

General Findings: Local Illegal Firearms Markets

This section summarizes enforcement findings and conclusions based on crime gun trace information from the 17 participating communities. The category “adult” includes ages 25 and over, “youth” includes ages 18 to 24, and “juvenile” includes ages 17 and under.*

Adult crime guns predominate. Most crime guns are recovered from adults. While youth firearms crime remains a special priority because of high rates of youth violence, adult firearms crime still predominates. In the largest city among the participants, New York, where almost 13,000 crime guns were submitted for tracing, juveniles under age 18 account for 11 percent of the crime guns, youth ages 18 to 24 account for 34 percent, and adults age 25 and over account for 55 percent. Only in Bridgeport does the adult crime gun category not constitute a plurality.

Juvenile crime guns are a significant percentage of the total. One out of ten crime guns is recovered from a juvenile. Juvenile crime gun trace requests accounted for at least 10 percent of the total traces requested, with three exceptions, Cleveland (6 percent), Milwaukee (8 percent), and Richmond (9 percent). The percentage of juvenile crime guns submitted for tracing was over 20 percent in two cities: Seattle and Memphis.

Juvenile and youth crime guns comprise almost half of the total. Juvenile and youth crime guns combined account for 45 percent of the crime guns requested for tracing, while adult crime guns account for 55 percent of the total.

Handguns predominate. Eight out of ten crime guns traced are handguns. Handguns include semiautomatic pistols, revolvers, and derringers. In all sites, handguns are the largest category of firearms recovered by enforcement agencies. The percentage of crime guns accounted for by handguns recovered from all age groups ranged from 63 percent in Salinas, to 98 percent in Atlanta.

A disproportionate number of juvenile and youth crime guns are handguns. Juvenile and youth crime guns are more likely than adult crime guns to be handguns. Eight out of ten

juvenile and youth crime guns traced are handguns, whereas seven out of 10 adult crime guns are handguns. Of the crime guns recovered from *juveniles*, the percentage that are handguns ranges from 73 percent in Salinas to more than 90 percent in five cities: Cleveland, New York City, Seattle, Richmond, and Boston. Of the crime guns recovered from *youth*, the percentage that are handguns ranges from 67 percent in San Antonio to more than 90 percent in three cities: Washington, DC, Memphis, and New York City. Of the crime guns recovered from *adults*, the lowest percentage of handguns is in Seattle and Memphis, 56 percent. Handguns account for between 80 and 90 percent of the adult crime guns in four cities.

Semiautomatic handguns predominate. Semiautomatic handguns are more common crime guns than revolvers. Semiautomatic handguns range from a high of 67 percent of crime guns in Atlanta, to a low of 39 percent in St. Louis. Revolvers supplied no more than 41 percent of crime guns in any site. Half of all the crime guns recovered are semiautomatics.

A disproportionate number of juvenile and youth crime guns are semiautomatic handguns. In each site, juveniles and youth are more likely to be associated with semiautomatic handguns than are adults. Semiautomatic handguns accounted for a high of 66 percent of the *juvenile* crime guns in Boston, to a low of 47 percent of the juvenile crime guns in Baltimore and Birmingham. Semiautomatic handguns accounted for a high of 71 percent of the *youth* crime guns in Memphis, to a low of 46 percent of the youth crime guns in Salinas. Semiautomatic handguns accounted for a high of 54 percent of the *adult* crime guns in New York City and Washington, D.C. to a low of 35 percent of the adult crime guns in Birmingham and Milwaukee. Overall, 47 percent of the adult crime guns are semiautomatics. Semiautomatics constitute 61 percent of the youth crime guns and 58 percent of the juvenile crime guns.

* Not all sites were considered for each of the findings below. Where the number of cases was insufficient for the particular finding, the site was excluded. A technical note with further explanation is available from ATF.

In each site crime guns are concentrated among a relatively few kinds of firearms by manufacturer and caliber. The top 10 types of crime guns, by manufacturer and caliber, represent a disproportionately large share of the total number of recovered firearms. The greatest concentration is in Inglewood, where the top 10 types of crime guns by manufacturer and caliber account for 48 percent of the total; 58 types of crime guns by manufacturer and caliber account for the remaining 52 percent. Even in Milwaukee, where the concentration is the least, the top 10 types of crime guns by manufacturer and caliber still account for 21 percent of the total; 567 types of crime guns by manufacturer and caliber account for the remaining 79 percent. Overall, the top 10 types of firearms by manufacturer and caliber account for more than 9,000 crime guns, or 24 percent, while 1,207 kinds of firearms by manufacturer and caliber account for the over 28,000 crime guns remaining, or 76 percent.

Crime gun concentration by kind of firearm, by manufacturer and caliber, is relatively greater among juveniles and youth than among adults. The highest concentration among *juvenile* crime guns is in Birmingham where the top 10 types of firearms by manufacturer and caliber account for 52 percent of recovered juvenile firearms. The highest concentration among *youth* crime guns is in Memphis where the top 10 kinds of firearms by manufacturer and caliber account for 46 percent of recovered youth firearms. By comparison, the highest concentration among *adult* crime guns is in Bridgeport, where the top 10 types of firearms by manufacturer and caliber account for 36 percent of the recovered adult firearms.

In general, the State in which the community is located is the largest single source of its successfully traced crime guns. In 12 of the 17 sites, the State itself supplies a *majority* of the successfully traced crime guns. This majority ranged from a high of 77 percent in San Antonio to a low of 54 percent in Seattle. In three of the 17 sites, the State itself supplies more crime guns than any other single source State, while the combination of all other States

supplies more than half of the successfully traced crime guns. This plurality ranges from a high of 47 percent in St. Louis to a low of 13 percent in New York City. There are two exceptions: for Jersey City, the top two source States are Virginia and Florida, each supplying 14 percent of the successfully traced crime guns, while New Jersey supplies 10 percent. No crime guns were traced to first retail sales in Washington, DC.

Many recovered firearms are rapidly diverted from first retail sales at federally licensed gun dealers to a black market that supplies juveniles and youth. This is shown by the proportion of guns recovered by law enforcement officials that are new, that is, bought less than three years before recovery by enforcement officials. New guns in young hands signal direct diversion — by illegal firearms trafficking, including straw purchases, theft from federally licensed gun dealers, or a combination of all of these. Enforcement officials can often identify the illegal sources of new firearms by following up on trace information. By contrast, older crime guns are more likely to have passed through numerous hands before entering illegal commerce, requiring other methods, such as debriefing criminal offenders, to identify their illegal sources. Based on crime guns recovered and submitted for tracing during the initiative, ATF estimates that new crime guns comprise between 22 percent and 43 percent of the firearms recovered from *juveniles*, between 30 percent and 54 percent of the firearms recovered from *youth*, and between 25 percent and 46 percent of the firearms recovered from *adults*.* This finding leads to our conclusion that an effort to identify, prosecute, and incarcerate illegal firearms traffickers can reduce the illegal firearms supply that supports criminal activity by young people.

Crime guns with *obliterated serial numbers* are likely to have been illegally trafficked. Local tracing practices with respect to firearms with obliterated serial numbers varied too much during this initiative to provide consistent community-based analyses of crime guns with obliterated serial numbers. Therefore, reports on crime guns with obliterated serial numbers are not

* A technical note explaining how these ranges were calculated is available from ATF upon request.