Introduction

Armed conflict has marked Nigeria’s history since pre-colonial times, but has intensified following independence in 1960. In 1967, a civil war between the Nigerian federal government and the Biafran secessionists erupted and quickly escalated into full-scale armed conflict before ending in 1970. Since then, Nigeria has been bedeviled by religious, communal, and civil strife.

Religious clashes in northern cities during the 1980s, protests over General Ibrahim Babangida’s nullification of the June 1993 presidential elections (1985–93), and repression during Sani Abacha’s rule (1993–98) contributed to sporadic conflict in different parts of the country. After almost 30 years of military rule, the return to democracy in May 1999 was a positive development. Greater freedom and less repression did, however, create opportunities for armed groups hostile towards the state or other Nigerian communities to organize and mobilize with relative impunity.

In two of Nigeria’s 36 states—Rivers state in the southern Niger Delta, and Plateau state in the north-central region—the situation grew particularly tense in 2004. In the oil-rich Rivers state, the proliferation of large politically driven armed groups such as the Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and the Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV) is causing significant concern. In Plateau state, increasing violence and bloodshed prompted the federal government to declare a six-month state of emergency on 18 May 2004.

This chapter documents the diversity and complex nature of armed groups in Nigeria, focusing on recent events in Rivers and Plateau states. It is divided
into three sections. The first section provides historical and contextual background to the conflict, to armed groups, and to small arms in Nigeria. The second section examines the current situation in Rivers state, while the third focuses on Plateau state. Both case studies specify the nature of the armed groups, review their weapons holdings, analyse the root causes of the conflict, and discuss attempts to disarm.

A variety of sources inform the analysis. The authors held two focus group meetings in Port Harcourt, Rivers state, on 30 August 2004 (with 10 participants), and in Jos, Plateau state, on 1 September 2004 (with 12 participants). The discussions involved academics, members of civil society groups, and retired police and military personnel. They focused on the themes explored in this chapter and sought to provide guidance for follow-up research. The authors subsequently conducted field research in Rivers and Plateau states between September and December 2004. They interviewed a wide range of stakeholders, including leaders and members of armed groups, as well as officials of local governments and community-based organizations. The research also benefited from information sharing with Our Niger Delta and Academic Associates Peace Work (AAPW), both of which are playing a significant role in the emerging peace process now under way in Rivers state. Other sources include Nigerian newspapers, as well as petitions and memos from communities listing casualties and loss of property owing to violence in Plateau.

The following are among the chapter’s most important findings:

- Nigeria is host to a wide variety of armed groups, including political gangs, ethnic militias, community defence groups, and, allegedly, foreign mercenaries.
- Nigerian armed groups are much more numerous than previously thought. Local authorities have officially identified approximately 100 ‘secret cults’ in Rivers state alone.
- Group allegiances may shift—demonstrating the importance of introducing pro-state militias and community vigilante groups into the debate over armed groups.
- Despite particularly high black-market prices, weapons include modern AK-47 type assault rifles. Nigerian groups also rely on cheaper craft-produced weapons.
Weapon sources include those trafficked from neighbouring countries or other Nigerian states, weapons seized or bought from corrupt members of the Nigerian security services, and locally manufactured small arms.

Perceived injustice perpetrated by the Nigerian government, insecurity, lack of political freedom, unemployment, and economic marginalization are among the key motivating factors behind the rise of armed groups.

**Conflicts, armed groups, and small arms in Nigeria**

Each of Nigeria's 370 identifiable ethnic groups (Otite, 2000, p. 20) perceives itself to be linguistically, culturally, and historically distinct, although four—the Hausa and Fulani in the north, the Yoruba in the south-west, and the Igbo in the south-east—constitute a larger share of the population. Tensions among these four are well documented, as are hostilities among other lesser-known groups who have grievances against both the major ethnic groups, the Nigerian state (which they perceive as insensitive to their interests), and one another.

Several armed conflicts have occurred in Nigeria since the inception of party politics that took place during the colonial era (the 1920s in the south and the 1940s in the north). In 1960, the countdown to independence engendered conflicts among groups who used crude weapons such as machetes, bows, and arrows; these conflicts intensified soon thereafter, culminating in the 1967–70 civil war. The United Kingdom exported weapons to the federal government while France supported and armed Biafran secessionists (Musah and Thamson, 1999, p. 112). In addition, the local crafting and manufacture of small arms was further developed, especially in Awka in the south-east, where the secessionists drew from the resources of a long-standing but relatively unsophisticated local blacksmithing industry to overcome the difficulty in obtaining arms from external sources. In the aftermath of the civil war, violence largely subsided—although armed robbers continued to harry the countryside.

In December 1980, the Maitatsine fundamentalist Islamic sect engaged in a number of brutal, religiously motivated attacks in northern Nigeria. The group relied mainly on traditional weapons such as bows, poisoned arrows, and machetes. A cleric of Cameroonian origin led the Maitatsine, which taught and promoted fundamentalist principles, and challenged and opposed the Nigerian state. Violent Maitatsine uprisings erupted in Kano in December
Mujahid Asari Dokubo, leader of the Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force (NDPVF).
1980, during which 4,177 persons were killed in less than ten days of fighting (Tamuno, 1993). It took a joint operation of the army, air force, and police to bring the situation under control. The group participated in similar armed violence in the northern cities of Maiduguri/Bulumkutu in 1982, Rigassa/Kaduna in 1982, Jimeta/Yola in 1984, Gombe in 1984, and Funtua in 1993 (Best, 2001). It fundamentally opposed the state and the role of traditional leaders in particular. The Maitatsine crises, however, were mostly intra-Islamic, and only occasionally deliberately targeted people outside the faith.

Inter-religious and ethnic conflicts escalated in the mid-1980s. Notable clashes include the Kafanchan, Kaduna, and Zaria debacles of 1987, which sharply pitted Christians against Muslims in Kaduna state (Kukah, 1993). From 1988 to 1994, violent brawls between Muslim and non-Muslim students erupted at a number of universities including Ahmadu Bello University (Zaria), Bayero University (Kano), University of Ibadan, and University of Sokoto (Kukah, 1993). Although these did not involve the use of small arms, violence and insecurity, combined with the repeated failure of the security agencies to protect lives and property, created a demand for weapons among citizens and communities. In the north-eastern zone of Nigeria, tensions over cattle-rustling and farmer-grazier conflicts further engendered calls for small arms among resident and nomadic pastoralists passing through or living in the region (Williams et al., 1999).

Overall, the 1990s saw increases in armed violence as a means of achieving group objectives. The faltering Nigerian economy, coupled with concomitant socio-economic upheaval and a weakened Nigerian state (Egwu, 1998; Suberu, 1996) increased the government’s reliance on coercion—as opposed to dialogue—to quell unrest. This in turn encouraged the populace to organize and acquire weapons either for self-defence or to fight back. In the south-western Yoruba states, armed groups challenged the annulment of the 12 June 1993 elections—which they believed their Yoruba kinsman, Moshood Abiola, had won—and contested the legitimacy of Abacha’s rise to power (1993–98). As the country moved from military rule to democracy during the 1990s, certain groups began to question what they saw as the absence of justice in the Nigerian political system. Estimates suggest between one million (Small Arms Survey, 2003, p. 2) and three million (Obasi, 2002, p. 69) small arms were in circulation throughout the country in the early 2000s.
In the 1990s, the north-central (Middle Belt) region of Nigeria experienced intense and violent confrontations between the Sayawa-Hausa and the Fulani in Tafawa Balewa local government area of Bauchi state; between the Tiv and Jukun communities in Taraba state (Otite and Albert, 1999); between the Chamba and Jukun-Kuteb in Taraba state (Best, 1998); and between the Bassa and Egbura in Nasarawa state (Best, 2004). The conflict between the Ife and the Modakeke in south-western Osun state, although an intra-Yoruba conflict, spawned the formation of armed militias on both sides. Meanwhile, the conflict between Ijaws, Itsekiris, and Urhobos in Warri led to the emergence of some of the toughest armed ethnic militias in the entire Niger Delta. Overall, state institutions performed poorly in the maintenance of law and order and the management of these crises. Some of these conflicts were characterized by unprecedented small arm use. Given the proximity of these communities, and because of the ethno-linguistic and other cultural associations between parties, small arms circulated freely within and between conflict zones.

The rise of the O’odua Peoples’ Congress (OPC) in the south-west, the Egbesu Boys in the Niger Delta, and the Bakassi Boys in the south-eastern states all contributed to the expanded use of small arms in Nigeria. Between 1997 and 2001 in the south, the OPC, a militant wing of the Yoruba politico-cultural group, repeatedly attacked and burned down police stations, killed officers, and carted away stolen arms. In the Niger Delta, the Egbesu Boys initially emerged as an Ijaw religious cultural group, but subsequently took up arms in order to challenge perceived injustice caused by the exploitation of oil resources in Ijaw land and the Niger Delta by the Nigerian state and multinational corporations. The Bakassi Boys in the Igbo-speaking south-east, initially formed as a vigilante group to help protect south-eastern traders and their clients from attacks by armed robbers, a situation that arose from the failure of the Nigerian police to perform their duties effectively. After 1999, south-eastern governors later endorsed the Bakassi Boys and they soon became a potent force in the cities where they operated (HRW and CLEEN, 2002, p. 10). Later, complaints regarding the Bakassi Boys’ reliance on extra-judicial means such as murder, ‘necklacings’, and torture drove the vigilantes underground (HRW and CLEEN, 2002). Critics also feared that a number of
south-east governors could deploy the group to terrorize the population in the event that they lost the May 2003 elections.

**Armed vigilantism and cults in Rivers state**

Fighting in the nine oil-producing states, which include the states of the Niger Delta, is motivated by the ongoing struggle for the control of oil wealth, and anger over the environmental degradation and high levels of unemployment that have surfaced since oil exploration began in 1956. Conflict epicentres included Warri in Delta state (the late 1990s) and, more recently, Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers state. In 2003 and 2004, two main rival armed groups, the NDPVF, the NDV, and a number of associated smaller groups fought over the control of territory and oil bunkering” routes in and around Port Harcourt. Fighting has caused the deaths of hundreds of people and resulted in the displacement of tens of thousands (HRW, 2005, p. 1).

The situation quietened in late September 2004 only after the NDPVF leader, Alhaji Mujahid Abubakar Asari Dokubo, threatened to launch an all-out war unless the Nigerian government granted greater control of the region’s oil resources to the Ijaw people, the major ethnic group in the Niger Delta. This move attracted international attention, particularly within the oil industry, and prompted the Nigerian government—which had deployed troops to the region for an internal security mission code-named ‘Operation Hakusi’—to negotiate with the two main armed groups. The 1 October 2004 ceasefire agreement and a call for the disarmament of all groups and militias was the end result (HRW, 2005, pp. 1–3).

**The NDPVF, the NDV, and secret cults**

While many armed groups were active in Nigeria during 2004, the NDPVF in Rivers state was one of the most organized, armed, and deadly. In 2004, Asari, who hailed from the town of Buguma (HRW, 2005, p. 6), claimed that his organization fronted a volunteer force of up to 168,000 fighters and more were joining every day (The News, 2004, p. 20)—a contention that most experts now believe to be a wild exaggeration. The NDPVF also maintained they were holding discussions with groups who shared similar ideas in other parts of Nigeria.
Rivers state Governor Peter Odili originally supported Asari in his ambitions to ‘contain’ the growing influence of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), an Ijaw organization formed in 1998 to push for greater resource control and environmental sustainability (HRW, 2005, pp. 4–5). In 2001, Odili reportedly backed Asari’s bid to become IYC president in order to curtail the movement’s political influence in the run-up to the April 2003 state elections (HRW, 2005, p. 5). Although Odili was re-elected, his strategy backfired because Asari later used his position within the IYC to gain popular support and to publicly criticize the elections (HRW, 2005, pp. 7, 10). Asari stepped down as IYC president on 10 July 2003 amid pressures from senior IYC figures, and subsequently created the NDPVF. The group’s rhetoric is perhaps best illustrated by the words of Asari himself:

I am not an illegal bunkerer. I am taking what belongs to my people and giving it back to them. How can petrol sell for 45 Naira in Abuja and Lagos and today in Buguma and Nembe [in the Niger Delta] it is sold at 200 Naira per litre? … I am refining it and selling 15 Naira per litre in the riverine areas. They are happy because I have emancipated them from Obasanjo and Odili’s slavery. I give oil, which belongs to the people, back to the people. Who amongst those accusing us about bunkering are not engaging in it from the highest level down? (The News, 2004, p. 20)

Led by Ateke Tom, the NDV emerged in Okrika, a major town in Rivers state, during a general state of lawlessness engendered by criminal gang activity. The group, known before 2003 as the Okrika Vigilante or as the Icelanders, gained the support of the community after it was able to neutralize local mafia. It gained prominence in reaction to the inability of the Nigerian police force to maintain law and order, and such was its influence that local politicians took note. Some sources report that former secretary to the state government and current federal transport minister Abiye Sekibo
granted political protection to Ateke as far back as 2001 on the understanding that the NDV would render coercive services—such as intimidating political opponents—during the 2003 elections (HRW, 2005, p. 4). The increasing politicization of the NDV meant that it could extend its reach beyond Okrika, and played a critical role in the Rivers state armed crisis because it opposed NDPVF control over oil bunkering routes following Asari’s quarrel with Odili (HRW, 2005, pp. 7, 10). Odili allegedly backed the NDV during the fighting in 2003–04 (HRW, 2005, pp. 10, 16).

A number of smaller groups gravitated towards the NDPVF and the NDV, and are commonly referred to as ‘cults’ and ‘vigilante groups’. These are essentially groups of individuals dedicated to providing security and economic opportunities for each other and their respective communities, subscribing to an oath of allegiance and secrecy and relying mostly on violent means to achieve their ends. Not all cults, however, are violent—although most are armed to varying degrees. Membership ranges from 20 to 3,000 persons. The Secret Cult and Similar Activities Prohibition Law (hereafter Secret Cult Law) passed in June 2004 officially listed about 100 cult groups, which are now banned. These cults include criminal gangs, spiritual and politically motivated groups seeking power and control, gangs that control waterways and passages, as well as those involved in oil bunkering activities.

Cult memberships, methods of operation, and initiation rites, which involve oaths of allegiance, remain secret. Some are pro-state or pro-government, some are anti-state, while others have no clear political objectives. Smaller groups themselves are prone to internal divisions, and during the 2003 elections most rallied behind the key groups of Asari and Ateke to facilitate access to arms and resources (HRW, 2005, p. 3). Interestingly, neither Asari’s NDPVF nor Ateke’s NDV are listed in the Secret Cult Law. However, affiliates such as the Icelanders are included. The Dey Gbam reportedly sided with NDPVF while the Germans enjoy a closer relationship with the NDV (HRW, 2005, pp. 11–14).

A significant amount of the violence in Rivers state, especially in the recent past, has been associated with these groups. Although the reliability of state public health data is questionable, some researchers estimate that violence between October 2003 and October 2004 in Okrika, Buguma, Tombia, Ogakiri, and Port Harcourt claimed the lives of dozens of local residents and resulted
Table 1.1 Secret cults identified in the Secret Cult law

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secret Cult Name</th>
<th>Other Cult Name</th>
<th>Note: Amazon, Black Brasserie, Black Ladies, and Daughters of Jezebel are female cult groups.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agbaye</td>
<td>Elegemface</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airwords</td>
<td>Executioners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amazon</td>
<td>Fangs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baccaneers (Sea Lords)</td>
<td>FF</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barracuda</td>
<td>Fliers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bas</td>
<td>Frigates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bees International</td>
<td>Gentlemen's Club</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big 20</td>
<td>Green Berets Fraternity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Axe</td>
<td>Hard Candies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Beret Fraternity</td>
<td>Hell's Angels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Brasserie</td>
<td>Hemos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Brothers</td>
<td>Himalayas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Cats</td>
<td>Icelanders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Cross</td>
<td>Jaggar Confederation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Ladies</td>
<td>KGB</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Ofals</td>
<td>King Cobra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Scorpions</td>
<td>Klam Konfraternity Klansman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Sword</td>
<td>Ku Klux Klan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanchers</td>
<td>Knite Cade</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blood Hunters</td>
<td>Mafia Lords</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blood Suckers</td>
<td>Mafioso Fraternity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brotherhood of Blood</td>
<td>Malcolm X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso: Revolution Fraternity</td>
<td>Maphites/Maphlate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canary</td>
<td>Mob Stab</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cappa Vandetto</td>
<td>Musketeers Fraternity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughters of Jezebel</td>
<td>National Association of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dey Gbam</td>
<td>Adventurers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dey Well</td>
<td>National Association of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolphins</td>
<td>Sea Dogs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dragons</td>
<td>Neo-Black Movement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreaded Friends of Friends</td>
<td>Night Mates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eagle Club</td>
<td>Nite Hawks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egbe Dudu</td>
<td>Nite Rovers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye of Air Lords Fraternity</td>
<td>Odu Cofraternity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
in the deaths of hundreds of fighters (HRW, 2005, p. 10). Cult violence has resulted in the destruction, totally or in part, of several communities. These include Port Harcourt’s Njemanze suburb and Okuru community, large sections of Okrika, almost all of Ogbakiri, and several houses in Buguma, Bukuma, and Tombia. Most former inhabitants were still listed as internally displaced as of late 2004. Although there are no reliable estimates of actual numbers, interviews with community members indicate more than 50,000 people, from all of the communities combined, are now homeless.

Small arms availability and sources

Armed groups in Rivers state deploy an arsenal that includes assault rifles (AK-47, Czech SA Vz. 58, G3, FN FNC, and FN FAL), pump-action shotguns, light machine guns, and home-made guns. The types of weapons surrendered in the wake of the peace process (see Table 1.2) confirm this. East European-made AK-47 assault rifles, moreover, are becoming more prevalent than the formerly favoured Beretta AR-70, FNC, and light machine guns. About 75 per cent of the AK-47s surrendered had no butt stocks, which affects the balance and accuracy of the rifle. It also indicates that, for the militia, precision is not as important as portability.

In 2004, a new AK-47 with two magazines could be purchased in the Niger Delta for approximately USD 1,700, and a 200-round machine gun for USD 7,400—inflated prices that suggest that demand for automatic weapons is particularly high and exceeds the current supply. Prices for pistols and automatic rifles reportedly ranged between USD 200 and USD 400 in 1999 (Musah and Thamson, 1999, p. 131).

Little information is available on the arsenals of specific groups. The NDPVF, however, appears to be more open and forthcoming, although it is necessary to exercise some scepticism over claims. One thing does seem certain, however, and that is that, as a result of its links to oil bunkering, the group has been able to invest in significant arms purchases. Asari, for instance, stated in 2004 that he owned 67 boats, each armed with two light machine guns (Newswatch, 2004, p. 10), and more than 3,000 assault rifles (IRIN, 2004d). ‘General Commander’ of the NDPVF, British Columbus Epebada, who claims to be a Nigerian army ex-serviceman, once boasted, ‘we have the GPMG
[general purpose machine gun], the SLR [self loading rifle], AK-47 Kalashnikovs, MG [machine guns] and several others. We have over five thousand arms among which the GPMG alone are up to 273’ (Abubakar and Bello, 2004, p. 17).

Several of the major weapon sources identified during the course of the research are identified below:\textsuperscript{14}

- A number of small arms originate from other war-ravaged parts of the West African sub-region, particularly Sierra Leone and Liberia. Members of the Nigerian military have reportedly brought back arms from Sierra

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weapon type</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assault rifles</td>
<td>778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AK-47</td>
<td>324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech SA Vz. 58</td>
<td>429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HK G3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FN-FAL</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shotguns</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light machine guns</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beretta 12S</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAT 49</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Model 26</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sten MK 2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machine guns</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Model 59 (Rachot)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MG 36</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunting rifles</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pistols</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revolvers</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craft weapons</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shotguns</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revolvers</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air guns</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>846</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Leone, where they took part in ECOMOG (ECOWAS Monitoring Group) for resale after being redeployed back into the state (Musah and Thamson, 1999, p. 131).

- Armed group supporters within the oil industry (see Von Kemedi, 2003) or political parties and even members of the state government (HRW, 2005, p. 8; NDPEHRD, 2004, pp. 5–6) provided weapons or the funds and required contacts to buy them. Traditional leaders seeking protection from armed groups have also supplied weapons, including a local chief from Okrika who Ateke claims purchased weapons for the NDV (HRW, 2005, p. 6).

- Weapons exchanged for stolen or bunkered oil are another major source. Illegal oil bunkering has reportedly been a significant source of revenue for both the NDPVF and the NDV (HRW, 2005, p. 7).

- Weapons captured or seized from local stocks or bought from corrupt individuals also add to the armed group stockpiles. These include arms captured from (or sold by) the Nigeria Mobile Police and Nigerian army personnel; those captured or bought from Cameroonian soldiers stationed in the Bakassi peninsula (whose jurisdiction is disputed between Nigeria and Cameroon); and those purchased from ex-Nigerian soldiers also deployed to the same region.

- One group leader claims that arms are available from vessels moored just off the coast of Rivers state, and can be purchased by anybody who can afford them. Warri, the capital of Delta state, is also known as a major arms trafficking hub. Smugglers from Guinea-Bissau, Gabon, and Cameroon reportedly use speedboats to reach offshore ships and purchase guns that they then sell to their respective communities in Warri, where they are often trafficked elsewhere (see Obasi, 2002, pp. 74–75).

- While the presence of craft weapons among those surrendered in Port Harcourt provides evidence of the existence of an underground industry, there is little information available regarding products, production levels, or the quality and price of weapons. Today, Awka, the Anambra state capital, appears to be Nigeria’s leading small arms craft manufacturing centre. There are also reports of Ghanaian gunsmiths travelling to Nigeria to train local blacksmiths in gun-making skills (see Chapter 3).
Protection, oil, party politics, and crime

A burgeoning informal protection industry, where police and army personnel are absent or are perceived as biased, contributes to the increased numbers of armed groups and the concomitant proliferation of small arms in Rivers state. This was evident during the run-up to the 2003 elections, which was marred by several unexplained killings of key political figures. Asari, the leader of the NDPVF, justified taking up arms by citing a long list of people that the state’s leadership eliminated on political grounds (Newswatch, 2004, p. 14). He claimed to have survived several attempts on his own life and charged the police with failing to apprehend known culprits. He concluded: ‘I decided reluctantly, but with the help of God on my side, to defend the helpless indigenes and residents of Rivers state who are daily under fear of death, extortion and intimidation … and have succeeded in putting a stop to all cult activities …’ (Newswatch, 2004, p. 16).

The oil economy and its environmental impact in the Niger Delta has had a huge impact on the increasing numbers of armed groups operating in the region. Oil producing communities have hired armed groups in order to have a greater say in state representation and to seek protection. Oil companies such as the Shell Petroleum Development Company have indirectly financed such groups (see Christian Aid et al., 2004, p. 7; HRW, 2005, pp. 5–6, 8; Musah and Thamson, 1999, p. 130) by paying for ‘stand-by workers’ working from home, or through fictitious contracts, which are paid for but never executed. Over time, armed groups have expanded into other communities belonging to the same clan. These include the Esenasawo groups from Nembe-Ogbolomabiri (Bayelsa state), which became progressively active in other Nembe communities and thereafter aligned with Asari’s NDPVF.

The political stakes grow ever higher as elected state officials gain access to oil resources and to the federal allocations, which tend to be comparatively generous. Rivers state receives the third largest allocation from the Nigerian Federation Account, after Delta and Bayelsa states. Within the local population, however, there is a widespread sense that there is little to show for these huge receipts.

During the 1999 general elections, various parties assembled and armed youth. Some observers contend that members of Peter Odili’s Rivers state
government and opposing political parties alike financed and armed group members (HRW, 2005, p. 8). In Okrika, former state government secretary, Dr Abiye Sekibo, now the Nigerian Minister of Transport, allegedly supported Ateke’s NDV in an attempt to counter the opposition All Nigeria People’s Party’s influence (ANPP) during the 2003 state and federal elections (HRW, 2005, p. 4). In the aftermath of an upsurge of violence in September 2004, Governor Odili dissolved the cabinet in what appeared to be an attempt to rid the government of cult ‘sponsors’.

Another important factor in the rise of armed gangs is the necessity of using weapons to control the waterways that facilitate the illegal transfer of oil assets. Oil bunkers pay rents and other charges to armed groups that administer the routes, and control without arms is hardly possible. Within Port Harcourt, drug dealers also buy protection from cult groups who also arm themselves to prevent incursions from other gangs intent on capturing a piece of their turf. Two main cartels offer protection to drug dealers: the Dey Gbam and the Dey Well street cults, both of them identified by the Secret Cult Law. However, many other cults are also involved in drug protection.

Conflict over traditional titles or rule is another reason behind the arms build-up. Rival claimants and their supporters will often seek to impose their will on the other gangs, often violently dislodging their supporters in the process. This was the case in Okrika, where the conflict also assumed a political dimension when supporters of rival chiefs became affiliated with two different political parties: the opposition ANPP and the ruling PDP. Oil revenue pay-offs exacerbate chieftancy disputes because companies will make payments, not only to the government, but also to ‘host communities’, which in practice means traditional leaders or chiefs (HRW, 2005, p. 5).

Disarmament and the Rivers state peace process
Nigerian state response has been typically repressive (see HRW, 2005, pp. 15–19). The dialogue that began in September 2004, however, deviated from this pattern. At a meeting between the officials of the Federal Government of Nigeria and leaders of the NDPVF and NVD in Abuja on 1 October 2004 (see HRW, 2005, pp. 19–20), leaders agreed to disband their militias and to totally disarm. They also agreed to an immediate ceasefire and pledged to uphold
peace and to abide by the law. Upon examining the violence in Rivers state, all participants, including the Nigerian president, agreed that efforts should be made to reconcile contending forces in Okrika and to facilitate the resolution of the chieftaincy. They agreed that a similar reconciliation process would also be useful in Kalabari land. The need to rehabilitate and reintegrate disarmed youth was also stressed.

After a second meeting, the president established a committee chaired by Major-General (retired) Abdulahi Muhammed to follow up. Two subcommittees were also formed: the Disarmament Sub-Committee chaired by Governor Odili, and a Community Sub-Committee headed by the deputy governor of Bayelsa state, Dr Goodluck Jonathan. A Community Committee was also established for Okrika chaired by Professor Tekena Tamuno, a respected scholar. In Bugama, a similar committee will likely be established. Both subcommittees held a series of meetings between October and December 2004.

By mid-December 2004, the Disarmament Sub-Committee had collected 1,100 guns (HRW, 2005, p. 19). The state government offered USD 1,800 for the return of each assault rifle, and offered armed group members immunity from prosecution and the release of members held in detention in exchange for weapons (HRW, 2005, p. 19). In accordance with the agreement reached on 1 October 2004 in Abuja, weapons were collected from the various militias, including the Asari and Ateke groups. A general amnesty was granted, ending on 31 December 2004, after which persons and groups found in possession of weapons would be dealt with according to the law.

The disarmament programme has its limitations; observers argue that weapons surrendered are old, and that militiamen still have in their possession newer and more sophisticated weapons—nor has the process addressed root causes (HRW, 2005, p. 19). By October 2004, critics were expressing concern over the relatively low number of weapons surrendered by the NDPVF (200 weapons out of the estimated 3,000) (IRIN, 2004d). Despite these and other issues, the peace process has nevertheless brought a certain degree of peace.

Apparent calm, however, may not last if the current trend of incremental disorder continues. Two recent linked incidents only serve to highlight the fragility of peace in the region. On 5 November 2004, individuals suspected of being Ateke group members killed three members of the Asari faction (IRIN,
About a week before, Asari group members inflicted life-threatening injuries on some of Ateke’s followers. Although the two factional leaders have so far resisted blaming each other and remain committed to peace, apparent differences could escalate into open conflict.

In Rivers state lasting peace is inevitably tied to the sustainable economic outlook of former combatants and other youth who remain susceptible to future recruitment into violent gangs. At the 5 November 2004 meeting, the facilitation team was asked to prepare a framework for a massive and rapid rehabilitation response that would gain the confidence of former combatants, affected communities, and the Rivers population as a whole. The communities identified as requiring immediate attention were Port Harcourt, Ogbakiri, Tombia, Okrika, and Buguma.

**Armed groups and ethnic violence in Plateau state**
Tensions between Muslim herders and Christian farmers over land and cattle led to several violent attacks and reprisals in 2001 and 2004—culminating in a bloody series of skirmishes between February and May 2004. More than 1,000 people were left dead and thousands displaced (Global IDP Project, 2004) following the September 2001 conflict in and around Jos, the state capital. The May 2004 killings in Yelwa, during which a Christian militia slaughtered several hundreds of Muslims in retaliation for the earlier massacre of 67 persons in a church in February 2004, led President Obasanjo to declare emergency rule in the state: the first time such measures had been taken since Nigeria’s transition to democracy in 1999.

The introduction in 2000 of strict Islamic Sharia law in 12 northern states intensified suspicion and introduced religious overtones into what was initially a classic dispute between indigenous farmers, traders, and herders (IRIN, 2004a). This sparked a spate of revenge killings against the Christian minority in northern Kano state (Global IDP Project, 2004). An official publication of the Plateau state government puts the number of displaced persons during 2001–04 at 150,000, with 150 villages destroyed and 50,000 households completely uprooted (Plateau State Government, 2004a, p. 5).
From ethnic militias to religious conflict

Between 2001 and 2004, Plateau state, which is a hub for northern Nigerian Christianity, was convulsed with a series of brutal armed conflicts involving various ethnic groups. Violence erupted mainly in the northern and southern zones. The northern zone is made up of six local government areas: Jos North, Jos South, Jos East, Barkin Ladi, Riyom, and Bassa. Only Jos East remained untouched by conflict. The southern zone also consists of six local government areas: Wase, Langtang North, Langtang South, Shendam, Qua’an Pan, and Mikang, all of which were shaken by episodes of violence. In the central zone, local government areas such as in Pankshin, Kanke and Kanam were affected due to their proximity to the primary zones of fighting and kinship with people from the north and the south. This particular conflict has turned out to be more protracted, intense, and destructive than in the north.

Minority ethnic groups have exploited the religious component of these conflicts in order to further engage in farming and cattle rustling disputes in this mainly agrarian state. While both Christians (who are mainly farmers) and Muslims (primarily cattle herders) have pointed to identification cards recovered during combat as proof that their adversaries are religiously motivated, its true role is insignificant except for the fact that the various ethnic groups involved just happen to belong to one or the other. The Fulani and Wase militias are exclusively Muslim, for example, while the Taroh and Gamai militias are non-Muslim—and are made up of Christians and practitioners of African traditional religions (ATR). Some, more cynical, residents believe that political manoeuvring by local politicians intent on exploiting local tensions before the 2007 elections has contributed to the escalation of conflict (Global IDP Project, 2004).

Nearly all of ethnic groups residing within conflict-affected areas have formed armed militia or community defence groups—usually trained by members with previous military experience. These include the Berom, Anaguta, Afizere, Irigwe, Hausa, and Fulani in the north, and the Taroh, Gamai, Mernyang, Demak, Kwalla, Yom, Ter, Montol, Hausa of Wase, and Hausa of Yelwa in the south. Owing to limited resources, not all can afford small arms and must rely instead on traditional weapons such as machetes and bows. The larger groups, on the other hand, such as the Hausa, Fulani, Taroh, and...
Gamai, enjoy access to different categories of military-type assault weapons. Several groups may also defend the interests of the same ethnic group. In Plateau North, the Berom militia was not centralized, but clustered so as to provide security to the various settlements in Jos, Du, Gyel, Vom, Barkin Ladi, Riyom, and Bachit, among others.\textsuperscript{17}

While field research confirms that armed resistance was usually organized along ethnic lines,\textsuperscript{18} since 2001 growing mutual suspicion has led to serious religious cleavages and violence. Religiously motivated operations, such as protecting or destroying places of worship, became common. Ethnic non-Muslim indigenous youth leaders interviewed felt that, after the 2002 and 2004 massacres of Christians, the Muslim enclave of Yelwa had become a threat to the stability and peace of the entire southern region.\textsuperscript{19} They perceived Islamic influence as expanding ever further with every renewed bout of fighting.

Violence also allegedly involved incursions by armed groups coming from outside and targeting local communities. Local ethnic communities in Plateau state—such as the Taroh, Gamai, and Berom—have accused the Fulani of hiring mercenaries from Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and other neighbouring countries to fight with them. Despite charges levied by Berom, Gamai, and Taroh leaders, no hard evidence backs up such claims.\textsuperscript{20}

Some residents and personnel working in community-based organizations operating in the southern zone believe that security forces sent to maintain law and order are often bribed to allow attackers from outside to come in and wreak havoc on local communities.\textsuperscript{21} Non-Muslims also contend that Islamic communities outside the state support their brethren in the Plateau by providing resources and arms. On the other hand, Muslims blame the church and certain Christian leaders for perpetrating and promoting armed violence against them. Complaints and counter-complaints, while common, can be attributed to the justifiable reactions to violence engendered by at least one, or indeed both, groups.

Needless to say, civilians suffered greatly. A study based on hospital data revealed that 16 per cent of the victims of fighting in and around Jos during 2001–02 were aged between 3 and 19, and more than a fourth were women (Uba et al., 2003). During the state of emergency, the government of Plateau
state set up a 23-member committee headed by Mr Thomas Kangna’an to conduct a census of IDPs both within and outside the state. The committee collaborated with the National Refugees Commission and developed questionnaires. It also trained personnel in survey administration, and submitted these to displaced persons. Not all could be reached, which left some gaps in coverage (Plateau State Government, 2004a, pp. 77–78). It was this committee that eventually estimated the total numbers of lives lost between September 2001 and May 2004 as approximately 53,000 (IRIN, 2004a). Officials from the suspended civilian democratic regime have contests this figure, however, because they contend that data comes from unverified claims filed by affected local groups.

Indeed, most of the petitions submitted by affected communities appear to have been exaggerated. For instance, the Muslim community in Yelwa Shendam, whose attack precipitated the state of emergency (Christians fled after the 2004 church killings), provided the following assessment—probably exaggerated—of the impact of the Christian militia’s retaliatory attack.22

- Six hundred and thirty people died from gunshot and machete cuts, of which 50 were married and single women, or girls; 250 were youth, and 100 elderly men and women, including the 66-year-old traditional leader of the town.
- One thousand five hundred people received gunshot and machete wounds.
- Property worth 800 million Nigerian Naira (USD 6 million) was destroyed.
- Twelve mosques, including two central mosques, were destroyed.
- Three markets were totally burnt down.
- Three hospitals and a motor park were destroyed.
- Thirty-two cars and lorries and 70 motorcycles were looted; 42 cars and lorries and 5 motorcycles were set ablaze.
- Twelve gas or petrol filling stations were destroyed.
- Five hundred children were taken away from the community by the attackers as spoils of war, and women variously raped by their captors.
- Ten thousand IDPs were in neighbouring states.
- One hundred and twenty women were missing.23
For its part, the indigenous Gamai tribe maintains that Hausa and Fulani Muslims, with the backing of foreign mercenaries, launched 42 armed attacks on their people. The Gamai also produced a long list of hundreds of people killed, injured, displaced, or abducted during the conflict. By 3 May 2004, Muslims had intimidated, killed, and driven the entire non-Muslim population in Yelwa from their homes. Not a single church remained standing. Other ethnic communities, such as the Taroh, Demak, Kwalla, Mernyang, Ter, and Montol, also claim lives were lost and property destroyed.

Human rights abuses involving the use of small arms were also recorded. These included deprivation of the right to worship, abduction of women, summary execution, and rape—often at gunpoint. All of the local ethnic communities interviewed—Hausa, Fulani, Gamai, Taroh, and so on—made similar accusations. Fighting caused the massive internal displacement of local populations. The Fulani population in Langtang North and South local government areas was totally sacked, and only pockets of Muslim settlements remained. Similarly, non-Muslim populations fled the Shendam, Qua’an Pan Wase, and Langtang South local government areas.

Cattle theft and rustling also intensified during the conflict. While the Fulani are the traditional cattle herders and owners, the Taroh and other indigenous tribes are also increasingly turning to livestock. Mutual cattle theft only deepened the animosities engendered by the conflict. While cattle theft provides the resources with which to acquire weapons, it also pushes owners to either take up weapons or to hire armed groups to protect their animals. The Hausa community in Yelwa claimed that about 700,000 cattle were stolen during the crisis. For the Fulani especially, but also for the Taroh, cows and livestock are not merely animals but are central to their self-definition as a separate culture, to their dignity, and life.

Small arms availability and sources
Although craft weapons have long been present in the region, the state was relatively safe during the 1990s, with small arms proliferation becoming a problem only during recent ethnic clashes. The 1 September 2004 focus group meeting and subsequent field research identified the following as the main weapon types available in Plateau state: AK-47 and G3 assault rifles, SLRs, sub-
Pastor Anifowoshe Caleb sits in front of the burnt Christ Apolistic Church in Kazaure, Jigawa state (northern Nigeria) on 21 November 2003. Religious clashes in Nigeria are not limited to Plateau state.
machine guns, light machine guns, pistols and revolvers, craft single- and double-barrel shotguns and dane guns, locally made bombs, as well as traditional weapons such as swords, machetes, and bows and arrows. Traditional instruments believed to be imbued with mystical powers, such as bamboo sticks, were also used. The AK-47 was the most commonly used assault rifle. The origin of these weapons, however, remains undetermined owing to the fact that security agencies and armed groups did not allow the authors to inspect weapons.

Non-Muslim natives possess large numbers of craft small arms such as shotguns and dane guns—as do some Muslims. Owners traditionally use these for hunting, which is a popular local pastime. Non-Muslims claim it was the sheer number of such shotguns that overwhelmed Muslims, who possessed AK-47s that were technologically superior, but relatively few in number. Muslims interviewed, however, dismiss this claim, and insist that indigenous non-Muslims, headed by the Taroh ethnic militia, attacked Muslim settlements with sophisticated military-type assault rifles and killed large numbers of people. In the Plateau, craft small arms are commonly available, are cheap even by local standards, and are locally crafted. They are used primarily for hunting, and only the extreme escalation of conflict caused people to use them to attack other citizens. Ammunition is not locally produced.

Combatants purchased weapons with contributions from community members fearful for their lives. The fact that places of worship and religious leaders were early targets suggests that both Muslim and Christian groups using their own funds were also involved in the acquisition of arms. Trusted ethnic and religious militia leaders and commanders usually held custody of such weapons and kept their location secret.

Interviews with both ethnic militia leaders and focus group participants revealed that a number of the weapons used in Plateau originated from internal and cross-border trafficking. Hired mercenaries and fighters brought in some arms from the neighbouring states of Nasarawa, Bauchi, and Taraba, usually on hire. Non-Muslim armed groups apparently purchased most of their weapons from the south-east, while Muslim groups looked northward to Chad and Niger and eastward to Cameroon for their weapons. Additional sources included other Nigerian conflict zones—such as Kaduna, Nasarawa, and Taraba. Well-connected local arms brokers facilitated trafficking.
The south-eastern part of Nigeria, where the local crafting of weapons is highly developed and widespread, was another source. Awka was the centre of the Biafran secessionist arms industry during the 1967–70 Nigerian civil war. Following the end of hostilities, the local industry went underground, but has become more advanced and more sophisticated. Onitsha, on the bank of the Niger River in Anambra state, is a market town where craft weapons are sold.

Corrupt security agents sometimes also hired out their weapons, though for short periods of time, sometimes only overnight. Ex-service personnel also donated large numbers of weapons. Following the declaration of the May 2004 state of emergency, some petitioners claimed that regular and serving security personnel, including police, were among those fighting alongside parties to the conflict, and provided photographs to prove it.\textsuperscript{35} Evidence suggests that official government assault rifles were used in the Plateau conflict. Because claims have yet to be officially investigated and verified, they can be neither confirmed nor denied.

\textbf{The Plateau state of emergency and disarmament}

As stated earlier, the federal government declared a state of emergency in May 2004—removing state governor Joshua Dariye and replacing him with a former army general, Chris Ali, for a period of six months (Global IDP Project, 2004). During emergency rule (18 May–18 November 2004), the Government of Plateau established special committees to look into matters arising from the conflict—such as internal population displacement, loss of lives and property, and possible reconciliation. The emergency regime was able to bring about a ceasefire, which was still holding as of late 2004.

The emergency administration also embarked on a programme that called on citizens to voluntarily surrender their arms and ammunition in exchange for cash. The government granted an amnesty period of 30 days, and later extended it. At the end, the Plateau state government announced that combatants had surrendered 300 weapons of different categories. The police, who supervised the process and received surrendered weapons, were reluctant to provide further details regarding numbers, type, and the condition of proffered weapons, or even where they had been collected. Officials claimed
that arms collection was a continuing exercise, and that they were in no position to comment. Most weapons were apparently recovered from the southern zone of the state, and it was rumoured that many of them were unserviceable.

In addition to receiving voluntarily surrendered weapons, the state government also ordered a cordon and search operation in Langtang North, Dengi, Wase, Qua’an Pan, and Shendam local government areas. On 28 August 2004, for instance, the Nigerian police, the army, and state security services recovered 75 rounds of live, and 10 rounds of expended, ammunition (Plateau State Government, 2004b, p. 60). Weapons seized to date include locally made pistols, rifles and shotguns, double-barrel shotguns, AK-47 and G3 assault rifles, and sub-machine guns (Plateau State Government, 2004a, pp. 59–60).

Generally speaking, all groups in the zone are uncertain whether the fragile peace is genuine and sustainable. In the course of field research, it became clear that people are still fearful of the possibility of future attacks. This makes the parties involved reluctant to disarm. Furthermore, the government has not enforced a compulsory disarmament aimed at forcing militias to relinquish their weapons. The issue also came up at the Plateau state peace conference held from 18 August to 21 September 2004. While members of the affected communities recognized the need for disarmament and its value to the peace process, some cautioned that it would create an opening for mercenaries from outside Plateau state to launch renewed attacks against local communities. They recommend that the federal government initiate a nationwide arms recovery programme, target neighbouring states, and stop armed attackers from entering Plateau state (Plateau State Government, 2004b, p. 92).

**Conclusion**

The increased incidence of armed conflict in Nigeria, particularly since the mid-1980s, fuelled the proliferation of small arms. Economic decline, which aggravated poverty and increased youth restiveness, undoubtedly facilitated this trend. Following the death of Abacha in 1999, and the rise of democracy, popular frustration with the Obasanjo-led civilian government has likely contributed to an upsurge in armed violence.

The general state of affairs has played a significant role in the rise of disparate armed groups throughout the country—as shown by the two case studies.
explored here. Conflicts over oil, political power, and control over agrarian resources have involved very different actors. Armed groups in Rivers and Plateau states are of differing strengths, representing everything from small ethnic groups to large urban communities. Their allegiances are also varied and complex—and include politicians, traditional and religious leaders, drug lords, and organized crime syndicates. These can also shift—with community-based groups becoming increasingly motivated both politically and financially.

Although the supply of guns is not equal to the heavy demand generated by the current state of political and economic disarray, historical trends suggest that weapons are becoming increasingly accessible. Trafficking between conflict zones, corruption among security officials and politicians, and the rise of craft production are among the major sources of weapons identified here. The armament acquired by various groups over time has enabled them to carry out sporadic attacks and organized resistance. No group, however, has yet shown the capacity to engage in sustained combat with the Nigerian military.

The situation may well further deteriorate should ongoing trends continue. The need to halt the continued rise of armed groups will take on more urgency with the approach of the 2007 presidential elections. Whether the Nigerian government’s efforts to resolve conflicts in Plateau and Rivers states succeed will greatly depend on several factors—chief among them the ability to create socio-economic opportunities for idle youth and to restore security in areas where confidence has long been lost. Neither disarmament nor peace initiatives, while commendable, will hold until the deeper problems affecting Nigerian society are addressed and dealt with.
List of abbreviations

AAPW Academic Associates PeaceWorks
ANPP All Nigeria People’s Party
ATR African traditional religions
CAN Christian Association of Nigeria
ECOMOG ECOWAS Monitoring Group
GPMG General purpose (light) machine gun
IDP Internally displaced person
IYC Ijaw Youth Council
JIBWIS Jama’atu Izalatil Bidia Wa’I Kamatus Sunnah
JNI Jama’atu Nasril Islam
LGA Local government area
MASSOB Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign state of Biafra
MG Machine gun
NDPVF Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force
NDV Niger Delta Vigilante
OPC O’odua People’s Congress
PDP People’s Democratic Party
SLR Self-loading rifle
TAPYA Taroh Progressive Youth Association
Endnotes

1 Our Niger Delta is an influential NGO comprising well-known youth and civil society leaders in the Niger Delta pursuing peace and democratic development in the region.

2 AAPW is a leading Nigerian NGO specializing in conflict management. It has worked in many of the nation’s conflict flashpoints, including the Niger Delta.

3 For complementary information, see ‘Nigeria’ in Part II of this book.

4 There are indications that remnants of the Maitatsine still exist in other parts of Nigeria. For instance, the Nigerian police raided a group at Rafin Pa in Jos North local government area in December 2003 and killed some members of a group which the Plateau state government claimed were members of the Maitatsine sect. No large-scale armed conflict has been carried on in the name of the group since 1993, however.

5 Also called traditional rulers. The Nigerian government used these local chiefs in an attempt to retain pre-colonial political and cultural institutions. They go by different names and designations depending on the section of Nigeria in question. In the Muslim north most are Emirs, in the south-west Obas, in the Ibo areas of the south-east Eze, and so on.

6 See also Nigeria mapping in Part II of this book. Other recent groups include the ‘Shiite’ movement in the north of Nigeria (Best, 1999), rhetorical but unarmed, and the ‘Taliban’ organization, active mainly in the north-eastern states of Borno and Yobe (IRIN, 2004b).

7 ‘Oil bunkering’ means stealing crude oil.

8 The most notable of such groups is the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign state of Biafra (MASSOB) based in the south-east of the country. This movement, although unarmed and committed to non-violent struggle, aims to re-enact the south-eastern secessionist bid of 1967–70 as a way of fighting against the perceived political under-representation of ethnic Igbos.

9 The Ijaw is the dominant ethnic group in the Niger Delta.

10 Onyefie Jon Jon was subsequently elected as the IYC’s new president.

11 A 2003 study based on 610 autopsy records found that 86 per cent of homicide victims in Rivers state between 1986 and 2000 were males, while almost 60 per cent were aged between 20 and 40. The study also found that firearms were the most common weapon used, and communal conflict and armed banditry were the primary motivating factors behind homicide cases (Seleye-Fubara and Etebu, 2003).

12 Based on field observation by the authors.

13 Money is reportedly not enough to purchase automatic weapons in Rivers state. NDPEHRD (2004, p. 5) reports that the market is highly protected and seriously restricted, and involves aides to top state officials.
14 These weapon sources were identified during the 30 August 2004 Port Harcourt focus group discussions. Additional references are provided where available to back up focus group results.
15 Confirmed during authors’ private discussions with militants, September 2004.
16 See, for instance, the 14 July 2004 surrender by an armed group of two Nigerian Army weapons documented in NDPEHRD (2004, p. 3).
17 Interview with a Berom Youth leader, Jos, 1 October 2004.
18 Discussions with retired navy Captain Ishaku Fanto and Honourable Ishaya Nankap at Garkawa and Langtang, respectively, November 2004.
19 Interviews with ethnic youth leaders in Langtang and Garkawa, 15 November 2004.
21 Confidential interviews with local residents and civil society organizations, Southern Plateau state, November 2004.
22 Compilation by the Muslim community under the auspices of the Ulama/Elders Council, Plateau state, June 2004.
23 Attacking militias in the southern zone of Plateau state commonly use the psychological weapon of abducting women into forced marriage, sex slavery, or other forms of humiliation.
24 The four largest attacks occurred on 24 February and 26 June 2002, and 2 and 18 May 2004.
26 Letter from Alhaji Danbaba Abdullahi II on Behalf of the Yelwa Rehabilitation Committee, to the Secretary, Special Plateau state Government Committee ‘C’, 7 June 2004.
27 For instance, a GPMG was used at Rim village, in Riyom local government area, Plateau state.
28 These include petrol and kerosene bombs and other high explosives that were used to attack people and also bring down buildings. The Jos main market was demolished by very high explosives. Details are not available because the government failed to institute an inquest into the destruction of the market. An attempt was made to blow up a bridge using similar explosives.
29 Elderly, rural people of the Berom ethnic group called Gwelle are known bamboo stick users. The stick is a traditional defence instrument that increases the protective power of those who hold it.
30 For instance, interview with Captain Ishaku Fanto (retd.), a resident of Garkawa, southern Plateau state, 15 November 2004, and Ishaya Nankap, a youth leader at Langtang.
31 Discussion with Dauda Damparimi from Wase local government area at Langtang and Jos, December 2004.
32 The focus group discussion of 1 September 2004 confirmed that there were no local producers of ammunition. This was confirmed during field research in informal discussions in the southern zone of the state.

33 Christians interviewed maintain that the Muslim organizations like Jama’atu Izalatil Bidia Wa’I Kamatus Sunnah (JIBWIS) and Jama’atu Nasril Islam (JNI) stock weapons and arms. The Muslims believe Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) has been doing the same.

34 Taraba borders Cameroon, and was affected by rampant armed robbery and conflict during the late 1980s and 1990s. The authorities made little effort to recover these weapons, which included assault rifles.

35 See for instance, a letter from the Taroh Progressive Youth Association (TAPYA), ‘Breach of Fundamental Human Rights and Freedom by the Army in Langtang North and South Local Government Areas, April 2004 to June 2004’, addressed to the Chief of Army Staff, Army Headquarters Abuja, 21 June 2004. Photographs of army kits and uniforms were attached.
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