

## Arms Proliferation and Militancy in Rivers State, Nigeria: A Comparative Study of Amaechi and Wike's Administrations

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### Abstract

This research examined the nature of arms proliferation and militancy in the administrations of Governors Chibiuke Rotimi Amaechi and Ezenwo Nyesom Wike in Rivers State, Nigeria. The objectives were to determine the nature of arms proliferation and militancy in Rivers State in the two administrations. This research became necessary owing to the increasing rate of insecurity in Rivers State. The inability of security agencies to mitigate the security challenges confronting the State and the politicisation of the security of the State makes this research inevitable. Two key areas of concerns were discernable. First, the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in the State has led to militancy of destructive proportion. Second, arms proliferation and militancy have undermined socio-economic and political development of the people of the State. The security challenges arising, therefore, have created an inhabitable state triggered by fear, intimidation, armed robbery, assassinations, cultism, kidnapping for ransom, arms smuggling, political thuggery, electoral violence, intimidation and destruction of lives and property across the 23 local government areas of the State. The Frustration-Aggression theory and the Realist Theory were used to establish a correlation between arms proliferation and militancy, on one hand, and deprivation, marginalisation, environmental degradation and lack of physical and human capital development for sustainable livelihood of the people of Rivers State which triggered arms proliferation and militancy in the state, on the other hand. This study used descriptive research design to examine the nature and justification, through psychological approach of comparison, of arms proliferation and militancy in both Amaechi and Wike's administrations. A trend analysis, through historical investigation, was also used to determine the nature of arms proliferation and militancy prior to Amaechi's administration in 2007. Secondary data were mostly used. Through content analysis and review of relevant literature, this research observed that the upsurge of arms proliferation and militancy in Rivers State started as part of the agitation for resource control and self-determination of the Niger Delta people. Redistribution of arms to political thugs and cultists after the 2009 Federal Government's Amnesty which has made elections in Rivers State nasty, bloody and brutal, and lives useless and short, instigated the new waves of arms proliferation and militancy in Rivers State under Amaechi and Wike's administrations. This research concluded that unless there are conscious efforts by the State Actors to comprehensively mop-up of arms and ammunition in Rivers State and bring perpetrators of these heinous crimes to book, the search for peace, stability, and security of lives and property of Rivers State people and residents alike would be too far to realise.

**Keywords:** *Amaechi, Wike, Arms Proliferation, Militancy, Ammunition, Amnesty*

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) are circulating in an unprecedented and alarming proportion in West-Africa especially in Nigeria. The Director of the United Nations (UN) Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC), Olatokunbo Ige had, in 2016, at the National Consultation on Physical Security and Stockpile Management (PSSM), Abuja, Nigeria, lamented the increasing rate of arm proliferation in West-Africa with much emphasis on Nigeria. He observed that 350 million (70%) of the 500 million Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in circulation across the states in West Africa were domiciled and utilised in Nigeria. (Abasi-Eno and Sulaiman, 2017). This is very worrisome and portends great danger to national security and democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

In Rivers State with a Police Staff Strength (PSS) of 15,500 as at 2015, the capacity and ability to protect lives and property have been hampered by the need to mopped up the increasing rate of arms proliferation in line with the Firearms Act of 2004, which prohibits certain categories of arms and ammunition in the hands of individuals and unlawful possession of lethal weapons (Edozie, 2015). The lamentation of the then Inspector General of Police (IGP), through the then Rivers State Commissioner of Police, Mr. Chris Ezike, on the need to address the increasing rate of arms proliferation in Rivers State was expected judging from available statistics on the existence of illegal arms and ammunition in Rivers State.

From the start of this Fourth Republic in 1999, Rivers State has been a flashpoint of criminality, militancy, arms smuggling, cultism, thuggery, arm robbery, and banditry. When Amnesty was granted in 2009 by the Musa Yar A'dua administration in Nigeria to 20,182 militants, criminals, cultists, etc; 6,997 of them were from Rivers State (Ogbuke, 2012). Similarly, of the 287,445 ammunitions and 2,760 weapons surrendered to the Federal Government through the Amnesty programme, 82,406 ammunition, and 1,009 weapons came from Rivers State (CASS Report, 2011). This shows that militancy, which uses arms in its activities thereby promoting its proliferation, took its roots in Rivers State at the dawn of this Fourth Republic. The Amnesty programme took place during Governor Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi's administration.

Between 2009 and 2015, the Fund for Peace, Partnerships Initiative in the Niger Delta (PIND), of the Niger Delta Partnership Initiative (NDPI), documented over 1,000 deaths related to militancy, kidnapping, cultism, arm robbery and banditry in Rivers State (The Briefing, 2015). These deaths and the high rate of criminality and militancy resulted in another amnesty, this time in Rivers State alone. Governor Ezenwo Nyesom Wike, granted amnesty to 22,430 militants, agitators, criminals, cultists, etc in 2016. In the amnesty ceremonies across the State, 1,000 firearms, 7,661 rounds of ammunition, and 147 explosives were recovered and recorded. However, out of the 22,430 militants/criminals, 2,000 of them surrendered 911 AK 47 rifles, 7,363 rounds of ammunition during the process of arms recovery (Eribake, 2016).

Therefore, in as much as this research disagrees with the position of Ugo Ugbuho, Member, Broad of Trustees, Centre for Counter Fraud Awareness (CCFA), Abuja, that "thuggery, militancy, and mayhem are the soul of Rivers Politics", and that violence and insecurity made elections practically impossible in 2015 and 2019 general elections in Rivers State (Egbuho, 2019), it is pertinent to look at both the Amaechi and Wike's administrations with respect to arms proliferation and militancy in Rivers State.

This research is, therefore, aimed at answering the following questions:

1. On what theoretical prism can arms proliferation and militancy be anchored upon?
2. Are there justifications for arms proliferation and militancy in Rivers State?
3. Prior to Amaechi's administration, what was the nature of militancy and arms proliferation in Rivers State?

4. During Amaechi's administration, what was the nature of militancy and arms proliferation in Rivers State and what is it in Wike's administration?
5. Using the psychological approach of comparative government and politics, what are the analytical results in the cooperative evaluation of the institutional and structural defects of both Governors Amaechi and Wike's administrations in curbing arms proliferation and militancy in Rivers State?

## **1.2 Arms Proliferation and Militancy Conceptualised**

The word "Arm" is gotten from the Latin word 'arma' and later from the Anglo-French word 'armes', meaning 'weapons'. The Merriam Webster Dictionary (2019) defined arm as, "to provide yourself, a group, a country, etc, with weapons especially in order to fight a war or battle. It is also, "to furnish or equip with weapons, to make a bomb, weapon, etc, and ready for use. This includes the process of strengthening or protecting a person, group, community, country, etc against attack, invasion, in crisis or war, etc.

Similarly, proliferation which originated from the Latin words, proles + fer, and French word, prolifere, which means "reproducing freely", is defined by the same dictionary as, "to grow by the rapid production of new parts, cells, buds, or offspring". This simply means an increase in number. It is the increase in number or amount quickly of something. This means arm proliferation is the increase in amount or number of weapons quickly and steadily through production, patronage, and utilisation.

In Nigeria, Okeke and Oji (2014) have identified the following: 1. Bad political leadership 2. Poor governance 3. The militarisation of the society 4. State violence, leading to poverty, mass unemployment and economic crisis of development etc. They also listed the causes of arms proliferation in Nigeria to include:

1. Trafficking in small arms, 2. Local arms production, 3. Arms theft etc other factors that contribute to proliferation as identified were: 1. Poverty 2. Economic disparity 3. Police presence 4. Ethno-religions diversity 5. Quest for easy profit 6. Self-defense 7. The rise in crime 8. Cultural practices 9. Greed 10. Porous borders 11. Inadequate border protection etc. We should also add that the quest for personnel security, over militarisation of the electoral process, arms smuggling, sea piracy, and militancy contribute to arms proliferation in Nigeria.

People have also justified the need to own and use firearms in Nigeria. There is insecurity of lives and property as the security agencies are overwhelmed by the combined strength of Boko Haram in the North, militants in the South and general insecurity across the country arising from increasing rate of criminality, banditry, arm robbery, kidnapping, ritualists, sea piracy, theft, political thuggery, cultism, etc. This underscored why Late Kofi Anan, the former Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN) in his 2000 Millennium Report to the United Nations General Assembly asserted that "the death toll from small arms dwarf that of all weapons systems and in most cases (years), greatly exceeds the toll of the atomic bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In terms of carnage they cause, small arms indeed could well be described as weapons of mass destruction".

Between 1999 and 2006, Okeke and Oji (2014) documented seizure of 32 arms and 237,000 rounds of ammunition and cartridges by the Nigerian customs. Within this period, the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), also seized over 8,741 arms and 350,000 ammunitions (Okeke and Oji; 2014). With about 350,000 officers in 2017, the Nigerian Police is incapacitated in the control of illegal importation, smuggling, and utilisation of firearms in Nigeria. The National Committee on the Proliferation and Illicit Trafficking in Small Arms and Light Weapons (NATCOM), whose responsibility include the following: 1. Regulation of small arm and light

weapons/ammunitions' importation and exportation 2.Registration and control of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria 3. Detection and destruction of illicit small and light weapons in Nigeria 4.Granting of permits for exceptions under the ECOWAS moratorium (Abdullahi, 2015). NATCOM is reported to be underfunded, lacks technical know-how and professional expertise, corrupt and also lacks the political will and power of enforcement.

The United Nations (UN) had in 2008 and 2010 stated that "small arms are dominant tools of criminal violence; they are cheap, light and easy to handle, transport and conceal, and their excessive accumulation and wide availability aggravate tension, which undermines human security" (Nwokueze & Okolie-Osemene, 2017, p. 6). This has been the situation in Rivers State in this Fourth Republic (1999-2019). The past 20 years had witnessed high political and security tension with wanton destruction of lives and property, occasioned by arm robbery, banditry, cultism, police brutality, kidnapping, sea-piracy and other criminal activities like political thuggery and militancy.

Militancy, gotten from the Latin word "militare", means "to serve as a soldier". This means being active, combative, aggressive especially in support of a cause. The American Heritage Dictionary (2019) defined militant as, "having a combative character, aggressive, especially in the service of a cause". The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2019) defined militant as; "having or showing a desire or willingness to use strong, extreme, and sometimes forceful methods to achieve something". This could be in the engagement in warfare (fighting), aggressively active (as in a cause), or combative. The quality or state of being a militant is militancy. However, sometimes, the media (cable, prints, electronic, social, cyberspace, etc) often apply and misapply the concept of militancy to terrorism.

To address this misapplication, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly Resolution (UNGAR) 42/159 on Terrorism of December 7, 1987), insisted that those resisting foreign military occupation may not merit the label of terrorists because their acts of political violence against military targets of a foreign occupier do not violate international law. Protocol 1 of the Geneva Convention also gives lawful combatant status to those engaging in armed conflicts against the alien (or foreign) occupation, colonial domination, and racist regimes. Nevertheless, in as much as protocol 1 does not legitimize attacks on civilians by militants who fall within this category, non-uniformed guerillas also gained combatant status if they carry arms openly during military operations.

Ajibola, Ebikefe, and Awodiran (2014) defined militancy as; "the acts of individuals, groups or parties displaying or engaging in violence, usually for a cause, whether religious, political, ideological, economic or social" (p. 119). In the context of Rivers State, the cause was political between 2009 and 2019. It was ideological (in alignment with the Niger Delta agitation) between 1999 and 2009. Between 1999 and 2009, when President Yar' Adua led Federal Government granted amnesty to the militant youths of the Niger Delta, there was militant protestation of the rights to enjoy the benefits of the resources in their area.

Occasioned by long years of marginalisation deprivation, subjugation, suppression, victimization etc, resulting in poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, health challenges, environmental degradation and lack of any meaningful and visible developmental or transformative human capital or infrastructural projects in the region that could guarantee sustainable development, the Niger Delta youths became militant-aggressive, violent and combative against the Federal government, the security agencies, the Multinational Corporations (MNCs) and their agents and collaborators benefiting from the resources domiciled in the region. However, political thuggery, intimidation of political opponents, the

quest for electoral victory against the wishes of the electorate, greed for personal aggrandisement and quest for self-preservation socially, economically and politically instigated militancy in Rivers State between 2009 and 2019. The justifications for this will be looked at from the theoretical prism.

### **1.3 Theoretical Foundation and Justification**

Arms proliferation is the outcome of criminality in Rivers State. Militancy is an act of criminality because, it is an illegal activity occasioned by violence, aggression, killings, intimidation, kidnapping, molestation, rape, wanton destruction of lives and property, etc. People who engage in militancy justify their militant activities on the bases of marginalization, neglect, injustice, and discrimination. Poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, greed and material acquisition could also entice people to engage in militancy.

In Rivers State, between 1999 and 2009 when the Federal Government of Nigeria, granted the amnesty to Niger Delta militants, 6,997 recorded militants who were granted amnesty engaged in the Niger Delta struggle for economic and political empowerment through agitation for resource control. Over 35,000 Niger Delta youths were engaged in the militant agitation. 20,192 accepted the amnesty at the initial start, while some others embraced it later. The justification for this phase of militancy in Rivers State and across the Niger Delta region, in the camps within and outside the creeks and forests of the vast ecosystem of the region was based on the February 23, 1966 speech of Isaac Adaka Boro, the leader of the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF): At the declaration of the "Niger Delta Peoples Republic" from Nigeria, he said; "Year after year, we were clenched to tyrannical chains and led through dark alley of perpetual political and social deprivation; strangers in our own country! Inevitably, therefore, the day would come for us to fight for our long-denied right to self-determination" (Boro, 1982).

The Niger Delta people were put on two developmental and environment constraints: (1) The disempowerment of the people that strips them of the ownership of their oil and gas resources, thereby denying them opportunities for investments, governance, and sustainable development. (2) Lack of environmental protection which resulted in massive environmental degradation that hindered sustainable development (Ibaba, 2005). There was a measure of justified aggression, that from 1956 to 2008, Nigeria earned over US \$ 600 billion (over ₦60 trillion). This should have gone to US \$ 800 billion as of May 2019. As at 2011, Nigeria had an estimated 37 billion barrels of proven oil reserves and 187 trillion cubic feet of proven natural gas reserves. These have also gone up steadily over the years (Ajakorotu & Gilbert 2010; EIA, 2011).

Also, between 2006 and 2011, the BP statistical review of World Energy Information and Administration (EIA, 2011) reported that approximately 2,400 oil spills had been reported in the Niger Delta with massive losses in biodiversity. The New York Times from the (EIA, 2011) report estimated that 260,000 barrels of oil per year was lost through oil spillages with over 13 million barrels wasted through spillages for the past 50 years (1956-2006) in Nigeria. The destruction within this period was unquantifiable. This created and consolidated anger arising from frustration and the death of thousands of Niger Delta activists notably major Isaac Adaka Boro in 1967 during the Nigeria-Biafran war; 13 prominent Ogoni activists (including Ken Saro-Wiwa) murdered, and over 2,000 Ogoni men and women killed in 1993.

The thousands of deaths recorded in the Niger Delta region as a result of aggression against the people by the Federal government which resulted in the gradual destruction of the people's means of livelihood, loss of fertile land, decline in agricultural produce, contamination of natural sources of drinking water, atmospheric pollution, rapid corrosion of roofing sheets

through acidic rain, gradual extinction and migration of wildlife, general biodiversity destruction and massive rural/urban migration etc. (Ojatorotu & Gilbert; 2010).

The federal government under President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2003) established the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000 to compensate the political elite. He also established a military unit, Operate Restore Hope, through a Joint Task Force (JTF) in 2003 with over 4,000 troops to ensure "consistent, persistent and aggressive suppression of oil-related protests in the Niger Delta" (Ikelegbe, 2006). The Ministry of Niger Delta was established in 2008, and the Amnesty in 2009 by the President Musa Yar'Adua administration.

The aggressive militancy in the Niger Delta which thousands in Rivers State participated in major groups like Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV) led by Chief Ateke Tom (Rivers); Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer forces (NDPVF), led by Alhaji Asari Dokubo (Rivers); Niger Delta Strike Force (NDSF), led by Farah Dagogo (Bayelsa); Outlaws, led by Soboma Goerge (Rivers), Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), led by Victor Ben Ebikabowei (Boyloaf), Government Ekpemupolo (Tompolo) and Henry Okah, an affiliate umbrella body of over 20 militant groups in Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo and Akwa Ibom was curtailed and peace restored.

Before now, the Niger Delta region was a hotbed of sea-piracy, blowing up of oil pipelines, kidnapping, killings, and destruction of properties of Multinational oil Corporations and security posts. There was also loss of revenue, US \$34 billion in 2008 ( Ojatorotu and Gilbert; 2010, p.18). Crude oil production came down to 700, 00 barrels per day from 2.6 million barrels, in 2009 per day and economic crisis was looming in Nigeria. Therefore, militancy in Rivers state from 1999 to 2009 was based on anger (frustration), which resulted in aggressive behaviour that led to destruction of lives and poverty in the region.

The theoretical prism to look at this first phase of militancy in Rivers State is the Frustration Aggression Theory; originally formulated by Dollard, et al., (1939). This theory, which emphasised the limited interference with an expressed and expected attainment of the desired goal on hostile (emotional) aggression, was further developed by the works of Ted Gurr (1967), Ivo Feierabend, Rosalind Feierabend and Betty Nesvold (1971); Leonard Berkowitz (1962) and Aubrey Yates (1962) (Faleti; 2006, p.35). The fundamental thrust of theory by these scholars is that "the occurrence of aggressive behaviour always presupposes the existence of frustration and on the contrary, the existence of frustration leads to some form of aggression" (Ojatorotu & Gilbert; 2010, p. 73). Ted Gurr went further to insist that the potential for collective violence is a function of the extent and intensity of shared discontents among members of society.

In Rivers state, as was applicable to the Niger Delta region, the act of aggression was blamed on the political system, the Multinational Corporations, and other stakeholders. Violence erupted because the degree of shared discontents was very high in the region occasioned by years of neglect. The aggressive behaviour exemplified through militancy in Rivers state was caused by frustration. Years of neglect, discrimination, and militarisation of the region devoid of any developmental objectives triggered the aggression. Accumulated frustration results in physical aggression.

Gur (1967) went further in "relative Deprivation", in furtherance of the theory of aggressive behaviour caused by frustration to establish the connection between the conscious experience of negative discrepancy between expectation and present activities, and all other factors which create economic, political and social deprivation that result to feelings of stress, political

apathy and nonchalant attitude to collective actions (Schaefer, 2008; Bayert, 1999). People of the Niger Delta (particularly Rivers State) were deprived of the benefits of their natural resources. They felt discontented comparing the level of development in their region with abundant resources to those of other regions with less endowment. The unfulfilled rising expectation that is unmet for a long time could create an extreme situation of deprivation which may lead to political violence, terrorism, etc.

Social conflict theorists (Merton, 1938; Rose, 1982; Gur, 1970; Kenda, 2005) agreed that people feel deprived of what they perceive as their fair share when established political and social institutions do not meet set goals. This could result in social movements, (militancy, cultism, rebellion, etc) and other forms of deviant behaviours. This phase of militancy in Rivers State (1999-2009), justified its activities from these theoretical standpoints. The Niger Delta people (especially Rivers State) did not benefit from oil wealth; however, there were unchecked human rights violations, poverty, deprivation, powerlessness, frustration, etc. These crises were caused by the actions of the political elite, security forces, militant groups, and Multinational Corporations. The results were extensive land, sea and air pollutions, corruption, corporate failure and official political neglect of the region.

The second phase of militancy in Rivers could be looked at from a realist perspective. Realist theory (realism) analysed conflict from the perspectives of human greed and selfishness. Greed and selfish political fulfillment and satisfaction in the pursuit of personalized self-interests (power) result in social conflict (Faleti; 2006: p.45). Militancy was revamped in Rivers in late 2010 for political intimidation and electoral victories. 2011, 2015 and 2019 elections saw upsurge of militancy, arm-proliferation, and kidnapping. Young people were armed by political elite in pursuit of scarce and competitive political interests in the state. With the built-up of arms, criminality became brutal and bloody. Deutsch, Morton (1973) and Morgenthau, Han (1973), two prominent realist scholars attributed the quest for political self-preservation using any means necessary, as the precursor to social conflict.

There was massive recruitment of youths for militancy and cultism in Rivers state by politicians. This resulted in arm-proliferation and the attendant consequences of insecurity occasioned by the high rate of criminality in the state. Militancy in this phase (2009-2019) was political, just as the realist theory was said to have originated from the classical political theory. This was in justification of Morgenthau's thesis (1973), that "conflict has its roots in forces that are inherent in human nature; that human nature is selfish, individualistic and naturally conflictive; that states will always pursue their national interests defined as power, and that such interest will come into conflict with those of others, leading to the inevitability of conflict" (p. 4). Rt. Hon. Rotimi Amaechi, Governor of Rivers State (2011-2015) in his second term, and Barr. Nyesom Wike, Minister of State, Education (2011-2015) challenged the political system in Rivers State with these political postulations. Arms proliferation and militancy were the were the instruments to achieve their political aims.

#### **1.4 Arms Proliferation and Militancy in Rivers State, 1999-2007**

The civilian administration of Dr. Peter Odili (1999-2007) witnessed arms proliferation and militancy in Rivers State. However, the central thrust of the arms proliferation and militancy during the period was general unrest in the Niger Delta and the agitation for resource control that led to militancy in the region. Several camps were in operation in the State and most of the strong names heading these camps; Ateke Tom, Soboma George, Asari Dokubo, etc were from Rivers State. There was massive destruction of oil facilities, vandalism, criminality and heightened level of insecurity.

Prior to the dawn of this Fourth Republic (May 29, 1999), militancy in the Niger Delta Region was met with military force. Over 90 people were killed and 500 houses burnt down in Umechem, Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State by anti-riot policemen called by the Federal Government to deal with the people demonstrating peacefully through protests, decades of neglects, deprivation and devastation by Shell, a major oil company in Nigeria in 1990 (Onyeayucha, 1997). Similar killings were also recorded in Ogoni, Rivers State. Over 2,000 people were killed, 8,000 forced into exile and more than 27 villages burnt down. (Onyeayucha, 1997; Epele, 2004; Folarin, 2007). This was in 1993. 13 prominent sons of Ogoniland, including Ken Saro Wiwa were also killed in 1993.

In 1999, Choba Community in Rivers State was invaded when the people protested peacefully against WilBros (a foreign oil servicing firm). Ojakorotu and Gilbert (2010) reported that “10 people were killed, 25 women raped and the surrounding communities deserted. Other killings in Amassoma, Odi, Odiodoma etc that recorded hundreds of deaths, and the deployment of 4,000 troops to the region to deal with protesting and militant youths, resulted in full-scale militancy in the region” (p. 6). Governor Peter Odili of Rivers State and other Governors in the Niger Delta region, had in 2001, September 20 to be precise, in a South-South Governor’s Forum held in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, pleaded with the federal government to address arm proliferation and militancy in the region through the enthronement of true federalism and fiscal autonomy of the federating states as well as proper devolution of power to the states (Ekpo; 2004, p.135). Unfortunately, not much was done. By 2007, militancy and arms proliferation in Rivers State had created an unprecedented level of insecurity through sea piracy, kidnapping, violence against security agencies, arm-robbery, and other criminal activities.

### **1.5 Arms Proliferation and Militancy in Amaechi’s Administration in Rivers State, 2007-2015**

Two phases of arms proliferation and militant activities can be identified in Governor Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi’s administration in Rivers State. The first was from 2007 to 2011 and the second, from 2011 to 2015. The first was his first term, and the second was his second term in office. His first term witnessed coordination with the federal government led by President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua (2007-2010). The Ministry of Niger Delta was created in 2008, and on July 20, 2009, President Ya’Adua according to (CASS Report; 2011) said “To those who genuinely took up arms to draw attention to the sad situation in the region, I say to to you, we have heard you and are ready to work with you to move the Niger Delta forward in the interest of of its suffering people” (p. 12).

Amnesty was granted to 6,997 militants in Rivers State out of the 20,192 militants who received the amnesty across the 9 states of Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). In the same vein, 82, 406 ammunitions and 1,009 weapons were surrendered by the militants from Rivers State out of the 287,445 ammunitions and 2,760 weapons surrendered by militants across the states of the region. There was calm, security and economic recovery in Rivers State, the Niger Delta region and Nigeria (CASS Report; 2011, p.198). The amnesty granted by the Yar’Adua administration with effect from August 6, 2009 to October 4, 2009 helped restore peace and security in Rivers State.

Prior to this kind gesture of the Yar’Adua administration, arms proliferation and militant activities had crippled Nigeria’s patro-based economy which Rivers State was a beneficiary. There was remarkable reduction in investment in both the upstream and downstream petroleum sectors. Foreign investors had also begun directing their investments to Angola which overtook Nigeria as leading crude oil producer in the continent of Africa. There were



also setbacks in meeting the expected 40 billion barrels of oil's projected proven reserves' capacity in 2010 in Nigeria (CASS Report, 2011). Governor Amaechi worked tirelessly to ensure the success of the amnesty programme through the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and sustainable reintegration phases. He went throughout the state, to camps, hideouts, and forests by himself and proxies to ensure that the conditions that the Federal government gave the militants which included:

1. The willingness and readiness of the militants in Rivers State (Niger Delta Region generally), to surrender their arms and ammunition.
2. The willingness and readiness to unconditionally renounce militancy and arms proliferation and allow peace to reign in the state (Niger Delta, region too).
3. The willingness and readiness to sign an undertaking to the effects of the first and second conditions. (NDAP, 2012).

Furthermore, Governor Amaechi helped to ensure that the pledges made by the Federal Government: Commitment to institute programmes to assist the militant's disarmaments, and commitment to demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration were judiciously adhered to. However, these did not last long enough as the youths were again, used as political thugs and personal security agents for electoral victory and political killings/assassinations by some politicians in the state before, during and after the 2011 general elections.

The second term of Governor Amaechi's administration (2011-2015) saw heightened insecurity once again. From 2013, political disagreements between the federal government and Rivers State government created much insecurity, arms buildup, militancy, cultism and general criminality that culminated in several deaths across several local governments in Rivers State. Militants were recruited in the state to destabilize the administration of Governor Amaechi (Ibanga, 2015). Late Soboma George was contacted by politicians opposed to the administration to kill Governor Amaechi. Emmanuel Gladstone, a close ally to Soboma George who rebelled against the deadly militant and killed him, confessed that he was contacted and paid by George to kill governor Amaechi and Mr. Peremobowei Ebebi, the Deputy Governor of Bayelsa State (Emmanuel, 2010). Gladstone told Police when he was arrested after he assassinated Soboma George that politicians paid George to kill the governor and all attempts to do so was unsuccessful. This resulted in a bitter disagreement between his group and Soboma's group that culminated in Soboma George's death.

There was also the Police assault and brutality against the governor and the All Progressives Congress (APC) members in Rivers state. The Commissioner of Police, Joseph Mbu withdrew police orderlies of APC members including the Governor, Speaker, Chief of Staff and key government functionaries. Francisco (2013) reported that Joseph Mbu teamed up with the First Lady Dame Patience Jonathan, the wife of the President Dr. Goodluck Jonathan and the Minister of State for Education, Barrister Nyesom Wike to unleashed mayhem in Rivers State. Five members of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the State House of Assembly were used to illegally impeach the Assembly Speaker, Rt. Hon. Otelemaba Dan Amachree. This was to give way for the governor's impeachment. The speaker alleged that the plots were instigated by the forces in Abuja.

The import of the deep-rooted, politically motivated militancy was the victory of the PDP in the 2015 general election in Rivers State. Prominent militants were also elected to the State House of Assembly in 2015. Mr. Farah Dagogo was elected to represent the Degema constituency, Mr. Adoki Tonye Smart, the second in command to Soboma George was elected to represent Port Harcourt Constituency 11, Chisom Promise Dike, second in command to Ateke Tom was elected to represent Oyigbo State constituency among others. These were the benefits that

militancy and arms proliferation give to the PDP in the elections. The Minister of State for Education, Nyesom Wike was also elected the governor of the state based on the role he played in destabilising the state under governor Amaechi.

The Fund for Peace Report (2015) showed that deaths through militancy, cultism and other criminal activities were recorded in Ikwerre, Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni, Port Harcourt, Okrika, Asari Toru, Degema, Akuku-Toru, Ahoada-East, Eleme, Obio-/Akpor L.G.A.s etc, with Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni L.G.A. recording over 68 deaths in the first half of 2015 alone. Gang violence, cult clashes, bunkering, illegal refining, gun-running/smuggling, increased steadily in the state. This was the situation of things until Governor Amaechi handed over on May 29, 2015.

### **1.6 Arms Proliferation and Militancy in Wike's Administration in Rivers State, 2015-2019**

The quest for political power in the 2015 general elections (Presidential, National Assembly, Governorship and State Assembly) in Rivers State created insecurity in the state. There were mass mobilisations of youths with arms and ammunition by politicians desperate for political power. The entire gamut of Rivers politics was enmeshed in blood, brutality, and criminality. Communities were deserted, political opponents killed and innocent lives lost in crossfire clashes between militants and cults groups armed with weapons and ammunition (Ebenezer, 2017). These created new upsurge of militancy and arms proliferation in Rivers State till date. Even the Amnesty programme instituted by the Rivers State government under Governor Nyesom Wike did little or nothing to curb militancy, criminality and armsproliferation in the State.

In 2016, the Barrister Nyesom Wike led administration in Rivers State instituted an amnesty programme for criminals, bandits, cultists, militants, arms smugglers, etc. The Special Adviser to the Governor on Amnesty programme, Sir Ken Chinda was made the chairman (Azubuike, 2017). The committee was mandated to ensure the restoration of peace, security and orderliness in the state ravaged by insecurity occasioned by crimes and other nefarious activities. 22,430 militants surrendered 911 assorted arms and weapons, 7,661 assorted ammunitions and 147 explosives. Azubuike (2017) averred that 2,000 of the 22,430 militants, who surrendered, presented 911 AK 47 rifles, and 7,363 rounds of armunition.

Two years later, cultists and militants who have embraced criminality in the State, had been pardoned through the amnesty programme were going around killing, kidnapping and molesting villagers and motorists in the state. Between 2015 and 2019, the police with staff strength of 15,500 in 2015 in Rivers State could not cope with the level of criminality and insecurity in the State (Edozie, 2015). In New Year Day, January 1, 2018, militants and cultists who have been granted amnesty killed 23 people on their way home from December 31, 2017 vigil in Omoku, Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State. The mastermind, Don Waney (Igwedibia Johnson), his second-in-command, (Ikechukwu Adiela), and their gang member (Lucky Ode) were later killed by combined security forces (Army, DSS, and Police) (Iheamnchor, 2018). The combined security forces had earlier raided the home of Don Waney where assorted weapons, dynamites, bags of suspected cannabis, full military camouflage uniforms, military boots, military communication radios, 10 human skulls, and human bones, decomposed bodies of some victims in his shrine, etc were recovered. This was the situation in other local government areas where militants indulge in all manners of criminality and killings.

In August, of 2016, a notorious cult leader was killed in Ahoada by the police. "General Igbudu" and five of his gang members who called themselves freedom fighters (militants), armed to the

teeth were killed by the police in Ahoada, Ahoada-East Local Government Area, Rivers State. The gang wreaked untold havoc in Ahoada-East, Ahoada-West, Ogba –Egbema, Ndoni L.G.As. They kidnapped, held hostage, killed, destroyed and constituted task-force to collect money before any event can be organized in these local Governments (Okafor, 2016). Ak 47 rifles, pistols, military wears, and ammunitions were recovered from them. This was also the situation in other L.G.As in Rivers State till recent. The situation has not abated. From 2015 to 2019, Rivers State has witnessed increased arms proliferation and militancy (judging from available statistics and information in the public domain).

### 1.7 **Comparative Analysis of Militancy and Arms Proliferation in Amaechi and Wike's Administration**

The methodology of analysis in comparative government and politics, according to Ishiaki (2005) is the identification uniformities and differences; determination of variables and phenomena as well as distinguishing the unique from the common. Almond and Powell (1966) had established five prisms for comparison. The Structural-Functional, Institutional Functional Historical-Descriptive, Legal-Rational, Psychological-Personality, and Marxian-Class based approaches can be used.

In Rivers State, between the eight (8) years administration of Governor Amaechi (2007-2015) and the first four (4) years of incumbent Governor Wike (2015-2019), these approaches can be applied in the comparative analysis of militancy and arms proliferation in the period (2007-2019) under review. We shall, therefore, look at the nature of structural and institutional challenges and the psychological variables to the problem of militancy and arm- proliferation in these administrations.

**1. Nature of Militancy and Arms Proliferation:** In Governor Amaechi's first term in office (2007-2011), militancy and arms proliferation in the State were geared towards the agitation for resource control and self-determination of the Niger Delta region. Structurally, militants were armed by local and foreign supporters and donors to the cause of the Niger Delta struggle. They lived in camps, have hierarchy and were structured like a military command. Functionally, they attack oil installations, police stations, military posts, and government-owned institutions. They also killed and kidnapped oil workers both foreign and local, security agents, local chiefs and politicians benefiting from the government or from the Multinational Corporations (MNCs). They were granted amnesty in 2009 by the federal government under late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. Thereafter, they announced a ceasefire for those who embraced the amnesty.

In the case of Governor Wike's Administration (2015-2019), they (militants) were recruited and armed by politicians for electoral victories and intimidation of political rivals. The retrieved arms and ammunition during the 2009 amnesty were redistributed back to the militants such that, by 2016, militants and criminals especially cultists had moved from 6,997 in 2009, to 22,430 in Rivers State. These were those who surrendered arms and ammunition and embraced the amnesty programme. However, in terms of arms and ammunition surrendered, only 911 assorted arms, 7,661 assorted ammunition, and 147 explosives were surrendered in Rivers State in 2016 as against the over 1,009 weapons and 82,406 ammunition surrendered by militants in the state in 2009. This could be the reason why there was no reduction in arms proliferation and militancy in the state after 2016 as against the ceasefire and restoration of peace and normally after the amnesty in 2009.

**2. Approaches to tackling militancy and arms proliferation in Rivers State:** The techniques to tackle the challenges of militancy and arms proliferation differ between the two

governors. Between 2007 and 2011, Governor Amaechi embraced the federal government's strategy and cooperated in addressing the scourge of militancy and arm- proliferation. He canvassed support and had a zero-tolerance for post amnesty militancy in the state. This paid off as calm was restored from 2009 to 2012 in the State (Ebenezer, 2017). The crisis that engulfed the State in 2013 where, an impeachment plot was hatched against the Governor by the five Assembly members supported by the federal government through the then Minister of State, Education, Barrister Nyesom Wike, changed the narratives.

Prior to 2015, two camps of political gladiators existed in Rivers State; one led by incumbent Governor Wike, then Minister of State (Education) and the other by the then Governor Amaechi, now Minister of Transportation. The Governor was suspended from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and then-Speaker of the Rivers State House of Assembly Rt. Hon Otelemenba Dan Amacree was allegedly impeached by five loyal Assembly members to Bar. Wike, then a Federal Minister. This was in preparation for the impeachment of the Governor (Ebenezer; 2017). Political thugs were recruited to cause unrests and mayhem in the State, backed by security agencies especially the police. These political thugs were armed by politicians for electoral victories in 2015. The result increased in militancy and arm-proliferation in 2015 immediately after the elections. The distributed arms in 2011 and 2015 that were not retrieved caused the upsurge of militancy and arms proliferation during Wike's administration.

### 1.8 Research Findings

From the statistics of militancy and arms proliferation in Amaechi and Wike's administrations in Rivers State, the following can be highlighted based on the information available in the public domain.

1. Militancy and arms proliferation during Amaechi's first term (2007-2011) were largely geared towards the Niger Delta struggle for resource control and self-determination. Militancy and arm- proliferation in his second term (2011-2015), and the first term of Governor Wike (2015-2019) were purely for political supremacy, criminality and social destabilisation of the politics and economy of the state.
2. The agitation for resource control in the Niger Delta created a structured militancy in Rivers state. These militants were well armed for the purposes of destabilising the economy of Nigeria. After the 2009 amnesty, the unrepentant militants joined forces with the politicians to sustain militancy and arms proliferation for political gains. This created a new criminal dimension as cultists were also empowered in the process to use guns freely without molestation.
3. The political supremacy battle between Governor Amaechi and Minister Wike in 2013 triggered the resurgence of militancy and arms proliferation in Rivers State from 2013 to date. Armed youths recruited for electoral victories by politicians resorted to criminality, banditry, and cultism (consolidation) after the elections. This was the case since 2013. The elections in the state from 2013 to 2019 were brutal and bloody because of political supremacy battle. The interests (security and safety) of the citizens of the state were not taken into consideration. The upsurge in militancy and arms proliferation is unlikely going to abate because of greed and political interests of politicians.
4. There is lack of political will to tackle militancy and arms proliferation in Rivers State. This was/is largely due to political affiliations. From 2012 to date, the political representatives of the state at the federal level, and the incumbent governor have been at loggerhead. Two personalities, former Governor Amaechi and incumbent Governor Wike have been the major actors. Except this personality conflict is resolved, the state will know no peace.

## 1.9 Conclusion and Recommendations

From 1999 to 2019, Rivers State has witnessed an upsurge in arms proliferation, and militancy. These phenomena started as part of the agitation for resource control and self-determination of the Niger Delta people. After the 2009 amnesty programme of the federal government where arms and ammunition were surrendered, relative peace was restored in the state. However, two years later, politicians redistributed arms and ammunitions back to militant youths. This made 2011, 2015 and 2019 general elections in Rivers State brutal and bloody.

Both Amaechi and Wike's administrations in Rivers State have witnessed militancy and arms proliferation. The former first as part of the general Niger Delta agitation, and later for political purposes; the later, purely for political and criminal purposes. The personality tussle between the two and the recruitment of political thugs to champion their selfish agendas have compounded the situation. There is an urgent need for neutral intervention and strategic changes by the security agencies to address the situation and mitigate its impacts in the lives of the citizens of Rivers State.

To address these challenges, the following recommendations are made:

1. There is the urgent need for a comprehensive mop-up of arms and ammunitions in Rivers State. A neutral committee (Task Force) for the surrendering of arms and ammunition made up of the Army, Police, DSS, Lawyers, Criminologists, Community Leaders, etc, constituted in a non-partisan manner, should be given a six months mandate to recover all illegal arms and ammunitions, and denounce militancy in the state. This six months window should be another amnesty. Thereafter, there should be a community-by-community search, arrest, and persecution of any person(s) found to be in possession of illegal arms and ammunitions for another six months. This will help to mop-up the high rate of arms and ammunition in circulation, (mostly in the hands of criminals, militants, bandits, cultists, arm-robbers, thugs, etc)
2. A committee made up of elder statesmen from Rivers State, Traditional Rulers, security agencies, federal government representatives and representatives of the state government, etc, should be set up to reconcile former Governor Amaechi and incumbent Governor Wike and their supporters. All other politicians in the state should also be reconciled and ensure the restoration of peace, normalcy, and security in the state. This committee should be a non-partisan reconciliatory committee for social harmony and peaceful co-existence of Rivers men and women devoid of political, religious and ethnic affinities.
3. Community policing should be introduced in Nigeria Rivers State. The state will benefit from this constitutional provision. Communities should be mandated to ensure peace, stability, and security in their domain. Traditional rules who are unable to ensure peace, normalcy and security for sustainable development in their domains should be arrested and charged to court for complacency. The arrest of criminals should be community driven and Know-Your-Neighbour policy consolidated in the villages in the state.

These recommendations, it is hoped, would restore peace, security, and safety of lives and property in Rivers State now and in the future when adhered to.

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