

Summary

In Ghana, there is a rising concern about the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW). Since 2021, an increasing influx of firearms from neighboring Burkina Faso has contributed to greater levels of violence in Bawku, northern Ghana. Besides, arms trafficking stands out as one of the major contributors to crime, which threatens the country's security and crime levels. Moreover, on December 7, Ghana will hold elections. Given the surge of SALW in Ghana, the security in the pre-election period and the safety of the elections can be potentially compromised.

Recent events and developments

There is a growing concern about the further spread of SALWs in Ghana. According to the Ghana National Commission for Small Arms and Light Weapons, out of 2.3 million weapons in the country, 1.1 are illegally present in the country. The causes for the influx of such weapons range from illegal arms trafficking, regional conflicts in the Sahel, and porous borders, such as the one with Burkina Faso, where the increased influx is said to be more prominent. The accelerating influx of SALWs from Burkina Faso, a hotspot for terrorism activity, has contributed to greater levels of ethnic-driven violence in Bawku, northern Ghana, resulting in numerous civilian deaths. Additionally, ACLED registered 264 events involving violence in Ghana from December 2023 to January 2024, which rose by 14.2% compared to the yearly average. Yet, attacks against civilians have become less frequent in 2023 compared to 2022. Further, tensions caused by high unemployment and a lack of safeguarding of civilians by law enforcement have heightened vigilantism by young sectors. Last, Ghana's presidential and legislative elections will take place on December 7, where the two main political parties, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) will be running for the presidency, along with other political parties.

Impact assessment

The proliferation of SALWs in Ghana compromises the security across the country. As the deterioration of security continues across the Sahel, such an influx of weapons is likely to continue, particularly from Burkina Faso. Although the terrorist threat from jihadist groups in Ghana is lower in comparison to bordering Sahelian countries like Burkina Faso, the availability of weapons in Ghana is likely to deteriorate the security situation in Bawku and to have major implications for crime. The dire economic situation and high youth unemployment in Ghana may drive more young people to resort to crime for survival. With the increased availability of weapons, particularly SALWs, there's a heightened risk of a surge in violent crimes like armed robbery and assaults across the country. Heightened insecurity among Ghanaians, coupled with a lack of trust in law enforcement, may prompt ordinary citizens to arm themselves in an attempt to bolster their sense of security. Party affiliates, including youngsters, often arm themselves and are known to have conducted vandalism acts against their opponents. Therefore, prior to the December elections, the larger presence of weapons across Ghana can potentially exacerbate existing electoral tensions between the main political parties (NPP and NDC) and result in politically motivated violent incidents and clashes. Staff residing in Ghana and international travelers have the potential to become collateral targets.

Advice from Forth Global

- Monitor local news to stay informed about any developments regarding the political situation and planned rallies.
- Advise staff to avoid all kinds of demonstrations and large public gatherings in the cities.
- Make sure contingency and security plans are updated to the current security circumstances and adequately distributed to employees on the ground.

Customized advice

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