The data suggest that a certain share of demobilizing CSA affiliates do not give up their weapons – or they acquire new ones after they leave. In the endline, among *current* CJTF affiliates, 57 per cent said they carry a weapon, which only drops to 22 per cent for *former* affiliates. There is a similar drop off in the endline survey between current and former Yan Gora, from 28 per cent to 13 per cent.¹⁰⁵ The subsample of former Hunters and Charmers was quite low - 17 in the midline and 11 in the endline - which did not allow for a similar analysis of the rate

¹⁰⁵ It should be noted that the subsample of current Yan Gora is relatively small in the endline – only 29 people – which is not optimal for summary statistics. That said, the rate of weapons holding among current Yan Gora in the endline was not far off what was found with a slightly bigger sample of 50 in the midline survey (28 per cent endline to 30 per cent midline).

of weapons retention. In almost all cases across different CSAs, it is men who have guns, with anomalies amongst current CJTF subpopulations where two women reported carrying a firearm in the endline survey. It must be noted that rates across the midline and endline for all subpopulations are very stable, increasing the confidence in the self-reported weapons holding rates. Given some of the abuses CSA affiliates have been accused of (including specific claims about gender-based harassment),¹⁰⁶ the potential for continued access to weapons, but with even less oversight, is concerning.

In addition to being more likely to carry weapons than former Boko Haram associates, there is a concern that former CSAs are more likely to take their firearms with them (or acquire new ones) when they "leave" their group. This concern is in part driven by less clear-cut "exit" pathways from CSAs, where the parameters of "membership" are less definite, and the reality that if security devolves, many former affiliates admit they would be expected to remobilize in the face of a threat.¹⁰⁷ The endline survey provides some insight on the topic. Of the former CSA affiliates who said they were armed while with the group, nearly half (49 per cent) said that they took their weapons with them when they left the group. This translates into a 35 per cent weapon retention rate for the larger sample of men and boys who left these groups. It does not appear, however, that many of these were guns as only one respondent of 11 who had a firearm said they took it with them when they left (but later handed it over to someone else still with the group). Although some said that they still have their weapon today (14 per cent of all male former affiliates), these were mostly clubs. This may suggest that even if guns are not "exiting" the group, those who exit CSAs are more likely to do so with some kind of weapon. The retention of weapons, even cruder ones (in light of reported abuses by CSAs) raises questions about how to best support the transition to civilian life for people standing down from these groups.

Prospective Factors Affecting Weapons Holdings for Self-Protection

a. Availability of Weapons and Ammunition

In the context of an ongoing conflict such as the one affecting the North East of Nigeria, it would be expected that weapons and ammunition are widely available. Interestingly, MEAC data from

¹⁰⁶ Center for Civilians in Conflict, *Civilian Perceptions of the Yan Gora (CJTF) in Borno State, Nigeria*, (2018), p.19.; Kato Van Broeckhoven, Zoe Marks, Siobhan O'Neil, Mohammed Bukar, and Fatima Yetcha Ajimi Badu, "[Community Security Actors and the Prospects for Demobilization in the North East of Nigeria](#)," *MEAC Findings Report 18* (New York: United Nations University, 2022).

¹⁰⁷ MEAC, *Focus Group with former CSA Affiliates*, (Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria, 21 March 2022) cited in Kato Van Broeckhoven, Zoe Marks, Siobhan O'Neil, Mohammed Bukar, and Fatima Yetcha Ajimi Badu, "[Community Security Actors and the Prospects for Demobilization in the North East of Nigeria](#)," *MEAC Findings Report 18* (New York: United Nations University, 2022).

the BAY states indicates that—analogue to weapons holdings discussed in the previous section—weapons and ammunition do not seem to be readily available. Potential reasons for this finding are discussed below.

When asked "If you wanted to get a gun, how long would it take you to find one to buy?", the vast majority of former associates/affiliates (across different groups) claimed to not be able to get one even if they wanted to, raising the question—how and where do those who carry guns get them? There is a notable exception being current Hunters and Charmers. In the endline survey, 11 per cent of current Hunters and Charmers said they could get a gun in a month or less. This may reflect the craft production of Dane guns among Hunters and Charmers—a long-documented practice.¹⁰⁸ Craft production—long-identified as an issue undermining effective arms control in the country—requires additional attention in light of this small but notable minority that is able to procure weapons. In the same survey, 97 and 99 per cent of former CJTF and former Yan Gora said they would not be able to procure a gun. A few of their peers (former CJTF and Yan Gora respondents), however, said they could get a gun within a few hours. While the latter's potential ability to arm themselves stands out as a small outlier, it is a concerning one that highlights the importance of enhanced WAM practices, not only at the federal and state level but also for non-state actors like the CJTF that work with and alongside the State. It also potentially underlines that for CSAs, "exit" is not as clearly demarcated.¹⁰⁹ Aside from these outliers (e.g., 11 per cent of current Hunters and Charmers and a handful of former CJTF and Yan Gora who claim they can access guns), overwhelmingly the data suggest that procuring firearms in the North East is extremely difficult if not impossible for most people.

In the 2022 community perceptions survey there is a large unaffiliated largely unarmed subsample. Most respondents who have never been with an armed group do not carry a weapon (89 per cent per cent). Only 2 per cent (7 respondents) of this never affiliated sample that admitted to carrying weapons said that they carried a gun. In this particular survey, overwhelmingly, respondents said that even if they wanted to acquire a gun, they would not be able to do so (98 percent). There are slight fluctuations by association—99 per cent of never affiliated respondents answered this way compared to 97 per cent of former Boko Haram associates and 93 per cent for former or current CSA affiliates.

When asked "Do you know of places where you can buy illegal weapons?", the vast majority of respondents across surveys, more than 99 per cent of respondents in the community perceptions and midline surveys, claimed to not have any knowledge about places where illegal

¹⁰⁸ Matthias Nowak and André Gsell, [Handmade and Deadly: Craft Production of Small Arms in Nigeria](#), (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, June 2018)

¹⁰⁹ MEAC, *Focus Group with former CSA Affiliates*, (Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria, 21 March 2022) cited in Kato Van Broeckhoven, Zoe Marks, Siobhan O'Neil, Mohammed Bukar, and Fatima Yetcha Ajimi Badu, "[Community Security Actors and the Prospects for Demobilization in the North East of Nigeria](#)," *MEAC Findings Report 18* (New York: United Nations University, 2022).

weapons can be purchased in their community. This finding remained almost entirely unchanged even amongst those who admitted carrying weapons. Interestingly, in the community perceptions survey, while 6 per cent of former and current CSA affiliates said they could get a gun if they wanted one, only one person said they knew where to buy illegal weapons (under 1 per cent of the CSA sample). Five ex-Boko Haram associates or 2 per cent of that subgroup, however, knew where to buy illegal weapons. This discrepancy highlights the potential that access to firearms amongst former CSAs may be associated with their old group and profession.¹¹⁰ This small discrepancy may indicate *how* former CSAs can get access to weapons, and thus the importance of improved WAM policies related to exiting such forces (more specifically on the internal transfer of weapons within and between security agencies or authorities) and addressing the role of professional and social networks to tackle illicit weapons possession. Despite this finding echoing previous research at the national and subnational level,¹¹¹ the discrepancies between the relatively frequent presence of weapons in communities, and the expressed near impossibility of acquiring them—even illegally—is still puzzling.

Provided that weapons are present in communities and assumed to be used at least by current CSA affiliates and provided also the high levels of armed violence in the North East, the question “Is ammunition readily available where you live?” should theoretically yield more affirmative responses. While small arms and light weapons are—once acquired—of relative longevity, ammunition is a depletable resource that needs restocking, thus often being called the “oxygen of conflict”. But even here, when the midline survey data is disaggregated by subsets of respondents, the percentages of those who say there is no access to ammunition are not any higher when compared to weapons, with a slight exception for current affiliates of CSAs, and former Boko Haram associates. Even among these, only two in 348 former associates of Boko Haram, 5 in 228 current CJTF, 2 in 104 current Hunters and Charmers and 1 in 50 current Yan Gora surveyed admitted that ammunition is available in their area.

These aforementioned statistics elicit questions about the supply of these weapons and ammunition in the North East. Looking at the way in which firearms are known to usually be acquired in Nigeria, e.g., through diversion from police or military stockpiles, vigilantes handing out weapons to communities for self-defence, social networks, craft production, or direct purchase might provide further context to these responses. In fact, the National Small Arms Survey found that “direct purchase was the single most important source of weapons” (52 per cent of responses). Less frequently mentioned but not to be neglected sources were acquisition through a friend or family member (14 per cent), craft weapons respondents had

¹¹⁰ Other studies have found that at the national level, weapons may be received by an employer (e.g., military, police), a family member or a friend. SAS, [Nigeria National Small Arms and Light Weapons Survey](#) (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, August 2021).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, A substantial minority claimed to not know (25 per cent).

manufactured themselves (14 per cent), and acquisition through an employer or vigilante (both 10 per cent).¹¹² Hence, the way this question was phrased (“Do you know of places where you can *buy* illegal weapons?”) the focus is on purchases, and thus may not quite cover the full spectrum of weapons supply. Assuming a fear of incrimination, local craft production and acquisition of firearms through friends and family can be expected to be rather sensitive aspects for some respondents, thus, from the outset, might invite evasive answers when it comes to supply-related questions.

The National Small Arms Survey asked, “How easy do you think it is to acquire a firearm around here?”¹¹³ The higher shares in the National Small Arms Survey responding that acquiring a firearm was ‘fairly easy’ (4 per cent) or ‘complicated, but possible’ (13 per cent) (when compared to these MEAC surveys), might be due to the relative openness with which the question is posed. This may allow for a larger diversity of weapons sources apart from direct purchases to fall under the affirmative response options. It is also less personal in the way it is phrased. Conceivably, between “How easy do you think it is (...)” and “If you wanted to get a gun (...)”, the latter might cause more concern of incrimination amongst respondents. The MEAC survey question is able to trace a potentially much closer link between personal experience and circumstances and the ability to acquire a firearm – a unique added value provided by this data. However, it does potentially come with a trade-off given its higher sensitivity and potentially some reticence of respondents to share their thoughts. Nonetheless, these methodological considerations will still only account for part of the explanation of these clearly lopsided results, given the overwhelming majority of respondents including a diverse range of current and former associates/affiliates as well as unaffiliated individuals nearly all tended to answer the same way.¹¹⁴

Another partial explanation for why many respondents report no knowledge about illegal firearms and ammunition supply, especially those formerly or currently affiliated with CSAs and particularly CJTF, could be their vested interest in keeping these sources undetected. Some scholars have suggested that the substantial war economy which has developed in the North East, feeding off corruption and illegal markets, might provide little incentive to the various security actors, be they governmental or CSAs, to sustainably quell the insurgency.¹¹⁵ Provided that the acquisition of weapons through CSA and vigilante groups seems to play an important role in the North East of Nigeria and given the clearly larger holdings amongst current and

¹¹² SAS, [Nigeria National Small Arms and Light Weapons Survey](#) (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, August 2021).

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ To the question “If you wanted to get a gun, how long would it take you to find one to buy?”, across former associates/affiliates of different groups, 94 per cent and more claimed to not be able to get one even if they wanted to,

¹¹⁵ Center for Democracy and Development, [Multiple Nodes, Common Causes: National Stock take of Contemporary Insecurity and State Responses in Nigeria](#) (Abuja: 2022).

former CSA affiliates, the association with such groups and its relationship with weapons holding will be examined further in the following sections.

b. Previous or Current Association with Armed Groups

All three surveys underline that as far as community security actors go, previous and (expectedly) current associations are strong factors explaining weapons holding. Interestingly, however, former Boko Haram associates are no more likely to report carrying weapons than the general public.

In the 2022-2023 midline sample, 73 per cent of respondents identified as current or former associates/affiliates of either Boko Haram or a CSA. Almost half of the respondents were formerly or are currently affiliated with a CSA, with 24 per cent currently/formerly with CJTF, 14 per cent currently/formerly with Yan Gora (non-CJTF), and 9 per cent currently or formerly identifying as Hunters and Charmers.¹¹⁶ To isolate and ascertain the influence of association on weapons holding, a probit regression model was run controlling for factors of victimization, gender, and age.¹¹⁷ Its results suggest that people who were formerly affiliated and especially those currently affiliated with CSAs were considerably more likely to report carrying a weapon for protection than people who were never associated with them. While current male CSA affiliates were nearly 49 percentage points more likely to carry a weapon than Boko Haram former associates, (and 50 percentage points more likely than unaffiliated respondents) this difference narrows to 31 percentage points for women current CSA affiliates for both groups. For former affiliates, this difference dropped to 6 percentage points over former Boko Haram associates and 7 points over unaffiliated community members (for women former CSAs it drops to 2 and 3 percentage points respectively). This suggests that *some* people leaving CSAs do so with their weapons—or rearm after leaving. A relationship between association and current weapons holding, however, is not seen for individuals leaving Boko Haram.

Early in the Boko Haram conflict, CJTF were often reported to have initially been equipped with axes, knives, and bows and arrows as well as other traditional means of weaponry. Only later, select groups were also provided with small arms.¹¹⁸ Midline data underlines this development, showing that of current arms bearing CJTF affiliates, 62 cent reported to carry a gun. Nearly 83 per cent of armed current Hunters and Charmers said they carried a gun, although that may not reflect a state-led effort to arm them, but rather craft production as discussed earlier.

¹¹⁶ It is important to take into consideration that CSAs are active across the North East (and beyond), and the experiences of those who are affiliated with these groups might be different and vary according to location.

¹¹⁷ Abduction cases in the respondent's family and at community level as well as cases of beatings and having been hurt.

¹¹⁸ International Crisis Group (ICG), " [Watchmen of Lake Chad: Vigilante Groups Fighting Boko Haram](#) ", Africa Report, No. 244 (Brussels, 23 February 2017).

The regression analysis based on the community perceptions survey found that having formerly been a Boko Haram associate had no effect on weapons holding. The endline survey appears to reinforce this finding. Only 12 out of 378 surveyed former Boko Haram associates reported to currently hold a weapon and among these, and only one carried a firearm. In fact, in the endline survey, 36 per cent of male former Boko Haram associates said they had had a weapon while with the group, out of which almost all were guns. Of those who said they had a weapon with them when they left the group, 65 per cent said that they gave the weapon to someone else with the group when they left, 22 per cent handed it into the military, and others abandoned or hid the weapon in the bush. Twenty per cent of men and boys who said they had been armed reported that they initially took their weapon with them, but most got rid of it along the way. Only one respondent said they still had the weapon today and that that weapon was not a gun. Indeed, also Boko Haram splinter ISWAP is known to store weapons in armouries to limit their circulation and only hand them out on a needs-basis, for instance, for large-scale operations,¹¹⁹ potentially making it harder to leave the group with arms.

Although in comparison, the 2022 community perceptions survey had a larger share of unaffiliated respondents and lower levels of weapons holding (14 per cent), it too suggests that previous association with a community security actor plays a crucial role in driving weapons holding. A probit regression confirmed with statistical significance that, when controlling for the effect of violence norms, gender, age, and former association with Boko Haram,¹²⁰ former affiliation with CSAs is closely linked to weapons possession. Male and female former CSA affiliates are respectively 27 and 15 percentage points more likely to carry weapons than respondents who were never associated with any armed group.

These higher rates of weapons holding by former CJTF affiliates have important implications for disarmament and community violence reduction efforts implemented in the North East of Nigeria. The embeddedness of CSAs in communities might blur entry into and exit from these groups more than for other groups like Boko Haram. The fact that many CSA affiliates may retain their weapons or have access to weaponry even after leaving their group carries concerns about their potential use outside the conflict (e.g., for criminal violence, GBV, or domestic violence).

c. Victimization and Association with Victims

Beyond association, the other key question raised in the region is whether conflict-related victimization drives weapons holding. Personal victimization amongst respondents of both

¹¹⁹ International Crisis Group, [“Fighting among Boko Haram Splinters Rages On”](#), 30 May 2023.

¹²⁰ Violence norms included attitudes towards political violence, violence as a necessary means to protect one's community, and preparedness to use violence to protect one's community. Additionally, the model controlled for the variable relating to the question “Do you think CJTF has protected your community from Boko Haram and other security threats?”.

surveys was low, although with some gender variations.¹²¹ However, experiences of violence, especially abduction at the family level and community victimization, were reported frequently.¹²² Both the community perception and midline surveys asked about a range of types of victimization at the personal, family, and community levels. The types of crimes and level of violence and brutality experienced by respondents and those with close proximity to them appear to influence their likelihood to bear weapons for self-protection. Notably, abductions of family members and community members and banditry attacks seem to have the largest effect on weapons holding.

In the 2022 community perceptions survey,¹²³ high numbers of respondents in this survey have experienced different types of crimes, with the most prevalent having been Boko Haram attacks on their community (86 per cent), extortion, theft, or harassment of the community at the hands of Boko Haram (72 per cent), or close relatives having been killed (nearly 65 per cent) or beaten, tortured, or shot (nearly 62 per cent) as a result of the conflict with Boko Haram. A smaller, but still very sizable share reported a close relative had been abducted by Boko Haram (35 per cent).

In the 2022-2023 midline survey a slightly smaller and similar, but not identical set of questions was asked about personal, family, and community-level victimization.¹²⁴ Within this sample, which contained a larger share of former armed group associates and current CSA affiliates, high levels of family abduction by Boko Haram (40 per cent of respondents) and especially at the community level were exceptionally high. This makes sense as many of those who ended up in Boko Haram were abducted into the group—including family members.¹²⁵

Previous research in the North East has presented anecdotal evidence that underpinned the decisive role victimization can play for individuals' decisions to take up arms and join CJTF,¹²⁶ which could in turn also reasonably explain weapons holding more broadly. The MEAC data at hand suggests that it is certain types of crimes experienced by respondents, that appear to have stronger effects on weapons holdings than other crimes enquired about.

¹²¹ For instance, men answer at higher rates to have been abducted (4.8 per cent), than women (1.1 per cent).

¹²² Note, these questions were focused on Boko Haram and were not asked in analogue fashion about CSAs, the military, police, and only to a certain extent regarding bandits.

¹²³ Respondents were asked a series of questions regarding community-level, family-level, and personal victimization, for instance: "Did Boko Haram fighters ever conduct an attack on your community?", "Were any of your close relatives killed as a result of the conflict with Boko Haram?" or "Were you ever beaten, tortured, or shot as a result of the conflict with Boko Haram?"

¹²⁴ Including: "Since we last talked to you, have you been beaten or hit by someone, even once?", "Are you aware if any of your close relatives were abducted by Jam'at Ahl as-Sunnah (also known as Boko Haram) or another group like this?" or "Were you ever abducted by Jam'at Ahl as-Sunnah (also known as Boko Haram) or another group like this?"

¹²⁵ Sophie Huvé, Dr Siobhan O'Neil, Dr Remadji Hoinathy, Kato Van Broeckhoven with Mohammed Bukar, Fatima Yetcha Ajimi Badu, Teniola Tayo, Jessica Caus, and Adja Faye, "[Preventing Recruitment and Ensuring Effective Reintegration Efforts: Evidence from Across the Lake Chad Basin to Inform Policy and Practice](#)," *MEAC Lake Chad Basin Case Study Report* (New York: United Nations University, 2022).

¹²⁶ UNDP, [Understanding and Managing Vigilante Groups in the Lake Chad Basin Region](#), March 2023.

For the effect of abduction cases in the family on weapons holding, the two surveys showed mixed results, while those at the community level¹²⁷ showed a tangible effect on weapons holding. In the 2022 community perceptions survey, amongst family members of abductees weapons holding was by 4 percentage points higher than amongst those respondents who had no abduction cases amongst close relatives. This effect was confirmed as statistically relevant when tested in a probit regression analysis which controlled for other types of victimizations and armed group association, showing that male and female family members of abductees were by 6 and 4 percentage points more likely respectively to carry a weapon.¹²⁸ The 2022-2023 midline survey asked about both abduction cases at the family and community levels. Unlike in the community perceptions survey, family abduction¹²⁹ showed no effect on weapons holding when tested in a regression analysis which controlled for other types of victimization, association with armed groups, as well as gender and age.¹³⁰ However, abductions in the community had a tangible effect on weapons holdings, accounting for 14 and 13 percentage point increase in weapons holding respectively for men and women respondents who noted “many, almost all, or all” of their community was abducted when compared to respondents who said their community had no such cases. The effect is seen for respondents who reported “a few” abduction cases albeit expectedly smaller (a 6 and 5 percentage point increase in weapons holding for men and women respondents to those whose communities were unaffected in this way).

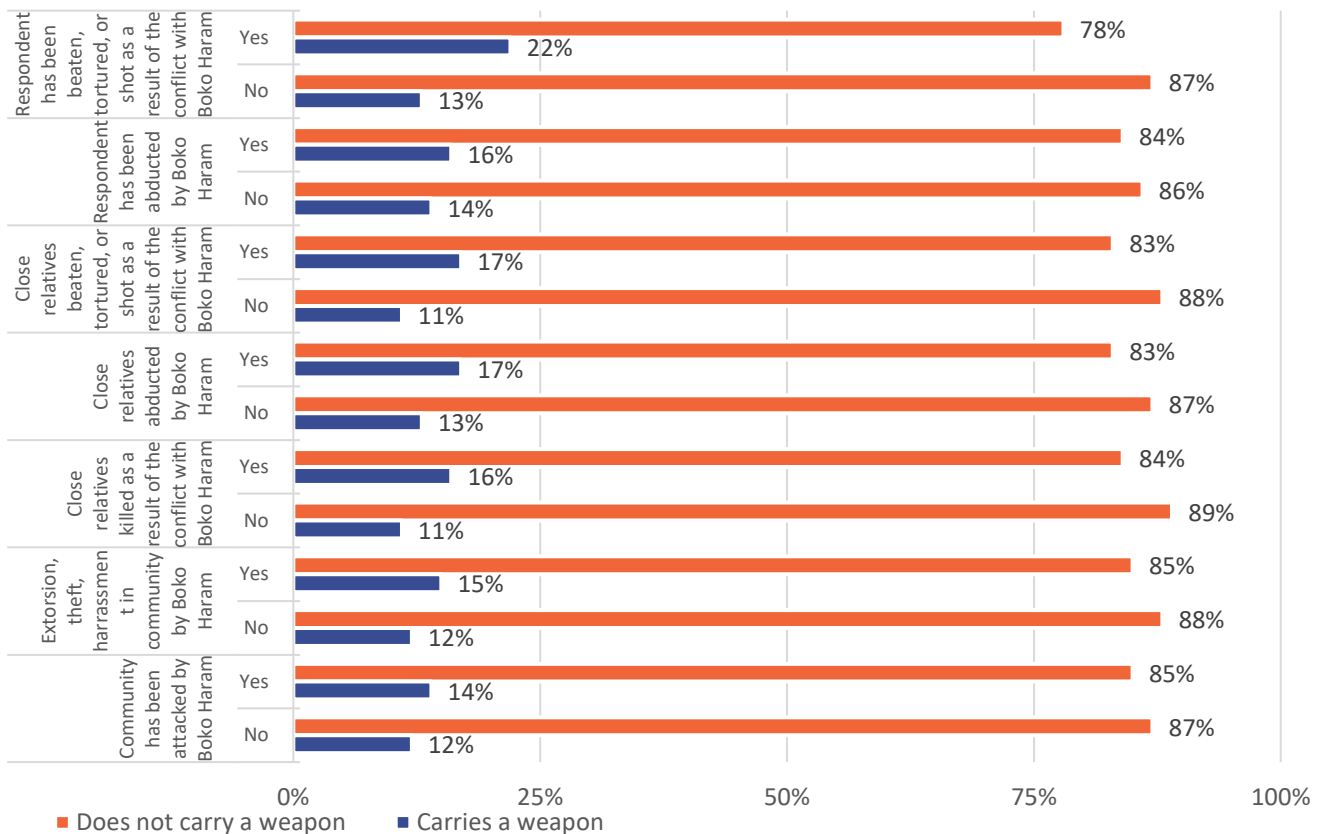
¹²⁷ Only examined in the midline survey.

¹²⁸ The regression controlled for personal victimization (having been beaten, tortured or shot; abduction); family victimization (beatings, torture, shootings; killings) and at the community level (sexual violence; harassment, extortion, theft; Boko Haram attack; bandit attack) as well as for gender and armed group association.

¹²⁹ Ascertained by the question “Are you aware if any of your close relatives were abducted by Jam‘a‘at Ahl as-Sunnah (also known as Boko Haram) or another group like this?”

¹³⁰ Probit regression model, controlling for abductions in the community, personal victimization of the respondent (having been beaten or hit), association with armed groups as well as gender and age.

FIGURE 7– VICTIMIZATION AND WEAPONS HOLDING (COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS SURVEY)



People who have experienced violence as part of the Boko Haram conflict were also more likely to carry a weapon than those who have not suffered from such violence. As seen in Figure 7, respondents who had reported being beaten, tortured, or shot during the conflict hold weapons at higher rates than those who have not been victimized in this way (by 10 percentage points). Boko Haram’s violence appears associated with higher levels of weapons when the victim was one step removed from the respondent. Those respondents who have had close relatives a.) beaten, tortured, or shot or b.) killed in the conflict hold weapons at higher rates (by 10 percentage points in both cases). More indirect violence that was levelled at the community (e.g., extortion, theft, harassment, or other attacks on the community) was associated with smaller increases in weapons holding rates (6 and 2 percentage points, respectively). As expected, personal experiences with victimization are associated with higher weapons holding rates. Higher emotional bonds with family members and the implications for personal security and well-being that come from attacks on one’s family may drive the higher weapons rates for respondents who report family victimization in the conflict. The brutality of crimes could be another differentiating factor, as torture or killings can understandably be seen as considerably more traumatizing than lower-level crimes such as extortion, theft or harassment, particularly when it occurs at the community level.

It is interesting to note that scholars have found that, at the national level, individuals belonging to a household with a firearm were approximately three times as often victimized as those not having a gun at home, and they also reported three times more often to have a household member who had been.¹³¹ While the MEAC surveys ask about conflict-related violence, the potential trap of violence or vicious cycle in which previous victimization can drive weapons holding which in turn can lead to increased risk of victimization of a weapon in the home cannot be ignored.

Perpetrator-specific Patterns

Victims of banditry attacks seemed to show a particularly high propensity to carry weapons for protection when compared to victims of other armed groups. When asked “Were you or any of your close relatives ever attacked by bandits?” in the 2022 community perception survey nearly 16 per cent of respondents said yes (510 respondents). However, the effect of bandit attacks on weapons holding was noticeably stronger than victimization by Boko Haram. When tested in a probit regression model, controlling for the other victimization variables as well as association with armed groups and gender, victims of bandit attacks were 11 and 7 percentage points (for men and women respondents respectively) more likely to carry a weapon than those who had never experienced such attacks.¹³² Highway robbery (nearly half of the cases), but also more serious crimes such as murder (34 per cent), and kidnapping (20 per cent) were amongst the most frequently mentioned crimes respondents thought were committed by bandits. This finding is particularly interesting for the North East of Nigeria, where banditry is not as endemic as in other parts of the country, such as the North West and North Central zones, and where it is often assumed the insurgency is responsible for all insecurity. Despite banditry not being as common of a phenomenon, the survey findings may nevertheless provide insights into the impact of being victimized by bandits, which appears to have a greater impact on weapons holding than Boko Haram-related violence. As the international response in the North East has focused on dealing with insecurity associated with the Boko Haram insurgency, this data point highlights the presence of other sources of insecurity that have largely been overlooked in this region, but which may have long-term security implications especially as interactions with bandits appear associated with weapons acquisition.

d. Conflict-related Sexual Violence

Survey responses indicate that there is a notable association between sexual violence at the community level and weapons holding. Questions on sexual violence were asked differently in each survey. In the 2022-2023 midline survey, respondents were asked if they themselves had

¹³¹SAS, [Nigeria National Small Arms and Light Weapons Survey](#) (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, August 2021). Note, that the survey seems to have asked about general victimization, not necessarily by the specific weapon in the home.

¹³² Relevant at the $p < 0.001$ level.

suffered from sexual violence (“Since we last talked, has anyone had sex with you forcefully, or touched you in any way, without your consent?”) since the baseline survey. Self-reported victimization through sexual violence was, however, extremely low at 0.4 per cent in the midline survey. This may be due to several factors, including the way the question was phrased, which captured a specific snapshot in time “Since we last talked” (i.e., during the baseline survey) and not the individual’s entire lived experience. Other factors, such as social stigma, feelings of shame and guilt as well as fear of reliving the situation by reporting may also contribute to lower reporting of instances of sexual violence.

In the 2022 community perceptions survey, a broader casting beyond the respondent’s own experience led to higher rates of sexual violence reported. Respondents were asked, “Do you personally know anyone in your community who experienced forced sex or non-consensual touching or something similar by an armed group, like Boko Haram or Yan Gora?”¹³³ As expected, without the time restrictions and base as community-wide, these questions yielded more reports of sexual violence. Eight per cent of women respondents, 12 per cent of men, and 7 per cent of girls and boys each affirmed they knew people who had experienced sexual violence in their community. Conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence have escalated since the start of the Boko Haram insurgency.¹³⁴ Cases of sexual violence have been documented in the region, with 601 cases of sexual violence recorded in 2021, affecting 326 girls and 275 women.¹³⁵ Eighty per cent of these reported cases constituted rape and five per cent constituted sexual slavery.¹³⁶ While it is thought that sexual violence is significantly underreported in the region (and beyond), data from 2022 further showed that reports of sexual violence perpetrated by non-state armed groups such as Boko Haram but also by security forces and other conflict actors have increased in recent years.¹³⁷

When analyzed in conjunction with weapons holding, community perception survey respondents who personally knew anyone in the community who experienced sexual violence by an armed group like Boko Haram or Yan Gora reported carrying a weapon at twice the rates as those who did not know of such crimes. Controlling for other victimization factors on the personal, family and community level¹³⁸ as well as previous association with armed groups and gender, a probit regression analysis confirmed the correlation to be statistically significant.¹³⁹

¹³³ In the questionnaire, sexual violence was framed as forced sex, non-consensual touching or similar.

¹³⁴ UNFPA, “[Gender Based Violence](#)” last accessed 12 December 2023.

¹³⁵ Conflict-related Sexual Violence: [Report of the United Nations Secretary-General, S/2022/272](#), 29 March 2022, p. 23.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

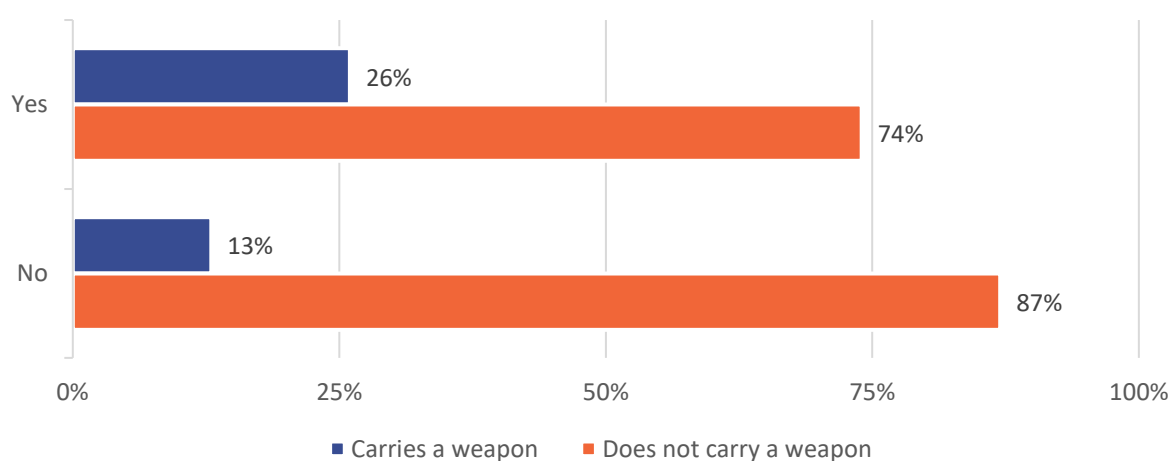
¹³⁷ Julius Gaiya “[Nigeria Needs to Do More to Prevent & Respond to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence](#),” CIVIC blog dated 19 June 2023; Insecurity Insight, “[2020-2023 Nigeria Conflict-Related Sexual Violence \(CRSV\) Incident Data](#)”, 13 November 2023, last accessed 19 December 2023.

¹³⁸ Included personal victimization (beatings, torture, shootings; abduction), family victimization (beatings, torture, shootings; killings; abductions), and community-level victimization (extortion, theft, harassment; attacks by Boko Haram; bandit attacks).

¹³⁹ Significant at the $p < 0.05$ level.

While men respondents who reported such sexual violence cases were 10 percentage points more likely to carry a weapon, the difference was 6 percentage points for women. That the size of the effect is greater for men may seem counterintuitive given the assumption that women are more likely to be the targets of sexual violence. Yet, it is striking that the difference is not much larger considering the general distribution of weapons amongst survey respondents (25 per cent of men and boy respondents said they carried a weapon compared to just over 3 per cent of women and girls). Additionally, even if women and girls were victimized or were the ones in the household affected by sexual violence in the community, social norms often tend to promote an association between weapons and masculinities, which help to explain the gendered difference.

FIGURE 8– DO YOU PERSONALLY KNOW ANYONE IN YOUR COMMUNITY WHO EXPERIENCED FORCED SEX OR NON-CONSENSUAL TOUCHING OR SOMETHING SIMILAR BY AN ARMED GROUP, LIKE BOKO HARAM OR YAN GORA? (COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS SURVEY)



Indeed, the proliferation of SALW has also been recognized as a factor enabling widespread and systemic conflict-related sexual violence. The proliferation of weapons and ammunition are used by perpetrators to facilitate the commission of rape, to threaten or coerce individuals into sexual acts against their will, and to injure and/or kill survivors and victims of sexual violence. There are also indirect links as weapons and ammunition proliferation contribute to the escalation of conflict violence, which, in turn, propagates the conditions that lead to conflict-related sexual violence,¹⁴⁰ which may serve to explain the situation in the North East of Nigeria since the start of the insurgency. Given that prevailing social norms stigmatize victims of sexual violence, a lack of confidence by Nigerians in the police to properly investigate GBV claims,¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Hana Salama, *Addressing Weapons in Conflict-related Sexual Violence: The Arms Control and Disarmament Toolbox*, (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2023), p.6.

¹⁴¹ For an example of how GBV cases have been handled in the past, see Richard Abayomi Aborisade, “On the ‘darkness of dark figure’ of sexual crimes: Survivors’ rape reporting experiences with the Nigerian police,” *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, Volume 73, (June 2023).

and the complicity and sometimes active participation of security forces in perpetrating sexual violence,¹⁴² it is possible that those who have been previously exposed to sexual violence or know someone who has, may resort to carrying a weapon for protection or to deter perpetrators.

e. Trust in Institutions and Political Leadership

The potential that people in the North East are taking their security into their own hands may not be only related to victimization and conflict violence exposure, but a lack of faith in the institutions meant to protect them or provide justice and accountability for victims. Scholars have previously shown how the security sector's inability to protect the Nigerian population from the various forms of political and criminal violence has provided communities and individuals with a rationale for acquiring small arms for their protection.¹⁴³ Surveys have demonstrated that in the northern regions of Nigeria even though the vast majority of respondents stated they would report a crime to the police, less than half felt satisfied with the quality of policing, pointing to a significant gap in state security provision.¹⁴⁴ Despite the findings of prior research, the MEAC study finds that counter to expectation, amongst respondents mentioning a lack of trust in governmental and traditional institutions¹⁴⁵ rates of weapons holding is in fact not higher.

In the community perceptions survey, when asked whether the CJTF has protected their community, 84 per cent of respondents in the North East answered "yes". Also, respondents of the 2022-2023 midline survey seemed to trust the CJTF (78 per cent indicating "a lot") more than courts, the police and, in the case of male respondents, also more than the military (whereas women's trust seems similarly high towards CJTF and the military). The composition of the midline sample, with many respondents previously associated with a CSA likely drives some of this positivity (although there is a sizeable sub-sample of former Boko Harm associates who may feel differently), but MEAC surveys have indicated a generally positive relationship between the CJTF and communities. This trust in the CJTF persists alongside some concerns about past abuses and the evolution of the CJTF/CSAs' role to include broader

¹⁴² In MEAC's baseline survey, of those who said they had been victims of sexual violence, "...4 per cent designated the military as having been responsible." Sophie Huvé, Dr Siobhan O'Neil, Dr Remadji Hoinathy, Kato Van Broeckhoven with Mohammed Bukar, Fatima Yetcha Ajimi Badu, Teniola Tayo, Jessica Caus, and Adja Faye, "[Preventing Recruitment and Ensuring Effective Reintegration Efforts: Evidence from Across the Lake Chad Basin to Inform Policy and Practice](#)," MEAC Lake Chad Basin Case Study Report (New York: United Nations University, 2022).p. 59; see also: Insecurity Insight, "2020-2023 Nigeria Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) Incident Data", 13 November 2023, last accessed 19 December 2023; Amnesty International, "[Nigeria: Children and women face sexual violence in Borno prisons](#)", 19 April 2019; HRW, "[Nigeria: Officials Abusing Displaced Women, Girls](#)", 31 October 2016.

¹⁴³ Bolaji Omitola and Goke Awotayo, "[Arms Proliferation and Challenges of National Security and Sustainable Development in Nigeria](#)," in *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* Vol. 18 No. 2 (2016).

¹⁴⁴ SAS, [Nigeria National Small Arms and Light Weapons Survey](#) (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, August 2021).

¹⁴⁵ The whole range of institutions the survey explicitly asked about were government courts, police, military, CJTF, leaders in the Federal Government, leaders in the Borno State Government, your Bulama, and the United Nations. The level of trust towards different institutions involved in providing public security was determined through the question "How much do you trust the [insert] – a lot, some, or not at all?"

policing duties, dispute mediation, and everyday support for communities.¹⁴⁶ The CJTF's physical and cultural proximity to communities,¹⁴⁷ as well as the fact that they are often the first—or only—ones to arrive to fight against Boko Haram attacks on communities explains higher proximity and trust. Yet, trusting the CJTF does not mean the people leave their security to the group.

While factors relating to trust in institutions were not tested in a regression analysis, summary statistics across the different institutions suggest that weapons holding is not clustered with mistrust in institutions. Likewise, a probit regression model run on the community perception survey data found that respondents who agreed that the CJTF had protected their community from Boko Haram and other security threats were *more—not less*—likely to carry weapons (among men by 9 percentage points and with women by 5 percentage points). In some ways, these findings run counter to the expectations set by other studies that those who distrusted or thought their main security provider would be more likely to take up arms themselves. While more research is needed to better understand the relationship at play, these findings may suggest that in observing combatting insurgents, respondents decide to follow their lead and also take security into their own hands. Although these respondents perceive CJTF as effective security providers, the often dynamic security situation might motivate some respondents to still keep a weapon themselves thereby avoiding complete reliance on CSAs when it comes to their personal and families' security.

f. Violence Norms

Beyond the concerns about taking security or justice into one's own hands or the impact of prior armed group association on the propensity to commit future violence, there is the broader issue of the normalization of violence in conflict. Across contexts, there are concerns about the legacies of violence, both in the way security is oriented and structured, but also with regard to the normalization of violence. If violence has been normalized by years of political conflict, there are concerns that violence will be used to resolve personal conflicts or pursue political and personal goals. While the direction of the relationship cannot be determined from the snapshot provided by the MEAC surveys, it is clear that in the North East of Nigeria, amongst individuals who hold social norms that justify violence, weapons holding is more widespread.

Using the 2022 community perceptions survey data, a probit regression model found that agreeing that violence is sometimes needed to achieve political change was associated with a higher likelihood of weapons holding. The effect was mitigated by gender, with an 11

¹⁴⁶ Kato Van Broeckhoven, Zoe Marks, Siobhan O'Neil, Mohammed Bukar, and Fatima Yetcha Ajimi Badu, "[Community Security Actors and the Prospects for Demobilization in the North East of Nigeria](#)," MEAC Findings Report 18 (New York: United Nations University, 2022)

¹⁴⁷ For example, CJTF affiliates speak the same local languages as their communities, a marked difference with the military troops who often come from other areas of Nigeria. Day, Adam, Vanda Felbab-Brown and Haddad, Fanar, [Hybrid Conflict, Hybrid Peace: How Militias and Paramilitary Groups Shape Post-Conflict Transitions](#), ed. Day, Adam (New York: United Nations University, 2020).

percentage point increase for men respondents and a slightly smaller 7 percentage point increase in likelihood for women respondents. The regression model controlled for other violence norms¹⁴⁸ as well as association with armed groups, gender, and perceptions as to whether CJTF had protected the community. A similar finding was found with respondents who said that they were "prepared to use violence to protect their community." Men who agreed with this statement were 7 percentage points more likely and women who agreed were 5 percentage points more likely to carry a weapon. On the gender differential, it is important to note that in the 2022 community perceptions survey, a high share of women respondents mentioned being prepared to use violence to protect their community when compared to men respondents (30 per cent versus 28 per cent respectively). Despite this slightly higher preparedness amongst women respondents to use violence as a protective means, this did not translate into a higher probability to also bear arms. Although women and girl respondents show a general preparedness to protect their communities including through violent means—indicative of an acute and general awareness about security threats in civil society that is independent of gender—societal norms seem to mediate who is expected to act on threats, with men being the primary (although clearly not only) bearers of weapons.

Policy and Practical Implications

The 2021 National Small Arms and Light Weapons Survey for Nigeria concluded that “Both the general public and civil society respondents expect stronger efforts at arms control, including through civilian disarmament, in order to improve community security overall; but they also fear that civilian disarmament could destabilize local security, at least in the short term. A large proportion of respondents who possessed firearms (43 per cent) stated that they would be prepared to give them up, but many indicated that this was conditional on the removal of threats to life and property through improved safety and security.”¹⁴⁹ This reflection highlights the challenge at hand in the North East: how do you put measures in place to control and reduce the number of weapons in order to improve security tomorrow when today’s insecurity makes people want to hold onto their weapons? Hard-learned lessons elsewhere make it clear that efforts to control weapons should not wait until conflict has subsided, rather measures to effectively and sustainably manage and control arms need to be put in place even before the guns of war have gone silent. Otherwise, risks are high that weapons procured during times of

¹⁴⁸ Violence necessary to achieve political change; Violence sometimes necessary to protect one’s community.

¹⁴⁹ SAS, [Nigeria National Small Arms and Light Weapons Survey](#) (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, August 2021), p. 17.

conflict cast a long shadow even beyond conflict-related violence has ceased, potentially enabling other forms of armed violence such as criminal violence and GBV.

The emerging findings from MEAC's study in Nigeria suggest that while weapons holding in the North East is relatively low compared to other zones that have been impacted by conflict, the potential for weapons retention, particularly, by certain actors, may carry risks for long-term peacebuilding and security prospects. Conflict associations (e.g., current, or former involvement in a number of CSA groups) and experiences (e.g., certain types of victimization) are statistically correlated with a higher propensity to carry a weapon. Prior association with Boko Haram's factions was associated with very low weapons holding rates and was not found to be statistically significant in predicting weapons holding. In the North East, the normalization of personal involvement in violence or using violence as a justifiable means to achieve change is associated with weapons holding, raising concerns that those who hold weapons today, would be less inhibited about the prospects of using them defensively and offensively. These findings have several practical implications for current conflict prevention and mitigation efforts and hint at recommendations to promote a more sustainable peace in the North East of Nigeria.

First, there appear to be several national-level steps that could be taken to strengthen the control of small arms and ammunition in Nigeria that would bring the country's domestic regulatory framework and practices in line with some of its international commitments as also acknowledged by the Nigerian government.¹⁵⁰ A key action point here would be ensuring that Nigeria's legal and regulatory framework meets the security and development needs of Nigeria, as well as satisfying its international and regional legal obligations and political commitments with regards to conventional arms, especially SALW, and ammunition.¹⁵¹ Lastly, and somewhat counterintuitively, robust legal provisions on licensing procedures for small arms and light weapons vis-à-vis civilians, including checks on applicants to ensure they do not pose a risk for diversion or misuse, may help stem the demand for illicit weapons. Licensing must be accompanied by a national authority to design, implement, and oversee the process, alongside relevant regional offices to ensure these are adequately and consistently implemented across all six geopolitical zones. Consideration should also be given to reviewing licencing procedures and ensuring that they are gender-sensitive with the aim of preventing GBV and domestic violence.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ UNIDIR, [Towards a National Framework on Weapons and Ammunition Management in the Federal Republic of Nigeria](#) (Geneva: November 2016).

¹⁵¹ [Ibid.](#)

¹⁵² Boris Colinas, with Emilia Dungal and Paul Holtom, "[Gendered firearms regulations: Assessing the risk of gender-based violence during firearm licence applications](#)," *Medium*, 2 April 2020.

Second, improvements for a comprehensive and effective national WAM system¹⁵³ would likely help address stockpile diversion and cross-border trafficking, which have been major issue in the country at large and in the North East in particular. Applying enhanced community-based WAM approaches to non-state security actors like the CJTF, and particularly for those affiliates standing down or those more peripherally involved, could impact the retention of arms from quasi-formalized security forces in the region. It must be noted that to effectively enhance the national level WAM system, it is necessary to have a strong national coordination mechanism, which is particularly true for Nigeria. The country has 15 arms-bearing agencies each with their own weapons and ammunition management procedures and the National Centre for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons currently does not hold the same legal status as a full-fledged National Commission as required by the ECOWAS Convention on SALW.¹⁵⁴ A strong centralised and mandated National Commission together with a comprehensive WAM system at the national level could help reduce the diversion of state-controlled weaponry and thus help reduce SALW-related violence in the country.

Third, while the two aforementioned steps would be important, additional steps will be needed to address the craft manufacture of firearms that is impacting the North East zone. In the short term, without a revised legal and regulatory framework, existing legal measures could help curb the supply of craft weapons if properly implemented. For example, the Firearms Act explicitly prohibits the unlawful manufacture or repair of small arms, and increased action by law enforcement agencies such as patrols and seizures of illicitly produced weapons could yield positive results. Further, measures aimed at regulating, licensing, and marking craft-produced weapons accompanied by strengthened national record keeping measures could help to bring craft production under state control and oversight. Such measures would allow certain types of manufacture, repairs, and sales by licensed actors, in line with laws and regulations. Such measures should ideally be undertaken in concert with other and particularly neighbouring states in the region—an area in which ECOWAS could play a key role. These measures may further help curb the illicit proliferation of weapons, and in turn, could help reduce violent crime rates.

Fourth, as the geographic variation in weapons holding and use detailed in this report highlights, enhanced national arms control laws and WAM mechanisms alone are unlikely to address all the particular drivers of weapons-driven violence in the North East (nor in other zones). Some region-specific initiatives will also likely be necessary. Steps also need to be taken to address cross-border flows of weapons, including by identifying major trafficking routes. Greater coordination among arms control institutions such as a strengthened National Commission and WAM coordination bodies, as well as border security and law enforcement

¹⁵³ UNIDIR, [Towards a National Framework on Weapons and Ammunition Management in the Federal Republic of Nigeria](#) (Geneva: November 2016).

¹⁵⁴ DPO, UNODA and LCBC., [Weapons and Ammunition Dynamics in the Lake Chad Basin](#) (2022).

agencies in Nigeria and in neighbouring countries in the Lake Chad Basin would help address the source of these weapons into, and out of the country.

Fifth, at the programmatic level, defector, DDRRR,¹⁵⁵ and reintegration interventions in the North East of Nigeria should look beyond SALW to also account for the presence and role of cruder non-SALW weapons. Just because ex-associates/affiliates no longer have a gun, does not mean that they do not still carry cruder weapons. That said, holistically addressing disarmament is particularly complicated in an active conflict zone where insecurity persists and full disarmament is initially unrealistic, and in communities where certain types of weaponry also have hunting, agricultural, traditional, and household uses (e.g., bladed weapons). Thus, in some cases, there may need to be a more nuanced approach to disarmament that adapts weapons collection efforts to fit the operational environment. Such intermediary measures could focus on registering, a focus on safe storage, normative change, and/or awareness raising on GBV facilitated by weapons (and improving women's participation across these efforts).¹⁵⁶ Ultimately, the conditions that lead people to lay aside all manner of weapons also need to be better understood. A more human-centered approach to disarmament could complement the technical collection and management of weaponry to more comprehensively address the issue for better security outcomes.

Sixth, this is particularly true with regard to victimization. MEAC's data suggests that individuals who have experienced certain types of victimization are more likely to be armed. In looking forward to long-term community reconciliation and peacebuilding goals, it is important to recognize that certain populations and communities may need additional security assurances in order to give up arms. Communities with high rates of sexual violence, those who have experienced banditry attacks, and/or been abducted or had family members abducted carry weapons at a higher rate than those who have not had these experiences.

Seventh, gender is one of the key dimensions influencing weapons holding in the North East, and it also permeates and mediates other influencing factors such as victimization, violence norms, and association with armed groups. Men and boy respondents are more likely to carry weapons than women and girls respectively. Furthermore, self-reported instances of sexual violence are extremely low and likely underreported. However, knowledge of sexual violence (which may reflect the respondent's own experience or that of someone else they know) is found to be associated with an increased likelihood of weapons holding. Disarmament and community violence reduction programmes should take these gendered patterns into account (e.g., by offering adequate referral pathways to medical and psychosocial support to sexual violence survivors in such programmes as well as by addressing social norms linking

¹⁵⁵ In the Lake Chad Basin, Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation, Reinsertions and Reintegration or DDRRR is often used instead of DDR.

¹⁵⁶ Salama, Addressing Weapons in Conflict-related Sexual Violence, p.39, and Hana Salama and Emma Bjertén-Günther, [*Women Managing Weapons: Perspectives for Increasing Women's Meaningful Participation in Weapons and Ammunition Management*](#), (Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2021).

masculinities to weapons possession and security provision). In light of existing knowledge around the role weapons often play in sexual violence, civilian weapons holdings in the North East in general and the herein analysed higher rates of weapons retention (or those re-acquired/accessed) by former community security actors pose potential risks for long-term security and violence reduction, potentially including gender-based violence.

Eighth, efforts to demobilize or transition CSA affiliates to other professions need to have a clear disarmament and/or weapons and ammunition management component to address potential weapons retention (or re-acquirement or continued access) amongst former CSA affiliates. Here, nuanced approaches that acknowledge the spectrum of CSAs and the continuum of “membership” in the North East are necessary in light of the realities on the ground (and to avoid doing harm). For instance, the CJTF’s and Yan Gora’s embeddedness in communities blurs the “exit” of their rank and file, which bears important implications for disarmament programmes. Transitional WAM approaches¹⁵⁷ could be employed to facilitate trust building and the gradual disarmament of some CSA affiliates, while reducing misuse or diversion in communities in the North East. Inherently, building the WAM capacity of CSAs may inadvertently strengthen their fighting capacity or legitimize their status. As such, these efforts must be aligned with a broader professionalization, integration, and demobilization strategy for transitioning CSAs that is approved and owned by state and national authorities.

¹⁵⁷ The Integrated Disarmament Demobilisation and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) “[Transitional Weapons and Ammunition Management](#),” *Module 4.11*.

MANAGING EXITS FROM ARMED CONFLICT



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