



When Statistics Speaks So Little

Policy Recommendations

1. Government should urgently tackle the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW), which is on constant rise in the country.
2. Community policing and local intelligence gathering should be one of the cardinal pillars of a reformed and re-organised security architecture in the country.
3. Reporting of violent killings should not only be statistically driven but should contain measures of tackling the enablers of violent killings and deaths.
4. Support should be given to charities, NGOs, youth associations and think tanks working on ways and means of reducing violent killings in the country.

Nextier SPD Policy Weekly provides an analysis of topical conflict, security, and development issues and proposes recommendations to address them. It is a publication of Nextier SPD.

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2018 was a violent year in Nigeria. There were hundreds of deaths resulting from various conflicts including farmer-herder clashes, Boko Haram terrorism, ethnic crisis in Plateau state, religious crisis in Kaduna state, killings of Shiite protesters in Abuja, rural banditry in North West Nigeria, violent armed robbery across the country, kidnappings, state violence, and even from natural disasters. On November 17, 2018, President Muhammadu Buhari shared his exasperation when he declared, “I’m depressed by killings in Nigeria”. As if to underline the fact that no one is safe in Nigeria, on December 18, 2018, [Air Chief Marshal Alex Badeh \(Nigeria’s former Chief of Defence Staff\)](#), was shot and killed in Abuja as he returned to his home. Even his retinue of armed soldiers could not protect him from the rising spate of violence in the country.

Nigeria’s security architecture appears to be overwhelmed by a barrage of conflicts in almost all parts of the country. There seems to be no end in sight for the security threats. This edition of Nextier SPD Weekly examines the challenges with the statistical representations of violent killings in Nigeria and what it fails to cover. This essay presents recommendations on how to use such data to prevent future occurrence.

The major question that comes to mind is why there has been a sustained rise in violent deaths and killings in Nigeria over the last few years? Whenever such deaths occur, there is the usual rush to announce false or incorrect number of deaths or casualties. There is, however, a failure to explain the linkages between such killings and already known situations, emerging circumstances, or failing safeguards.

Most often, the announced casualty figures become the subject of discussion with minimal interrogation of the immediate and remote causes of the situation. For instance, according to Amnesty

International, [between January 2016 and October 2018, 3,641 violent killings linked to farmer-herder clashes occurred](#) with 57 percent of such death taking place in 2018 alone. The report highlighted how government’s failure to arrest and prosecute offenders further fuelled the violent killings. However, causes such as the rise in the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW), are often not interrogated or used to explain the rise in the violent death. By the way, in the last three years, [Nigeria has attained global infamy](#) as a major transit and destination point for both trade and usage of SALW.

There are not enough rigorous debates on how to address the root causes of the conflicts. For instance, there are little national discussions on the optimal models to [manage Nigeria’s porous borders](#), curb flow of illegal arms, or control armed immigrants into the country. Rather, government-announced conflict statistics are often used for political ends, either for the state to empathise with the victims or to insinuate that the state is in control of the situation.

Even the president’s proclamations do not carry the heft that is to be expected. On October 21, 2018, President Muhammadu Buhari [tweeted](#) that “The violence in Kaduna, which has resulted in the deaths of 55 innocent people, is condemnable. The Police have been authorized to do everything possible to restore calm. A Special Intervention Force has been deployed to the flash-points, and the IG will provide regular updates”. Many Nigerians have not held their breathe in anticipation of any meaningful progress; mainly because similar pronouncements in the past did not lead to any significant improvement in the security situation.

Statistics on violent killing have become a tool for political denial or promotion of political interests. Whenever such violent



killings occur, figures of death recorded are never accurate and mitigating measures are never holistic or acceptable to all parties concerned. Positions held by Nigerians, political parties, pressure groups and other interest groups concerning such violence are often politicised and with no debate on finding a lasting solution.

There is little discussion of conflict enablers such as proliferation of SALWs, poor intelligence gathering, lack of community policing, inadequate use of an early warning system, and the application of proper investigation and prosecution of indicted offenders. For instance, in the United Kingdom, [the number of recorded deaths out of knife-related violence in England and Wales](#) has given room for questions into issues of policing, public services, gangs, drugs and youth culture. The question of how to deal with such enablers are constantly discussed, with charities, youth clubs and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) involved in seeking lasting solutions. [The pros and cons of gun control as a means of reducing violent killings in The United States](#), has continued to be a subject of political parties' debates and pressure groups activities in that country.

Nigeria has not been able to get beyond the headline discussions into a robust debate in the conflict enablers and, as such, has failed in its efforts to deal with the rise of violent deaths in the country. This essay recommends the following measures to address the challenges:

1. Proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) is constantly on the rise, with a growing demand and supply for arms in Nigeria. For example, [Nigeria ranks 5th in the black market sale of AK-47 in the world](#). This challenge can be addressed through the establishment of a robust database for

SALWs. This process will be supported with a robust intelligence gathering platform specifically targeted at SALWs but can be used for other conflict issues in the country.

2. Community policing and local intelligence gathering should be one of the cardinal pillars of a reformed and re-organised security architecture in the country. The current policing system is centrally controlled and programmed. It has a reporting system which flows from Abuja and gives little room for community policing and use of local knowledge. However, a new policing framework which is anchored on community policing and use of local intelligence will help in detecting potential violent conflicts within local communities.

3. Reporting of violent killings should not only be statistically driven but should contain measures of tackling the enablers of violent killings and deaths. For instance, when mainstream media report violent killings, there is need to buttress such reports with what look like potential cause and enablers of such violent killings, in order to drive a national conversation on how best to solve the problem and stop further occurrence.

4. Support should be given to charities, NGOs, youth associations and think tanks working on ways and means of reducing violent killings in the country. Such support should include assistance with peace education projects which could help in reducing violent conflicts like inter-religious/ethnic crisis.

Finally, there is no one silver bullet that will solve the problem of violent killings in the country. The solutions lie in tackling the various violence enablers. Effort should also be directed at making it more difficult to perpetuate violence.