



NATIONAL FIREARMS COMMERCE AND TRAFFICKING ASSESSMENT:

Firearms in Commerce

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ATF Firearms Trace Data Disclaimer

Firearm traces are designed to assist law enforcement authorities in conducting investigations by tracking the sale and possession of specific firearms. Law enforcement agencies may request firearm traces for any investigative reason, and those reasons are not necessarily reported to the federal government. Not all firearms used in crime are traced and not all firearms traced are used in crime.

Firearms selected for tracing are not chosen for purposes of determining which types, makes or models of firearms are used for illicit purposes. The firearms selected do not constitute a random sample and should not be considered representative of the larger universe of all firearms used by criminals, or any subset of that universe. Firearms are normally traced to the first retail seller, and sources reported for firearms traced do not necessarily represent the sources or methods by which firearms in general are acquired for use in crime.

Firearms in Commerce

FOREWORD

As part of an administration-wide strategy to combat the rise in violent crime, in April 2021, President Biden and Attorney General Garland directed the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) to issue a comprehensive report on firearms commerce and trafficking. To execute this directive, ATF has assembled a team of subject experts from within the Bureau and experts from academic and related fields to produce the National Firearms in Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), a comprehensive examination of commerce in firearms and the diversion of firearms to illegal markets. Although ATF issues a variety of public and law enforcement reports and bulletins regarding firearm commerce, trafficking, and related issues every year, it has not undertaken a joint academic study on the scale of the NFCTA in more than 20 years. Recognizing that effective approaches to reducing gun violence are data-driven, grounded in research, and informed by multi-disciplinary input, the NFCTA will issue its initial assessment in a series of four separate reports. To ensure NFCTA reports remain timely, ATF will be updating key findings annually.

A critical part of ATF's mission is to regulate the lawful commerce in firearms to help prevent diversion of these firearms from the legal to the illegal market. Understanding the firearm marketplace from the perspective of the general public, firearm owners, and the regulated firearm industry is essential to this mission. That is why Volume I of the NFCTA report, issued today, is a broad overview of firearms commerce in the United States. This volume covers the period from 2000 to 2020; much of the analysis, however, focuses on the period for which the most comprehensive data is available, 2016 to 2020 (2020 is the most recent calendar year for which information was available at the time of the assessment).

This volume presents and analyzes data collected by ATF and other federal agencies related to the manufacture, exportation, and importation of firearms. Between 2000 and 2020, the number of Gun Control Act (GCA) firearms and National Firearms Act (NFA) weapons that were domestically manufactured, exported by U.S. manufacturers, or imported into the U.S. increased by 187%, 240% and 350% respectively. This data illustrates the flow of new firearms into the domestic market over time which can help document trends and patterns in commerce. Trends in firearm commerce highlighted by this report include the pistol becoming the dominant firearm type manufactured and imported into the U.S. over the last decade, and an increase of 24,080% in annual manufacturing of short-barreled rifles in the period from 2000 to 2020.

This volume analyzes technological developments that have occurred in the past 20 years. One of the most significant developments affecting lawful firearm commerce and law enforcement's ability to reduce illegal access to guns in this period has been the proliferation of privately made firearms (PMFs). Since the early 2000s, advances in firearm manufacturing and design, combined with the readily online availability of parts and information necessary to assemble PMFs have made it easier for unlicensed persons to make a firearm at home without any records or a background check. These PMFs lack identifying markings or recordkeeping requirements making it difficult for law enforcement to completely know how many are being made and distributed into commerce. The data available, however, makes it clear that criminals are actively making, using, and distributing PMFs both domestically and internationally. Indeed, the number of suspected PMFs recovered by law enforcement and subsequently traced by ATF increased 1,000% between 2016 and 2021. As is detailed in the report, to address the challenges posed by the proliferation of PMFs, the Department of Justice and ATF have recently updated the regulatory definitions applicable to the federal firearm laws.

We have striven to ensure that the information provided in Volume I of the NFCTA, and in subsequent reports, will help federal, state, and local law enforcement, prosecutors, policymakers, and other

stakeholders obtain a better understanding of commerce in firearms and how to best address illegal firearms trafficking. The increase in firearm commerce documented in Volume I highlights the challenges faced by ATF as its resources have not kept pace.

ATF appreciates the opportunity to develop the NFCTA as a resource to inform public policy and reinforce the broad range of initiatives the Biden administration, the Department of Justice, ATF, and our law enforcement and community partners are taking to reduce the risk of gun violence and enhance safety in all communities across the Nation. We want to thank all those who directly participated in this report, including our knowledgeable academic partners and law enforcement subject matter experts. Every member of the NFCTA team joins me in expressing our gratitude.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gary Restaino".

Gary Restaino
Acting Director