

**COMMUNITY SECURITY, RULE OF LAW AND CONFLICT PREVENTION IN NIGERIA:
A POSITION PAPER ON RESPONSES TO INSECURITY AND THE REJECTION OF SELF-
HELP ARMING**

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Abstract

Messages circulating on community platforms have called for indigenous communities to arm themselves in response to attacks by armed non-state actors. This paper analyzes the security, legal, and conflict dynamics underlying such calls and provides an evidence-based exposition on the correct and lawful approach to community protection. Drawing on the 1999 Constitution, the Firearms Act, plural policing theory, and twelve monographs by Barrister Adebayo Akinade, the paper argues that self-help arming undermines rule of law, escalates communal violence, and weakens state capacity. It clarifies who may lawfully possess firearms in Nigeria, the procedures and circumstances for licensing, and proposes a conflict-sensitive alternative centered on devolved policing, community early warning, documentation, and inter-agency coordination.

Keywords: Community Security, Rule of Law, Plural Policing, Firearms Licensing, Conflict Prevention, Nigeria

1. Introduction

The persistence of attacks on rural communities by armed groups has generated frustration and calls for self-help, including proposals for communities to arm themselves. While these calls reflect genuine concern for safety, they contradict Nigeria's constitutional order and international best practices on the monopoly of legitimate force. This paper examines the subject matter, explains why the advocacy for self-help arming should be declined, clarifies the lawful categories of persons and organisations permitted to possess arms, and outlines the lawful and effective alternative for community protection.

2. Methodology

The analysis uses doctrinal legal analysis of the 1999 Constitution and the Firearms Act Cap F28 LFN 2004, policy analysis of plural policing models, and conflict-sensitive program design. It draws on Akinade's twelve monographs on security operations, community policing, documentation, agrosecurity, and communal conflict prevention.

3. Analysis of the Call to Self-Help Arming

The message under review argues that communities must arm themselves because state actors have failed and because adversaries possess firearms. Three core claims require examination:

1. **Claim of state abandonment:** While response gaps exist, the constitutional duty to protect life and property remains with the state under Section 14(2)(b) of the 1999 Constitution.
2. **Claim of parity through arms:** Parity achieved through illegal arming creates a cycle of violence, reduces investigative capacity, and increases civilian casualties.
3. **Claim of inevitability of conflict:** Historical and comparative evidence shows that communal violence is preventable through early warning, mediation, and accountable policing.

4. Legal and Policy Reasons to Decline Self-Help Arming

Constitutional and statutory framework: Section 214 vests the Nigeria Police Force with responsibility for internal security. Section 3 of the Firearms Act prohibits the possession of firearms without a license issued by the President. Unlawful arming exposes individuals to criminal liability and undermines prosecutions of genuine offenders.

Risk of escalation: Akinade's Communal Conflict and Violence: Response, Resolution and Prevention demonstrates that reciprocal arming transforms criminal incidents into identity-based conflicts, making resolution more difficult.

Erosion of accountability: Without documentation and chain-of-custody protocols, as detailed in Communication Skills in Security Documentation in Law Enforcement, self-help actions destroy evidence and shield perpetrators on all sides.

5. Categories of Organisations and Persons Lawfully Permitted to Possess Arms in Nigeria

Under the Firearms Act and subsidiary regulations, possession of firearms is restricted. Lawful possession is limited to:

A. State Security Agencies

1. Nigeria Police Force
2. Armed Forces of Nigeria – Army, Navy, Air Force
3. Department of State Services
4. Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps
5. Nigeria Customs Service, Nigeria Immigration Service, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, and other agencies designated by law

These agencies possess firearms for official duties under their establishing statutes and operational protocols.

B. Licensed Private Security Organisations

Private guard companies licensed by the Nigeria Police Force may possess firearms for the protection of designated clients, premises, and assets. Licensing is subject to vetting, training standards, and storage requirements under the Private Guard Companies Act and Police regulations.

C. Individuals with Presidential License

Section 4 of the Firearms Act vests the President with power to grant licenses to individuals. Licenses are issued sparingly and typically to:

1. Persons requiring firearms for self-defence where credible threat is established
2. Sport shooters and hunters registered with approved clubs
3. Collectors and dealers under strict conditions

Applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis and are subject to background checks, mental health evaluation, and justification of need.

D. Traditional Institutions in Limited Circumstances

Certain traditional rulers and chiefs may be authorized to possess ceremonial firearms under historical licenses. These are not operational weapons for public security and do not extend to community youths.

6. Methods and Circumstances for Acquiring a Firearm License

The process for obtaining a civilian firearm license in Nigeria is administered by the Nigeria Police Force under the authority of the President:

Step 1: Application

Submit an application to the Commissioner of Police of the state of residence, stating the purpose, type of firearm, and justification. Supporting documents include means of identification, proof of address, and evidence of the threat or sporting activity.

Step 2: Vetting and Investigation

The Police conduct background checks, criminal record verification, and character assessment. References from community leaders and employers may be required.

Step 3: Medical and Mental Health Evaluation

Applicants undergo medical examination to confirm fitness to possess and handle firearms.

Step 4: Training and Competency Test

Applicants must demonstrate knowledge of firearm safety and handling at an approved range.

Step 5: Approval and Issuance

If approved, the application is forwarded to the Office of the President for final approval. Upon approval, the license is issued with conditions on storage, use, and renewal.

Circumstances for Refusal: Licenses are typically refused where the applicant lacks a demonstrable threat, has a criminal record, shows signs of mental instability, or seeks a firearm for purposes inconsistent with public safety.

Renewal and Revocation: Licenses are renewable annually and may be revoked if the holder violates conditions or becomes a security risk.

7. The Correct and Right Approach: Plural Policing with Standards

The effective alternative is plural policing within a constitutional framework. This involves:

1. Devolved policing with national standards: State police units operating under certification, training, and oversight protocols prevent abuse and ensure interoperability.
2. Community Security Integration Boards: These boards link traditional rulers, youth leaders, and security agencies for early warning and coordinated response, as outlined in *Community Policing: Strategic Approaches in Crime Prevention*.
3. Documentation and communication protocols: Akinade's *Communications in Security and Law Enforcement Operations* shows that timely, factual public information reduces rumors and prevents escalation.

8. Agrosecurity and Rural Protection

Attacks on farmers undermine food security. Akinade's *Agrosecurity, Bioterrorism and Environmental Protection* recommends dedicated rural patrol units, farm community liaison officers, and environmental threat assessment. These measures protect livelihoods without resorting to illegal arming.

9. Strategic Security Management and Capacity Building

Managing Strategic Security and Crime Prevention Models and *Managing Strategic Security in Statecraft, Public Affairs and Foreign Relations* argue that reform fails when operational capacity lags legal authority. Capacity building must precede devolution of functions. Training, equipment, and oversight are prerequisites for effective rural policing.

10. Role of Communication and Peace Education

Misinformation accelerates violence. Security Culture, Diplomacy and Communication Skills in International Relations and Communications in Security and Law Enforcement Operations recommend single incident command, regular briefings, and engagement of traditional rulers to manage public information. Peace education in NYSC and secondary schools builds resilience against mobilization for violence.

11. Accountability and Oversight

Civilian oversight boards, mandatory incident reporting, and independent review of sexual violence and homicide cases ensure that security actors remain accountable. Akinade's Communication Skills in Security Documentation in Law Enforcement provides the standards for admissible evidence and transparent processes.

12. Recommendations

1. Reject self-help arming and pursue legal redress through formal security channels.
2. Accelerate phased establishment of state police with mandatory certification and oversight.
3. Institutionalize Community Security Integration Boards in all LGAs with forest reserves and agricultural activity.
4. Train investigating officers on documentation and communication protocols to improve conviction rates.
5. Establish a Victim Support Fund for survivors of violent crime.
6. Conduct quarterly security audits of rural LGAs and publish findings for public accountability.
7. Publicize lawful channels for firearm licensing to reduce misinformation and prevent illegal acquisition.

13. Conclusion

The frustration behind calls for self-help arming is understandable, but the response undermines the rule of law and increases long-term insecurity. Nigerian law restricts firearm possession to specific categories of state actors, licensed private security firms, and individuals who meet strict criteria and obtain presidential approval. A lawful, conflict-sensitive approach that combines devolved policing, community early warning, strict documentation, and strategic communication provides a sustainable path to community safety. The frameworks in Akinade's published works provide the theoretical and practical tools to implement this approach.

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Appendices

- Appendix A: Model Community Security Integration Board Terms of Reference
- Appendix B: Early Warning Indicators Checklist for Rural Communities
- Appendix C: Sample Incident Report and Chain of Custody Form
- Appendix D: Draft Petition Template for Increased Security Deployment

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