Illicit Small Arms Proliferation in Nepal: Challenges and Strategies

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Abstract

Illicit small arms proliferation poses threat to peace and security everywhere and Nepal is no exception. This paper explores the key factors contributing to the proliferation of illicit small arms in Nepal, including open borders, history of conflict, organized crime, weak enforcement mechanisms and socio economic factors. To address these challenges, this study recommends strengthening border control using modern technology, enhancing cross-border cooperation with neighboring countries, and raising community awareness. It emphasizes the importance of involving local actors to detect and report suspicious activities, alongside improving the capacity of security institutions. Regional collaboration and information sharing are also key steps toward tackling the issue. Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative approach based on secondary sources such as academic literatures, government reports, and INGOs/NGOs publications etc. The findings aim to guide practical interventions for controlling illicit small arms in Nepal.

Keywords: illicit small arms; proliferation; organized crime; trafficking; law enforcement; border security; cross border cooperation

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

Illicit arms proliferation refers to illegal buying, selling, and trafficking of weapons and ammunition. Such an agenda tends to include organized crime groups, insurgent

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factions and individual traffickers. The activities in such trades may occur at a local or an international level. The term, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), is an effective contributor to violence, crime, and insecurity in many parts of the globe (UNODC, 2021). The proliferation of illegal small arms has prevailed as a serious global problem, affecting the regions of South Asia, the weapon being facilitated due to its portable nature and being easy to use, thereby easily accessible by non-state actors, criminal groups, and civilians vulnerable to conflicts. According to UNODA, there are over 875 million small arms circulating across the globe, most being with illegality (UNODA, 2021). The availability of these weapons leads to violence, crime, and social instability around the world, adding fuel to the already ignited fire of conflicts and terrorism (Small Arms Survey, 2021). Small arms problem has remained a critical concern in South Asia for many years. This has been so because the region has long been associated with conflict which in turn influences affect trade in banned commodities such as these arms. There is a key issue of small arms proliferation, misused by non-state actors and criminal groups in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, for organized crime, terrorism, personal protection, or settling local scores. The porous borders and weak law enforcement in South Asia make worse the arms proliferation (Basu, 2019).

In Nepal, small arms proliferation became an issue much before the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Accord, which was presented to end a decade-long conflict. From 1996 to 2006, armed conflict relied extensively on small arms. The armed conflict employed such weapons with a view to launching armed activities in the country, while government security forces armed themselves in response to armed activities during the conflict (International Crisis Group, 2005). This large-scale use of small arms are reportedly the main contributors of numbers and severity to violence and loss of life in that period. A few small arms had existed within Nepal already before the hostilities began, however, they were outnumbered. Nepal's geographical position, partly surrounded by India and China, has made it susceptible to arms smuggling across these borders. Porous borders, especially with India, allowed smugglers and criminals to push arms easily into Nepal. In addition, with political instability in Bangladesh, the development of armed factions meant that arms were gathered by many factions to ensure their interests (Thapa, 2017). With much attention to regional conflicts, the influx of arms during the 1990s has been mostly linked to the establishment of smuggling routes during tensions in the neighboring country. Weak border enforcement and absence of checks on the movements of arms are known to enable the entry of arms and small arms into the state even before the armed conflict flared (South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2020).

Particularly during the armed conflict from 1996 to 2006, small arms proliferation grew more acute, resulting in many armed groups acquiring and using those arms. They even taken weapons from police stations and security bases, further exacerbating the violence (Karki, 2020). In spite of the signing of the CPA in 2006, unregulated small arms were still widespread in post-conflict Nepal, whereby disarmament was included in the CPA

even though met with obstacles during implementation (International Crisis Group, 2010). There have been efforts since 2006 to combat the uncontrolled flow of illegal weapons through various programs, but it remains a huge problem. Weak law enforcement and continued instability do not permit to monitor and regulate moves regarding arms possession effectively. However porous borders with India and China continue to serve as a vital route for arms trafficking, making mitigation of this question more complicated. Smuggling coming in from southern boarder remain a significant concern, as the criminal groups exploit Nepal's porous borders to smuggle weapons across (South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2020). There is an urgent need for addressing small arms proliferation in Nepal. The consequences of armed violence in Nepal go beyond potential risk to the community's public safety; it extends to trust and social bonds in the society. This study aims to achieve objectives like examination of historical narrative of illicit arms proliferation in Nepal, particularly in relation to its armed conflict and socio-economic contexts, evaluation the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies in controlling the spread of illicit small arms, investigation of societal consequences of such proliferation, including impacts on public security and finally proposition of actionable policy and operational recommendations to address the challenges.

Methodology

The research methodology used in this study adopted a qualitative methodological approach as it relies on secondary data sources and these include published academic articles, government reports, policy briefs, Non-Governmental Organization's publications among others. The study uses conflict theory and security studies to establish how best to understand the multi-faceted issue of illicit arms proliferation in Nepal. The study is used content analysis.

Analysis and Interpretation

1 Arms Proliferation and Conflict Theory

Conflict theory linked with Marx and its later elaboration by Hébert, so this doctrine elaborates how the derived competitive interest-based conflicts result between various social classes and groups present in the society. The position occupies that society has struggles as its most important agents in their endeavors for power, wealth, and other resources. It states in its theory and suggests that often the social structures and institutions in the society are adopted through the relationship of powers unfolding predispositions toward the ruling group and against the remaining ones. Conflict theory attempts, in the domain of arms proliferation, especially illicit small arms proliferation, to explain the etiology of multifaceted communal violence and insecurity. In particular, it discusses the reasons why, post-conflict, such societies as Nepal are separated by an inherent dividing line of historical grievances, socio-economic gaps, and political instability. The theory

of conflict has suggested that competition for power and resources the root causes of conflicts and is anchored in societal-political and economic issues.

1.1 Historical Context of Conflict Theory in Nepal

Nepal's socio-political landscape has been shaped by a series of conflicts, mostly the decade-long Armed conflict from 1996 to 2006. This conflict was fueled by a numerous of factors, including class and ethnic-enforced demands for political representation and inclusion. The conflict has left more than 17,000 people dead, with countless other injured or displaced (International Crisis Group, 2020). The tensions that led to the rise of armed groups and proliferation of small arms throughout the country today remain largely unaddressed. In Nepal, conflict theory suggests that the features inherent in the post-arms conflict set up usually provide the basis for the emergence of cycles of renewed violence and instability. The 2006 Comprehensive Peace Accord sought to end armed conflict and prepare for impending political and social reforms.

Such historical context affects for the flourishing of illicit arms within itself not just since different groups, realize that the need to emphasize their rights or refuse to submit is the driver of violence, but also in the emergence of various armed factions in the Terai region, which advocating for autonomy and recognition of the rights of marginalized ethnic groups. The presence of illicit arms merely fuels tensions in these communities and leads to violent confrontations, for peace building efforts initiated after conflict get disrupted (Sharma, 2020). Arms Proliferation as a Social Construct Conflict theory is founded on the premise that social realities, including arms proliferation, patterns of norms, values, and historical contexts. Which are essentially social ones? During armed conflict, when the dominance of certain classes over others became a dagger to the heart of other classes, the quarry of weapons, normally-from tools of violence to a mark of culture usable by some of the communities. The message has been clearly defined: normalizing weapons possession could profoundly affect societal attitudes toward violence. Within many marginalized communities, and particularly among those struggling for rights, the embrace of weapons as the normal means of self-defense and identity assertion could bolster a culture of violence, whereby firearms are legitimized not just as civic rights of defense for communities but are actualized or vested with the essential capacity to constitute agency (Poudel, 2021). Conflict theory emphasizes that the meaning and significance of arms within a society are shaped by the historical context and the power dynamics at play. The interpretation of firearms as a means of empowerment can lock cycles of violence and contribute to the ongoing proliferation of illicit arms. These cultural and social constructs surrounding firearms should be addressed if one is to engage in efforts to limit arms proliferation in Nepal.

1.2 The Role of Marginality and Inequality

One of the tenets of conflict theory is the relation of marginalization, inequalities, and social turmoil. In Nepal, as in several other countries, certain ethnic and regional groups have felt that they are historically de facto discriminative group and exclusion from political processes. The inability of state mechanisms to compensation those grievances seem to create a feeling of division and bitterness on the part of the marginalized communities. Specifically, it manifests itself as minority populations in the Terai, Limbuwan, and Khumbuwan regions, where ethnicity has become a strong rallying point for demands for autonomy and other rights. The escalation of violence in these areas is about perceived injustices. These injustices inflame armed struggle by the marginalized regions claiming their rights, with the Terai region being heavily populated with grievances about land rights and political representation and the wide gap in socio-economic provisioning (Thapa, 2015). The interplay between the weak state authority in providing governance and the fair distribution of scarce resources gives vent to these problems of inequality and stand to support violence. The existence of armed groups only highlights inequality, as they have operated-discouraging themselves away from the state's legal structures. The culture of violence is repeated as marginalized groups use arms to try and authenticate their claims, perpetuating their exclusion from legitimate political processes. Further, the socio-economic conditions in most of these areas have been alarming-the high rate of poverty, unemployment, and total lack of access to education and healthcare. When individuals engaged in the conflict or in the informal business sector see no clear pathways through which to challenge their unyielding socio-economic conditions, they are more likely to engage in illegal activities, including arms trafficking and violence. Hence, addressing socio-economic disparities becomes critical in breaking the cycle linking arms proliferation and violence in Nepal.

Socio-economic factors can be expected to play a significant role in conflict formation and arms proliferation. Few can deny the existence of a favorable environment for illicit arms trading and violence due to the high level of poverty and unemployment and low or no development of Nepal. It is for the lack of legitimate opportunities for obtaining a living that individuals involved in the illegal arms trade and violence tend to misgovern while permitting, supporting, and or protecting. Sharp contrast between poverty and arms proliferation has been witnessed across communities in Nepal. Economic deprivation and a perceived hopelessness may make one even more vulnerable to arms, as they offer more power and a chance to justify control. Instances of arms proliferation act as a feasible economic alternative in areas where legal employment options fall short. Arms within communities make their residents feel secure against alternative threats-their very own poor communities. In societies where this unquestioned belief reflects that to ensure safety of people, one must possess arms; the vicious cycle thus lends to increase in the presence of such arms in these communities. The above ideas may be stronger in places where police and the justice system are ineffective or even existing – in which case the ideas promote personal and group protection. Realizing the socio-economic factors that result in the proliferation of arms in the society are not mutually exclusive from issues of

governance, law enforcement.

1.3 Intergroup dynamics and violence.

Conflict theory emphasizes the significance of intergroup dynamics in understanding violence and arms proliferation. In Nepal, various ethnic and regional groups compete for resources, representation, and political power. A case of violence may emerge, especially when the rival factions or the state are perceived as sticky by certain groups. The growth of armed factions aggravates intergroup conflicts. Once armed groups are accepted by the community, they may attract support and resources, perpetuating violence. A clear example is seen in Khumbuwan and Kirat, places where armed groups formed in reaction to perceived marginalization or injustice (Sharma, 2019). The use of conflict theory enables understanding from a deeper perspective concerning the dynamics inter-group that feed into arms proliferation in Nepal. There is a clear difference that exists within the intricate dynamics surrounding the associated grievances and power relations from where issues arise in view of their contributing role in fueling widespread violence or a decrease in infrastructural developments are the realization that proliferation is in many instances a symptom of deeper issues within societies.

1.4 Policy and Practice Implications

Application of conflict theory for the issue raised in arms proliferation in Nepal has a strong implication on both policy and practice. It emphasizes that remedies for violence and arms proliferation would be feasible only when the likely fault lines that create social, economic, and political discord amounting to the proliferation of violence are highlighted. The latter must be resituated more comprehensively so that applications made by the policymakers to the actor groups in conducting effective intervention are remedied and sustained against mere control of firearms.

1.4.1 Effective Governance and Rule of Law: Effective governance provides the strongest foundation against illicit arms proliferation. For this reason, law enforcement agencies need greater capacity, better support for accountability, and improved transparency within their security institutions (Bhattarai, 2022). Strengthening the rule of law will generally lead to greater public faith into governance and reducing the perception that resorting to arms as solution.

1.4.2 Promoting Socio-Economic Development: In reducing the factors that results to arms proliferation, socio economic disparity should be given priority in order to facilitate the achievement of this goal. The growth in economic standards, provisions in education, and generation of employment opportunities help eliminate or discourage people's attraction to negative behaviors (Nepal Police, 2021). Community participation in development endeavors can as well bring the voice of the minorities and social integration.

1.4.3 Fostering Dialogue and Reconciliation: Another reason is the necessity to

stimulate discussion between various ethnos and regions to create the conditions for conflict resolution and trust. Reconciliation should concern itself with issues of past discriminations and marginalization and integration into the political systems. Disarmament and the consequences of arms circulation remain important topics for discourses that enable the amplification of particular standards within communities by emphasizing the negative aspects of firearm usage (Poudel, 2021).

1.4.4 Enhancing Community Policing Initiatives: One of the most vital reference prevention activities that require permanent construction is the creation and ongoing development of meaningful and effective communication between police organizations and the communities they serve. Its measures of community policing will ensure improved cooperation, understanding and relations between security departments and citizens. It will lay a strong fundamental to fight against the causes of violence and allow everyone to live safely (Sharma, 2020).

Critical Discussion

1.1 Historical Context and Drivers of Arms Proliferation

Decade long armed conflict made Nepal possess a wide amount of small arms proliferation. At this very time, most groups in armed struggle looked for weapons for this or that purpose. This brought about huge amounts of arms into the hands of the armed fighters and others. The intensity of the conflict increased the demand for firearms, many of whom sought these weapons for protecting and safeguarding their interest, and their circle, from escalated violence and insecurity (Bhatta, 2018). The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) in 2006 marked a critical turning point in Nepal's history in attempting to formally end the armed conflict. The CPA called for measures of arms control, with the provision of a weapons monitoring system and disarmament measures for the combatants. Many roadblocks arose to the complete implementation of these provisions. Many weapons remained without proper tracing, carried out in the absence of a robust monitoring mechanism, thus incubating sporadic illicit arms proliferation (Dahal, 2019).

Besides, the post-CPA instability compromised the disarmament efforts. The new transition toward a more inclusive society faced various challenges, including unending struggles over consensus on important governance issues. As a consequence, many people with past involvement in the conflict continued to have possession of arms. Hence, the instance of violence and insecurity persisted. Reports indicate that some splinter groups that continued engaging in violent activities-persistent attempts to disrupt peace efforts-in a fear-inducing climate (Upreti, 2020).

1.1.1 Socioeconomic Aspects of the Armed Conflict

Apart from the legacy of armed conflict, some social-economic factors have played a significant part in the surge of arms proliferation in Nepal. The high poverty and

socioeconomic inequalities together with social marginalization fueled grievances among communities, thus rendering them susceptible to joining armed groups. In regions like Khumbuwan, Limbuwan, Kirat, and Terai, various factions are motivated by local grievances pertaining to ethnic identity and social exclusion. The marginalized groups in these areas have expressed their dissatisfaction with the socioeconomic conditions, demanding organized means to assert their rights and interests. Thus, this has created a fragmented security environment, where multiple non-state actors acquire arms for furthering their agendas, an act that escalates the risk of arms proliferation (Thapa & Sijapati, 2009).

Mobilization of these groups has most often centered on identity-related issues. For instance, communities residing in the Terai area are facing discrimination and exclusion from state resources and opportunities. In return, these classes are mobilizing to demand a greater realization of their rights. Such situations breed cycles of violence in which different factions compete for power and influence, further complicating the security setting of Nepal (Hachhethu, 2016). Moreover, the lack of economic opportunities and high youth unemployment rates increases the vulnerability of the young to recruitment by armed factions. Disillusioned youth are attracted by these groups, which, on their path to release-lift them from shadows into respect, social status.

Illicit arms proliferation in Nepal has been further compounded and amplified by a surplus of driving forces like geographical reality, social dynamics, and, lastly, economic conditions. The country bordering unique cultures India and China is known to possess porous borders, thus giving easy drift further migration of firearms across borders. Recent reports indicate that firearms are smuggled into Nepal from various sources, conflict zones in the neighboring countries being the most potential (Sharma, 2019).

1.1.2 Factors Contributing to Illicit Arms Proliferation

Historical Factors

The contemporary form of violence by arms in Nepal has least anything to do with the arms availability due to armed conflict, therefore the given facts and figures primarily and solely a condition setting process of armed conflict in Nepal which had set arms proliferation environment. Individual firearms, government forces and armed groups acquired large amounts during the conflict, thus enhancing the accessibility of firearms among civilians. Although there have been efforts towards disarmament after conflict, many of the firearms are still out of reach and used in various illicit uses. Also, there are the socio-political processes which have some issues for grievances among people. Such grievances may lead to the creation of local armed groups who demand their rights, seek protection, thereby catch up the arms proliferation question (Bhattarai, 2022).

1.1.3 Socio-Economic Factors

The Nepalese socio-economic context today is defined by high prevalence of poverty and unemployment most especially in the rural settings. These conditions put the society in a right environment for proliferation of illicit arms since people become forced to engage in criminal activities. Lack of economic avenues compels people into the black market where they deal in firearms, that pay well. Also, ethnical segregation and continuing inequality among different regions act as sources of conflict sentiments that incubate armed groups in Nepal. Parts of the country like Khumbuwan, Limbuwan, Kirat or Terai have witness localized conflict and fighting and most of which are attributed to being in possession of firearms. These social relations provide us reasons why efforts should be made toward specific programmes to manage the socio-cultural requisites that have led to the culture of carrying and using firearm among individuals (Thapa, 2015).

1.1.4 Governance and Regulatory Challenges

Poor resource mobilization and insufficient policing is a major weakness to controlling the use of illicit arms in Nepal. Uncoordinated and widespread isolated practices, lack of capacity, and poor funding compromise the capacity of policing organizations in the performance of extant laws and management of firearms. Moreover, the Nepal Police have recorded a rise in the incidences of firearm related crimes, underlining the call for enhanced policies and practices as well as accountability (Nepal Police, 2021). Moreover, the cooperation between different security institutions is still rather inefficient, and the problem is connected with the lack of effective information sharing. Such lack of integration undermines arms control measures and facilitates inflow of the illicit arms into the communities (Bhattarai, 2022).

1.1.5 Societal Impacts

Amongst the societal impacts of illicit arms proliferation in Nepal, some are deeper, and many others are far-reaching. Possession and access to these prohibited firearms results to increased incidences of violent crimes such as armed robbery, kidnapping, extortion. The existence of these prohibited firearms con to violence related incidents including robbery, domestic violence, and gang violations. These kinds of violence also pose risks to the lives of persons in societies for it also nurtures insecurity among these societies.

These are the long and many social effects of the illicit arms proliferation in Nepal. This has been attributed to increased accessibility of prohibited weapons, which results in increasing tendency of violent form of criminal activity such as armed robbery, and complaints arising from "gang" related crimes. They are this sort of violence which put the lives of many people of the public in serious danger while planting seeds of insecurity all over the places.

Many people affected by armed violence experience Loyal psychological effects that impute societies' trust in policing and governmental organizations. Whenever people and entire communities think that they are at risk and that police unable protect them from

armed criminals they often resort to other measures of safety, hiring private security for example or taking the law into their own hands. The loss of trust merely increases violence and the cycle of insecurity not easy to transition from (Poudel, 2021).

1.2 Governance and Regulatory Issues

1.2.1 Inefficient Law enforcement.

Inadequate resources are one of the major limitations for law enforcement agencies. Many police departments work on limited resources. Thus, police departments have very little to invest in tools, technologies, or personnel who could enforce the arms regulatory laws aptly. Every such investment gap leaves behind the inadequately trained police workforce, ill-equipped to tackle the complexities of the illicit arms trade. The lack of trained professionals results further in the incapacity of officers to develop specialized skills to identify and resolve the conditions in dealing with illicit arms activities.

In the absence of resources and training programs, the law enforcement personnel are often at loss to counter the changing tactics of the traffickers, which makes it increasingly difficult to respond to it considering such scenario (Khanal, 2019). The bureaucratic inefficiency further makes it hard to regulate, control and manipulate the arms trade. As the law enforcement agencies and their security forces work in common and there are many gaps and lack of coordination among themselves and their duties. Such aspects lead to breakdown and work in separately completion (Brierley, 2008). Assistance of customs, border security forces and law enforcement forces weaken further when the priorities and conflicts are overcome. With no central and interagency mechanism or any dedicated interagency task force to deal with the arms control, it is already very problematic and hard to relegate and is another weakness to oppose (Poudel, 2021). Conversely, several measures can help address such challenges. Like long-term strategies that deal with proper development, utilization and sustainable training programs along with accountabilities need to be built. International and national measures that foster the inter-agency collaboration and communications should be taken (Kaderk, et al, 2019).

1.2.2 Border Security Concerns

Geographically well-rich Nepal, with porous borders with both India and China, faces overwhelming task of regulating arms trafficking in that area. Such easy movement facilitates the entry of firearms into Nepal simply by avoiding any opposition from law enforcement (Sharma, 2018). Vast and rugged terrains characterizing Nepal's borders hinder effective monitoring and control over cross-border movements. The limitations posed by the geographical landscape are compounded by inadequate law enforcement presence in border areas. Those living along the borders in many areas are remote and inaccessible, avoiding regular patrols and surveillance by security forces. Such lack of supervision opens avenues for traffickers to exploit the porous borders to smuggle firearms into the country with little chance of detection (Rai, 2020). Besides these, the effectiveness

of border security operations is afflicted by poor infrastructure and inadequate resources. Border security officers might not find adequate technical support and equipment for the detection of illegal arms shipments. Being without technology might lead to missing identified firearms at border checkpoints or unchecked boarder. In most cases, their lack of technology allows traffickers to be creative in getting weapons into Nepal, for example, by hiding them in legitimate shipments or exploiting loopholes in laws (Sharma, 2018). More about the border security situation framing concerns over it is the fact that there is no cohesive policy framework in place dealing with arms trafficking. The different government agencies accordingly have different priorities and ways of running their operations. The gap created between agencies due to the absence of a single strategy that is based on arms control will surely deteriorate the efforts to combat trafficking. Establishment of an extensively framed policy for border security in which intelligence motions and joint operations among relevant agencies are brought under further consideration for general improvement of the security environment (Rai, 2020).

The poverty, unemployment, and lack of education in boarder regions may push a handful of individuals to traffic arms for mere economic survival. In fact, in local eyes, arms trafficking can be perceived as a business opportunity, which could develop into a culture of participation that further foils law enforcement efforts. Addressing this with poverty eradication strategy and alternative livelihoods would help immensely reduce the pull toward engaging in illicit activities. Surveilling border security by way of inter-agency collaboration and active involvement in infrastructure improvement and resource enhancement from the diplomatic and administrative levels is one strategy worth drawing attention to here for combating arms trafficking. Surveillance technology and training in scans and searches should be turned towards closing detection capability gaps and creating shorter response times for border security forces on potential threats. Further, a strong community partnership in border areas may ease intelligence-sharing and into community-state engagement in the fight against arms trafficking. Empowering local communities in the fight for border security should create a strengthened environment against all forms of lifestyle that nurture the trade in arms and, in its construct, assure a degree of trust between law enforcement and the rest of the population.

1.3 Social Impact of Illicit Arms Proliferation:

According to the Nepal Police, arm related violence has reportedly intensified lately, making things worse in an already insecure environment (Nepal Police, 2022). One major effect of the rise of violent crime owned by the availability of illicit arms upon public safety is that individuals have, in fact, felt the need to alter their normal life routine to lessen the chances of being exposed to violence. Essentially, this could be by reducing interaction with people by not going through areas seen threatening, not associating with people one would former regularly hang around with and adopting behaviors that would favor personal safety over community participation. Thus, the fear of engaging in armed violence may sometimes disrupt actions of the communities, as individuals become less

willing to participate in public gatherings or community activities that could help bind their social fabric together; thus, the lack of social cohesion and the further destruction of public trust is noticeable. Arm related violence does affect not only those affected immediately but also the community's psychological well-being. Very often, those who witness or experience violence will endure psychological effects in the form of severe trauma; there might be subsequent symptoms such as anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Psychological effects may sever social coherence within communities, as people become concerned with their safety and become reluctant to participate in community activities. Adhikari (2021) adds that the ever-present fear of violence frequently conjures social withdrawal, whereby individuals either retreat from social interactions altogether or continue isolating oneself more from public, discrediting community ties.

Conclusion

This study offers a powerful reflection on Nepal's illicit small arms trade. The decade-long conflict (1996–2006) left a lasting imprint on national security, as large quantities of weapons circulated among armed factions and civilians, resulting in a pervasive culture of fear and insecurity even after the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) was signed on 21 November 2006. Although the CPA mandated disarmament and weapons monitoring mechanisms, persistent political instability and fragmented governance thwarted effective implementation. Many arms remain uncollected due to weak enforcement and poor coordination among agencies like police, customs, and border control. Nepal's porous borders with India and China, compounded by difficult terrain, further enable smuggling and concealment of illicit weapons. Enforcement structures suffer from resource shortages, limited training, and bureaucratic inefficiencies. Consequently, illegal firearms—especially improvised pistols—continue to fuel armed crime, domestic violence, and public mistrust in institutions, underscoring the enduring challenge of arms control in post-conflict Nepal.

To curb illicit small-arms proliferation, Nepal must urgently enhance law enforcement capacity via resources, advanced training, and stronger collaboration across agencies like Nepal Police, APF, customs, and immigration. Modern surveillance, increased patrols, and joint exercises with India and China are critical to seal porous borders and stem smuggling Regional and international cooperation through platforms like SAARC and BIMSTEC, intelligence sharing, and community based initiatives will help build public trust and support grassroots risk mitigation efforts

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