

# UCIMUN 2025



***DISEC***

*Background Guide*

By: Kellie Fernandez



Hello everyone!

I am honored to welcome you to UCI's Model United Nations conference for 2025! My name is Kellie Fernandez, and I am so excited to serve as your Director for the Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC)! This will be my ninth year in Model UN and my third year with UCIMUN! Last year I served as the Director for SPECPOL at UCIMUN, and when I was a sophomore in high school, I attended UCIMUN as a delegate.

I'm currently a fourth-year student at UCI, double majoring in Political Science and History. I'm very interested in U.S. politics, foreign policy, and international relations which is what guided me to my majors. Aside from this, I'm involved in various political organizations and other Model UN organizations outside of UCI.

The topics we will be debating in DISEC for this conference are, are "Addressing Illicit Transnational Weapons Trafficking" and "Social Media's Role In Fueling Conflict and Its Impact on International Security". As both of these issues impact millions of people worldwide, it is essential to have these debates in order to combat these issues one step at a time. As a committee, part of DISEC's mission is to focus on disarmament as well as topics of international security concern. Thus, both of these topics require the attention of DISEC to help maintain security in our communities.

While we urge you to read the topic synopsis, I'd like to remind everyone that this paper is just a starting point for your research. These topics are highly complex, and many different factors influence them. When researching these topics, we urge you to gain a thorough understanding of your country's policy and look at these topics through a multifaceted lens.

I'm so excited to hear you all debate the broad range of issues that our topics encompass at the conference in April! Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions, and I'll do my best to assist you in any way I can. We know you are all capable of great things, and we are so thrilled to see you all in committee!

Best,

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## **Topic A: Social Media's Role in Fueling Conflict and Its Impact on International Security**

### **Introduction**

Social media platforms are growing exponentially worldwide. It is currently estimated that 5.07 billion people are active users of social media (Petrosyan, 2024). The typical user interacts with more than six social media platforms for an average of two hours and twenty minutes per day (Data Reportal, 2024). Because of its global reach, social media can serve as a tool for political actors to build support through propaganda. Propaganda is defined as the spread of “information to influence public opinion often conveyed through mass media (Smith, 2024).” It seeks to change people’s beliefs and actions by selectively presenting facts or arguments believed to have the most impact. Given the effects that social media has had on international security, it is critical to examine how social media influences political and ethnic conflicts and how it can contribute to the radicalization of its users.

Individuals in areas of conflict tend to be more sensitive to external factors, as they may be in a more fragile mental state. People are generally more likely to trust information when it appears attractive or resonates with their emotions. In vulnerable situations, any explanation that satisfies their need for understanding can seem true, particularly when it comes from a place of power or familiarity. . Thus, individuals affected by conflict are more likely to be influenced by the information they see on social media, especially when it comes from family, friends, or public figures (Ecker, 2022). Because information spreads rapidly on platforms, social media can negatively impact conflict and fuel further division. For example, in the first six months of 2020,



Facebook alone removed or flagged 3.5 billion pieces of harmful content (Siripurapu, 2021). While not all information on social media is false or hateful, a significant portion of it is.. Unfortunately, this type of content often circulates widely on major platforms, facilitated by social media algorithms.

Social media also has a unique ability to increase polarization. Polarization occurs when different political groups become less likely to reach an agreement and more inclined to exhibit hostility toward each other. This polarization can lead to political violence. Two studies conducted by Augusta University, analyzing data from over 150 countries from 2000 to 2019, showed evidence that linking social media usage to political violence. These studies found that there was a link between time spent on social media and the development of polarized political views. Similarly, the researchers identified a relationship between extreme political views and occurrence of political violence. This pattern has been observed in both democracies and non-democracies, as well as developed and developing countries (Faigle, 2023).

## Description

### *Social Media as a Driving Force for Internal Conflict*

In recent years, people worldwide have been drawing attention to social media's role in worsening conflict. Social media enables the mass and rapid spread of information at the click of a button, giving millions of people access to scroll through a seemingly endless news feed. Today, social media reaches billions of people across multiple platforms for extended periods of time per day. As a result, it has the potential to spread misinformation, hate speech, propaganda, and violence. This is particularly true in areas experiencing conflict.



Although social media posts often lack evidence or context to support their claims, they are widely used as a primary source of news for many individuals, creating critical gaps in the information they consume. In the United States, a study conducted by Pew Research Center found that nearly half of U.S. adults say that they get news from social media “often” or “sometimes” (Walker and Matsa, 2021). In Nigeria, studies show that this number may even be higher. A 2023 survey taken by Statistica showed that 78 percent of Nigerian respondents stated that they use social media as a news source (Watson, 2023). Receiving news from social media is not inherently bad. However, it increases the risk of individuals being exposed to misinformation from non-credible sources.

Social media can influence how, when, and whether conflicts occur by mobilizing users and shaping their values. Moreover, algorithms can amplify certain narratives as “truth”, increasing the potential to spread misinformation and incite violence. In high-stress situations, it can be difficult to properly analyze and evaluate social media content, leaving more people vulnerable to believing false information. Social media content in languages other than English are even more susceptible to propaganda and misuse. This is because there is significantly less moderation of hate speech and fake news in non-English languages (Shifa and Pabon, 2022). Most social media platforms do not conduct the same amount of fact-checking in languages other than English, which allows misleading content to remain on these platforms for an extended time (Sanchez, 2022).

Due to social media’s ability to drive ethnic and sectarian tensions, conflicts between competing ethnic groups are uniquely vulnerable to the spread of misinformation online. Ethnic conflicts can be defined as, “a form of conflict in which the objectives of at least one party are



defined in ethnic terms, and the conflict, and possible solutions are perceived along ethnic lines (Reuter, 2023). In other words, if a conflict is perceived by its participants to have a solution that involves competing with another ethnic group, it is considered an ethnic conflict. Since social media algorithms tend to present information that aligns with individuals' existing beliefs, including information that demonizes other ethnic groups, they pose a threat to intergroup cohesion. These algorithms primarily expose users to information they already agree with, which can be particularly dangerous in the context of ethnic conflict.

### ***Effects of Policies of Social Media Companies***

Misinformation on social media is a significant challenge that has become increasingly difficult to combat. Powerful algorithms capable of spreading information quickly and at a large scale make it difficult to curb misinformation, especially in areas of conflict. Often, users have no idea from who or where the information originated, making it difficult for regulators or platforms to trace a post directly back to its source. Because of this, many individuals and organizations that share posts containing misinformation or propaganda do so intentionally, aiming for the content to spread quickly before social media companies can identify its origins (Rahman, 2020).

While many social media companies have implemented policies to curb the spread of hate speech and misinformation, these platforms still lack sufficient identity verification procedures. This makes it more difficult to address the root causes of false posts. For example, some companies, such as X (formerly known as Twitter) have introduced verification processes like the blue-check mark badges for "accounts of public interest." However, you can pay for the blue check mark which can delegitimize the badge. Additionally, the vast majority of accounts



on X remain unverified, leaving a large portion of the platform's community unaddressed (Rahman, 2020). Furthermore, X and Instagram now allow users to buy these blue-check marks, lessening the credibility of this badge of verification (Bhojnagarwala, 2023).

Companies like Facebook have stated their commitment to addressing polarization issues by removing content and accounts that violate Facebook's Community Standards. They aim to do this by reducing the spread of "borderline" content that could escalate into misinformation and by informing individuals about the internet at large (Chakrabarti and Birch, 2019). However, these policies are expected to change as the platform will be removing its fact-checking feature with community notes. Despite policies that claim to focus on curbing hate speech and misinformation, many social networks tend to overlook a significant portion of these posts. This is partly because ignoring such posts can align with the platforms' interests. Shareholders will reap the benefits of growing user numbers and interactions when viral content spreads. A 2018 large study conducted by a group of researchers revealed that divisive content tends to generate higher engagement, creating an incentive for social media companies to overlook much of the inflammatory content that arises on their platforms (Shao, 2018). As platforms prioritize user growth over moderating and sorting through inflammatory content, the responsibility for filtering through social media content largely falls on its users. This presents an issue for many users, as many people are inclined to believe information that aligns with their existing view, making it difficult to accurately identify and filter false information. Therefore, the lack of a monitoring system on social media has potentially fuels conflicts.

### ***Conflicts Impacted by Social Media***

Social media has impacted many conflicts around the world, including wars, regime



changes, internal polarization, and more. Specific conflicts affected by social media include the Russo-Ukrainian War, the Rohingya genocide in Myanmar, extreme polarization in the United States, and the civil conflict in Ethiopia. While social media did not directly cause any of these conflicts, it has played a role in fueling them. The Russo-Ukrainian War, in particular, has been heavily influenced by sharing both information and misinformation on social media. This conflict has become one of the most controversial and broadly discussed wars in recent years, partly due to social media's ability to spread live updates on the situation. Individuals on both sides of the conflict are actively participating in this spreading of information. As a result, many have referred to this as the “world’s first TikTok war,” with users spreading content and information on the war in real time (Brown, 2022).

While the spread of information can be beneficial, it can also carry the risk of disseminating misinformation, further escalating the tensions in the conflict. A recent investigation from NewsGuard found that users are exposed to misinformation within 40 minutes of logging on to a social media platform, even if they are not actively searching for war-related content (Cadier, 2022). In addition, the Russia-Ukraine Disinformation Tracking Center has also found propaganda posts on social media that originate from the Kremlin (Roache, 2023). With no clear distinctions made between false and reliable information, it is challenging for users to properly evaluate the content they encounter and consume. Both Russia and Ukraine have been accused of utilizing social media to influence public opinion and spread misinformation, which has in turn, affected the dynamics of the conflict. This conflict has shown how the dynamics of war are changing and how military strategy has been affected by the use of social media. The growing use of nonmilitary means to achieve political goals is evident, with social media





utilization playing a key role in this shift today. (Magnier, 2023).

Social media has also affected the crisis in Myanmar, which resulted in the genocide of the Rohingya people. The Rohingya are an ethnic Muslim minority group in Myanmar, which is a predominantly Buddhist country. In 2017, the government of Myanmar launched a military campaign that targeted the Rohingya. This caused hundreds of thousands to flee the state. Civil rights groups accused the government of committing genocide against the Rohingya (Albert and Maizland, 2020). In this conflict, Facebook's algorithm spread harmful anti-Rohingya content in Myanmar at a rapid rate. To make matters worse, there was no response from the company (Amnesty International 2023). In the years and months leading up to the military crackdown, Facebook's algorithms were amplifying and intensifying anti-Rohingya content that contributed to violence against those people. Many organizations and refugees have spoken out against Meta for its role in fueling this conflict. They have argued that Meta is profiting from hateful echo chambers without changing their algorithm. One 21-year-old Rohingya refugee stated, "I saw a lot of horrible things on Facebook...but Facebook is also responsible. Facebook is helping them by not taking care of their platform." Facebook in Myanmar during this time had become a hub for anti-Rohingya content. Many of those posting this content were linked to the Myanmar military and other extreme Buddhist nationalist groups. These groups filled the platform with severe anti-Muslim content and spread significant misinformation, claiming that the Rohingya were attempting a Muslim takeover (Amnesty International, 2023). This caused many average citizens of Myanmar to hold hostility towards the Rohingya. This case study serves as an example of how echo chambers created by social media companies can have severe, violent repercussions.



In the United States, social media has fueled extreme polarization and posed a threat to democracy. While social media platforms are not the root causes of political polarization, they exacerbate it through algorithms that function largely to spread and share content that is most profitable for the company (Barrett, 2021). The growing amount of news content circulating on social media has intensified feelings of hatred between members of different political parties (Finkel, 2020). Social media has made political polarization in the U.S. significantly more personal, with individuals expressing hatred not only for the opposing ideas but also for the people who hold them. The continuous cycle of inflammatory content on social media platforms tends to make individuals much more upset and angry toward the opposing side. It also pushes individuals to adopt much stronger and more rigid views on certain political issues (Barrett, 2021). Algorithms that tailor content to maximize engagement often prioritize inflammatory material, creating echo chambers that reinforce users' existing beliefs. The issue of polarization in the United States fueled by social media is not unique, as it has the potential to take place worldwide.

### ***The Use of Social media as Propaganda During Conflict***

Social media has become a new powerful weapon in modern warfare, enabling governments and conflict groups to spread propaganda and bolster public opinion and support. Individuals and groups can also use social media to help influence the actions of others, manipulating the opposing side into acting in their favor. This strategy was notably used by the Islamic State (ISIS) in 2014 when they invaded northern Iraq. Instead of concealing their invasion, they broadcast it on social media, using the hashtag “#AllEyesOnISIS,” to spread propaganda on X (formerTwitter) (Singer and Brooking, 2019). Bots and supporters on X



flooded the platform with content using this hashtag, making it a trend among Arabic-speaking users. Even though ISIS only had a small invading force, their strategic use of social media spread fear, leading people in the area to believe that they were far more powerful than they actually were. Ultimately, this fear encouraged defenders of a city with 1.5 million residents to drop their weapons (Singer and Brooking, 2019). Through this strategy, ISIS were also able to recruit more than 30,000 fighters from the Middle East and other regions worldwide to join their cause (Singer and Brooking, 2019). By using social media as a vessel to spread propaganda, ISIS deceived their opponents into surrendering and expanded their ranks by recruiting other fighters abroad to join their cause. This strategy significantly contributed to the escalation of conflict and violence across the Middle East. Furthermore, conflict groups can also use social media to market themselves much like a business or artist promotes a product or album. By creating specific hashtags and flooding them with posts, these groups leverage social media to spread mass propaganda, fueling conflict in warfare.

Moreover, social media has allowed users around the world to connect and engage with each other more than ever before. However, this connectivity has come with significant consequences. For example, user privacy has been both invaded by social media platforms and weaponized by governments and groups during conflict. Across the globe, politicians and other government actors have been expanding their social media presence, making it easier for governments to attempt to control mass public opinion and manipulate the populations for their own benefit. The spread of propaganda through social media has increasingly become a tactic employed not only by individuals but also by government actors, raising serious concerns within the international community.



In India, for example, many social media users have reported a large surge in politically motivated messages and advertisements, including forms of hate speech from political parties and government officials (Zargar, 2022). These messages have the goal of engaging a younger, tech-savvy supporter base who can carry out these cyber operations by flooding social media platforms with propaganda, misinformation, and clickbait messages. This spread of propaganda has profoundly affected India by deepening divisions between its majority and minority populations. For example, when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) announced its Citizen Amendment Bill—which was opposed by India’s Muslim population —the BJP’s cyber team was able to link the protests with pro-Pakistani groups, further villainizing the Muslim minority in the country (Bhargava, 2021). This tactic of using social media to spread propaganda is becoming more and more popular, especially in places of war.

Additionally, governments weaponize social media to suppress individuals from criticizing the government. X has been accused of censoring posts from prominent journalists, politicians, and activists on its platform in India. The platform has faced criticism for yielding to government pressure, agreeing to block more than 120 accounts. India is the third-largest market for X, following the U.S. and Japan, making it challenging for the platform to resist government demands. However, Indian citizens heavily rely on social media platforms like X to express dissent, particularly as traditional media in the country has largely caved to government influence as well. As a result, Indian users are calling on X to resist censorship and uphold free expression. Propaganda spreads through social media because algorithms amplify and circulate the same information. Unless users actively search for opposing viewpoints and attempt to alter their algorithm, they will be trapped in an echo chamber that exposes them to further



propaganda. Moreover, as more people rely on social media as a primary source of news, they are increasingly likely to believe what they see online, making these misinformation and propaganda campaigns even more dangerous (Wood, 2017). Much of this information continues to be repeated in different forms, allowing more and more people to internalize such messaging and accept it as the truth. Propaganda has always been dangerous, even before social media. However, it has never been able to spread at the speed and scale that it has today through social media, making it imperative for social media companies to take stronger actions to combat propaganda and misinformation on these platforms.

## **Bloc Positions**

### *States with Medium to High Free Press Indices and Medium to Low Social Media Usage*

Countries that rank medium to high in the Press Freedom Index include those with a ranking of 50 and above. Countries with medium to low social media usage include countries that have 65 percent or less of their population active on at least one social media platform. These platforms can include Facebook, X, Youtube, and WhatsApp, and others. Countries in this bloc is notable for having a relatively open press and reliable information available to the public, while also having a populace that is not highly active or reliant on social media for news. As a result, countries in this bloc may advocate for greater reforms and accountability for social media companies. They may also push for a return to traditional media sources for news.

### *States with Medium to High Free Press Indices and Medium to High Social Media Usage*

Countries in this bloc have a ranking of 50 and above on the Press Freedom Index and have more than 65 percent of their population active on more than one social media platform. Unlike the





previous bloc, these countries are more likely to be open with their press while also having a public that is highly active on social media. These countries may support social media reforms but are likely to discourage policies that would limit social media usage in the country. While these countries may also support traditional media, they are generally supportive of the expansion of social media networks. Delegates in this bloc should research what restrictions, if any, their country may have on social media platforms and understand the reasons behind such policies.

*States with Medium to Low Free Press Indices and Medium to High Social Media Usage*

Countries that rank 50 or below in the Press Freedom Index and have 65 percent or more of their population active on at least one social media platform fall into this bloc. Similar to the previous bloc, these countries tend to restrict the circulation of traditional media. Additionally, countries in this bloc may impose restrictions on certain social media platforms, though the extent of these restrictions varies by country.. Such restrictions may include special laws prohibiting content that is perceived to negatively impact religious values, public morals, and the government's image. While these countries may support limitations on social media, they are unlikely to support for shutting it down entirely.

*States with Medium to Low Free Press Indices and Medium to Low Social Media Usage*

Countries in this bloc have a Press Freedom Index below 50, and 65 percent or less of its population is active on at least one social media platform. These countries may impose stricter controls on the information available to the public, including both traditional media sources and social media. These countries might be more authoritarian in nature, and are likely to approve



restrictions on social media within their borders. In some cases, countries in this bloc may attempt to fully restrict access to social media rather than work with social media companies or regulate them. Delegates should look for overlaps between restrictions on traditional media and social media when researching this bloc

### Committee Goals

For this committee, I hope to see all delegates leave with a greater understanding of social media's impact on conflicts worldwide, as well as its implications for international security. I am looking forward to lively debate, insightful discussion, and cooperation among delegates in DISEC. I urge all delegates to examine the different nuances of this topic, paying particular attention to the subtopics listed. When researching, delegates should aim to understand the root causes of the issue, as well as possibly ways to solve it. While exploring this topic, it is also encouraged to explore how the UN and other international bodies have engaged with the topic. Delegates should consider the role of private sector and non-governmental organizations when investigating social media's role in conflict. This topic is of great international concern, making it essential that the Disarmament and International Security Committee be respond quickly and appropriately.



## Research Questions

1. What laws, if any, does your country have in place regarding social media usage? What is the general attitude of the citizens of your country toward its regulation of social media?
2. Does your country have any laws addressing hate speech or misinformation? How successful have these laws been in regulating negative content?
3. What social media platforms are most popular in your country and where does your country rank on the Global Press Freedom Index?
4. Does your country have any ongoing conflicts that are affected by social media? What role has social media played in the escalation or deescalation of that conflict?
5. How can countries in active conflict areas use social media as a tool to mediate conflict rather than allow it to worsen the conflict?



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## **Topic B: Addressing Illicit Transnational Weapons Trafficking**

### **Introduction**

Illicit transnational weapons trafficking is a major contributor to global instability, as it undermines peace and security, hinders socioeconomic development, and facilitates human rights abuses. The United Nations has addressed this issue through the United Nations Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking of Firearms, their Parts and Components, and Ammunition. Through this protocol, the UN defines illicit arms trafficking as the import, export, purchase, and sale of weapons, their parts, and ammunition into or through a territory without authorization from either party involved. (Illicit Trade Group, 2024). According to the European Center of Expertise on Crime Prevention, there were approximately 640 million illicit firearms in circulation as of 2005 (Lumpe, 2005). The illicit trade generates an estimated 125 million to 236 million euros per year worldwide (IMF, 2024). This issue is widespread as it occurs on both large and small scales, with the trade mainly fueled by diversions from the legal firearms trade. Recognizing that most of the illicit weapons in circulation are not the result of illegal manufacturing, but rather are diverted from legal production and other conflict-related stockpiles, making weapons trafficking much more difficult to identify and regulate. Moreover, unlike other trafficked or smuggled products, weapons such as firearms tend to be durable and can remain operational for decades, exacerbating the problem over time.

One of the most common categories of weapons in circulation in the illicit arms trade is small arms and light weapons (SALWs). The United Nations defines small arms as those that can be operated by a single person, while light weapons are those that require two or more people to



operate and carry (Small Arms and Light Weapons, 2024). These weapons pose a significant risk to communities worldwide, as they are a leading cause of violent deaths globally in both conflict and non-conflict settings (United Nations, 2024). SALWs contribute to ongoing violence, humanitarian crises, and displacement by fueling and sustaining armed conflicts worldwide that lead to instability.

Firearms trafficking is directly linked to several other forms of organized crime. It facilitates the growth of criminal markets, exacerbating crime and violence in communities globally. According to the Global Organized Crime Index in 2021, arms trafficking is the third most prevalent criminal market globally (Almada, 2022). The illicit arms trade also enables other organized crime to occur, by providing weapons used for intimidation, coercion, and force for other vulnerable groups and illegal activities. Recognizing these challenges, it is crucial for this committee to take proactive steps to address this issue and work toward providing solutions that ensure international security.

## Description

### *Key strategies, routes, and causes of the illicit weapons trade*

The illicit trafficking of weapons occurs on both small and large scales, often utilizing existing criminal routes to traffick these weapons. Illegal weapons are typically obtained through various means, including the reactivation of neutralized weapons, embezzling of legal arms, reactivating decommissioned military firearms, burglaries and thefts, and the unlawful manufacturing of arms (Europol, 2024).

According to the Small Arms Survey, there are approximately 857 million firearms



owned by civilians worldwide, however, only 12 percent of these are registered (Vazquez, 2022). This lack of regulation poses a major risk to international security and allows for the exploitation of legitimate supply chains to obtain weapons illegally. One of the major routes for illicit weapons trafficking is the US-Mexico border, as the United States is the world's largest producer of arms (Chicago Policy Review, 2024). Additionally, 90 percent of the global arms supply is provided by just ten countries, with much of it exported to the Middle East. Saudi Arabia, the world's largest arms importer, is a primary recipient. (Sharife, 2021). This transnational arms trade often contributes to the creation of illicit markets, as patrons of trade can facilitate illegal activities within a legal framework. Ultimately, ambiguous legal definitions of what constitutes illegal arms transfer allow illicit markets to thrive even within the context of legal transactions. (Sharife, 2021).

The trafficking of weapons remains a pervasive issue due to the significant variation in laws and regulations across the globe. These laws are often described as “uneven, contradictory, influenced by corrupted leadership, and rife with loopholes,” (Sharife, 2021). In recent years, the dark web has played a substantial role in facilitating the trafficking of firearms, ammunition, explosives, and other weapons. On the dark web, illicit firearms make up 42 percent of all listings (Paoli and Aldridge, 2017). For example, the weapons used in the 2016 Munich Shooting were carried out using a weapon purchased on the dark web (Rand, 2024). Thus, the dark web serves as an enabler for organized criminals and terrorists who seek firearms, further jeopardizing international security.

***The Prevalence of Illicit Manufacturing and Trafficking of Weapons and Ammunition in Europe***





Since the early 1900s, the illicit manufacturing and trafficking of firearms and ammunition in Europe has become a global epidemic, impacting the international community for over a century. Illicit arms trafficking has fueled organized crime in Europe, with 60 percent of criminal networks in the EU, employing weapons as part of their violent tactics (European Commission, 2024). The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation estimated that nearly 500,000 firearms have been lost or stolen in Europe (IMF, 2024). Many European governments reduce their arsenal in order to cut costs or comply with international agreements, only to sell these arms locally or overseas for profit. Instead of reducing the global stockpile, this practice simply redistributes weapons, shifting the associated risks from one community or country to another.

The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (SALWs) is particularly alarming, as these weapons are estimated to account for 45 percent of all violent deaths globally (United Nations, 2023). While most arms trafficking appears to be carried out by private entities, some governments also contribute to illegal trafficking by actively arming proxy groups. These include insurgents fighting against rival regimes, extremists with similar ideologies, or other armed non-state actors. In the European Union alone, it was estimated that 35 million illicit firearms were owned by civilians, comprising 56 percent of the total firearms in the region (European Commission, 2024). However, this statistic accounts only for illicit firearms in circulation and does not include other dangerous weapons such as explosives, chemical materials for weapons, ammunition, and other improvised explosive devices.

***The Use and Impact of Illicit Transnational Weapons Trafficking on Fueling Terrorist Organizations***



Globally, the largest demand for illicit firearms comes from terrorist organizations (UNODC, 2024). These groups are often both the largest perpetrators and beneficiaries of transnational illicit weapons trafficking (Homeland Security, 2024). Suppliers and smugglers of weapons frequently provide terrorist organizations with weapons, which are then used to carry out acts of terror or intimidate vulnerable groups. Moreover, while private individuals and entities play a significant role in fueling weapons trafficking, governments can also have a role in the illicit trade. The illegal weapon trafficking from governments to armed groups is a recurring issue, often conducted covertly, which exacerbates conflicts and destabilizes countries. Research collected by Conflict Armament Research in 2014 revealed that the Islamic State alone collects and uses firearms and ammunition manufactured in at least 21 countries (Conflict Armament Research, 2014). The transfer of such a large amount of arms is made possible through elaborate weapons trafficking schemes. These operations rely on facilitators, securing routes, and coordinated efforts to ensure successful delivery. Rather than sourcing weapons through numerous small-scale transactions, terrorist organizations often acquire arms through large-scale trafficking networks.

Terrorist groups are major importers of illicit weapons, typically sourcing them from other organized crime groups (OCGs). They employ a wide variety of weapons, with the most common being small arms and light weapons (SALW), ghost guns, privately-made firearms, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) (Conventional Terrorist Weapons, 2024). Terrorist organizations seeking territorial and political control often have the highest demand for weapons. Groups such as Al Qaeda, ISIS, Boko Haram, and Ansar al-Sharia are examples of terrorist organizations that use some of the largest amounts of weapons and ammunition to gain and



maintain territorial control (Strazzari and Zampagni, 2024). While some of the weapons used by terrorists are illegally manufactured, the majority of firearms in their possession are diverted from legal production lines and subsequently leaked into the illicit trade (Strazzari and Zampagni, 2024). Ultimately, illicitly trafficked weapons play a major role in enabling armed violence as well as funding terrorist organizations (UN Office of Counter Terrorism, 2024).

## **Bloc Positions**

### *Countries that rank high on the Global Organized Crime Index for Arms Trafficking*

Countries that are high on the Index are those ranked 1-62 for arms trafficking (Global Organized Crime Index, 2024). These countries are identified as having the largest and most severe arms trafficking markets worldwide. This can be a result of ongoing conflicts that create a heightened demand for weaponry or a broader culture of gun ownership within these nations. Countries in this block likely have armed groups as a major customer base, contributing to the proliferation of weapons flooding its market. Additionally, these countries may lack comprehensive policies to address weapons trafficking and insufficient coordination between law enforcement agencies, enabling trafficking to occur on a large scale.

### *Countries that rank medium on the Global Organized Crime Index for Arms Trafficking*

Countries that are medium on the Index are those ranked 81-123 for arms trafficking (Global Organized Crime Index, 2024). These countries likely maintain a significant firearms and ammunition manufacturing industry, but it is generally more well-regulated. While tighter control may be in place to curb the weapons trafficking market for countries in this bloc, occasional reports of arms being unlawfully acquired still persist. Countries in this bloc may also



serve as source countries for illicit weapons destined for other countries. Although the circulation of illegal weapons remains notable, it is less prevalent compared to the higher-ranked bloc.

#### *Countries that rank low on the Global Organized Crime Index for Arms Trafficking*

Countries that are low on the Index are those ranked 136-192 for arms trafficking (Global Organized Crime Index, 2024). These countries generally experience much lower levels of weapons trafficking, however, many illicit arms may still be easily accessible. Stricter regulations on arms usage in these countries often contribute to the reduced prevalence of trafficking. Despite this, many of these countries may serve as transit countries for weapons linked to organized crime groups. Additionally, smaller crime groups, such as local street gangs, are often the primary users of illicit weapons in these regions, rather than having a connection to larger transnational weapons trafficking networks.

### **Committee Goals**

For this committee, I'm hoping to see all delegates develop a deeper understanding of the danger posed by illicit transnational weapons trafficking and its implications for international security. I am looking forward to lively debate, deep discussion, and cooperation among delegates in DISEC. I urge all delegates to look at the different nuances of this topic, paying particular attention to the subtopics listed. When researching, delegates should aim to understand the causes of the issue as well as possible ways to solve it. While exploring this topic, it is encouraged to also investigate the ways that the UN and other international bodies have engaged with the topic. Delegates should consider the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and legal bodies when exploring illicit weapons trafficking. This topic is of great international



concern, making it essential that the Disarmament and International Security Committee be proactive in responding quickly and appropriately.

## Research Questions

1. Where does your country rank on the Global Organized Crime Index's Arms Trafficking Index? What laws or lack thereof may be contributing to your country's ranking?
2. Are there any major organized crime groups near or around your country with a high demand for weapons? If yes, how has your country addressed this issue?
3. What influence do strict weapons and arms regulations have on illicit arms trade? Do countries with stricter regulations have lower levels of this illicit trade?
4. How are countries that are geographically located near a major producer of arms impacted by the arms trade?
5. What can be done to slow the arms trade in countries that are in or around active war zones? What policies can be put in place to ensure the safety of the most vulnerable populations in places of war who can be threatened with arms violence?



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