

Summary

Firearms sales in Lebanon have skyrocketed since the economic and financial crisis in 2019. Widespread ownership of firearms serves to exacerbate the danger posed by clashes between individuals, clans, religious sects, and/or armed groups.

Civil unrest and riots too may become deadly as more civilians, and especially youth, carry guns. The country's dire economic situation serves as a catalyst for petty crime, robbery, and carjacking. Such occurrences have and are likely to continue to involve the use of firearms, which further increases the risk of injury and death, especially when victims resist.

Recent events and developments

Illegal sale and ownership of firearms in Lebanon has grown dramatically since 2019. Weapons are smuggled into Lebanon through Syria, illustrated by a May 21 incident involving a truck coming from Syria which caught fire on the Tripoli-Beirut highway. Onboard was over 300 Turkish-made pistols bound for Beirut. Weapons dealers are generally more common in poor neighbourhoods such as Beirut's Sabra and Dahieh. Youth are reportedly the most common customers, buying firearms to feel safe or resolve disputes. Such disputes often turn violent. On March 23, a clan dispute turned into an armed clash in Khaldah, Mount Lebanon district, South of Beirut's airport, no fatalities were reported. On March 19, 2 people were killed and 3 injured in an armed clash between two clan militias in Qabb Elias, Bekaa district, just South of Road 30 which links Beirut with Damascus. Instances of brawls and mob violence occur with relative frequency in Beirut. On May 6, rioters blocked Road 51, which connects Beirut with Saida/Sidon, protesting a trial, clashing with police. On April 24, a brawl between a group of Syrian and Lebanese nationals in the Al Matn area of Mount Lebanon district left several injured. On April 16, a protest in front of a bank, also in Al Matn, led to clashes between protestors and security forces, resulting in several injuries. Firearms also heighten the impact of crime. On April 9, the body of a civilian was found in Beit Mery, East Beirut. He had been kidnapped, robbed, shot, and killed. On March 6, a Palestinian man in Saida was shot and killed in an attempted robbery while transporting people to the airport.

Impact assessment

The widespread proliferation of gun ownership, especially in the hands of youth, could be a source of increased gun deaths and armed clashes in Lebanon, where disputes and fights between clans, armed groups and/or individuals with differing political loyalties often turn violent, as seen on March 23 and 19. Such cases are most likely to take place in poor, crowded neighbourhoods inhabited by individuals of different clan allegiances, religious sects, and nationalities, such as in the Sabra area of Beirut. Beyond this, there is a further potential for protests and riots turning into armed clashes between rioters and security forces, as tensions remain high due to the unstable economic and political situation. This dire economic situation increases the prevalence of petty crime and robberies. Such instances, as seen on April 9 and March 6, can turn deadly more easily due to the presence of firearms. Valuable vehicles could be targeted for carjackings, especially during night. Criminals are likely to use firearms in such cases as a means of stealing vehicles swiftly. In cases of petty crime, robbery, and/or carjackings, resistance could be cause for the use of firearms. Further, authorities have warned that in cases of celebrations, where individuals sometimes fire their firearms into the air, could be a source injuries and deaths, as stray bullets pose a threat to bystanders. Such conditions have led Lebanese security forces to deploy in large numbers across Beirut to address rising crime and law violations, and this is likely to continue. Authorities are likely to further increase security in case of developing unrest, riots, and clashes. Roadblocks and checkpoints can cause traffic disruptions.

Advice from Forth Global

- Advise staff traveling to Lebanon to undertake a several days long HEAT training prior to travel.
- Monitor local news and communicate with local partners to remain updated on developing events.
- Exercise de-escalatory measures in case of disputes and show no resistance in case of attempted robbery.
- Avoid demonstrations and large gatherings of people.
- Cooperate with Lebanese security forces and police.

Customized advice

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