



WISCONSIN FIREARMS TRAFFICKING AND CRIME GUN FACT SHEET

Wisconsin is facing a crime gun crisis—and the evidence points squarely at the state’s own federally licensed gun dealers. In 2023 alone, law enforcement recovered and traced 8,441 crime guns across Wisconsin. Of those, 84 percent (7,127) were originally purchased through Federal Firearms Licensees (FFLs). Even more troubling, more than 85 percent of those guns—6,053 firearms—were sold by FFLs operating within Wisconsin.¹

Many Wisconsin crime guns show indicia of trafficking. Approximately 56 percent of all crime guns recovered in Wisconsin were purchased less than three years before their recovery—a key red flag for illegal trafficking.² Additionally, between 2017 and 2021, nearly 84 percent of crime guns were recovered in the possession of someone other than the purchaser, another significant indication of firearm trafficking.³ Based on this data, it is estimated that 3,364 crime guns recovered in 2023 were likely funneled from FFLs to obvious traffickers and ultimately to violent criminals.

According to the ATF trafficking investigations studied in the National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), nearly 90 percent of trafficking cases involve a possessor that is prohibited from legally possessing a firearm. Additionally, possessors or recipients of trafficked guns tend to be convicted felons (60 percent), known gang members (29 percent), or drug users or drug traffickers (22 percent).⁴ Trafficked firearms are more likely to be used in violent crimes.

Despite there being roughly 1,700 active FFLs in Wisconsin, it is estimated just 273 FFLs are actively selling firearms,⁵ and it is likely that just 11 FFLs are responsible for

¹ ATF, “Firearms Trace Data 2023,” December 2024, <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/firearms-trace-data-2023>. See Firearm Types Recovered and Traced in the United States and Territories and Time-to-Crime - Firearms Sourced and Recovered in the United States and Territories.

² ATF, “Firearms Trace Data: Wisconsin - 2023,” December 2024, <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/firearms-trace-data-wisconsin-2023>. See Time-To-Crime Rates for Firearms with a Wisconsin Recovery.

³ ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), Wisconsin State Report,” November 2023, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/wisconsin-state-report/download>. See Crime Guns Recovered and Traced, 2017-2021. See Page 3, Crime Guns by Purchaser/Possessor Grouping when Purchaser is Known.

⁴ ATF, “National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), Volume III: Firearms Trafficking Investigations—Part VI: Characteristics of Firearm Traffickers, End Users, and Defendants,” April 2024, 1, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iii-part-vi/download>. See table CFT-25a.

⁵ 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,

nearly 1 in 5 crime guns sourced in Wisconsin. In other words, stop a few FFLs, and you can make a huge impact on violent gun crime.

This isn't an abstract national issue—it's a local supply chain problem. And, without meaningful action, it will continue to fuel violence in Wisconsin communities.

TRACED CRIME GUNS BY TYPE

In 2023, 8,441 crime guns were recovered in Wisconsin and subsequently traced. Wisconsin ranked 22nd in the U.S. for most traces of crime guns recovered in 2023.⁶

Type ⁷	Recovered and Traced	Percentage of Total
Pistols	6,672	79%
Rifles	705	8%
Revolvers	460	5%
Shotguns	392	5%
Machinegun Conversion Devices	89	1%

TOP FIVE CITIES WITH THE MOST CRIME GUNS RECOVERED⁸

Wisconsin FFLs supply 85 percent of all crime guns recovered in the state.⁹ Approximately 60 percent of crime guns were purchased within 25 miles of where they were recovered in Wisconsin.¹⁰ The state is its own source of crime guns, making it a viable target for trafficking reduction strategies aimed at local dealers.

<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."

⁶ Everytown analysis of ATF Firearms Trace Data 2023.

⁷ ATF, "Firearms Trace Data: Michigan - 2023," December 2024,

<https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/firearms-trace-data-wisconsin-2023>. See "Firearm Types with a Wisconsin Recovery."

⁸ Recovery City known in 7,123 traces.

⁹ ATF, "Firearms Trace Data: Wisconsin - 2023," December 2024,

<https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/firearms-trace-data-wisconsin-2023>. See "Top 15 Source States for Firearms with a Wisconsin Recovery, 2023."

¹⁰ ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), Wisconsin State Report," November 2023, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/wisconsin-state-report/download>. See Crime Guns Recovered and Traced, 2017-2021.

Recovery City	Number of Crime Guns Traced ¹¹	Percentage of Traces
Milwaukee	3,781	45%
Madison	413	5%
West Allis	348	4%
Racine	322	4%
Kenosha	275	3%

TIME-TO-CRIME OF TRACED FIREARMS RECOVERED IN WISCONSIN¹²

Fifty-six percent (4,005) of all crime guns were purchased less than three years prior to recovery in a crime. Wisconsin's percentage of traces within three years is seven percentage points higher than the national average.¹³ The rapid movement from purchase to use in a crime strongly indicates Wisconsin has a significant trafficking problem.

TTC ¹⁴	Number of Traces	Percentage of Traces
Less Than 1 Year	1,676	24%
Less Than 3 Years	4,005	56%

FEDERAL FIREARMS LICENSEES IN WISCONSIN

Currently, there are 1,725 active FFLs in Wisconsin;¹⁵ however, based on NFCTA research, just 15 percent of retail dealers, 38 percent of pawnbrokers, and about 17 percent of manufacturers account for 90 percent of all firearm sales. Based on this information, there are about 273 FFLs actively selling firearms, providing a more manageable number for oversight.¹⁶

¹¹ ATF, "Firearms Trace Data 2023," December 2024, <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/firearms-trace-data-2023>. See Firearm Types Recovered and Traced in the United States and Territories and Time-to-Crime - Firearms Sourced and Recovered in the United States and Territories.

¹² TTC known in 7,117 traces. ATF, "Firearms Trace Data: Wisconsin - 2023," December 2024, <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/firearms-trace-data-wisconsin-2023>.

¹³ 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, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-iv-part-iii-%E2%80%9393-crime-gun-tracing-updates-and-new-analysis/download>. See page 9 Figure CGT-10.

¹⁴ ATF, "Firearms Trace Data: Michigan - 2023," December 2024, <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/firearms-trace-data-wisconsin-2023>. See Firearm Types with a Michigan Recovery. See Time-To-Crime Rates for Firearms with a Wisconsin Recovery.

¹⁵ ATF, "State Federal Firearms Listings," September 2025, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/listing-federal-firearms-licensees/>. Includes Type 01, Type 02, and Type 07 FFLs.

¹⁶ NFCTA Volume I, Part V, Tables SD-03, 04, and 05.

Type of FFL	Number of Active FFLs	Percentage of FFLs
Type 01 - Dealer	1,225	71%
Type 02 - Pawnbroker	35	2%
Type 07 - Manufacturer	445	26%
Type 08 - Importer	20	1%

METHOD OF FIREARM TRAFFICKING

According to ATF trafficking investigations between 2017 and 2021 conducted in the ATF St. Paul Field Division, which covers Wisconsin, the top three methods of trafficking involved theft from an FFL, straw purchasing, and unlicensed dealing.¹⁷ Nationally, nearly 24 percent of straw purchasing trafficking cases, 16 percent of unlicensed dealing, and nearly 7 percent of FFL theft trafficking cases were linked to at least one shooting.¹⁸ FFL oversight and accountability are critical in reducing firearm trafficking and gun violence.

Method of Trafficking	Number of Cases	Percentage of Total Cases
Stolen from an FFL	48	36%
Straw Purchasing	39	29%
Unlicensed Dealing	37	27%
Private Party Theft	11	8%

ADDITIONAL DATA ON CRIME GUN RECOVERIES BETWEEN 2017-2021¹⁹

Between 2017 and 2021, more than 28,000 crime guns were recovered in Wisconsin and traced by law enforcement, of which nearly 85 percent were traced to a purchase from an FFL. Further, more than 84 percent of these crime guns were purchased from FFLs operating within Wisconsin. During this time, 53 percent of these crime guns were

¹⁷ The cases encompass the entire ATF St. Paul Field Division, which includes Wisconsin, Minnesota, South Dakota, and North Dakota. Data is from the NFCTA Volume III, Part III, Appendix FTC-05.

¹⁸ NFCTA Volume III, Part IX, Table IO-06.

¹⁹ "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), Wisconsin State Report," November 2023, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/wisconsin-state-report/download>. See Crime Guns Recovered and Traced, 2017-2021.

purchased less than three years prior to recovery, and just 16 percent were recovered in the possession of the purchaser. These statistics further highlight the fact that Wisconsin's violent gun crime is fueled by traffickers who obtain their crime guns from local FFLs.

Total Crime Guns Recovered and Traced	28,122
Total Traced to a Purchaser from an FFL	23,842
Total Traced to a Purchase at a WI FFL	20,096

TOP SOURCE CITIES FOR CRIME GUNS

Between 2017 and 2021, it is likely that 11 FFLs located in three cities in Wisconsin were the source of more than 20 percent of all crime guns. These same FFLs are still selling guns in 2025.

City	Number of Crime Guns Recovered and Traced²⁰	Number of FFLs Active Between '17-'21 and Still Operational
Germantown	1,707	5
Richfield	1,523	3
Franklin	1,176	3

DISTANCE BETWEEN FFL PURCHASE LOCATION AND CRIME GUN RECOVERY LOCATION

Nearly 60 percent of all crime guns in Wisconsin were recovered within 25 miles of the FFL they were purchased from.²¹ To reduce gun violence, you must identify and investigate the FFLs located in the areas with the most crime gun recoveries.

²⁰ ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), Wisconsin State Report," November 2023, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/wisconsin-state-report/download>. See page 3.

²¹ ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), Wisconsin State Report," November 2023, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/wisconsin-state-report/download>. See page 3.

Distance in Miles	Number of Crime Guns Recovered and Traced	Percentage of Total Traces
0-10	6,306	35%
11-25	4,404	25%
26-50	1,612	9%
51-100	1,755	10%
101-200	1,136	6%
201-300	482	3%
More than 300	2,270	13%

SHOOTINGS AND NIBIN LEADS

According to NFCTA research of ATF firearm trafficking investigations, approximately 15 percent of trafficked firearms are used in shootings.²² In order to disrupt those who pull the trigger, you must stop the traffickers and the FFL suppliers. The median time-to-first-shooting of just 1.4 years for recovered pistols in Wisconsin indicates the perpetrators were likely armed by traffickers.²³

Total Casings and Test Fires Entered into NIBIN	40,226
NIBIN Leads	19,539
NIBIN Lead Rate	49%
Total Pistols Recovered and Test Fired	12,638
Pistols with NIBIN Leads	3,703
Lead Rate from Pistol Test Fires	29%
Median Time-to-First-Shooting (TTFS)	1.4 Years

²² ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), 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>.

²³ ATF, "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA), Wisconsin State Report," November 2023, <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/wisconsin-state-report/download>. See page 6.