



THE SUPPLY SIDE OF VIOLENCE: HOW GUN DEALERS FUEL FIREARM TRAFFICKING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gun trafficking is arming lethal violence around the country. Hundreds of thousands of guns are illegally channeled into communities, where they are used in shootings and other violent crimes that terrorize neighborhoods. Gun trafficking is not just a problem of the individuals who move guns from legal commerce to illegal use. It's also a problem of the gun dealers who supply these guns through their own negligence or complicity. The gun industry is not blameless in the gun trafficking epidemic in this country: it is a key actor in the illegal movement of guns and profits substantially from it.

Despite the significant impact of gun trafficking on public safety, the full nature of this problem and the most effective approaches to addressing it have received little attention. In this report, we provide a new analysis of gun trafficking—including its prevalence, the primary trafficking methods and channels used, the role of gun dealers in enabling trafficking, and the profit earned by the gun industry from trafficked guns. We also evaluate the federal government's role in addressing gun trafficking and the Trump administration's recent abdication of this responsibility. Finally, this report offers recommendations for how state leaders can fill this void.

Key takeaways from this report:

- Gun trafficking is a significant problem and leads to hundreds of thousands of illegal guns being channeled into communities around the country. By the end of 2026, Everytown estimates that 1.27 million guns will have been illegally trafficked since 2017.¹
- Gun trafficking fuels community violence. Data show trafficked guns are used to arm individuals who cannot legally purchase guns and are used in twice as many shootings as guns that are not trafficked.² Nearly 28 percent of trafficking investigations involve firearms that were used in furtherance of a drug offense or

¹ See Appendix 3—Methodology to Calculate Annual Revenue of Trafficked Firearms.

² ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part IX: Investigation Outcomes," April 2024, 5, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-part-ix/download>; ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part IV: Firearm Trafficking Investigations," January 2025, 19, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-iv-%E2%80%93-firearm-trafficking-investigations/download>.

drug trafficking, 19 percent were used in aggravated assaults, 11 percent were used in homicides, and 9 percent were used in attempted homicides.³

- The vast majority of guns that end up trafficked begin as part of the inventory of a licensed gun dealer.⁴ The top two trafficking methods are straw purchasing and unlicensed dealing, which both involve illegal sales from a licensed gun dealer and account for more than half of all trafficked firearms.⁵ When dealers fail to recognize the telltale signs of suspicious sales that indicate trafficking, they become suppliers of trafficked guns—prioritizing profit over safety.
- Trafficked firearms are big business. We estimate that between 2017 and 2023, gun dealers earned approximately \$695 million from sales of trafficked firearms.⁶
- Although the Trump administration purports to prioritize fighting crime, it has taken steps to severely weaken the ability of federal law enforcement agencies to identify gun traffickers and their suppliers and shut down trafficking pipelines. These actions will undoubtedly embolden criminal networks to continue funneling illegal guns into our communities.
- State leaders can take action to address gun trafficking and fill the void created by the Trump administration by adopting a comprehensive strategy that includes (1) using data to identify, interrupt, and prosecute trafficking, (2) implementing robust regulatory oversight of gun dealers, and (3) enacting foundational gun safety laws that deter trafficking.

³ There can be multiple crimes identified in a firearm trafficking investigation, so these statistics are not mutually exclusive. ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part IX: Investigation Outcomes,” April 2024, 4, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-part-ix/download>. See Figure IO-03: “Top Ten Crimes Identified, 2017–2021.”

⁴ The only crime guns that do not originate from a gun dealer are privately made firearms (PMF), also known as “ghost” guns. According to ATF trace data, between 2017 and 2023, 92,702 PMFs were recovered by law enforcement and submitted to ATF for tracing. Comparatively, PMFs represent just 4 percent of all crime guns recovered and traced during this period. ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America From Trafficked Firearms—Part V: PMF Updates and New Analysis,” January 2025, 5, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-v-%E2%80%93-pmf-updates-and-new-analysis/download>.

⁵ ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part III: Firearm Trafficking Channels and Methods Used,” April 2024, 2, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-part-iii/download>. See Table FTC-02: “Total Number and Percentage of Cases by Firearm Trafficking Channel Types, 2017–2021.”

⁶ Appendix 3—Methodology to Calculate Annual Revenue of Trafficked Crime Guns.

INTRODUCTION

In 2022, six individuals launched a firearms trafficking operation that moved guns from Mississippi to Chicago. In just five transactions between April 2022 and July 2022, one of these individuals purchased approximately 23 nearly identical Glock pistols from a single dealer: Renegade Firearms in Greenville, Mississippi.⁷ These weren't casual purchases for personal use—they were textbook red flags for trafficking, as should have been obvious to Renegade.

The guns were quickly trafficked north into Chicago, where they fueled violent crime. All told, this operation trafficked more than 60 firearms to the Chicago area, many of which were recovered with machine-gun conversion devices attached, making them fully automatic pistols. Some of the trafficked firearms were used in a crime just one day after being purchased hundreds of miles away.⁸

The six individuals were ultimately convicted on federal charges related to gun trafficking and sentenced to years in prison.⁹ But Renegade Firearms faced no consequences for its role in supplying these traffickers and kept all profits from these illegal sales.

Firearm trafficking is uniquely responsible for the violence that plagues communities across the United States. It is the hidden infrastructure undergirding countless shootings—a quiet, steady supply chain that moves guns from legal inventory to illegal use. While headlines focus on individual acts of gun violence, the flow of trafficked guns is the current beneath the surface, enabling those acts to occur, again and again.

Gun trafficking thrives on loopholes, weak oversight, and willful ignorance. The truism that “criminals will always find a way to get guns” has merit solely because we make gun trafficking so easy. Unlike drug trafficking, which starts with underground labs and complex clandestine distribution networks, gun trafficking often begins at a well-lit gun store, with a handshake across a counter, paperwork, and at least the veneer of legality. A trafficker can walk out of a legally operated business with a trunk full of weapons and move them to buyers in nearby neighborhoods or cities far across state lines. Those guns nearly always end up in the hands of prohibited individuals and are

⁷ U.S. v. Derrick Stewart, Jr. et al., No. 4:23-CR-116, Indictment (N.D. Ms. filed August 15, 2023), <https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.msnd.48263/gov.uscourts.msnd.48263.1.0.pdf>.

⁸ U.S. Department of Justice Northern District of Mississippi, “Illinois Man Sentenced to 10 Years for Trafficking Guns from Mississippi to Chicago, October 2024,” <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndms/pr/illinois-man-sentenced-10-years-trafficking-guns-mississippi-chicago>.

⁹ U.S. Department of Justice Northern District of Mississippi, “Six Defendants Sentenced in Multi-State Gun Trafficking Scheme,” March 2025, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndms/pr/six-defendants-sentenced-multi-state-gun-trafficking-scheme>.

disproportionately used in violent crimes, sometimes mere days later. When we wake up to news on Sunday morning of multiple people shot at a block party late Saturday night, the cash from the sale of the gun used might still be in the register of a federally licensed gun dealer. Sure, criminals will always find a way to get guns . . . often from a gun store eager to profit off of sales that it knows or should know are illegal.

That is, unless we do something about it.

The agency principally charged with doing something about it is the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF). In recent years, ATF has adopted a smart new approach to gun trafficking that used crime gun intelligence to shut down known trafficking networks and identify the worst-of-the-worst dealers.¹⁰ Combined with strict policy guidance and more dogged enforcement, this new tack led to the shuttering of hundreds of problematic gun dealers that had violated the law. These welcome changes in an agency that has long been conflicted and systematically underfunded coincided with some of the most dramatic drops in gun violence and violent crime in our nation's history.

Unfortunately, the Trump administration began to unwind those efforts on day one, shifting resources away from gun trafficking and violent gun crime investigations,¹¹ [reversing a policy](#) that allowed the agency to strip licenses from gun dealers who supply traffickers,¹² and proposing a drastic budget cut that would render the agency unable to conduct effective oversight of gun dealers.¹³ This leaves a dangerous vacuum that will embolden traffickers and the dealers that supply them.

Fortunately, there is still a way to protect our communities from gun trafficking. States can step into the void created by federal abdication and enact policies and enforcement plans that can prevent trafficking from occurring and hold all culpable actors to account when it does. These actions are urgent, and failure to act threatens reversal of the historic reductions in gun violence. For many states, however, the laws and policies

¹⁰ Biden-Harris White House, "Fact Sheet: Biden-Harris Administration Announces Comprehensive Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gun Crime and Ensure Public Safety," June 23, 2021, <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/23/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-announces-comprehensive-strategy-to-prevent-and-respond-to-gun-crime-and-ensure-public-safety/>; ATF, "Enhanced Regulatory Enforcement Policy," accessed January 17, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250117171012/https://www.atf.gov/rules-and-regulations/enhanced-regulatory-enforcement-policy>.

¹¹ Bob Ortega and Allison Gordon, "Gun Crime Cases Fall as Agents Shift to Immigration Crackdown," CNN, October 15, 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/10/15/us/trump-immigration-atf-gun-cases-invs>.

¹² ATF, "DOJ, ATF Repeal FFL Inspection Policy and Begin Review of Two Final Rules," press release, April 7, 2025, <https://www.atf.gov/news/press-releases/doj-atf-repeal-ffl-inspection-policy-and-begin-review-two-final-rules>; ATF, "Enhanced Regulatory Enforcement Policy," April 8, 2025, <https://www.atf.gov/rules-and-regulations/enhanced-regulatory-enforcement-policy>.

¹³ U.S. Department of Justice, "Fiscal Year 2026 Budget and Performance Summary," June 13, 2025, 145, <https://www.justice.gov/media/1403736/dl>.

currently in place leave them unable to see the trafficking problem clearly, let alone effectively intervene to stop it.

This report brings gun trafficking into focus. Relying on critical but often overlooked insights from ATF’s National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA)—a comprehensive analysis of firearms trafficking investigations—this report explains the scope and scale of trafficking (Section I), the common methods for moving guns from dealers to illegal uses (Section II), and frequent trafficking channels (Section III). It offers new insight into the profit motive of dealers who continue to sell guns under highly suspicious circumstances (Section IV), highlights recent innovations from federal law enforcement to effectively identify and stop traffickers and the dealers who supply them (Section V), and outlines why these innovations are unlikely to continue in the foreseeable future (Section VI). Finally, this report provides a clear and detailed road map for state action that can help protect communities in the face of federal inaction (Section VII). Along with its detailed appendices, this report provides the tools needed for states to combat trafficking and save lives.

What Is the National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA)?

Beginning in 2021, ATF partnered with a team of academic experts to examine firearm commerce, crime guns, and trafficking in a four-volume study. [Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations](#) looked at more than 10,000 firearm trafficking investigations initiated by ATF Special Agents between 2017 and 2021. Using ATF case management data and detailed agent surveys, the study provided first-of-its-kind insights into modern firearm trafficking schemes, the profiles of traffickers and end-users, and the violence associated with these criminal activities. For additional information on the case population and data methodology, see the full report posted at [atf.gov](#).

I. Measuring the Scope and Scale of Gun Trafficking

ATF defines firearm trafficking as the “movement of one or more firearms into the illegal market for a criminal purpose or use.”¹⁴ Trafficked firearms are a serious public safety concern. These guns are destined for use in violent crime: nearly 28 percent of trafficking investigations involve firearms that were used in furtherance of a drug offense or drug trafficking, 19 percent were used in aggravated assaults, 11 percent were used in homicides, and 9 percent were used in attempted homicides.¹⁵ Trafficked firearms are

¹⁴ ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part I: Introduction and Methodology,” April 2024, 2, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-part-i/download>.

¹⁵ There can be multiple crimes identified in a firearm trafficking investigation, so these statistics are not mutually exclusive. ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part IX: Investigation Outcomes,” April 2024, 4,

also used more often in shootings: On average, only about 6 percent of all crime guns are used in shootings.¹⁶ But when looking specifically at trafficked guns, that number more than doubles: 15 percent of trafficking investigations involve guns that were linked to at least one shooting.¹⁷ Trafficking is a primary way that prohibited individuals obtain firearms. Most recipients of trafficked firearms would be unable to purchase a gun through a transaction that required a background check: nearly 88 percent were prohibited from buying guns because of prior criminal convictions or other prohibitors.¹⁸

When most people hear the term “gun trafficking,” they imagine clandestine meetings in dark alleys, sophisticated criminal networks that steal guns from unsuspecting gun shops and traffic them abroad, and sketchy secondhand sales occurring from the trunk of someone’s car. The reality of gun trafficking is much simpler, more pervasive, and closer to home.

According to ATF trace data, 96 percent of crime guns that were recovered and traced originated from a purchase from a licensed gun dealer’s inventory.¹⁹ Of the 2.3 million crime guns recovered and traced to a purchase from a gun dealer from 2017 to 2023, a significant portion show indicia of trafficking.

One key indicator that a firearm has been trafficked is its “time-to-crime” (TTC), which measures the time between when that firearm was purchased from a licensed gun

<https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-part-ix/download>. See Figure IO-03: “Top Ten Crimes Identified, 2017–2021.”

¹⁶ ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part IV: Firearm Trafficking Investigations,” January 2025, 19, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-iv-%E2%80%93firearm-trafficking-investigations/download>. The 6 percent represents firearms recovered between 2017 and 2023, traced and linked through the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) to at least one fired cartridge casing. NIBIN’s imaging technology captures the unique markings that firearms make on ammunition cartridge casings as they are fired. Through an automated comparison analysis of other images within the NIBIN network, potential matches are identified. These matches are then further reviewed and provided as investigative leads to law enforcement for further investigation. Six percent is approximately 127,000 firearms, each connected to at least one shooting.

¹⁷ ATF Special Agents (SAs) were able to report whether trafficked firearms were or were not used in shootings in approximately 66 percent (6,455 of 9,708) of cases. In these 6,455 investigations, SAs indicated that a trafficked firearm was used in a shooting in 15.1 percent (974) of cases. ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part IX: Investigation Outcomes,” April 2024, 5, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-part-ix/download>.

¹⁸ ATF Special Agents were able to identify an end recipient of trafficked firearms in 46 percent of the cases studied. In these cases, 12 percent of end recipients had no prior prohibiting convictions. ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part VI: Characteristics of Firearm Traffickers, End Users, and Defendants,” April 2024, 13, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-part-vi/download>. See Table CFT-25a: “Number and Percentage of Cases by Top Five End User Background Characteristics, 2017–2021.”

¹⁹ ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part III: Crime Gun Tracing Updates and New Analysis,” January 2025, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-iii-%E2%80%93crime-gun-tracing-updates-and-new-analysis/download>, Table CGT-06: “Number and Percentage of Crime Guns Traced to a Purchaser by Year”; ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part V: PMF Updates and New Analysis,” January 2025, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-v-%E2%80%93pmf-updates-and-new-analysis/download>, Table PMF-01: “Total PMF Crime Guns Recovered and Traced.”

dealer and when it was recovered in connection with a crime. Law enforcement generally considers a TTC of less than three years to be indicative of firearm trafficking, with a shorter TTC increasing the likelihood that the purchaser initially purchased the firearm with the intent to traffic it to someone who could not legally purchase it.

According to our analysis of ATF trace data of crime guns recovered between 2019 and 2023, an average of 10.3 percent of crime guns were purchased between two and three years prior to recovery in a crime, 14.4 percent were purchased one to two years prior, and an astonishing 25.3 percent of crime guns were purchased from a dealer just one year before being recovered in crimes.²⁰

Applying the average TTC to firearms sold between 2017 and 2023 and subsequently recovered in crimes reveals that more than 930,000 firearms were likely trafficked during that period.²¹ By the end of 2026, we estimate that number is projected to exceed 1.27 million trafficked crime guns.²² This estimate only considers the trafficked guns that are successfully recovered and traced by law enforcement, so the actual number is likely far greater.

²⁰ Everytown analysis of ATF, “Data & Statistics: Firearm Trace Data,” 2019–2023, <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/data-statistics>.

²¹ Everytown analysis of ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part III: Crime Gun Tracing Updates and New Analysis,” January 2025, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nftca-volume-iv-part-iii-%E2%80%93-crime-gun-tracing-updates-and-new-analysis/download>, Table CGT-06: “Number and Percentage of Crime Guns Traced to a Purchaser by Year”; and ATF, “Data & Statistics: Firearms Trace Data,” 2019–2023, <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/data-statistics>.

²² See Appendix 3—Methodology to Calculate Annual Revenue of Trafficked Firearms.

Estimated Total Trafficked Crime Guns Sold, 2017–2023

Year of Sale	Actual and Estimated Total Crime Gun Recoveries Traced to a Purchase from an FFL ²³	# of Traces with TTC Less Than 1 Year ²⁴	# of Traces with TTC between 1 and 2 Years	# of Traces with TTC between 2 and 3 Years	Total Trafficked and Recovered Crime Guns
2017	N/A	68,149 (recovered 2018)	40,077 (recovered 2019)	32,686 (recovered 2020)	140,912
2018	269,363	70,413 (recovered 2019)	45,697 (recovered 2020)	37,647 (recovered 2021)	153,757
2019	278,313	80,287 (recovered 2020)	52,632 (recovered 2021)	42,603 (recovered 2022)	175,522
2020	317,339	92,472 (recovered 2021)	59,561 (recovered 2022)	42,354 (recovered 2023)	194,387
2021	365,501	104,645 (recovered 2022)	59,214 (recovered 2023)	Est. 40,868 (recovered 2024)	Est. 204,727
2022	413,618	104,035 (recovered 2023)	Est. 57,136 (recovered 2024)	Est. 41,942 (recovered 2025)	Est. 203,113
2023	411,207	Est. 100,384 (recovered 2024)	Est. 58,637 (recovered 2025)	Est. 41,721 (recovered 2026)	Est. 200,742
Est. 2024	396,775				

²³ “Total Crime Gun Recoveries Traced to a Purchaser from an FFL” data for 2018–2023 were obtained from NFCTA volume IV, part III, table CGT-06: “Number and Percentage of Crime Guns Traced to a Purchaser by Year.” Data for 2024–2026 have not yet been released by the ATF, in place we used projected estimates based on a rolling average of the previous three years’ totals. For more information see Appendix 3—Methodology to Calculate Annual Revenue of Trafficked Firearms.

²⁴ To determine the estimated number of traces with a given time-to-crime (TTC), we first calculated a national average of the total recoveries in each TTC category based on annual ATF Firearms Trace Data for the years 2019 through 2023 and then calculated the percentage of total trafficked guns in each TTC category. The 5-year (2019–2023) average percentage was 25.3 percent for a TTC of less than one year, 14.4 percent for a TTC of between one and two years, and 10.3 percent for a TTC of between two and three years. Those percentages were then applied to the “Total Crime Gun Recoveries Traced to a Purchaser from an FFL” each year. For more information see Appendix 3—Methodology to Calculate Annual Revenue of Trafficked Firearms.

Est. 2025	407,200				
Est. 2026	405,061				
Total	3,264,377				Est. 1,273,159

Source: Everytown analysis of ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part III: Crime Gun Tracing Updates and New Analysis,” January 2025, 3, Table CGT-06; <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-iii-%E2%80%93-crime-gun-tracing-updates-and-new-analysis/download> and ATF, Firearm Trace Data, 2019–2023; <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/data-statistics>. See Appendix 3—Methodology to Calculate Annual Revenue of Trafficked Firearms.

A trunk with over a million guns doesn’t fill itself. It was stocked by someone who purchased the guns from a licensed dealer after passing a background check. The owners of the car aren’t likely to be the ones who ultimately pull the trigger—they’re the traffickers: without them, most crime guns would never reach the street. And without dealers, traffickers wouldn’t be able to reliably arm and rearm criminals.

That’s what makes firearm trafficking such a critical issue. The guns used to perpetrate violent crimes and shootings don’t just appear in the criminal marketplace. They’re moved there, step by step, by people who are breaking the law and are supplied by gun dealers—Federal Firearms Licensees (FFLs)—who either knowingly or negligently turn a blind eye.

II. Primary Gun Trafficking Methods

The NFCTA included a comprehensive study of nearly 10,000 ATF firearm trafficking investigations that were initiated between 2017 and 2021 and completed by March 2023.²⁵ The results were clear: The three leading methods of gun trafficking are straw purchasing, unlicensed dealing, and thefts from gun dealers.²⁶ Together, these methods account for the vast majority of how crime guns move from a licensed gun store to prohibited possessors and perpetrators of violent crimes.²⁷

²⁵ ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part I: Introduction and Methodology,” April 2024, 5 <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-part-i/download>.

²⁶ ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part III: Firearm Trafficking Channels and Methods Used,” April 2024, 2, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-part-iii/download>. See Table FTC-02: “Total Number and Percentage of Cases by Firearm Trafficking Channel Types, 2017–2021.”

²⁷ In addition, some firearms traffickers specialize in ghost guns, which are privately made using kits or 3D-printing technology (rather than purchased from a dealer) and are untraceable because they lack the markings that licensed manufacturers are required to place on all firearms. According to ATF data, approximately 93,000 ghost guns were recovered in crimes and submitted to ATF for tracing between 2017 and 2023. ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part V: PMF Updates and New Analysis,” January 2025, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-v-%E2%80%93-pmf-updates-and-new-analysis/download>. An [Everytown analysis](#) of 114 federal prosecutions from 2010 to April 2020 found that more than 1,300 ghost guns were used or sold by criminal enterprises to facilitate crimes, including gun trafficking, robbery, drug trafficking, terrorism, and murder.

Primary Trafficking Methods

Method of Trafficking	% of Trafficking Cases ²⁸	Total # of Trafficked Firearms ²⁹	Average # of Firearms Trafficked per Case ³⁰	% of Cases with Shootings ³¹
Unlicensed Dealing	41%	68,388	20	16%
Straw Purchasing	40%	37,749	11	24%
Stolen from an FFL	17%	20,202	14	7%

Straw Purchasing

Straw purchasing occurs when someone buys a firearm for someone else, usually someone who is prohibited from purchasing a firearm. When purchasing a firearm from a licensed gun dealer, the buyer is required to complete ATF Form 4473, which asks the buyer if they are buying the firearm for themselves.³² Straw purchasers lie on the form, indicating that they are buying the firearm for themselves when in reality they are purchasing it for someone else. Under federal law, it is illegal both to buy a firearm on behalf of someone who is prohibited from possessing one and to lie on Form 4473.³³

In ATF trafficking investigations initiated between 2017 and 2021, straw purchasers trafficked nearly 38,000 firearms and an average of 11 firearms per investigation.³⁴ According to ATF data, for trafficking cases involving straw purchasing, nearly 24 percent of trafficked guns were used in shootings.³⁵

²⁸ ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part III: Firearm Trafficking Channels and Methods Used,” April 2024, 2, Table FTC-02. Of the 9,708 ATF trafficking cases studied, the case agent was able to provide the method of trafficking in 8,373 cases. More than one method could be identified per case, but in 77 percent of cases, only one method of trafficking was identified.

²⁹ ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part V: Type and Volume of Firearms Trafficked,” April 2024, 10, Table TVF-09.

³⁰ ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part V: Type and Volume of Firearms Trafficked,” April 2024, 10, Table TVF-09.

³¹ ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part IX: Investigation Outcomes,” April 2024, 5, Table IO-06. Of the 9,708 ATF trafficking cases studied, the case agent was able to report whether or not a trafficked firearm was used in a shooting in 2,285 cases involving straw purchasing, 2,241 cases involving unlicensed dealing, and 895 cases involving theft from an FFL.

³² ATF, “Firearms Transaction Record,” ATF Form 4473, August 2023, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/4473-part-1-firearms-transaction-record-over-counter-atf-form-53009/download>.

³³ 18 U.S.C. §§ 922(a)(6), 932.

³⁴ ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part V: Type and Volume of Firearms Trafficked,” April 2024, 10, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-part-v/download>. See Table TVF-09: “Total Number of Cases and Volume of Trafficked Firearms by Trafficking Channel, 2017–2021.”

³⁵ ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part IX: Investigation Outcomes,” April 2024, 5, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-part-ix/download>. See Table IO-06: “Total Number of Cases by Trafficking Channel and Use in Shootings, 2017–2021.” ATF Special Agents were able to report whether trafficked firearms were or were not used in shootings in approximately 66 percent (6,455 of 9,708) of cases.

Straw Purchasing Case Example

On April 25, 2023, Travon Brunson purchased four identical Taurus 9mm pistols from Academy Sports and Outdoors in Columbia, South Carolina. For these four pistols, Brunson paid \$240 in cash and used a credit card in the name of Aizavier Roache for the remaining balance. Just 15 days later, one of the pistols was used in a shooting in Boston and was later recovered in the possession of a gang member 41 days after the shooting. A second pistol that was part of this transaction was recovered 127 days later in the unlawful possession of a juvenile, and a third pistol was recovered in a crime in Massachusetts 123 days later.³⁶

This was just one of many straw purchases Brunson made on behalf of Aizavier Roache between May 2020 and August 2023, who was prohibited from purchasing them himself because of a prior felony conviction. Roache provided the money—sometimes even providing a credit card in his own name—to Brunson to complete the straw purchases.³⁷ By January 2024, 11 of the 24 firearms straw purchased by Brunson had been recovered in crimes in Massachusetts.³⁸

Straw purchases are often very easy to spot. A number of red flags for a straw purchase are readily apparent to gun store employees, including when a buyer:

- Returns to the store after failing a background check with a friend to complete the sale.
- Uses a shopping list to pick which firearm(s) to purchase and does not appear to understand much about the firearm(s) they have selected.
- Communicates with other individuals who are directing or guiding the purchase.
- Uses a credit card in someone else's name to pay for the firearm.
- Pays for the firearm after another individual completed the required paperwork.

Unlicensed Dealing

³⁶ *U.S. v. Travon Brunson and Aizavier Roache*, No. 24-cr-10001-LTS, Affidavit of ATF Special Agent Michael Sorrentino in Support of Pre-Trial Detention (D. Mass. filed January 12, 2024).

<https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.mad.265342/gov.uscourts.mad.265342.16.0.pdf>.

³⁷ *U.S. v. Travon Brunson and Aizavier Roache*, No. 24-cr-10001-LTS, Affidavit of ATF Special Agent Michael Sorrentino in Support of Pre-Trial Detention (D. Mass. filed January 12, 2024),

<https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.mad.265342/gov.uscourts.mad.265342.16.0.pdf>.

³⁸ United States Attorney's Office for the District of Massachusetts, "Two Arrested for Allegedly Trafficking More Than Two Dozen Illegal Firearms into Boston," press release, January 16, 2024,

<https://www.justice.gov/usao-ma/pr/two-arrested-allegedly-trafficking-more-two-dozen-illegal-firearms-boston>; United States Attorney's Office for the District of Massachusetts, "Two Men Plead Guilty to Trafficking More Than Two Dozen Illegal Firearms into Boston," press release, October 30, 2024,

<https://www.justice.gov/usao-ma/pr/two-men-plead-guilty-trafficking-more-two-dozen-illegal-firearms-boston>.

Unlicensed dealing involves an individual buying and selling firearms for profit, but without first obtaining a license from ATF to do so, as federal law requires. Unlicensed dealers are essentially running a gun business while ignoring the federal law that requires them to obtain a license and the regulations that licensed dealers must follow, such as keeping inventory and sales records and conducting background checks on customers. Like straw purchasers, they are also lying when completing Form 4473; the difference is that a straw purchaser is buying the firearm for a specific person or group of people, whereas the unlicensed dealer does not know exactly who they will sell it to, just that they have every intention of reselling it. A typical instance of unlicensed dealing in furtherance of trafficking is when an individual buys a large number of guns in a few transactions over a short period of time, often purchasing multiples of the same type with the intent of reselling them to other purchasers without conducting a background check. Unlicensed dealing is a crime under federal law.³⁹

Between 2017 and 2021, unlicensed dealers trafficked more than 68,000 firearms and saw an average of 20 firearms per investigation.⁴⁰ Approximately 16 percent of cases involving unlicensed dealers were linked to at least one shooting.⁴¹

Unlicensed Dealing Case Example

Michael Wayne Shirley was a prolific firearm trafficker who operated as an unlicensed dealer from 2021 to 2022. In just 11 months, Shirley purchased 224 handguns from the same gun store, Exile Armory, in Weaver, Alabama. The suspicious nature of Shirley's purchases was staggering. On May 18, 2022, Shirley bought 14 firearms in a single purchase. Just one week later, he returned and bought 14 Glock pistols in a single transaction.⁴²

Shirley posted firearms for sale on Facebook Marketplace, avoiding the site's restrictions on firearm sales by falsely advertising "gun boxes" for sale. On May 25, 2022, during an undercover operation, Shirley sold an ATF agent an assault-style pistol, which he had purchased from Exile Armory just seven days prior. During this interaction, Shirley informed ATF agents that he had already sold at least 50 pistols. Over the course of the investigation, Shirley admitted that he did not require identifying documents, such as driver's licenses or pistol permits, from anyone who

³⁹ 18 U.S.C. § 922(a)(1)(A).

⁴⁰ ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part V: Type and Volume of Firearms Trafficked," April 2024, 10, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-part-v/download>. See Table TVF-09: "Total Number of Cases and Volume of Trafficked Firearms by Trafficking Channel, 2017–2021."

⁴¹ ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part IX: Investigation Outcomes," April 2024, 5, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-part-ix/download>. See Table IO-06: "Total Number of Cases by Trafficking Channel and Use in Shootings, 2017–2021." ATF Special Agents were able to report whether trafficked firearms were or were not used in shootings in approximately 66 percent (6,455 of 9,708) of cases.

⁴² *U.S. v. Michael Wayne Shirley*, No. 4:24-cr-00408, Plea Agreement, (N.D. Ala. filed October 10, 2024) <https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.alnd.191562/gov.uscourts.alnd.191562.2.0.pdf>.

*purchased firearms from him.*⁴³

*Investigators later determined that Shirley had spent roughly \$90,000 on firearms from Exile Armory. Based on his online postings and undercover buys, ATF concluded Shirley was profiting substantially by trafficking firearms—knowingly bypassing legal requirements designed to keep guns out of the wrong hands.*⁴⁴

Unlicensed dealing also has telltale signs that a vigilant dealer can spot easily. Some common warning signs of unlicensed dealing include when a customer:

- Buys two or more nearly identical guns in the same transaction.
- Buys multiple guns over a short period of time, including those of similar make, model, type, or caliber.
- Pays in large amounts of cash.
- Uses a shopping list to acquire the firearms and does not appear to understand much about them.

Dealers are well aware of these signs. Both ATF and the gun industry's trade association provide frequent guidance on how to detect and deter suspicious sales.⁴⁵ A gun dealer's failure to do so reflects less a lack of knowledge and more a negligent attitude or knowing complicity in making these sales in order to profit from them.

Stolen Firearms

Another troubling trafficking pipeline involves guns that are stolen from gun dealers. Theft from gun stores is a shockingly large problem. Between 2017 and 2023, gun dealers reported 46,072 firearms stolen in 7,140 theft incidents.⁴⁶ A significant portion of these stolen guns end up trafficked. The ATF investigated 1,452 trafficking cases involving thefts from a licensed gun dealer between 2017 and 2021 involving more than

⁴³ *U.S. v. Michael Wayne Shirley*, No. 4:24-cr-00408, Plea Agreement, (N.D. Ala. filed October 10, 2024) <https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.alnd.191562/gov.uscourts.alnd.191562.2.0.pdf>.

⁴⁴ *U.S. v. Michael Wayne Shirley*, No. 4:24-cr-00408, Plea Agreement, (N.D. Ala. filed October 10, 2024) <https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.alnd.191562/gov.uscourts.alnd.191562.2.0.pdf>.

⁴⁵ ATF, "Don't Lie for the Other Guy," September 15, 2025, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/dont-lie-other-guy>.

⁴⁶ ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part II: Firearm Thefts and Losses Updates and New Analysis," January 2025, 3, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-ii-%E2%80%93firearm-thefts-and-losses-updates-and-new-analysis/download>. See Table FTL-07: "Number of Theft Incidents and Firearms Involved by Year." During this period, an additional 63,506 firearms were reported lost by gun dealers. ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part II: Firearm Thefts and Losses Updates and New Analysis," January 2025, 3, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-ii-%E2%80%93firearm-thefts-and-losses-updates-and-new-analysis/download>. See Table FTL-01: "Reported Number of Loss Incidents and Firearms Involved by Year."

20,000 firearms.⁴⁷ Unsurprisingly, persons under the age of 18 involved in firearms trafficking predominantly obtain their crime guns by stealing them from licensed gun shops. While just 5 percent of traffickers investigated by the ATF were under age 18, nearly 84 percent of trafficking cases involving juveniles were thefts from gun stores.⁴⁸ These stolen firearms are used in shootings almost a year faster on average than nonstolen firearms, underscoring the heightened risk that stolen guns pose to public safety.⁴⁹

Gun Dealer Theft Case Example

Superior Shooter's Supply, a gun store in Superior, Wisconsin, was the [repeat target](#) of burglars and traffickers, likely due to its practice of storing its handgun inventory in glass display cases on its showroom floor. In 2012, thieves took advantage of this lax storage practice and stole 19 guns from the store in a smash-and-grab. The store was hit again in 2016, when a thief smashed the showcase glass with a single swipe of a crowbar, stealing at least nine guns in seconds.

The store's owner was well aware of the potential consequences of these security breaches, stating in an interview about the 2016 burglary that the guns were "going right down to Chicago or Minneapolis. . . . They'll be there in 24 hours . . . and it's not going to be good." She was quickly proven correct: A single Glock 17 pistol stolen from her store was subsequently linked to 27 shootings in 19 months before it was recovered by law enforcement, including the fatal shooting of a 19-year-old college student who was walking to play basketball when he was shot and killed with the Glock 17. In total, [at least four of the guns](#) from Superior Shooter's Supply have been recovered in Chicago, linked to 35 shootings and at least three homicides.

While stolen firearms make up a smaller portion of firearms trafficking cases, their role highlights a troubling pattern: too often, [gun dealers fail to adequately secure their deadly inventory](#). Remarkably, there are no federal laws mandating security measures that gun dealers must adopt to prevent theft; however, ATF recommends a number of best practices, including:

- Installing a monitored alarm system.
- Securing firearms when the store is closed.

⁴⁷ ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part V: Type and Volume of Firearms Trafficked," April 2024, 10, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-part-v/download>. See Table TVF-09: "Total Number of Cases and Volume of Trafficked Firearms by Trafficking Channel, 2017–2021."

⁴⁸ ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part VI: Characteristics of Firearm Traffickers, End Users and Defendants," April 2024, 4, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-part-vi/download>. See Table CFT-07: "Top Five Trafficking Channels by Trafficker Age Category, 2017–2021."

⁴⁹ ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part VI: NIBIN Updates and New Analysis," January 2025, 8, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-vi-%E2%80%93nibin-updates-and-new-analysis/download>.

- Implementing video surveillance.
- Installing physical security measures, such as door and window bars, pull-down gates, and concrete balusters.⁵⁰

A number of states have also enacted laws requiring certain security measures.⁵¹

III. The Movement of Trafficked Guns

One common misperception is that gun trafficking always involves moving guns a long distance from the original purchase location. In reality, most crime guns do not travel far at all. Since 2017, 72 percent of all crime guns were recovered in the same state where they were purchased; only 28 percent were recovered in a different state.⁵²

When guns do move across state lines, they tend to follow a predictable pattern: Firearms are sourced in states with lax gun laws and funneled into target states with tighter restrictions. “Source” states generally do not have strong state laws that can deter trafficking, such as requiring background checks for private sales or imposing waiting periods on gun purchases. These weak legal environments create opportunities for traffickers to stockpile firearms undetected. Conversely, “target” states tend to have comparatively strong state and local laws that impose more restrictions on gun purchases. These stronger controls make it harder for prohibited individuals to buy guns locally, which is why traffickers step in to fill firearms demand across state lines. Research shows that states without background check laws are prime grounds for traffickers looking to acquire guns,⁵³ while state laws requiring background checks for all handgun sales are associated with 29 percent lower rates of gun trafficking across state lines.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ ATF, “Loss Prevention for Firearms Retailers,” January 2016, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/guide/loss-prevention-firearms-retailers/download>.

⁵¹ Everytown for Gun Safety, “The Life-Saving Promise of State Gun Dealer Licensing,” April 2025, accessed November 21, 2025.

⁵² ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume II: Crime Guns—Part III: Crime Guns Recovered and Traced within the United States and Its Territories,” February 2023, 38, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-ii-part-iii-crime-guns-recovered-and-traced-us/download>. See Figure GP-03. Thirty-five percent of crime guns are recovered within 10 miles of the FFL they were purchased from; another 19 percent are recovered within 11 and 25 miles. Conversely, 17 percent are recovered more than 300 miles from the FFL where they were purchased, see Table GP-01.

⁵³ Daniel W. Webster, Jon S. Vernick, and Maria T. Bulzacchelli, “Effects of State-Level Firearm Seller Accountability Policies on Firearm Trafficking,” *Journal of Urban Health* 86, no. 4 (July 2009): 525–37; Daniel W. Webster et al., “Preventing the Diversion of Guns to Criminals through Effective Firearm Sales Laws,” in *Reducing Gun Violence in America: Informing Policy with Evidence and Analysis*, ed. Daniel W. Webster and Jon S. Vernick (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 109–21.

⁵⁴ Daniel W. Webster and Garen J. Wintemute, “Effects of Policies Designed to Keep Firearms from High-Risk Individuals,” *Annual Review of Public Health* 36, no. 1 (March 18, 2015): 21–37, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-031914-122516>.

According to ATF trafficking investigations detailed in the NFCTA, there are currently three major trafficking pipelines operating within the United States:

- **East Coast I-95 Pipeline:** The East Coast I-95 Pipeline involves trafficking guns from the source states of Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Virginia to the target jurisdictions of Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and Washington, DC. According to ATF trace data, between 2019 and 2023, more than 57,000 crime guns were funneled through this pipeline. Alarming, 12 percent were linked to at least one shooting (double the national average of 6 percent), and nearly 87 percent of those shootings occurred in just four jurisdictions: New York, Maryland, Washington, DC, and New Jersey.⁵⁵
- **Mississippi River Pipeline:** The Mississippi River Pipeline involves trafficking from the source states of Alabama, Arkansas, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee to the target state of Illinois. According to ATF trace data, between 2019 and 2023, more than 23,000 crime guns were trafficked through this pipeline to Illinois, where 13 percent were linked to shootings.⁵⁶
- **Southwest Pipeline:** The Southwest Pipeline involves trafficking from the source states of Arizona and Nevada to the target state of California, one of the most heavily regulated firearm markets in the country. According to ATF trace data, between 2019 and 2023, more than 37,000 crime guns were trafficked to California. The problem is growing: Recoveries in this pipeline rose 50 percent from 2019 to 2023. What's more, traffickers in this pipeline are moving firearms into crime usage very quickly. More than half had a TTC of less than three years, and 26 percent had a TTC of less than one year,⁵⁷ compared to a national average of interstate recoveries of 32 percent and 14 percent, respectively.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part IV: Firearm Trafficking Investigations," January 2025, 10–14, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-iv-%E2%80%93firearm-trafficking-investigations/download>. See Figure FTI-07: "Market State of East Coast I-95 Pipeline Traces Associated with at Least One Shooting, 2019–2023."

⁵⁶ ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part IV: Firearm Trafficking Investigations," January 2025, 14–16, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-iv-%E2%80%93firearm-trafficking-investigations/download>. See Figure FTI-12: "Source State of Mississippi River Pipeline Traces Associated with at Least One Shooting, 2019–2023."

⁵⁷ ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part IV: Firearm Trafficking Investigations," January 2025, 16–19, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-iv-%E2%80%93firearm-trafficking-investigations/download>. See Figures FTI-13: "Total Southwest Pipeline Crime Guns Traced to a Purchaser;" and FTI-14: "Southwest Pipeline TTC Groupings and All Crime Gun TTC Groupings, 2019–2023."

⁵⁸ ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), Volume II: Crime Guns—Part III: Crime Guns Recovered and Traced within the United States and Its Territories," February 2023, 40, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-ii-part-iii-crime-guns-recovered-and-traced-us/download>. See Figure GP-05: "Intrastate versus Interstate TTC, 2017–2021."

While the majority of firearm trafficking occurs within the United States, approximately 19 percent of ATF trafficking cases involved firearms that moved internationally.⁵⁹ Not surprisingly, Mexico is the primary destination, accounting for 72 percent of international cases (Canada, the Bahamas, Haiti, and Brazil are the other top countries for international trafficking).⁶⁰ An estimated 200,000 guns are trafficked from the United States to Mexico each year.⁶¹ From 2022 to 2023, Mexican authorities recovered and traced 18,206 crime guns that originated from US gun stores. More than 73 percent of these crime guns were acquired in Texas, Arizona, and California. These firearms overwhelmingly arm transnational criminal organizations, with 82 percent recovered in cartel-dominated Mexican states controlled by either the Sinaloa Cartel or Jalisco New Generation Cartel.⁶²

In short, US gun stores are feeding both domestic gun violence and international cartel warfare. And in both cases, traffickers are using gun dealers in source states to arm criminals who should never have access to guns.

IV. How the Gun Industry Profits from Trafficked Guns

Gun trafficking devastates our communities, arming violent criminals and ensuring that every firearm that law enforcement seizes can quickly be replaced. But gun trafficking is also big business, and not just for the trafficking middlemen. Each trafficked firearm that ends up being used to commit a deadly violent crime provides a nice profit to the dealer who ignored the warning signs and sold the weapon.

While the percentage of crime guns relative to all firearm sales is small, the overall number of these guns is itself staggering. An ATF analysis of data from the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) reveals a conservative estimate of 106.7 million firearms sold in the United States from 2017 to 2023.⁶³ During

⁵⁹ ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part IV: Source-to-Market Type," April 2024, 2, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-part-iv/download>. See Table STM-01: "Source-to-Market Type, 2017–2021."

⁶⁰ ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part IV: Source-to-Market Type," April 2024, 17, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-part-iv/download>. See Table STM-16: "U.S. to Foreign Trafficking: Top Five Market-Countries, 2017–2021."

⁶¹ GAO, "Firearms Trafficking: U.S. Efforts to Disrupt Gun Smuggling into Mexico Would Benefit from Additional Data and Analysis," February 2021, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-21-322.pdf>.

⁶² ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part VII: Firearm Commerce, Crime Guns, and the Southwest Border," January 2025, 14, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-vii-%E2%80%93-firearm-commerce-crime-guns-and-southwest-border/download>. See Table SWB-13: "Total Crime Guns Recovered and Traced to a Purchaser by Mexico Recovery State, 2022–2023."

⁶³ ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part I: Firearm Commerce Updates and New Analysis," January 2025, 16, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-i-firearm-commerce-updates-and-new-analysis/download>. See Table FC-18: "EMSV Totals by Year."

that same period, we estimate that 1.27 million of those firearms were illegally sold to traffickers.⁶⁴ Applying the estimated number of trafficked crime guns for each firearm type⁶⁵ to the average pricing of the top-traced crime guns by firearm type⁶⁶ and the percentage of new and used trafficked firearms,⁶⁷ gun dealers are estimated to have earned more than \$695 million in sales of trafficked firearms between 2017 and 2023.⁶⁸ It should be noted that this is a very conservative estimate based on only those firearms recovered in crimes and subsequently traced by law enforcement. According to ATF, only approximately 55 percent of all law enforcement agencies in the United States trace firearms.⁶⁹ Additionally, this estimate does not include crime guns recovered internationally that were sourced from gun dealers in the U.S.

⁶⁴ Everytown analysis of ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part III: Crime Gun Tracing Updates and New Analysis,” January 2025, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nftca-volume-iv-part-iii-%E2%80%93-crime-gun-tracing-updates-and-new-analysis/download>, Table CGT-06: “Number and Percentage of Crime Guns Traced to a Purchaser by Year”; ATF, “Data & Statistics: Firearms Trace Data,” 2019–2023, <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/data-statistics>. See Appendix 3—Methodology to Calculate Annual Revenue of Trafficked Firearms.

⁶⁵ ATF data show that of traced crime guns recovered between 2017 and 2023, 71 percent were pistols, 12 percent rifles, 10 percent revolvers, and 6 percent shotguns. ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume II: Crime Guns—Part III: Crime Guns Recovered and Traced within the United States and Its Territories,” February 2023, 17, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nftca-volume-ii-part-iii-crime-guns-recovered-and-traced-us/download>, see Table CCT-02: “Percentage of Traced Crime Guns by Type, 2017–2021”; ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part III: Crime Gun Tracing Updates and New Analysis,” January 2025, 2, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nftca-volume-iv-part-iii-%E2%80%93-crime-gun-tracing-updates-and-new-analysis/download>, see Table CGT-02: “Types of Traced Crime Guns, 2022–2023.” For more information, see Appendix 3—Methodology to Calculate Annual Revenue of Trafficked Firearms.

⁶⁶ Top-traced firearms were obtained from ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume II: Crime Guns—Part III: Crime Guns Recovered and Traced within the United States and Its Territories,” February 2023, 18–20, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nftca-volume-ii-part-iii-crime-guns-recovered-and-traced-us/download>. See Tables CCG-05 to CCG-12. Average pricing was obtained from True Gun Value, accessed October 7, 2025, <https://truegunvalue.com/>. For more information, see Appendix 3—Methodology to Calculate Annual Revenue of Trafficked Firearms.

⁶⁷ ATF estimates that of trafficked firearms involved in trafficking investigations, 66 percent were sold new. Therefore, we applied 66 percent of each firearm type to the average new price and 33 percent to the average used price and summed those amounts to get the total for each type. ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part V: Type and Volume of Firearms Trafficked,” April 2024, 1, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nftca-volume-iii-part-v/download>. See Table TVF-01: “Total Number and Percentage of Cases by Firearm Kind, 2017–2021.” For more information, see Appendix 3—Methodology to Calculate Annual Revenue of Trafficked Firearms.

⁶⁸ See Appendix 3—Methodology to Calculate Annual Revenue of Trafficked Firearms

⁶⁹ ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part IX: Final Recommendations,” January 2025, 1, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nftca-volume-iv-part-ix-%E2%80%93-final-recommendations/download>.

Estimated Annual Revenue of Trafficked Crime Guns

Year Sold	Estimated Total Trafficked Crime Guns	# of Trafficked Pistols (Cost ⁷⁰)	# of Trafficked Rifles (Cost ⁷¹)	# of Trafficked Revolvers (Cost ⁷²)	# of Trafficked Shotguns (Cost ⁷³)	Annual Revenue
2017	140,912	100,000 (\$56M)	17,000 (\$10M)	14,000 (\$7M)	8,000 (\$4M)	\$77M
2018	153,757	109,000 (\$61M)	18,000 (\$11M)	15,000 (\$8M)	9,000 (\$4M)	\$84M
2019	175,522	125,000 (\$70M)	21,000 (\$12M)	18,000 (\$9M)	11,000 (\$5M)	\$96M
2020	194,387	138,000 (\$77M)	23,000 (\$14M)	19,000 (\$10M)	12,000 (\$5M)	\$106M
2021	204,727	145,000 (\$81M)	25,000 (\$14M)	20,000 (\$10M)	12,000 (\$6M)	\$112M
2022	203,113	144,000 (\$81M)	24,000 (\$14M)	20,000 (\$10M)	12,000 (\$6M)	\$111M
2023	200,742	143,000 (\$80M)	24,000 (\$14M)	20,000 (\$10M)	12,000 (\$6M)	\$110M
Total	1,273,159	904,000 (\$505M)	153,000 (\$90M)	127,000 (\$65M)	76,000 (\$35M)	\$695M

Source: Everytown analysis of data obtained from ATF and TrueGunValue.com. Estimated trafficked guns and costs may not sum to total due to rounding. See Appendix 3—Methodology to Calculate Annual Revenue of Trafficked Crime Guns for detailed methodology.

V. Recent Federal Innovations to Address Trafficking

For decades, state and local law enforcement have relied on ATF as the nation’s lead agency in protecting communities from firearm trafficking and reducing gun violence. That mission has translated into real results. Between 2017 and 2021, ATF initiated nearly 10,000 firearm trafficking investigations, as well as 2,000 additional cases involving the proliferation of illegal machine gun conversion devices, silencers, and other illegal firearms.⁷⁴ As underfunded and underresourced as ATF has been for

⁷⁰ True Gun Value, “Glock Pistol Price and Historical Value,” accessed October 7, 2025, <https://truegunvalue.com/pistol/glock/price-historical-value>. Average cost of a new Glock pistol is \$647 and a used Glock pistol is \$387.

⁷¹ True Gun Value, “Ruger AR Rifle Price and Historical Value,” accessed October 7, 2025, <https://truegunvalue.com/rifle/RUGER-AR-/price-historical-value>. Average cost of an AR-type rifle is \$638 new and \$497 used.

⁷² True Gun Value, “S&W .38 Revolver Price and Historical Value,” accessed October 7, 2025, <https://truegunvalue.com/pistol/S%26W-.38-REVOLVER/price-historical-value>. Average cost of a Smith & Wesson .38 revolver is \$577 new and \$377 used.

⁷³ True Gun Value, “Mossberg 12GA Shotgun Price and Historical Value,” accessed October 7, 2025, <https://truegunvalue.com/shotgun/mossberg-12GA-/price-historical-value>. Average cost of a Mossberg 12 gauge shotgun is \$552 new and \$293 used.

⁷⁴ ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part I: Introduction and Methodology,” April 2024, 7, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-part-i/download>.

decades,⁷⁵ the agency has consistently been at the forefront of identifying and dismantling trafficking networks that fuel violent crime.

Until recently, ATF was making significant progress in targeting gun traffickers and the dealers that supply them. For example, in June 2021, ATF announced a new “zero-tolerance” policy under which the agency would move to revoke the licenses of gun dealers who willfully violate certain federal laws. The violations that would trigger revocation under this policy include transferring a firearm to a prohibited person, failing to run a required background check, falsifying records, failing to respond to an ATF crime gun tracing request, or refusing to permit ATF to conduct an inspection.⁷⁶ Under this policy, ATF closed the doors of gun stores that repeatedly failed to document gun sales and facilitated straw purchases.⁷⁷ Additionally, of the inspections for which ATF published the underlying reports, [inspectors found repeat violations](#) of the law in roughly two-thirds of the gun dealers who had their licenses revoked. In this way, the zero-tolerance policy provided accountability for gun stores that willfully broke the law.

Zero Tolerance Policy Case Example

[Arrowhead Pawn & Jewelry](#) in Jonesboro, Georgia, became a major supplier of crime guns in the mid-2000s: Between 2006 and 2010, authorities reportedly traced more than 1,700 crime guns back to Arrowhead Pawn, making it the fifth-largest source of crime guns in the country during that period. In 2009, the New York City Police Department labeled it as the top out-of-state supplier of the city’s crime guns, and in 2014, a firearm used to kill two NYPD officers was traced back to the store. The problems at Arrowhead Pawn were well known to ATF: Over the years, Arrowhead Pawn received numerous citations and warnings from ATF for violating federal law. Yet Arrowhead Pawn refused to take those warnings seriously, telling ATF in 2016 that employees were too “busy” and “got distracted by other customers” to properly conduct sales.

Despite receiving numerous citations and warnings for violating federal regulations, including failure to complete and maintain transaction records and report multiple sales of pistols as required by law, Arrowhead Pawn did not stop selling guns [until its license was revoked under the zero-tolerance policy](#).

⁷⁵ Chelsea Parsons, Eugenio Weigend Vargas, and Rukmani Bhatia, “Rethinking ATF’s Budget to Prioritize Effective Gun Violence,” Center for American Progress, September 17, 2020, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/rethinking-atfs-budget-prioritize-effective-gun-violence-prevention/>.

⁷⁶ Biden-Harris White House, “Fact Sheet: Biden-Harris Administration Announces Comprehensive Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gun Crime and Ensure Public Safety,” June 23, 2021, <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/23/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-announces-comprehensive-strategy-to-prevent-and-respond-to-gun-crime-and-ensure-public-safety/>.

⁷⁷ ATF, “Enhanced Regulatory Enforcement Policy,” accessed January 17, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250117171012/https://www.atf.gov/rules-and-regulations/enhanced-regulatory-enforcement-policy>.

In addition to the zero-tolerance policy, ATF recently instituted an intelligence-driven approach to gun dealer inspections and trafficking investigations to target firearm traffickers more effectively and to make inspections of gun dealers more impactful.⁷⁸ In 2021, ATF adopted a data-driven inspection model that prioritized inspections of dealers disproportionately linked to crime guns. Using trace data, ATF developed a statistical baseline to compare dealers within similar geographical areas, examining key factors such as percentage of traced firearms relative to sales volume, TTC, percentage of crime guns recovered in the possession of someone other than the purchaser, and rates of interstate and international recoveries. This analysis was strengthened by ballistics evidence from the NIBIN Enforcement Support System,⁷⁹ which revealed not just which dealers supplied crime guns but which supplied guns that were used in shootings. By measuring “time-to-first-shooting”—how quickly a firearm sold by a dealer was used in a shooting—ATF gained a powerful indicator of trafficking activity that was directly fueling gun violence.

The results speak for themselves. When the intelligence-driven inspection policy was formalized in October 2024, ATF offices nationwide aligned on the use of crime gun intelligence data analytics. In the first six months, inspections directly generated over 70 criminal investigations into traffickers, straw purchasers, and prohibited possessors. Additionally, in the first 10 months, there was a 225 percent increase in the number of criminal referrals generated from these inspections as compared to the previous fiscal year. At the same time, the dealers who were inspected due to their trace activity were educated on trafficking red flags and placed on notice that their sales were under scrutiny.

These recent innovations at ATF occurred during a period of remarkable crime reduction: violent crime reached a 50-year low in 2024.⁸⁰

VI. Trump Administration Rollbacks to Anti-Trafficking Efforts

Despite ATF’s expertise and track record in combating trafficking and gun crime, its mission has recently been dramatically undercut. Under the Trump administration, ATF’s resources and priorities have been shifted away from firearm trafficking and violent crime. Instead of focusing on the traffickers and criminal networks driving gun violence, approximately 80 percent of the 2,500 ATF Special Agents who are specifically trained to investigate firearms trafficking have been reassigned to immigration enforcement

⁷⁸ Data and information about ATF’s intelligence-driven trafficking investigations program come from conversations with current and former ATF officials.

⁷⁹ ATF, “NIBIN Enforcement Support System: State and Local LE Agency Access,” June 2022, <https://crimegunintelcenters.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/NIBIN-Enforcement-Support-System.pdf>.

⁸⁰ Jeff Asher, “Murder Officially Plunged in 2024,” August 2025, <https://jasher.substack.com/p/murder-officially-plunged-in-2024>.

duties at the Department of Homeland Security. This diversion leaves far fewer agents to pursue the violent offenders, criminal dealers, and trafficking networks that ATF was created to stop.⁸¹

The Trump administration has also sought to weaken ATF's role as the agency providing regulatory oversight of licensed gun dealers. The administration's proposed budget for fiscal year 2026 would slash ATF funding by 26 percent—more than \$400 million.⁸² This would eliminate 541 of the agency's 825 investigators responsible for inspecting gun dealers, decimating ATF's inspection force and reducing annual gun dealer compliance inspections from 10,000 to approximately 3,400.⁸³ Such a drastic cut would cripple ATF's ability to uncover traffickers, embolden unscrupulous dealers, and open the floodgates for gun trafficking.

Most alarmingly, the Trump administration reversed the zero-tolerance policy that had been remarkably successful at shutting down dangerous gun dealers⁸⁴ and—in a stunning move—invited those dealers who lost their licenses as the result of these severe violations to apply to get them back.⁸⁵ These actions by the administration send a clear message to all gun dealers that, going forward, there will likely be few consequences for willful violations of the law.

While ATF has long struggled to effectively address gun trafficking because of severely limited resources, political interference, and weak federal gun laws, these new moves by the Trump administration mean that the United States is at a new low when it comes to federal oversight of the gun industry. To be clear, even though the Trump administration has reversed the zero-tolerance policy, the conduct that it addressed is still a violation of federal law. ATF can and should be in the business of enforcing federal law even without a formal zero-tolerance policy; anything less lets gun dealers who supply guns to traffickers off the hook. With the void created by this lack of regulatory oversight and criminal accountability, traffickers will be emboldened, and bad actors in the gun industry will continue to profit off of violence in our communities.

⁸¹ Bob Ortega and Allison Gordon, "Gun Crime Cases Fall as Agents Shift to Immigration Crackdown," CNN, October 15, 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/10/15/us/trump-immigration-atf-gun-cases-invs>.

⁸² U.S. Department of Justice, "Fiscal Year 2026 Budget and Performance Summary," June 13, 2025, 145, <https://www.justice.gov/media/1403736/dl>.

⁸³ U.S. Department of Justice, "Fiscal Year 2026 Budget and Performance Summary," June 13, 2025, 146, <https://www.justice.gov/media/1403736/dl>.

⁸⁴ ATF, "DOJ, ATF Repeal FFL Inspection Policy and Begin Review of Two Final Rules," press release, April 7, 2025, <https://www.atf.gov/news/press-releases/doj-atf-repeal-ffl-inspection-policy-and-begin-review-two-final-rules>; ATF, "Enhanced Regulatory Enforcement Policy," April 8, 2025, <https://www.atf.gov/rules-and-regulations/enhanced-regulatory-enforcement-policy>.

⁸⁵ ATF, "Protecting Second Amendment Rights," May 21, 2025, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/protecting-second-amendment-rights>.

VII. How State Leaders Can Take Action to Prevent Gun Trafficking

Gun trafficking is arming lethal violence in our communities. With the federal government pulling back from both regulatory and law enforcement efforts to identify and interrupt trafficking activity and hold traffickers accountable, there is an urgent need for state leaders to step in. This is not a new role for states. Many have taken action to address gun trafficking and ensure that the gun dealers who are enabling this illegal activity to pad their profits are shut down and held accountable, including through legislation and litigation.

To effectively prevent firearm trafficking, states should adopt a comprehensive strategy that includes (1) using data to identify and interrupt trafficking, (2) implementing robust regulatory oversight of gun dealers, and (3) enacting foundational gun safety laws that deter trafficking.

A. Use Data to Identify and Interrupt Trafficking

State and local law enforcement already have access to a wealth of data that can help identify key sources of trafficking in their communities and provide insight into the best approaches to focus limited resources on the gun dealers most responsible for its proliferation. State leaders should ensure that data are being collected statewide, efficiently analyzed, and deployed to guide gun dealer oversight efforts.

- **Collect Data through Comprehensive Crime Gun Tracing and Ballistics Evidence**

Crime gun tracing⁸⁶ is the investigative backbone for understanding the origin and history of guns that are used in crime. Each trace tells a story: where the firearm was sold, who bought it, how long it took to change hands, and ultimately where and when it was used in a crime and by whom. This information is essential for detecting trafficking patterns, identifying suspects to solve violent crimes, and dismantling the supply chains that feed gun violence. When investigating gun crimes, it is critical to the investigation that the purchaser of the firearm be identified and contacted immediately to begin identifying suspects and generating crucial investigative leads. None of this is possible without tracing.

Comprehensive tracing includes recording all details regarding the crime committed, all identifying information about the possessor, as well as the date and complete address of the recovery. These details, coupled with the information that will be received from

⁸⁶ See Appendix 1: Understanding Crime Gun Tracing to Prevent Gun Violence for a detailed explanation of the crime gun tracing process.

ATF following a trace request via the eTrace platform,⁸⁷ paint a clear picture of the firearm's life from legal commerce to firearm trafficker to criminal use. For a detailed explanation of the tracing process, see Appendix 1: Understanding Crime Gun Tracing to Prevent Gun Violence.

The number of crime guns recovered and traced has exploded in recent years, with crime gun trace requests to ATF increasing 78 percent from 2014 to 2023.⁸⁸ This is due in part to ATF's efforts to promote the use of the eTrace platform and to encourage all law enforcement agencies, regardless of size, to comprehensively trace all recovered crime guns. But despite this increase, it is currently estimated that only 55 percent of all law enforcement agencies trace recovered crime guns.⁸⁹ States should take steps to ensure that all law enforcement agencies comprehensively trace every crime gun recovered. As of October 2025, [14 states](#) have enacted laws requiring crime gun tracing, and other law enforcement agencies have adopted this practice as a matter of policy.⁹⁰

In addition, because gun crime crosses city and county boundaries, trace data must also cross jurisdictional borders. States need to establish a statewide trace data sharing infrastructure by ensuring that every law enforcement agency opts into data sharing with other agencies through the collective data sharing feature of ATF's eTrace platform. Cross-jurisdictional data sharing ensures that investigators statewide can see the full scope of trafficking activity. States can also enter into data sharing agreements with other states to further bolster crime gun intelligence efforts.⁹¹

In addition to comprehensive tracing, jurisdictions should also focus on ballistics data to improve trafficking investigations. While crime gun tracing enables law enforcement to detect and identify traffickers, their gun dealer sources, and criminal possessors, it does

⁸⁷ ATF, "Fact Sheet—eTrace: Internet-Based Firearms Tracing and Analysis," August 2025,

<https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/fact-sheet/fact-sheet-etrace-internet-based-firearms-tracing-and-analysis>.

⁸⁸ ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume II: Crime Guns—Part II: National Tracing Center Overview," February 2023, 17,

<https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-ii-part-ii-ntc-overview/download>, see Figure NTC-16: "Total Trace Requests Entered and Trace Requests Entered via eTrace, 2003–2021"; ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part III: Crime Gun Tracing Updates and New Analysis," January 2025, 2, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-iii-%E2%80%93-crime-gun-tracing-updates-and-new-analysis/download>. See Figure CGT-01: "Total Number of Crime Gun Trace Requests."

⁸⁹ ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part IX: Final Recommendations," January 2025, 1,

<https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-ix-%E2%80%93-final-recommendations/download>.

⁹⁰ See the Joyce Foundation, "A Model State Policy for Requiring Law Enforcement Use of Crime Gun Intelligence Tools," August 2025,

https://assets.joycefdn.org/content/uploads/A-Model-State-Policy-for-Requiring-Law-Enforcement-Use-of-Crime-Gun-Intelligence-Tools_August-2025.pdf.

⁹¹ Memorandum of Understanding among the State of New Jersey, the State of New York, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the State of Connecticut concerning Reciprocal Sharing of Crime Gun Data, October 2021, https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2021-10/Joint_Crime_Data_MOU.pdf.

not connect guns to specific shootings. ATF's National Integrated Ballistics Information Network (NIBIN) imaging technology captures the unique markings that firearms make on ammunition cartridge casings as they are fired.⁹² Through an automated process, NIBIN technicians are able to identify matches between fired cartridge casings recovered from crime scenes. Through this technology, law enforcement can often determine when the same firearm is used at multiple shootings. Then, when the firearm is eventually recovered, it can be linked to the previous shootings. By layering NIBIN technology with trace data, law enforcement can identify the individuals committing horrific shootings that terrorize communities and the traffickers who supplied them.⁹³ States should ensure that all law enforcement agencies have recovered crime guns test-fired and entered into NIBIN, as well as enter all recovered cartridge casings into the system.

- **Create a Crime Gun Intelligence Analytics Portal**

Not only must states ensure that all crime guns are being routinely traced, but this data must then be put to use not only to identify the perpetrators of individual crimes but also to uncover illegal trafficking activity, including which dealers are enabling it. This can be accomplished with a crime gun intelligence data analytics portal, which allows for quick analysis of large quantities of trace data. With a one-time batch download of historical trace data and automated nightly updates, states can quickly build a robust crime gun intelligence platform for investigators and state inspectors. By feeding comprehensive trace data into an analytics dashboard, agencies can:

- Integrate and process large volumes of trace data.
- Identify firearm traffickers and trafficking patterns.
- Pinpoint sources of crime guns, including specific gun dealers.
- Detect patterns of violent gun crime across jurisdictions.⁹⁴

By layering other known firearm trafficking indicators and using strong data visualizations, law enforcement can focus on the individuals, networks, and FFLs most

⁹² ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume II: Crime Guns—Part I: National Integrated Ballistic Information Network," February 2023, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-ii-part-i/download>.

⁹³ ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part VI: NIBIN Updates and New Analysis," January 2025, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-vi-%E2%80%93nibin-updates-and-new-analysis/download>.

⁹⁴ ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Foreword by the Director," January 2025, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-foreword-director/download>; ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part II: Firearm Thefts and Losses Updates and New Analysis," January 2025, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-ii-part-ii/download>; ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume II: Crime Guns—Part VII: Recommendations & Future Enhancements," February 2023, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-ii-part-vii-recommendations/download>.

responsible for driving gun violence. For a detailed discussion of crime gun intelligence, see Appendix 2: Crime Gun Intelligence Firearm Trafficking Indicators.

In 2016, the New York State Attorney General's Office published a first-of-its-kind crime gun intelligence analysis of crime guns recovered in the state and launched an interactive tool that examined the purchase history and source of crime guns to highlight the unique gun trafficking patterns affecting the state.⁹⁵ The Illinois Attorney General's Office launched a trace data analytics platform in 2022 called Crime Gun Connect. This platform "utilizes more than 10 years of crime-gun trace data, high tech mapping capabilities and advanced search features to crack down on illegal gun trafficking and straw purchasing. With this tool, our local, state, and federal law enforcement partners can leverage this advanced technology to analyze crime-gun traces and identify gun trafficking patterns."⁹⁶

- **Adopt an Intelligence-Driven Trafficking Investigations Model**

With comprehensive tracing and a crime gun analytics platform, states can develop a focused, intelligence-driven investigations model that allows state and local law enforcement to direct limited resources to the dealers most responsible for enabling gun trafficking. While finding bad actors among the approximately 76,000 licensed dealers authorized to sell guns in the United States sounds like a daunting task, in fact, just 13,000 sellers are responsible for more than 90 percent of all retail firearm sales. That means less than one-fifth of dealers are responsible for supplying nearly all of the guns in circulation, including the vast majority of trafficked guns recovered in crimes.⁹⁷

ATF began to use an intelligence-driven approach to dealer inspections in 2021, employing data analytics derived from crime gun intelligence to target firearm traffickers more effectively and to make inspections of gun dealers more impactful. Rather than

⁹⁵ Office of the New York State Attorney General, "A.G. Schneiderman Announces First-of-Its-Kind Analysis Illustrating Gun Trafficking Into NY," October 2016, <https://ag.ny.gov/press-release/2016/ag-schneiderman-announces-first-its-kind-analysis-illustrating-gun-trafficking-ny>; Office of the New York State Attorney General, "Target on Trafficking: New York Crime Gun Analysis," October 2016, <https://ag.ny.gov/sites/default/files/reports/target-on-trafficking-2016.pdf#pa>.

⁹⁶ Office of the Illinois Attorney General, "Violence Prevention and Public Safety, Crime Gun Connect: Tracking Guns Used in Crimes," accessed October 22, 2025, <https://illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/Safer-Communities/Violence-Prevention-and-Community-Safety/Crime-Connect/>.

⁹⁷ As of August 2025, there are approximately 47,000 gun dealers and 6,000 pawnbrokers licensed to sell firearms. Additionally, licensed manufacturers (21,000) and importers (1,700) are also authorized to sell guns. ATF, "Complete Federal Firearms Listings," 2025, https://www.atf.gov/firearms/listing-federal-firearms-licensees/complete?field_ffl_date_value%5Bvalue%5D%5Byear%5D=2025&ffl_date_month%5Bvalue%5D%5Bmonth%5D=1. According to NFCTA research, actual sales are concentrated among a small subset of this overall group of licensees: just 15 percent of gun dealers account for 90 percent of all retail gun sales, 38 percent of pawnbrokers are responsible for 91 percent of pawnshop sales, and 17 percent of manufacturers are responsible for 96 percent of retail sales conducted by manufacturers. ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), Volume I: Firearms in Commerce," May 2022, 67–68, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/national-firearms-commerce-and-trafficking-assessment-firearms-commerce-volume/download>. See Tables SD-03: "Total Type 01 FFLs and EMSV by EMSV Range, 2017–2020;" SD-04: "Type 02 FFLs and EMSV Range, 2017–2020;" and SD-05: "Type 07 FFLs and EMSV Range, 2017–2020."

trying to inspect all dealers once every five years—regardless of the volume and nature of a dealer’s sales and any indicators of trafficking—ATF shifted to a data-based, intelligence-driven approach that focused limited resources on the dealers most likely to be supplying traffickers. By applying limited resources where the risk is greatest, ATF turned inspections into a precision tool—simultaneously deterring trafficking, strengthening dealer accountability, and driving criminal prosecutions.

With the current federal administration starving ATF of the resources necessary to continue this work, states should adopt ATF’s approach and use crime gun intelligence to identify the dealers supplying traffickers and hold them accountable.

- **Hold Traffickers Accountable**

State policymakers should ensure that adequate criminal laws are on the books to hold individuals accountable for gun trafficking. States should enact criminal statutes that allow those who engage in gun trafficking to be held accountable, such as laws that clearly define straw purchasing and trafficking behavior and provide criminal penalties for those who engage in those activities—including the gun dealers who make the illegal sales. As of October 2025, 23 states have already enacted criminal statutes that penalize straw purchasing,⁹⁸ and 35 states have enacted other criminal statutes related to illegal gun transfers.⁹⁹

While prosecutors often criminally charge the individuals who ultimately use trafficked firearms in the commission of a crime or unlawfully possess one, prosecutions of those who were responsible for trafficking the firearm in the first place are much more rare. An investigation into a crime that involved a gun should not focus solely on the individual who ultimately illegally used or possessed the gun but should also focus on where that gun came from, whether it is connected to other crime guns, and any other individuals who may have been involved in illegally trafficking it. In addition to potential criminal investigations, states should consider civil lawsuits against problematic gun dealers that

⁹⁸ Cal Pen Code § 27515; C.R.S. 18-12-111; Conn. Gen. Stat. § 29-37j; 11 DE Code § 1455; Fla. Stat. § 790.065; GA Code § 16-11-113; 720 Ill Comp Stat 5/24-3.5; IC 35-47-2-7; Ky. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 527.090; MD Public Safety Code § 5-101; Minn. Stat. § 624.7133; Nebraska Revised Statute 69-2422; Nev. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 202.362; NJ Rev Stat § 2C:39-10; NM Stat § 30-7-7.2; N.Y. Penal Law § 265.17; OH Rev Code § 2923.21; 18 Pa.C.S.A. § 6111; R.I. Gen. Laws § 11-47-23; Utah Code Ann. § 53-5a-604; 13 V.S.A. § 4025; Va. Code Ann. § 18.2-308.2:2; Wis. Stat. § 941.2905.

⁹⁹AL Code § 13A-11-58.1; Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 13-3102; Ark. Code Ann. § 5-73-132; Cal Penal Code § 27520; Conn. Gen. Stat. §§ 53-202aa, 52-571f; GA Code § 16-11-113; Idaho Code Ann. § 18-8505; 720 Ill Comp Stat 5/24-3; IN Code § 35-47-2.5-16; Iowa Code §§ 724.16, 24.29A; Ky. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 527.090; La. Rev. Stat. §§ 14:95.1.3, 14:95.1.4; Me. Stat. 15 § 394; MD Public Safety Code §§ 5-138, 5-140, 5-144; MI Comp L § 750.223; Minn. Stat. § 609.66; MS Code §§ 97-37-105, 97-37-35; Mo. Rev. Stat. § 571.063; Nebraska Revised Statute 28-1212.03; NJ Rev Stat §§ 2C:39-16.2, 2C:39-10; N.Y. Penal Law §§ 265.11, 265.12, 265.13, 265.16, 265.17; N.C. Gen. Stat. § 14-408; N.D. Cent. Code § 62.1-02-08; Ohio Rev. Code Ann. § 2923.20; 21 OK Stat § 1289.28; OR Rev Stat § 166.470; 18 Pa.C.S.A. § 6111; RI Gen L § 11-47-37; SC Code § 16-23-30; TN Code § 39-17-1316; Tex. Penal Code §§ 46.06, 46.14; Utah Code Ann. §§ 76-11-307, § 76-11-308; Va. Code Ann. § 18.2-308.2:1; Wash. Rev. Code Ann. § 9.41.080; W. Va. Code § 61-7-10.

seek accountability for their role in gun violence. Several states have enacted gun industry accountability laws that facilitate these kinds of cases.

B. Implement Robust Gun Dealer Oversight

It is more important than ever for states to fill the dangerous gaps left by a porous federal regulatory regime—now coupled with federal leadership that is openly hostile to protective regulation—by ensuring that gun dealers within their borders are adequately regulated. Indeed, state policymakers have the tools to go above and beyond what even a fully resourced ATF could offer, using their considerable power to require physical security measures, comprehensive record-keeping, and consistent discipline in ways that federal regulators may not. [Many states](#) have been regulating gun dealers for decades, and thankfully, state gun safety leaders are actively meeting the moment, adopting gold-standard policies establishing strong oversight and enforcing existing protections that protect the public from the flow of illegal guns into our communities.

In April 2025, Everytown released a report entitled “The Life-Saving Promise of State Gun Dealer Licensing,”¹⁰⁰ which provides a comprehensive overview of existing federal and state approaches to regulating gun dealers and offers a road map for how states can step in to make up for the lax federal approach. As that report explains in more detail, Everytown recommends that states enact the following state laws to increase oversight of gun dealers and help prevent trafficking:

- **Require gun dealers to obtain a state license** in addition to the license required by federal law, and prohibit issuance of a license to a person who is prohibited from having guns under federal or state law or who has a recent firearm conviction, who has previously had a gun dealer license revoked (absent extenuating circumstances), or where the issuance of the license would be a danger to public safety.
- **Require gun dealers to implement security measures to prevent theft**, including physically securing guns on the business premises, utilizing alarm and video surveillance systems, and installing security measures designed to prevent unauthorized entry on all exterior doors and windows.
- **Mandate annual background checks and training**—including how to identify straw purchasers and other indicators of trafficking—for gun dealers and their employees.
- **Authorize a state agency or local law enforcement to conduct regular compliance inspections of gun dealers**, prioritizing inspections of newly

¹⁰⁰ Everytown for Gun Safety, “The Life-Saving Promise of State Gun Dealer Licensing,” April 2025, accessed November 21, 2025.

licensed dealers and those with the highest percentage of crime gun traces with a short TTC.

- **Require gun dealers to send records of all gun sales to state officials for retention;** provide authorities with ongoing electronic access to records of firearm acquisition, disposition, and inventory; and notify state authorities of all trace requests received from ATF.
- **Authorize disciplinary action against gun dealers who violate the law,** including mandatory suspension of the state license for a dealer who is charged with a disqualifying crime and mandatory revocation of the license in specified circumstances, including failing to conduct a required background check, refusing to allow authorities to conduct an inspection, knowingly or negligently transferring a firearm to a prohibited person, failing to respond to a trace request, or falsifying records.
- **Require gun dealers to provide information to gun buyers at the point of sale** about secure storage, suicide prevention, and the risks associated with firearm ownership.
- **Establish a minimal threshold for responsible business conduct by gun dealers** and allow for civil liability if their firearms cause harm.
- **Require authorities to prepare an annual report** that includes information on dealer applications, inspections, and disciplinary actions, as well as an analysis of crime gun trace data showing patterns and trends relating to crime guns and trafficking.

These laws provide the tools for state law enforcement and regulatory agencies to conduct effective oversight of gun dealers and minimize the risk of dealers supplying guns to traffickers.

C. Enact Strong Gun Laws That Deter Trafficking

States can and should enact a number of strong gun laws to close existing gaps in federal law that enable gun trafficking.

- **Require background checks for all gun sales.** Under federal law, background checks are only required for gun sales conducted by licensed dealers; it does not address gun sales by unlicensed dealers. States should close this loophole by requiring background checks on all gun sales—not just on the sale of firearms from licensed gun dealers. As of October 2025, [22 states](#) have acted to close this deadly loophole.
- **Create a waiting period for gun purchases.** State laws requiring a mandatory [waiting period](#) before a gun sale can be completed can help slow down and deter trafficking activity.

- **Limit the number of guns an individual can purchase per month.** Gun purchase limits can help limit the bulk purchasing of guns that is typical of many traffickers who operate as illegal unlicensed dealers and shut down this method of trafficking. Several states have enacted laws limiting the number of guns that may be purchased per month.¹⁰¹

CONCLUSION

Gun trafficking fuels violence in communities around the country and abroad. With an estimated 1.27 million guns illegally trafficked from 2017 through the end of 2026, this is not a small issue—it's a public safety crisis.

Gun trafficking is also big business. And for too long, law enforcement has turned a blind eye to the role of gun dealers in supplying trafficked firearms—allowing the industry to prioritize profits over safety. Perhaps most disappointing is the fact that gun dealers could immediately interrupt the most common forms of gun trafficking simply by paying attention to their customers, being vigilant about obviously suspicious sales, and refusing to sell guns to traffickers. Their failure to do so is not just a moral disappointment—it is a violation of their obligations as federally licensed gun dealers and, in some cases, potentially criminal.

Despite the Trump administration's tough-on-crime posturing, the administration has siphoned federal law enforcement resources away from gun trafficking investigations, leaving traffickers and the dealers who supply them emboldened to continue this criminal conduct. But state and local leaders have the opportunity to step into this void and take real action to cut off the flow of illegal guns into their communities. By using data to identify trafficking sources and pipelines, implementing strong oversight of gun dealers, and enacting foundational gun laws to prevent the most common trafficking methods, state and local leaders can address this issue head-on and help make their communities safer.

¹⁰¹ Cal Pen Code §§ 27535, 27540 (three firearms per month); Conn. Gen. Stat. § 29-33(f) (three handguns per month); MD Public Safety Code § 5-128 (one "regulated firearm" per month); NJ Rev Stat §§ 2C:58-2(a)(7), 2C:58-3(i) (one handgun per month); Va. Code Ann. § 18.2-308.2:2(R) (one handgun per month).

APPENDIX 1: UNDERSTANDING CRIME GUN TRACING TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE

How are firearms traced?

Crime gun tracing is an important tool for law enforcement to trace the lawful chain of custody of a firearm in order to generate leads in criminal investigations where firearms are recovered. Crime gun traces are conducted by the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF). By law, ATF is only authorized to trace firearms recovered in crimes.

Tracing a crime gun generally involves the following step-by-step process:¹⁰²

Step 1: A firearm is used in a crime and recovered by law enforcement. Local law enforcement is generally the recovering agency.

Step 2: The recovering law enforcement agency submits a request to ATF to conduct a trace. The request is generally submitted using ATF's electronic system known as eTrace.

Step 3: ATF uses the description of the crime gun provided by the recovering law enforcement agency and contacts the original manufacturer or searches the manufacturer's records electronically.

Step 4: The original firearm manufacturer reviews its required records and provides to ATF information on the first lawful transfer of the firearm. ATF will continue to contact each Federal Firearms Licensee (FFL) in the [distribution chain](#) who possessed the gun, until the final retail FFL is contacted.

Step 5: The final retail FFL is the FFL that sells the firearm to an unlicensed individual. This retail FFL reviews its transaction records and provides a copy of the transfer record (ATF Form 4473) to ATF.

Step 6: ATF provides ATF Form 4473 to the original requesting law enforcement agency, which is then able to initiate their investigation.

¹⁰² ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume II: Crime Guns—Part II: National Tracing Center Overview," February 2023, 3, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nftca-volume-ii-part-ii-ntc-overview/download>. See Figure NTC-02: "Crime Gun Tracing Process and Workflow Chart."

Why is tracing important?

Tracing creates key investigative leads that are crucial to solving violent crimes. When a firearm is recovered in a crime, it is critical to the investigation that the source/purchaser of the firearm be identified and contacted immediately to begin identifying suspects. Additionally, in mass casualty incidents, contacting the purchaser of the firearm used in the shooting is crucial in determining the possible identity of the shooter and whether additional attacks are imminent.

APPENDIX 2:

CRIME GUN INTELLIGENCE FIREARM TRAFFICKING INDICATORS

What is Crime Gun Intelligence?

Crime Gun Intelligence (CGI) is primarily trace data associated with crime guns recovered in a particular jurisdiction. When available, CGI can also include data derived from the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN).

What information is contained in a comprehensive crime gun trace that forms the basis of CGI?

- Purchaser demographics (name, date of birth, and address)
- Date of purchase and date of recovery, which is used to calculate time-to-crime (TTC)
- Possessor demographics, if any (name, date of birth, address, gang affiliation [if any])
- Recovery location (address, city, county, state)
- NCIC¹⁰³ crime category (e.g., weapons offense, homicide, aggravated assault)
- Transferring¹⁰⁴ Federal Firearms Licensee (name, address, license number)
- Crime gun description: manufacturer, model (if any), type, caliber, or gauge

By collecting this information from individual crime gun traces and then analyzing aggregate trace data from a particular jurisdiction, investigators can efficiently and effectively analyze trends and patterns, identify the traffickers and straw purchasers who are arming the criminal possessors committing violent gun crimes in their jurisdiction, and determine which licensed dealers are the sources of crime guns that traffickers purchase.

The following are known indicators that can be captured in a Crime Gun Intelligence Analytics Dashboard to identify traffickers:

- Purchasers with at least one trace with a TTC of less than one year in which the possessor is someone different from the purchaser or unknown.
- Purchasers with at least one trace with a TTC of less than one year in which the firearm was recovered more than 100 miles from where it was purchased.
- Purchasers with at least one interstate trace with a TTC of less than three years in which the possessor was someone different from the purchaser or unknown.

¹⁰³ The National Crime Information Center (NCIC) is a computerized database of documented criminal justice information available to virtually every U.S. law enforcement agency.

¹⁰⁴ The “transferring” FFL is the final known FFL that transfers or sells the firearm to a private citizen.

- Purchasers with two or more traces with an average TTC of less than three years.
- Purchasers with two or more traces with interstate recoveries.
- Purchasers with two or more traces in which the possessor was someone different from the purchaser or unknown.

These additional indicators can be used if NIBIN data is layered into a Crime Gun Intelligence Analytics Dashboard:

- Any trace with a negative¹⁰⁵ time-to-first-shooting (TTFS) of less than one year.
- Purchasers with at least one trace linked to a TTFS of less than one year.
- Purchasers with at least two traces associated with shootings with a TTFS of less than three years.
- Purchasers with at least two traces, both with different possessors, and associated with at least one shooting.

How to Initiate a CGI Analytics Program to Identify Trafficking Sources

In order to identify the gun stores supplying traffickers, investigators must first formulate a baseline of trace activity for all gun stores in the relevant jurisdiction. This baseline will normalize the data and allow for effective analysis of the gun stores disproportionately responsible for arming traffickers.

Using only the FFLs with at least one trace in the past 12 months, create the following baseline metrics:

- Average number of traces per FFL
- Average TTC for all traces
- Percentage of traces with a TTC of less than one year
- Percentage of traces with a TTC of less than three years
- Percentage of traces in which the possessor is different from the purchaser
- Percentage of interstate recoveries
- Percentage of international recoveries
- Trace-to-disposition ratio (if volume is known through NICS Point-of-Contact [POC] checks or required sales reporting)¹⁰⁶
- Percentage of traces associated with shootings (if NIBIN data are available)

¹⁰⁵ A negative TTFS can occur when a fired cartridge casing from the firearm has been recovered and entered into NIBIN, the firearm is then reacquired by a gun dealer, later resold, and finally recovered and entered into NIBIN.

¹⁰⁶ The Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (18 U.S.C. § 922(t)) requires FFLs to initiate a National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) background check prior to transferring a firearm to an unlicensed person. In certain states, these checks are completed by a designated state agency rather than FBI-NICS. For a list of those states, see <https://www.atf.gov/rules-and-regulations/laws-alcohol-tobacco-firearms-and-explosives/gun-control-act/brady-law/brady-state-lists>. The number of NICS checks conducted by an FFL can be used as an estimated number of firearms disposed or transferred.

After these baseline metrics have been established, a crime gun intelligence analytics dashboard can be used to calculate how many categories are above baseline for each FFL in the jurisdiction, accounting for their total number of traces. Those results would allow investigators to prioritize FFLs with at least 10 traces and three or more categories above baseline.

APPENDIX 3: METHODOLOGY TO CALCULATE ANNUAL REVENUE OF TRAFFICKED CRIME GUNS

While the percentage of crime guns relative to firearm sales is small, the overall number of crime guns is itself staggering.¹⁰⁷ For those firearms used in crimes, the time between when the firearm was purchased from a dealer and when it was recovered in a crime, known as time-to-crime (TTC), is critical in determining whether the original purchase was illegal. According to law enforcement and researchers, a TTC of less than three years is widely considered to be a strong indicator of trafficking and illegal activity by licensed gun dealers.¹⁰⁸

Estimating Trafficked Crime Guns by Year of Sale and TTC

To estimate the number of trafficked crime guns sold between 2017 and 2023, we first determined the actual and estimated number of crime gun recoveries traced to a purchase from an FFL between 2018 and 2026. Data from 2018 to 2023 were obtained from ATF data using the actual number of crime guns traced to a purchaser.¹⁰⁹ Data for 2024 and 2025 have not yet been released by ATF and 2026 is speculative; for these years we calculated projected estimates based on a rolling average of the previous three years' totals.¹¹⁰

Next, to determine the estimated number of trafficked crime guns recovered each year, we calculated the national TTC average using the annual ATF Firearms Trace Data for

¹⁰⁷ ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part I: Firearm Commerce Updates and New Analysis," January 2025, 16, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-i-firearm-commerce-updates-and-new-analysis/download>. See Table FC-18: "EMSV Totals by Year." Between 2017 and 2023, an average of 15 million firearms have been sold by licensed dealers annually.

ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part III: Crime Gun Tracing Updates and New Analysis," January 2025, 3, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-iii-%E2%80%93crime-gun-tracing-updates-and-new-analysis/download>. See Table CGT-06: "Traced to Purchaser." Between 2018 and 2023, an average of approximately 340,000 crime guns have been recovered and traced to a purchase from a licensed dealer.

¹⁰⁸ ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume II: Crime Gun Intelligence and Analysis—Part III: Crime Guns Recovered and Traced within the United States and Its Territories," March 2024, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-ii-part-iii-crime-guns-recovered-and-traced-us/download>; H.S. Laqueur, C. Smirniotis, and C. McCort, "Predicting Short Time-to-Crime Guns: A Machine Learning Analysis of California Transaction Records (2010—2021)," *Journal of Urban Health* 101, no. 5 (October 2024): 955-967, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11461422/#:~:text=The%20rapid%20diversion%20of%20a.crime%20%5B10%2C%2011%5D>.

¹⁰⁹ Everytown analysis of ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part III: Crime Gun Tracing Updates and New Analysis," January 2025, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-iii-%E2%80%93crime-gun-tracing-updates-and-new-analysis/download>, Table CGT-06: "Number and Percentage of Crime Guns Traced to a Purchaser by Year."

¹¹⁰ For example, to estimate traces in 2024, the average of traces in 2021, 2022, and 2023 was utilized.

the years 2019 through 2023. The five-year (2019–2023) average was 25.3 percent for a TTC of less than one year, 14.4 percent for a TTC of between 1 and two years, and 10.3 percent for a TTC of between two and three years.¹¹¹ Those percentages were then applied to the total crime gun recoveries traced to a purchase from an FFL each year between 2018 and 2026. For example, to determine the number of trafficked crime guns sold in 2017, we take 25.3 percent of the total crime guns recovered in 2018, 14.4 percent of crime guns recovered in 2019, and 10.3 percent of crime guns recovered in 2020.

This analysis revealed that between 2017 and 2023, more than 930,000 firearms had a TTC of under three years and were likely trafficked.¹¹² Assuming the rates of recoveries and tracing continue, by the end of 2026, that number is projected to exceed 1.27 million.

Table 1. Estimated Total Trafficked Crime Guns Sold, 2017–2023

Year of Sale	Actual and Estimated Total Crime Gun Recoveries Traced to a Purchase from an FFL ¹¹³	# of Traces with TTC Less Than 1 Year ¹¹⁴	# of Traces with TTC between one and two Years	# of Traces with TTC between two and three Years	Total Trafficked and Recovered Crime Guns
2017	N/A	68,149 (recovered 2018)	40,077 (recovered 2019)	32,686 (recovered 2020)	140,912
2018	269,363	70,413 (recovered	45,697 (recovered	37,647 (recovered 2021)	153,757

¹¹¹ Everytown analysis of ATF, “Data & Statistics: Firearm Trace Data,” 2019–2023, <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/data-statistics>.

¹¹² Everytown analysis of ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part III: Crime Gun Tracing Updates and New Analysis,” January 2025, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nftca-volume-iv-part-iii-%E2%80%93-crime-gun-tracing-updates-and-new-analysis/download>, Table CGT-06: “Number and Percentage of Crime Guns Traced to a Purchaser by Year”; ATF, “Data & Statistics: Firearms Trace Data,” 2019–2023, <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/data-statistics>.

¹¹³ “Total Crime Gun Recoveries Traced to a Purchaser from an FFL” data for 2018–2023 were obtained from NFTCA volume IV, part III, table CGT-06: “Number and Percentage of Crime Guns Traced to a Purchaser by Year.” Data for 2024–2026 have not yet been released by the ATF, in place we used projected estimates based on a rolling average of the previous three years’ totals.

¹¹⁴ To determine the estimated number of traces with a given time-to-crime (TTC), we first calculated a national average of the total recoveries in each TTC category based on annual ATF Firearms Trace Data for the years 2019 through 2023 and then calculated the percentage of total trafficked guns in each TTC category. The 5-year (2019–2023) average percentage was 25.3 percent for a TTC of less than one year, 14.4 percent for a TTC of between one and two years, and 10.3 percent for a TTC of between two and three years. Those percentages were then applied to the “Total Crime Gun Recoveries Traced to a Purchaser from an FFL” each year.

		2019)	2020)		
2019	278,313	80,287 (recovered 2020)	52,632 (recovered 2021)	42,603 (recovered 2022)	175,522
2020	317,339	92,472 (recovered 2021)	59,561 (recovered 2022)	42,354 (recovered 2023)	194,387
2021	365,501	104,645 (recovered 2022)	59,214 (recovered 2023)	Est. 40,868 (recovered 2024)	Est. 204,727
2022	413,618	104,035 (recovered 2023)	Est. 57,136 (recovered 2024)	Est. 41,942 (recovered 2025)	Est. 203,113
2023	411,207	Est. 100,384 (recovered 2024)	Est. 58,637 (recovered 2025)	Est. 41,721 (recovered 2026)	Est. 200,742
Est. 2024	396,775				
Est. 2025	407,200				
Est. 2026	405,061				
Total	3,264,377				Est. 1,273,159

Source: Everytown analysis of ATF, Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part III: Crime Gun Tracing Updates and New Analysis," January 2025, 3, Table CGT-06; <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-iii-%E2%80%93-crime-gun-tracing-updates-and-new-analysis/download>; and ATF, Firearm Trace Data, 2019–2023, <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/data-statistics>.

Estimating the Price of Trafficked Crime Guns

To estimate the revenue from trafficked firearms, it's essential first to understand crime gun composition and the cost of new and used firearms. According to ATF, of traced crime guns recovered between 2017 and 2023, 71 percent were pistols, 12 percent

rifles, 10 percent revolvers, and 6 percent shotguns.¹¹⁵ NFCTA research on ATF trafficking investigations indicates two-thirds of trafficked guns are new.¹¹⁶

The retail cost of firearms can also vary dramatically depending on caliber, finish, material, and accessories. To calculate average sales price, we used the website [TrueGunValue.com](https://www.truegunvalue.com), which aggregates online listings of firearms to determine the current average price of new and used firearms.

While there are hundreds of different makes, models, and caliber combinations of firearms, for pricing purposes, this analysis used the top-traced make and caliber for each type of firearm.

- **Pistols:** The top-traced pistol was manufactured by Glock, and the top-traced pistol caliber was 9mm.¹¹⁷
- **Rifles:** The top-traced rifle was split between Marlin and Ruger. Given that Marlin firearms have been produced by Ruger since 2020, and Ruger produces several AR-type rifles, a Ruger rifle was used for pricing purposes. The top-traced rifle caliber was .22— but the calibers of 5.56mm, 7.62mm, and .223mm, all commonly used in AR-style rifles, when combined were the top-traced calibers.¹¹⁸
- **Revolvers:** The top-traced revolver was manufactured by Smith & Wesson and the top traced revolver caliber was .38.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), Volume II: Crime Guns—Part III: Crime Guns Recovered and Traced within the United States and Its Territories,” February 2023, 17, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-ii-part-iii-crime-guns-recovered-and-traced-us/download>. See Table CCT-02: “Percentage of Traced Crime Guns by Type, 2017–2021”; ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part III: Crime Gun Tracing Updates and New Analysis,” January 2025, 2, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-iii-%E2%80%93-crime-gun-tracing-updates-and-new-analysis/download>. See Table CGT-02: “Types of Traced Crime Guns, 2022–2023.”

¹¹⁶ ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part V: Type and Volume of Firearms Trafficked,” April 2024, 1, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-part-v/download>. See Table TVF-01: “Total Number and Percentage of Cases by Firearm Kind, 2017–2021.”

¹¹⁷ Between 2017 and 2021, 20 percent of all pistols recovered and traced were manufactured by Glock and 50 percent of all pistols recovered and traced were 9mm. ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), Volume II: Crime Guns—Part III: Crime Guns Recovered and Traced within the United States and Its Territories,” February 2023, 18–20, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-ii-part-iii-crime-guns-recovered-and-traced-us/download>. See Tables CCG-05 and CCG-09.

¹¹⁸ Between 2017 and 2021, nine percent of all rifles recovered and traced were manufactured by Ruger and 34 percent of all rifles recovered and traced were either .233, 5.56mm, or 7.62mm. ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), Volume II: Crime Guns—Part III: Crime Guns Recovered and Traced within the United States and Its Territories,” February 2023, 18–20, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-ii-part-iii-crime-guns-recovered-and-traced-us/download>. See Tables CCG-06 and CCG-10.

¹¹⁹ Between 2017 and 2021, 26 percent of all revolvers recovered and traced were manufactured by Smith & Wesson, and 41 percent of all revolvers recovered and traced were .38 caliber. ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), Volume II: Crime Guns—Part III: Crime Guns Recovered and Traced within the United States and Its Territories,” February 2023, 18–20, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-ii-part-iii-crime-guns-recovered-and-traced-us/download>. See Tables CCG-07 and CCG-11.

- Shotguns: The top-traced shotgun was a Mossberg, and the top-traced shotgun gauge was 12 gauge.¹²⁰

Table 2. New and Used Average Cost of Top-Traced Firearms¹²¹

Type of Firearm	Make and Caliber	Price/New	Price/Used
Pistol	Glock 9mm	\$647	\$387
Rifle	Ruger AR	\$638	\$497
Revolver	S&W .38	\$577	\$377
Shotgun	Mossberg 12 GA	\$552	\$293

Estimating the Annual Revenue of Trafficked Crime Guns

To estimate the annual revenue of trafficked firearms, we first calculated the estimated number of trafficked firearms for each type of firearm (pistols, rifles, revolvers, and shotguns) based on the estimated number of trafficked crime guns.¹²² Next, we applied the percentage of new (66 percent) and used (33 percent) trafficked firearms to the estimate for each firearm type.¹²³ Finally, we applied the average corresponding pricing of the top-traced crime guns for new and used firearms to each firearm type¹²⁴ and summed across firearm types and years.

This analysis revealed that gun dealers are estimated to have earned approximately \$695 million in illegal sales of trafficked firearms between 2017 and 2023.

¹²⁰ Between 2017 and 2021, 20 percent of all shotguns recovered and traced were manufactured by Mossberg, and 76 percent of all shotguns recovered and traced were 12 gauge. ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume II: Crime Guns—Part III: Crime Guns Recovered and Traced within the United States and its Territories,” February 2023, 18–20, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nftca-volume-ii-part-iii-crime-guns-recovered-and-traced-us/download>. See Tables CCG-08 and CCG-12.

¹²¹ True Gun Value, accessed October 7, 2025, <https://truegunvalue.com/>.

¹²² See Table 1. Estimated Total Trafficked Crime Guns Sold, 2017–2023.

¹²³ The ATF estimates that of trafficked firearms involved in trafficking investigations, 66 percent were sold new. Therefore, we applied 66 percent of each firearm type to the average new price and 33 percent to the average used price and summed those amounts to get the total for each type. ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part V: Type and Volume of Firearms Trafficked,” April 2024, 1, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nftca-volume-iii-part-v/download>. See Table TVF-01: “Total Number and Percentage of Cases by Firearm Kind, 2017–2021.”

¹²⁴ See Table 2. New and Used Average Cost of Top-Traced Firearms.

Table 3. Estimated Annual Revenue of Trafficked Crime Guns

Year Sold	Estimated Total Trafficked Crime Guns	# of Trafficked Pistols (Cost ¹²⁵)	# of Trafficked Rifles (Cost ¹²⁶)	# of Trafficked Revolvers (Cost ¹²⁷)	# of Trafficked Shotguns (Cost ¹²⁸)	Annual Revenue
2017	140,912	100,047 (\$55.9M)	16,909 (\$10.0M)	14,091 (\$7.2M)	8,455 (\$3.9M)	\$77.0M
2018	153,757	109,167 (\$61.0M)	18,451 (\$10.9M)	15,376 (\$7.8M)	9,225 (\$4.3M)	\$84.0M
2019	175,522	124,620 (\$69.6M)	21,063 (\$12.4M)	17,552 (\$8.9M)	10,531 (\$4.9M)	\$95.9M
2020	194,387	138,015 (\$77.1M)	23,326 (13.8M)	19,439 (\$9.9M)	11,663 (\$5.4M)	\$106.2M
2021	204,727	145,356 (\$81.2M)	24,567 (\$14.5M)	20,473 (\$10.4M)	12,284 (\$5.7M)	\$111.8M
2022	203,113	144,210 (\$80.6M)	24,374 (\$14.4M)	20,311 (\$10.3M)	12,187 (\$5.7M)	\$110.9M
2023	200,742	142,527 (\$79.6M)	24,089 (\$14.2M)	20,074 (\$10.2M)	12,045 (\$5.6M)	\$109.6M
Total	1,273,159	903,943 (\$504.9M)	152,779 (\$90.1M)	127,316 (\$64.8M)	76,390 (\$35.4M)	\$695.3M

Source: Everytown analysis of data obtained from ATF and TrueGunValue.com. Estimated trafficked guns and costs may not sum to total due to rounding.

The estimated \$695 million in sales revenue from 1.27 million trafficked firearms is alarming—but likely a significant underestimate. According to the NFCTA research, only 55 percent of all law enforcement agencies trace recovered crime guns,¹²⁹ and just 14 states mandate comprehensive tracing.

¹²⁵ True Gun Value, “Glock Pistol Price and Historical Value,” accessed October 7, 2025, <https://truegunvalue.com/pistol/glock/price-historical-value>. Average cost of a new Glock pistol is \$647 and a used Glock pistol is \$387.

¹²⁶ True Gun Value, “Ruger AR Rifle Price and Historical Value,” accessed October 7, 2025, <https://truegunvalue.com/rifle/RUGER-AR-/price-historical-value>. Average cost of an AR type rifle is \$638 new and \$497 used.

¹²⁷ True Gun Value, “S&W .38 Revolver Price and Historical Value,” accessed October 7, 2025, <https://truegunvalue.com/pistol/S%26W-.38-REVOLVER/price-historical-value>. Average cost of a Smith & Wesson .38 revolver is \$577 new and \$377 used.

¹²⁸ True Gun Value, “Mossberg 12GA Shotgun Price and Historical Value,” accessed October 7, 2025, <https://truegunvalue.com/shotgun/mossberg-12GA-/price-historical-value>. Average cost of a Mossberg 12 Gauge Shotgun is \$552 new and \$293 used.

¹²⁹ ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), Volume IV: Protecting America from Trafficked Firearms—Part IX: Final Recommendations,” January 2025, 1, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-ix-%E2%80%93-final-recommendations/download>.

Even when guns are submitted for tracing, only about 80 percent can be successfully traced back to a purchase from a dealer. The remaining 20 percent fail for several reasons—including incomplete or invalid firearm descriptions provided by law enforcement (7 percent), dealer failure to maintain required records documenting the acquisition and sale of the firearm (5 percent), and the recovered firearm has a partial, incomplete, or obliterated serial number (2.5 percent).¹³⁰

If these tracing gaps were resolved, and an additional 14.5 percent of trafficked crime guns were successfully traced, the estimated number of trafficked crime guns would increase to nearly 1.46 million—pushing total illicit sales revenue above \$796 million.

Note that many firearms, especially assault-style rifles, are often outfitted with magazines, sights, grips, and other accessories, all of which enhance industry revenue. In fact, according to a [survey](#) recently conducted by the leading firearm trade association, the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), approximately 86 percent of AR- and AK-style rifle purchasers customize their rifle, spending an average of \$618 on accessories.¹³¹ Based on the estimated number of trafficked rifles, the additional accessories would generate nearly \$81 million in additional sales revenue.¹³²

¹³⁰ ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), Volume II: Crime Guns—Part III: Crime Guns Recovered and Traced within the United States and Its Territories,” February 2023, 5, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-ii-part-iii-crime-guns-recovered-and-traced-us/download>. See Table OFT-05: “Reasons Crime Guns Are Not Traced to a Purchaser, 2017–2021.”

¹³¹ National Shooting Sports Foundation, “NSSF Report: Modern Sporting Rifle Comprehensive Consumer Report,” July 14, 2022, <https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.ncmd.98070/gov.uscourts.ncmd.98070.54.4.pdf>.

¹³² An estimated 153,000 rifles were trafficked, of which 86 percent (131,580) may have been accessorized at an average of \$618 per rifle.