

PART V:

Type and Volume of Firearms Trafficked

Firearms Trafficked

New, Secondhand, and Stolen Firearms

The study survey provided 11 descriptive categories to characterize the “firearm kind” involved in the investigation. These included new, secondhand, stolen, and National Firearm Act (NFA) weapons¹. ATF SAs identified the kinds of firearms involved in 83.0% of the surveyed investigations closed between 2017 and 2021 (8,055 of 9,708). New firearms (65.8%) were the predominant kind of firearm identified, followed by secondhand (39.8%), and stolen (18.8%) firearms (Table TVF-01). While new firearms figured more prominently, new and secondhand firearms were trafficked together in about 17.5% (1,412 of 8,055) of investigations. ATF SAs also identified NFA and privately made firearms (PMFs)² in approximately 5% and 4% of the trafficking investigations, respectively. Receivers, firearms with obliterated serial numbers, and firearms subject to the Arms Export Control Act were reported in smaller percentages of the investigations.

Table TVF-01: Total Number and Percentage of Cases by Firearm Kind, 2017 – 2021

| Firearm Kind | Number of Cases | % Total Cases |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| New firearms | 5,299 | 65.8% |
| Secondhand firearms | 3,208 | 39.8% |
| Stolen firearms | 1,514 | 18.8% |
| National Firearms Act weapons | 432 | 5.3% |
| Privately made firearms | 316 | 3.9% |
| Receivers | 168 | 2.1% |
| Obliterated serial number firearms | 119 | 1.5% |
| Arms Export Control Act firearms | 73 | 0.9% |

Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive.

Table TVF-02 reflects the yearly trends in the percentage of kinds of firearms trafficked between 2017 and 2021. The percentage of investigations involving the trafficking of new firearms increased by 12 percentage points from 61.3% in 2017 to 73.2% in 2021 (19.4% increase in the annual share). In contrast, the percentage of investigations with trafficked secondhand firearms decreased by 12.6 percentage points from 46.0% in 2017 to 33.3% in 2021 (27.6% decrease in the annual share). The percentage of investigations involving the trafficking of stolen guns decreased by 8.5 percentage points between 2017 and 2021 with the bulk of this decrease attributable to a decline from 21.1% in 2020 to 12.1% in 2021. As shown earlier in Part III – Firearm Trafficking Channels and Methods Used, Table FTC-02, there was a similar decrease in investigations involving firearms stolen from FFLs only.

The annual percentages of firearm trafficking investigations involving PMFs were small relative to other types of trafficked firearms. However, the percentage of investigations with trafficked PMFs increased by 2.9 percentage points from 2.7% in 2017 to 5.6% in 2021 (107.4% increase in the annual share). As

reflected in Table TVF-02, the annual percentage of investigations with PMFs fluctuated after 2017 with a low of 3.1% in 2020 increasing to a high of 5.6% in 2021.

Table TVF-02: Trends in Top Five Kind of Firearms Trafficked

| Firearm Kind | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | % Difference 17-21 |
|---------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------------------|
| New firearms | 61.3% | 62.6% | 64.5% | 69.5% | 73.2% | 12.0% |
| Secondhand firearms | 46.0% | 44.1% | 38.9% | 34.0% | 33.3% | -12.6% |
| Stolen firearms | 20.6% | 20.6% | 18.4% | 21.1% | 12.1% | -8.5% |
| National Firearms Act weapons | 4.6% | 4.9% | 6.5% | 4.5% | 3.8% | -0.8% |
| Privately manufactured firearms | 2.7% | 4.6% | 3.7% | 3.1% | 5.6% | 2.9% |
| Total Cases | 1,830 | 1,825 | 1,530 | 1,454 | 1,416 | |

Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive.

Types of NFA Weapons Trafficked

SAs identified 432 investigations (5.3% of 8,055) that involved the trafficking of NFA weapons (Table TVF-03). More than half of these investigations (51.2%, 221 of 432) involved trafficking in machinegun parts and/or conversion kits. Silencers and silencer parts were trafficked in nearly 24% and silencer parts sold as other items (e.g., solvent traps) were involved in almost 18% of these investigations. Short-barreled rifles and short-barreled shotguns were trafficked in approximately 21% and 12% of the trafficking investigations involving NFA weapons, respectively.

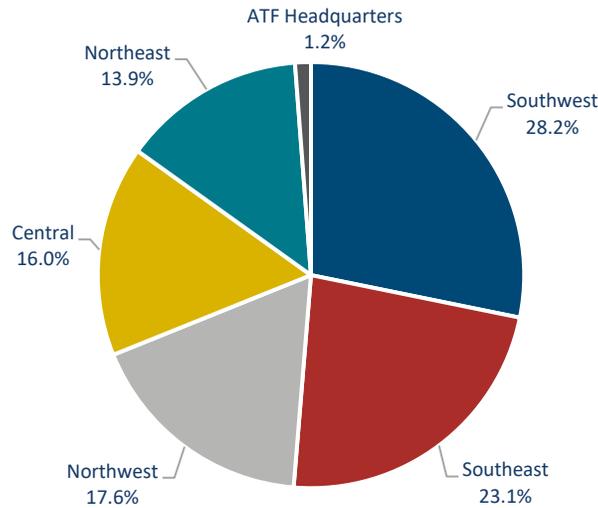
Table TVF-03: Total Number and Percentage of Cases by Types of NFA Weapons Trafficked, 2017 – 2021

| NFA Weapon Type | Number of Cases | % of Cases |
|--|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Machinegun / Machinegun parts / Conversion devices | 221 | 51.2% |
| Silencers / Silencer parts | 103 | 23.8% |
| Short-barreled rifles | 89 | 20.6% |
| Silencer parts sold as other items | 76 | 17.6% |
| Short-barreled shotguns | 50 | 11.6% |
| Other NFA weapons | 20 | 4.6% |
| Destructive devices / Explosives | 12 | 2.8% |

Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive.

As reflected in Figure TVF-01, the ATF field divisions in the Southwest region accounted for the largest percentage of the 432 NFA trafficking investigations (28.2%, 122) followed by the Southeast region (23.1%, 100).

Figure TVF-01: Percentage of Total NFA Trafficking Investigations by Region, 2017 – 2021



Types of Privately Made Firearms Trafficked

SAs identified 316 investigations (3.9% of 8,055) that involved the trafficking of PMFs (Table TVF-04). Handguns were most frequently trafficked in these PMF investigations (45.6% of 316) closely followed by long guns (38.6% of 316). Machinegun conversion kits, machineguns, silencers, silencer parts, and a variety of other firearms were also trafficked in the PMF investigations.

Table TVF-04: Total Number and Percentage of Cases by Types of PMFs Trafficked, 2017 – 2021

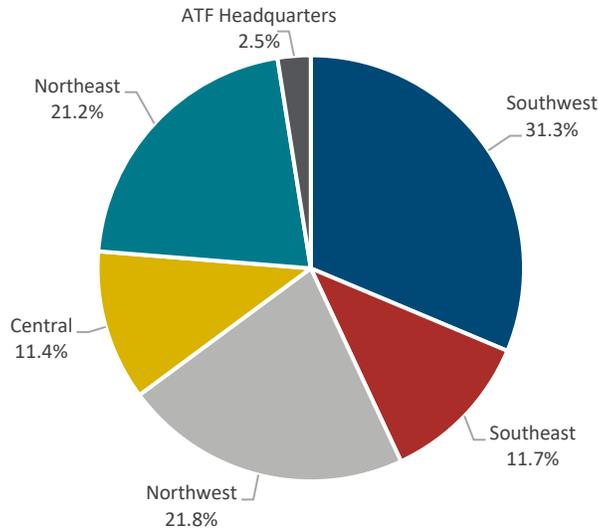
| PMF Type | Number of Cases | % of Cases |
|---|-----------------|------------|
| Handguns | 144 | 45.6% |
| Long guns | 122 | 38.6% |
| Receivers - Fully milled | 49 | 15.5% |
| Machinegun conversion devices - Installed | 47 | 14.9% |
| Machinegun conversion devices - Not Installed | 44 | 13.9% |
| Silencers | 35 | 11.1% |
| Handguns - Unassembled kit | 33 | 10.4% |
| Machineguns | 32 | 10.1% |
| Receivers - Partially milled | 28 | 8.9% |
| Silencer parts | 22 | 7.0% |
| Long guns - Unassembled kit | 16 | 5.1% |
| Receiver flats | 12 | 3.8% |
| Other PMFs - Assembled | 5 | 1.6% |
| Short-barreled rifles | 4 | 1.3% |
| Destructive device | 3 | 0.9% |
| Other PMFs - Unassembled | 1 | 0.3% |

Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive.

ATF field divisions in the western part of the U.S. generated the largest percentages of PMF investigations (Figure TVF-02). Of the 316 investigations involving PMF trafficking, the Southwest region accounted for more than 31% (99) and the Northwest region accounted for nearly 22% (69) of

cases respectively. ATF field divisions in the Northeast region accounted for slightly more than 21% (67) of the investigations involving PMF trafficking.

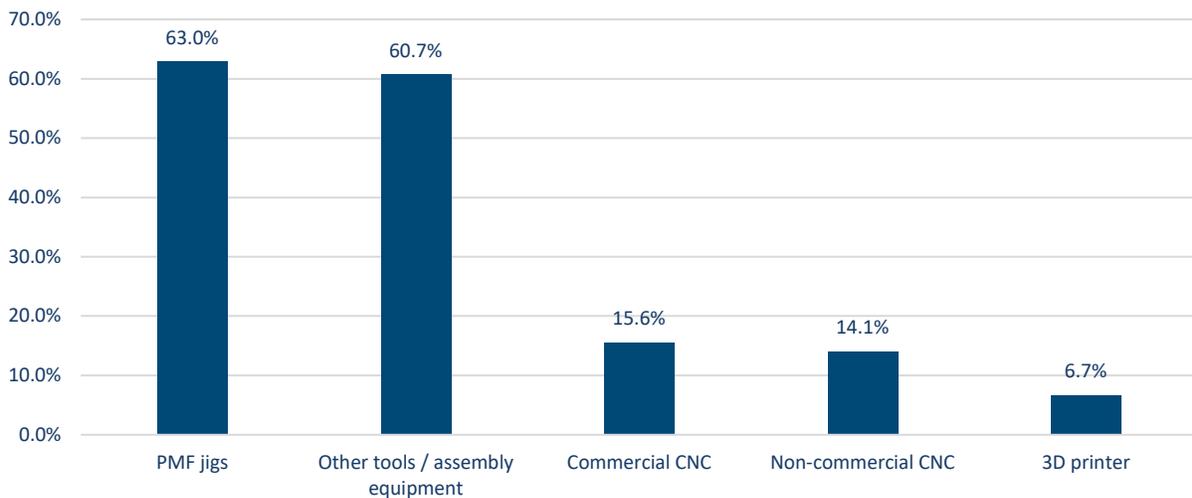
Figure TVF-02: Percentage of Total PMF Trafficking Investigations by Region, 2017 – 2021



Types of PMF Assembly Equipment

ATF SAs identified the assembly equipment used to manufacture PMFs in nearly 43% (135) of the 316 investigations involving the trafficking of PMFs. In these 135 investigations, the most frequently used equipment was PMF jigs (63.0%, 85). PMF jigs are the templates used to complete drilling and milling of unfinished frames or receivers. The use of PMF jigs was followed closely by the use of other tools and assembly equipment (60.7%, 82). Other tools and equipment are generally comprised of hand drills, screw drivers, punches, and files.

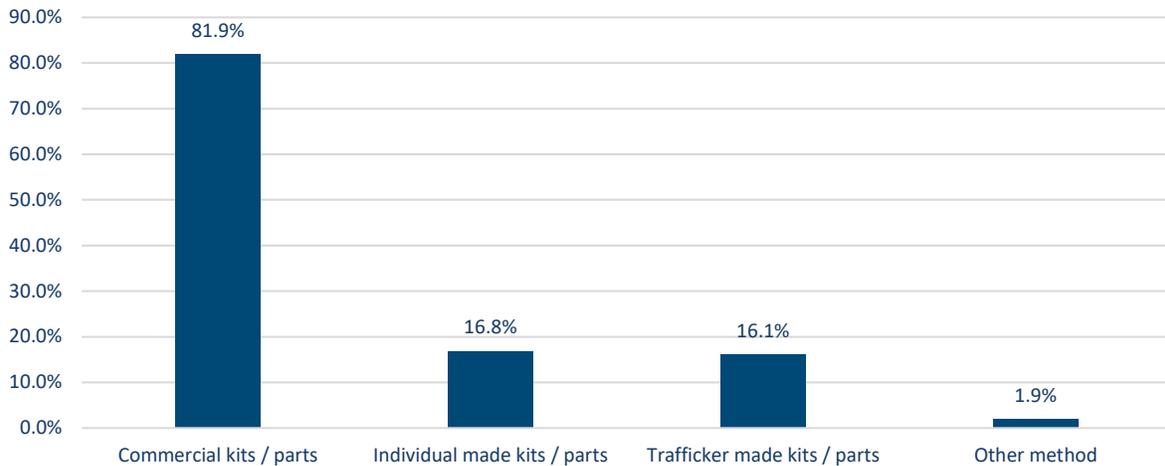
Figure TVF-03: Percentages of Cases with Types of PMF Assembly Equipment Used, 2017 – 2021



Methods of PMF Component Acquisition

ATF SAs identified the methods used to acquire PMF components in more than 49% (155) of the 316 investigations involving the trafficking of PMFs. In these 155 investigations, commercial kits that contained most or all the parts necessary to assemble a functioning firearm and commercial firearm parts were the most common method for acquiring PMF components (81.9%, 127).

Figure TVF-04: Percentages of Cases with PMF Component Acquisition Methods Used, 2017 – 2021



Volume of Firearms Trafficked

Estimated Volume of Firearms Trafficked

In many investigations, LE recovers trafficked firearms; however, these same investigations may involve trafficked firearms that are not recovered by LE. A variety of factors can account for why firearms suspected of being trafficked are not taken into LE custody. The most common reason is that a firearm trafficker may have been actively trafficking firearms before LE learns of their activity. Such firearms may be trafficked to unknown end users and not yet recovered by LE. Another reason may involve persons suspected of trafficking firearms and who are under investigation, however LE may not possess enough probable cause and legal authority to seize and forfeit the firearms until further into the investigation. Additionally, there may be firearms that are trafficked prior to the start of a LE investigation, and it is their recovery that may generate a lead that precipitates the opening of an investigation.

The estimated number of firearms trafficked are those that an ATF SA reasonably believed had been trafficked during an investigation, excluding any firearms reported as in LE custody in ATF's case management system. In approximately 65% (6,327 of 9,708) of the trafficking cases included in this study, ATF SAs were able to estimate the number of trafficked firearms not recovered by LE. In these 6,327 investigations, ATF SAs estimated 132,875 firearms were trafficked and not recovered by LE. As reflected in Table TVF-05, ATF SAs reported that almost 58% of the cases involved five or fewer trafficked firearms while less than one percent involved more than 250 trafficked firearms that were not recovered by LE.

The mean and median represent two different measures of the average number of estimated trafficked firearms. The mean is the sum of all estimated numbers of firearms reported in each case divided by the total number of cases. The median is the middle number of estimated firearms reported in a case (or 50th percentile value) when the number of firearms in the cases are ranked from smallest to largest. As reflected in Table TVF-05, the mean and median estimated number of trafficked firearms that were not recovered by LE were 21 and 4, respectively. The difference between these two measures is due to the larger number of firearms (57,044 or 42.9% of 132,875) associated with the 41 cases involving more than 250 trafficked firearms. This included the presence of a single investigation that involved an estimated 35,000 trafficked firearms that were not recovered by LE³. When this outlier case is excluded, the mean and median estimated number of trafficked firearms were 15.5 and 4, respectively.

Table TVF-05: Total Number of Cases and Estimated Volume of Firearms Trafficked by Number of Firearms per Case, 2017 – 2021

| Number of Firearms per Case | Number of Cases | % Total Cases | Est. Number of Firearms | Median | Mean | Est. % Firearms |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------------------|------------|-------------|-----------------|
| 1 - 5 | 3,660 | 57.8% | 8,162 | 2.0 | 2.2 | 6.1% |
| 6 - 10 | 929 | 14.7% | 7,297 | 8.0 | 7.9 | 5.5% |
| 11 - 20 | 764 | 12.1% | 11,523 | 15.0 | 15.1 | 8.7% |
| 21 - 50 | 647 | 10.2% | 20,663 | 30.0 | 31.9 | 15.6% |
| 51 - 100 | 200 | 3.2% | 14,338 | 68.5 | 71.7 | 10.8% |
| 101 - 250 | 86 | 1.4% | 13,848 | 150.0 | 161.0 | 10.4% |
| 251 or greater | 41 | 0.6% | 57,044 | 449.0 | 1,391.3 | 42.9% |
| Total | 6,327 | 100.0% | 132,875 | 4.0 | 21.0 | 100.0% |
| Total w/o outlier | 6,326 | 100.0% | 97,875 | 4.0 | 15.5 | 73.7% |

Volume of Trafficked Firearms in LE Custody

The number of firearms in LE custody is the number of firearms seized or purchased as evidence or abandoned in an investigation and are notated in ATF’s case management system as being either in ATF’s custody or in the custody of another LEA. Firearms may only be seized if they are evidence of a violation of law. Federally, firearms that are evidence of a violation of law are also subject to the forfeiture process. In some cases, a state or local agency may have broader authority to seize firearms as evidence and for forfeiture. There are firearms that may be in LE custody related to a trafficking case that are not reflected in these numbers because that custodial agency was not directly part of the trafficking case and/or the SA did not annotate these firearms in the case management system.

In 3,515 (36.2%) of the trafficking cases in this study, firearms were taken into LE custody and documented in the ATF case management system. A total of 96,811 trafficked firearms were recovered by LE in these cases. As reflected in Table TVF-06, the mean and median number of trafficked firearms in LE custody were 27.5 and 2, respectively. ATF SAs reported that almost 78% of the cases involved 5 or fewer trafficked firearms while less than one percent involved more than 250 trafficked firearms recovered by LE. This table includes the same outlier investigation identified above that involved the recovery of 68,111 firearms. When this outlier case is excluded, the mean and median number of trafficked firearms in LE custody were 8.2 and 2, respectively.

Table TVF-06: Total Number of Cases and Volume of Trafficked Firearms in LE Custody by Number of Firearms per Case, 2017 – 2021

| Number of Firearms Per Case | Number of Cases | % Total Cases | Est. Number of Firearms | Median | Mean | Est. % Firearms |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------------------|------------|-------------|-----------------|
| 1 - 5 | 2,728 | 77.6% | 5,390 | 1.0 | 2.0 | 5.6% |
| 6 - 10 | 367 | 10.4% | 2,768 | 7.0 | 7.5 | 2.9% |
| 11 - 20 | 216 | 6.2% | 3,095 | 14.0 | 14.3 | 3.2% |
| 21 - 50 | 124 | 3.5% | 3,867 | 30.0 | 31.2 | 4.0% |
| 51 - 100 | 40 | 1.1% | 2,689 | 63.0 | 67.2 | 2.8% |
| 101 - 250 | 25 | 0.7% | 3,430 | 116.0 | 137.2 | 3.5% |
| 251 or greater | 15 | 0.4% | 75,572 | 399.0 | 5,038.1 | 78.1% |
| Total | 3,515 | 100.0% | 96,811 | 2.0 | 27.5 | 100.0% |
| Total w/o outlier | 3,514 | 100.0% | 28,700 | 2.0 | 8.2 | 29.7% |

Combined Volume of Estimated and Trafficked Firearms in LE Custody

Table TVF-07 presents the combined distribution of the total number of firearms that were estimated to be trafficked, but not recovered, and the total number of trafficked firearms recovered by LE in 7,779 (80.1% of 9,709) trafficking investigations initiated between 2017 and 2021. The 7,779 trafficking investigations represent the cases that reported both the estimated volume of trafficked firearms not recovered by LE and the number of trafficked firearms in LE custody, cases that only reported estimated volume of trafficked firearms not recovered by LE, and cases that only reported the number of trafficked firearms in LE custody. ATF SAs estimated that 132,875 firearms were trafficked and not recovered by LE, and an additional 96,811 firearms were trafficked and recovered by LE in these 7,779 investigations. This combination reflects a combined total volume of 229,686 firearms trafficked among these investigations. This includes the outlier investigation that accounted for 103,111 firearms (68,111 trafficked firearms recovered by LE and 35,000 trafficked firearms not recovered by LE).

The 7,779 investigations involved, on average, a mean of almost 30 trafficked firearms. However, as reflected by the median of four trafficked firearms, most ATF trafficking investigations involve relatively small numbers of firearms (Table TVF-09). Approximately 57% of cases involved five or fewer trafficked firearms and these investigations accounted for roughly 4% of the total number of trafficked firearms between 2017 and 2021. While only 55 investigations involved the trafficking of more than 250 firearms (0.7% of 7,770), these higher volume cases accounted for almost 59% of the total number of trafficked firearms during the study period. This includes an outlier case involving a combined total volume of 103,111 firearms trafficked. When this case is excluded, the mean and median numbers of combined total firearms trafficked were 16.3 and 4, respectively.

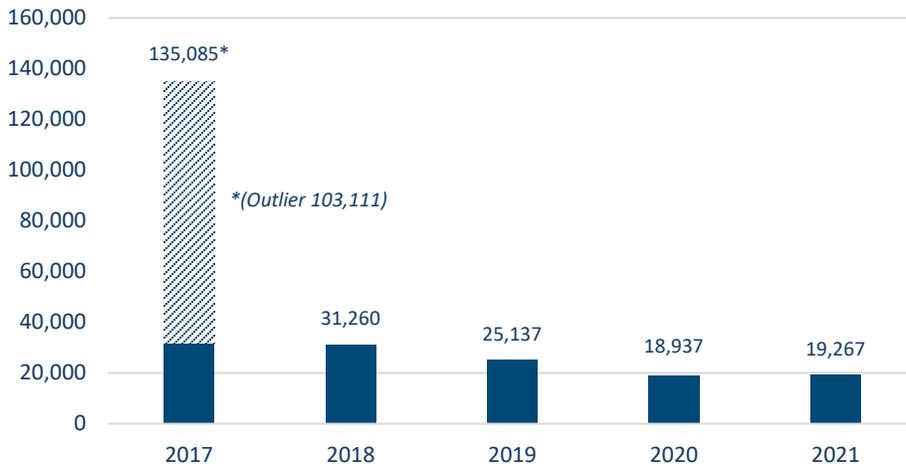
Table TVF-07: Number of Cases and Volume of Combined Estimated and In-Custody Trafficked Firearms by Number of Firearms per Case, 2017 – 2021

| Number of Firearms per Case | Number of Cases | % Total Cases | Est. Number of Firearms | Median | Mean | Est. % Firearms |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------------------|------------|-------------|-----------------|
| 1 - 5 | 4,438 | 57.1% | 10,183 | 2.0 | 2.3 | 4.4% |
| 6 - 10 | 1,188 | 15.3% | 9,214 | 8.0 | 7.8 | 4.0% |
| 11 - 20 | 936 | 12.0% | 13,872 | 14.0 | 14.8 | 6.0% |
| 21 - 50 | 776 | 10.0% | 24,251 | 30.0 | 31.3 | 10.6% |
| 51 - 100 | 255 | 3.3% | 17,560 | 65.0 | 68.9 | 7.6% |
| 101 - 250 | 131 | 1.7% | 20,182 | 141.0 | 154.1 | 8.8% |
| 251 or greater | 55 | 0.7% | 134,424 | 485.0 | 2,444.1 | 58.5% |
| Total | 7,779 | 100.0% | 229,686 | 4.0 | 29.5 | 100.0% |
| Total w/o outlier | 7,778 | 100.0% | 126,575 | 4.0 | 16.3 | 55.1% |

Trends in Volume of Firearms Trafficked

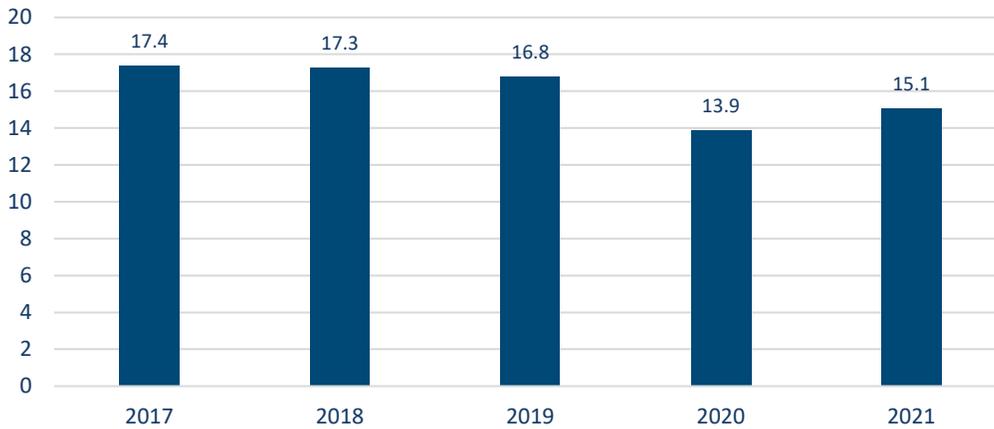
Figure TVF-05 reflects the annual total number of firearms trafficked in the aforementioned 7,779 ATF trafficking investigations. The outlier investigation involving 103,111 trafficked firearms was initiated in 2017. This case involved a company manufacturing and selling unmarked and unregistered silencer parts, including tubes, end caps, and baffles, as well as silencer kits⁴. Based on evidence uncovered in the case, including shipping records, purchase orders, and financial documents, it is estimated that in addition to the 68,109 silencer and silencer parts and two handguns taken into ATF custody, approximately 35,000 unregistered silencer parts were trafficked.

Figure TVF-05: Annual Volume of Firearms Trafficked



The mean number of firearms trafficked per investigation for each year between 2017 and 2021, with the outlier investigation excluded, is presented in Figure TVF-06. The mean number of firearms per investigation was about 17 between 2017 and 2019. The mean number of firearms trafficked per investigation dropped by 2.9 percentage points between 2019 and 2020 to 13.9 (reflecting a 17.3% decrease in the mean number of firearms trafficked per investigation). The mean number of firearms trafficked per investigation subsequently increased modestly to about 15 in 2021.

Figure TVF-06: Mean Number of Firearms Trafficked Per Investigation by Year



This outlier investigation reflects the reality that ATF agents rarely encounter cases involving very large numbers of trafficked firearms. The inclusion of this outlier case would artificially inflate the mean and total volume of firearms associated with other investigations sharing the same characteristics. As such, the remaining analyses below exclude the 103,111 trafficked firearms associated with the outlier case. The total number in these analyses included 126,575 trafficked firearms from 7,778 closed investigations between 2017 and 2021.

Firearms Trafficked by Weapon Type

Handguns represented the most frequently trafficked firearm, accounting for almost 56% of the 126,575 firearms trafficked during the study period (Table TVF-08). Rifles represented almost 19% of trafficked firearms, followed by shotguns (4.3%), silencers (4.1%), and frames or receivers (2.9%). The specific type of firearm was not identified for about 11% of trafficked firearms. In some instances, the SAs who completed the surveys were not the original investigators on the case and did not have access to the information indicating the type of firearm trafficked. In other instances, the information received by SAs was provided by informants and witnesses who did not include the specific type of firearm trafficked.

Table TVF-08: Total Number and Percentage of Firearms Trafficked by Weapon Type, 2017 – 2021

| Weapon Type | Number of Firearms | % Total Firearms |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Handguns | 70,594 | 55.8% |
| Rifles | 23,511 | 18.6% |
| Shotguns | 5,503 | 4.3% |
| Silencers | 5,132 | 4.1% |
| Frame or receiver | 3,680 | 2.9% |
| Machinegun conversion device | 1,394 | 1.1% |
| PMF | 1,122 | 0.9% |
| Machinegun / parts | 752 | 0.6% |
| Short-barreled rifles/shotguns | 570 | 0.5% |
| Any other weapon | 83 | 0.1% |
| Weapon made from rifle / shotgun | 57 | 0.0% |
| Destructive device | 18 | 0.0% |
| Unknown | 14,159 | 11.2% |
| Total | 126,575 | 100.0% |

Firearm Trafficking Volume by Trafficking Channel

The mean number of firearms per investigation varied depending on the trafficking channel used (Table TVF-09). Unlicensed dealers were associated with the largest number of trafficked firearms (68,388) and averaged 20 trafficked firearms per investigation. Straw purchasers and straw purchasing rings were associated with the next largest number of trafficked firearms (37,749) but averaged only about 11 trafficked firearms per investigation. Trafficking in firearms at gun shows, flea markets, and auctions was associated with the highest mean number of firearms trafficked per investigation (59.1). Gun show investigations represent a venue for firearm sales that can involve transactions from FFLs and unlicensed dealers. Although FFLs were involved in less than 2% of trafficking investigations (see Table FTC-01 in Part III), trafficking in firearms by FFLs was associated with a mean of slightly more than 57 firearms per investigation.

The average number of firearms trafficked in investigations of firearms stolen from private persons and investigations of firearms stolen from FFLs was approximately 14. Trafficking cases involving firearms stolen from an FFL were associated with 20,202 firearms and cases involving firearms stolen from private persons were associated with 9,319 firearms.

Table TVF-09: Total Number of Cases and Volume of Trafficked Firearms by Trafficking Channel, 2017 – 2021

| Trafficking Channel | Number of Cases | Mean | Total Number of Firearms |
|---|-----------------|------|--------------------------|
| Trafficking in firearms by an unlicensed dealer (private person) | 3,403 | 20.1 | 68,388 |
| Trafficking in firearms by a straw purchaser or straw purchasing ring | 3,305 | 11.4 | 37,749 |
| Trafficking in firearms stolen from an FFL | 1,452 | 13.9 | 20,202 |
| Trafficking in firearms stolen from private persons | 664 | 14.0 | 9,319 |
| Trafficking in firearms illegally exported from the United States | 649 | 16.7 | 10,809 |
| Trafficking in firearms through online marketplaces | 297 | 47.1 | 13,983 |
| Trafficking in firearms through unlicensed making (PMFs, etc.) | 252 | 35.0 | 8,814 |
| Trafficking in firearms at gun shows, flea markets, or auctions | 250 | 59.1 | 14,775 |
| Trafficking in firearms through social media platforms | 226 | 27.8 | 6,287 |
| Trafficking in firearms by an FFL(s) | 136 | 57.3 | 7,795 |

Firearms Trafficking Volume by Region and Field Division

ATF field divisions located in the Southeast region of the U.S. were associated with the largest mean number of firearms trafficked per investigation (24.8) followed by field divisions in the Northwest (21.5) during the study period (Table TVF-10). ATF field divisions in the Southeast region were associated with the largest total number of trafficked firearms (34,455) followed by field divisions in the Southwest region (32,191).

Table TVF-10: Total Number of Cases and Volume of Trafficked Firearms by Region, 2017 – 2021

| Region | Number of Cases | Mean | Total Number of Firearms |
|-----------|-----------------|------|--------------------------|
| Central | 1,683 | 17.4 | 29,361 |
| Southwest | 2,248 | 14.3 | 32,191 |
| Southeast | 1,388 | 24.8 | 34,455 |
| Northeast | 1,856 | 9.5 | 17,639 |
| Northwest | 522 | 21.5 | 11,223 |

Phoenix field division investigations accounted for the largest total number of trafficked firearms among the 25 ATF field divisions (Table TVF-11a) while New Orleans field division had the largest mean number of trafficked firearms per investigation (Table TVF-11b).

Table TVF-11a: Highest Volume of Trafficked Firearms for the Top Five ATF Field Divisions, 2017 – 2021

| ATF Field Division | Number of Cases | Mean | Total Number of Firearms |
|--------------------|-----------------|------|--------------------------|
| Phoenix | 837 | 13.2 | 11,051 |
| Houston | 672 | 14.5 | 9,725 |
| Chicago | 552 | 14.8 | 8,151 |
| Louisville | 212 | 36.6 | 7,754 |
| Dallas | 491 | 15.7 | 7,718 |

Table TVF-11b: Highest Mean Volume of Trafficked Firearms for the Top Five ATF Field Divisions, 2017 – 2021

| ATF Field Division | Number of Cases | Mean | Total Number of Firearms |
|---------------------------|------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------|
| New Orleans | 204 | 37.3 | 7,607 |
| Louisville | 212 | 36.6 | 7,754 |
| Atlanta | 216 | 34.0 | 7,344 |
| Charlotte | 160 | 26.2 | 4,185 |
| Denver | 145 | 24.4 | 3,532 |

See Table TVF-11 in Appendix TVF – Type and Volume of Firearms Trafficked for a full ranking of ATF field divisions by firearm trafficking volume between 2017 and 2021.

Firearms Trafficking Volume by Geographic Scope and Source-to-Market Type

Firearm trafficking cases involving the interstate movement of firearms had a higher mean number of trafficked guns per investigation (23.3) relative to firearm trafficking cases involving the intrastate movement of firearms (17.9). Firearm trafficking cases that featured the movement of guns from the U.S. to foreign countries had a mean of almost 19 trafficked firearms per investigation. Investigations involving firearms trafficked from the U.S. into Mexico represented almost 73% of cases involving the illegal flow of guns from the U.S. to foreign countries (854 of 1,176) and had a mean of almost 16 trafficked firearms per investigation. Firearm trafficking investigations involving the movement of firearms from foreign countries into the U.S. had a mean of slightly more than 50 trafficked firearms per investigation. Firearm trafficking investigations involving the movement of firearms from China into the U.S. represented almost 55% of foreign country into the U.S. trafficking cases (45 of 82) and had a mean of 77 trafficked firearms per investigation. As noted in the discussion above about the outlier case involving silencer parts, investigations involving illegal imports from China primarily relate to silencers, silencer parts, machine gun conversion devices, and unfinished frames or receivers (regulated for purposes of import).

Table TVF-12: Total Number of Cases and Volume of Trafficked Firearms by Geographic Scope, 2017 - 2021

| Geographic Scope | Number of Cases | Mean | Total Number of Firearms |
|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------|
| Intrastate | 3,557 | 17.9 | 63,603 |
| Interstate | 1,977 | 23.3 | 46,037 |
| U.S. to Foreign | 1,176 | 18.5 | 21,717 |
| To Mexico | 854 | 15.5 | 13,276 |
| Foreign to U.S. | 82 | 50.4 | 4,129 |
| From China | 45 | 77.1 | 3,470 |

In interstate trafficking investigations, the mean number of firearms trafficked per investigation for the top five source-states ranged from about 14 per trafficking case in Ohio to almost 22 per trafficking case in Arizona.

Table TVF-13: Total Volume of Firearms Trafficked by Top Five Most Frequent Source-states, 2017 – 2021

| Source-state | Number of Cases | Mean | Total Number of Firearms |
|--------------|-----------------|------|--------------------------|
| Georgia | 228 | 15.6 | 3,563 |
| Arizona | 218 | 21.9 | 4,779 |
| Virginia | 200 | 18.0 | 3,598 |
| Indiana | 129 | 20.7 | 2,666 |
| Ohio | 103 | 14.4 | 1,482 |

The mean number of firearms trafficked per interstate trafficking investigation for the top five market-states ranged from about ten per trafficking case in New York and Massachusetts to almost 35 per trafficking case in Illinois.

Table TVF-14: Total Volume of Firearms Trafficked by Top Five Most Frequent Market-states, 2017 – 2021

| Market-state | Number of Cases | Mean | Total Number of Firearms |
|---------------|-----------------|------|--------------------------|
| New York | 461 | 9.6 | 4,419 |
| California | 355 | 29.4 | 10,445 |
| Illinois | 218 | 34.8 | 7,593 |
| Massachusetts | 158 | 10.6 | 1,674 |
| Maryland | 155 | 23.4 | 3,626 |

Firearm Type by Selected Trafficking Channel

Handguns, rifles, and shotguns were respectively the most frequently trafficked types of firearms for multiple trafficking channels, including unlicensed dealers, straw purchasers, thieves who stole firearms from FFLs and private citizens, and FFL traffickers (Table TVF-15). Frame or receivers were among the top five most frequently trafficked types of firearms for unlicensed dealers, straw purchasers, FFL thieves, and FFL traffickers. Silencers were among the top five most frequently trafficked firearms for unlicensed dealers, FFL thieves, unlicensed makers, and FFL traffickers. Machinegun conversion devices were among the top five most frequently trafficked firearms for thieves who stole from private citizens and unlicensed makers.

Table TVF-15: Top Five Types of Firearms Trafficked by Selected Trafficking Channel, 2017 – 2021

| Unlicensed Dealer (N=68,388 firearms) | | |
|--|--------------------|------------|
| Firearm Type | Number of Firearms | % Firearms |
| Handguns | 35,900 | 52.5% |
| Rifles | 12,514 | 18.3% |
| Shotguns | 3,179 | 4.6% |
| Frame or receiver | 2,923 | 4.3% |
| Silencers | 1,327 | 1.9% |
| Straw Purchaser (N=37,749 firearms) | | |
| Firearm Type | Number of Firearms | % Firearms |
| Handguns | 25,140 | 66.6% |
| Rifles | 6,215 | 16.5% |
| Frame or receiver | 1,187 | 3.1% |
| Shotguns | 378 | 1.0% |
| Short-barreled rifles/shotguns | 195 | 0.5% |

| FFL Theft (N=20,202 firearms) | | |
|--|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Firearm Type | Number of Firearms | % Firearms |
| Handguns | 13,000 | 64.4% |
| Rifles | 3,482 | 17.2% |
| Shotguns | 990 | 4.9% |
| Frame or receiver | 184 | 0.9% |
| Silencers | 73 | 0.4% |
| Private Person Theft (N=9,319 firearms) | | |
| Firearm Type | Number of Firearms | % Firearms |
| Handguns | 4,367 | 46.9% |
| Rifles | 2,628 | 28.2% |
| Shotguns | 1,147 | 12.3% |
| Machinegun conversion device | 178 | 1.9% |
| PMF | 141 | 1.5% |
| Unlicensed Making (N=8,814 firearms) | | |
| Firearm Type | Number of Firearms | % Firearms |
| Rifles | 2,289 | 26.0% |
| Handguns | 1,759 | 20.0% |
| Silencers | 1,236 | 14.0% |
| PMF | 980 | 11.1% |
| Machinegun conversion device | 827 | 9.4% |
| FFL Trafficker (N=7,795 firearms) | | |
| Firearm Type | Number of Firearms | % Firearms |
| Handguns | 2,879 | 36.9% |
| Silencers | 1,770 | 22.7% |
| Rifles | 1,616 | 20.7% |
| Shotguns | 621 | 8.0% |
| Frame or receiver | 266 | 3.4% |

Summary

Firearm trafficking investigations primarily involve the diversion of new, secondhand, and stolen firearms. While still representing a small share of cases, there was a notable increase in the percentage of investigations with trafficked PMFs between 2017 and 2021. Pistols and rifles were the most frequently trafficked PMFs and ATF field divisions in the Southwest, Northwest, and Southwest regions generated the largest numbers of PMF trafficking investigations during the study period. NFA weapons were also trafficked; machineguns, machinegun parts, machinegun conversion devices, silencers, silencer parts, and short-barreled rifles were the prevalent types of firearms in NFA trafficking investigations.

ATF firearm trafficking investigations documented nearly 230,000 firearms trafficked in 7,779 cases between 2017 and 2021. Most firearm trafficking investigations involved the diversion of a relatively small number of firearms with an overall mean of 16 firearms trafficked per investigation and 57% of the investigations involving five or fewer firearms trafficked. Cases involving the trafficking of large numbers of firearms were relatively rare but accounted for disproportionate shares of the total number of firearms trafficked during the study period. Trafficking investigations involving the diversion of 251 or greater firearms represented less than one percent of the cases but generated almost 59% of the guns trafficked between 2017 and 2021. Nearly 56% of the firearms trafficked were handguns. Rifles accounted for the second highest percentage of firearms in these investigations at nearly 19%. Followed by shotguns, silencers, and frames or receivers, each representing less than 5% of these investigations.

While relatively few investigations involved FFL traffickers and trafficking in firearms through gun shows, these trafficking channels were associated with the highest mean numbers of trafficked firearms per investigation (57 and 59, respectively). In contrast, the most frequent trafficking channels were associated with smaller mean numbers of firearms per investigation: unlicensed dealers averaged about 20 trafficked firearms per case, FFL thieves averaged almost 14 trafficked firearms per case, and straw purchasers averaged a little more than 11 trafficked firearms per case.

APPENDIX TVF – TYPE AND VOLUME OF FIREARMS TRAFFICKED

Table TVF-11: Total Number of Cases and Volume of Trafficked Firearms by ATF Field Division, 2017 – 2021

| ATF Field Division | Number of Cases | Mean | Total Number of Firearms |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|------|-----------------------------|
| Phoenix | 837 | 13.2 | 11,051 |
| Houston | 672 | 14.5 | 9,725 |
| Chicago | 552 | 14.8 | 8,151 |
| Louisville | 212 | 36.6 | 7,754 |
| Dallas | 491 | 15.7 | 7,718 |
| New Orleans | 204 | 37.3 | 7,607 |
| Atlanta | 216 | 34.0 | 7,344 |
| San Francisco | 267 | 23.8 | 6,359 |
| Tampa | 257 | 22.2 | 5,700 |
| Nashville | 311 | 18.1 | 5,639 |
| Columbus | 302 | 15.6 | 4,717 |
| Kansas City | 314 | 14.1 | 4,423 |
| Charlotte | 160 | 26.2 | 4,185 |
| Washington | 276 | 15.1 | 4,156 |
| Miami | 240 | 16.6 | 3,980 |
| Philadelphia | 359 | 11.0 | 3,936 |
| Los Angeles | 248 | 14.9 | 3,697 |
| Denver | 145 | 24.4 | 3,532 |
| Boston | 386 | 8.5 | 3,265 |
| New York | 484 | 6.6 | 3,193 |
| Baltimore | 263 | 9.3 | 2,457 |
| St. Paul | 131 | 17.2 | 2,250 |
| Detroit | 172 | 12.0 | 2,066 |
| International Affairs Division | 73 | 18.5 | 1,352 |
| Seattle | 110 | 12.1 | 1,332 |
| Newark | 88 | 7.2 | 632 |
| Operational Intelligence Division | 6 | 58.7 | 352 |
| National Investigative Division | 2 | 1.0 | 2 |

ENDNOTES

¹ The NFA was originally enacted in 1934. Similar to the current NFA, the original Act imposed a tax on the making and transfer of weapons defined by the Act, as well as a special (occupational) tax on persons and entities engaged in the business of importing, manufacturing, and dealing in NFA weapons. The law also required the registration of all NFA weapons with the Secretary of the Treasury. Firearms subject to the 1934 Act included shotguns and rifles having barrels less than 18 inches in length, certain firearms described as “any other weapons,” machine guns, and firearm mufflers and silencers.

² Privately made firearms (PMFs) are firearms (including a frame or receiver) that have been completed, assembled or otherwise produced by a person other than a licensed manufacturer. PMFs are also made without a serial number placed by a licensed manufacturer at the time the firearm was produced. However, not all PMFs are illegal and not all firearms are required to have a serial number.

³ This investigation involved a company manufacturing and selling unmarked and unregistered silencer parts, including tubes, end caps, and baffles, and silencer kits. Based on evidence uncovered in the case, including shipping records, purchase orders, and financial documents, it is estimated that in addition to the 68,109 silencer and silencer parts and two handguns taken into ATF custody, approximately 35,000 unregistered silencer parts were trafficked.

⁴ The term “firearm silencer” or “firearm muffler” means any device for silencing, muffling, or diminishing the report of a portable firearm, including any combination of parts, designed or redesigned, and intended for the use in assembling or fabricating a firearm silencer or firearm muffler, any part intended only for use in such assembly or fabrication.