One Market, Many Guns: Illicit and Trafficked Firearms in the United States and Mexico, 2021–2026

A Report by Stop US Arms to Mexico
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Executive Summary

Firearm violence is one of the most pressing public health and public safety problems in the United States and in the hemisphere. About two-thirds of crime guns recovered in Mexico and submitted for tracing came from the United States, and most traces of U.S.-sourced firearms outside the United States were recovered in Mexico. Because the gun markets in the United States and Mexico are so intertwined and impact people in both countries so profoundly, it is crucial to examine them together.

Between January 2021 and May 2026, 2,216,052 firearms recovered in the United States and Mexico were traced to their purchase from a U.S. gun dealer, according to data from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). For 2,214,914 of them, the data identify the zip code of the dealer that sold the gun. Through public records litigation and subsequent records requests, Stop US Arms to Mexico for the first time obtained crime gun tracing data broken down by the zip code of purchase, the state where guns were recovered, year of recovery, and time between the gun's purchase and when it was recovered (known as "time-to-crime," or TTC). The data show that gun trafficking is not a diffuse national or international problem. It is rooted in specific places.

Mexico is the fastest-growing of the report's four destination categories for trafficked firearms (within state, bordering states, non-bordering states, and Mexico). The number of guns recovered in Mexico and traced to a U.S. sale rose 85 percent from 2021 to 2025, and Mexico was the only one of these destination categories where traces rose in every interval of time-to-crime.

Guns purchased in a small number of zip codes have the biggest impact. Just 456 zip codes, about 1.1 percent of zip codes in the United States, rank in the top 20 percent of sources in all four recovery categories. They account for 44 percent of guns recovered in Mexico and about one in four traced firearms overall. A smaller number of 120 zip codes supply more than a quarter of all Mexico gun traces, about one in eight guns recovered in bordering states, and nearly one in ten of all firearms traced in this period. But trafficking is also widespread: 10,316 zip codes were the source of at least ten crime guns recovered in Mexico or the United States.

Texas and Arizona supply two-thirds of Mexico gun traces. Between 2021–2022 and 2024–2025, Mexico traces originating in Maricopa County, Arizona, more than tripled, accounting for 41 percent of the increase. Several of the same Phoenix-area zip codes, in Phoenix and Glendale, also rank among Arizona's leading sources of in-state and California-bound traces. This is one retail market feeding several destinations, not separate pipelines.

Most crime guns are recovered close to where they were sold. Of firearms recovered in the U.S. or Mexico and traced to a purchase, 1,581,227 (71.4 percent) were recovered in the same state where they were bought, and their leading sources are suburban zip codes on the edges of metro areas such as Atlanta, Charlotte, Chicago and Cleveland. Another 249,017 firearms were recovered in a neighboring state, 331,201 in a non-neighboring state, and 52,480 in Mexico.

Guns that cross state lines follow several prominent corridors. The largest move from Arizona and Nevada into California, from Indiana and Missouri into Illinois, from Horn Lake, Mississippi, into Tennessee, and from Virginia into Maryland and Washington, D.C. The ten largest neighboring-state flows account for 36 percent of all bordering-state traces, and some run almost entirely one way: Arizona sent about 20 guns to California for every one that traveled in the opposite direction. Farther afield, Georgia, the Carolinas, Virginia, and Florida feed the "Iron Pipeline" north to New York and the Mid-Atlantic in large but dispersed volumes.

Inside Mexico, Arizona and Texas feed two distinct corridors. Since 2024, more than three in five Arizona guns have been recovered in Sonora and Sinaloa, the state where cartel violence is now most acute. Arizona also supplies 65 percent of traced guns recovered in Chiapas, about 1,800 miles by road from its border, and most of those had been bought within the previous three years. Texas guns spread more widely across northern and central Mexico, led by Nuevo León, Chihuahua and Tamaulipas.

Much of the cartels' firepower comes from the most powerful weapons sold legally in the United States but not in Mexico: AK-47s, AR-15s, and .50-caliber Barrett rifles. Of 4,027 short time-to-crime guns recovered in Mexico since the beginning of 2024, more than half (2,184) were 7.62-caliber firearms, which are typically AK-47-type rifles. Century Arms International, based in Florida and Vermont, now dominates the illegal gun market in Mexico. More than a third of the short time-to-crime weapons (1,484) were produced by Century Arms. Nearly all of these quickly trafficked Century weapons (92 percent) were purchased in Arizona. Fifty-caliber rifles also continue to be trafficked into Mexico, principally Barrett rifles. In all, 213 Barretts recovered in Mexico were traced to U.S. purchases since 2024, more than the number recovered and traced in the United States during the same period. While Arizona purchases accounted for 55 percent of the Mexico short time-to-crime Barrett traces, more than a quarter of the trafficked Barretts originated from non-border states.

State gun laws correlate strongly with the patterns of crime gun flows. States with the most permissive laws have about six times as many recently purchased crime guns per resident as states with the strictest laws. Most of the ten largest neighboring-state flows run from a more permissive state into a stricter one. This is a descriptive pattern, not proof of cause, but it holds for each of the three laws examined (background checks, assault weapons bans, and waiting periods) and matches two decades of research.

Firearms sales that flow into trafficking are concentrated enough to target through regulation, enforcement and social norms. The same suburban retail markets appear again and again, across time-to-crime bands and destinations: metro Atlanta, Glendale and Phoenix, Lake County, Indiana, North Las Vegas, and the Mississippi suburbs of Memphis. All of them host dealers that ATF itself flagged for supplying guns recovered in crimes soon after sale.

More than half of the traced guns were sold at least three years before they were recovered, and that number is growing. Guns diverted now will keep turning up at crime scenes, in the United States and in Mexico, long after they are sold. Today's choices will have effects that last for years.

We urge the U.S. federal government to take action: to provide funding and authority to the ATF to inspect dealers, incentivize investigations, resume the program notifying dealers of trafficked guns, and other measures; and to enact legislation to ban assault weapons, high-capacity magazines, and .50-caliber rifles and to universally require background checks to purchase a firearm.

We also call on state governments to take similar measures to stem the sale and purchase of guns used for violence. And we urge communities, the gun violence prevention movement, researchers and journalists to make use of this data and analysis, and to treat the market of guns used in violence in both the United States and Mexico as one problem affecting all of us.

1. Introduction

Firearm violence is one of the most pressing public health and public safety problems in the United States and in the hemisphere. Between 2021 and 2024, an estimated 73,900 people were murdered with a firearm in the United States, roughly 50 people every day for four straight years. In 2021 alone, there were at least 89,100 gun-related homicides in Latin America and the Caribbean. Firearm injuries are a leading cause of death among youths in Mexico, Brazil, and Colombia,[1] and for children and teenagers in the United States, having overtaken car crashes for the first time in 2020.[2]

Most crime guns recovered in Mexico came from the United States, and most traces of U.S.-sourced firearms outside the United States were recovered in Mexico. The two countries, with vastly different firearms regulations, share a border almost 2,000 miles long - one of the longest in the world. As a result, a firearm purchased in the southwestern United States is more likely to be used in a homicide in Mexico than in the United States itself. Because the gun markets in the United States and Mexico are so intertwined and impact people in both countries so profoundly, it is crucial to examine them together.

In May 2025, police recovered a loaded pistol, with seventeen rounds in the magazine, from a youth at a Maryland high school. Federal investigators traced it to a straw-purchasing group that had bought at least 68 firearms from licensed dealers in Georgia between May 2023 and August 2024 and moved them north. Police in the Maryland and Washington, D.C., area have recovered at least fifteen of those guns, several linked to suspected drug trafficking and others under investigation in drive-by shootings. In March 2026, federal prosecutors announced the indictment of three defendants.

In October 2025, a state grand jury in Arizona indicted 20 people accused of running a ring that obtained about 334 firearms from licensed dealers in just nine months, from May 2024 to February 2025. The ring paid straw buyers to purchase the guns and lie on federal forms about who the real buyer was. Federal tracing later showed that many of the guns had been recovered in Mexico.

These cases are small pieces of a much larger pattern: firearms bought legally at a retail counter in one state, moved across a state line or an international border, and recovered by police in another state or in Mexico, or recovered, sometimes years later, in the same city where they were sold.

The data in this report begin in January 2021, during a historic surge in U.S. firearm purchasing and firearm violence that reshaped the gun market and never fully receded, and go up to May 6, 2026. An estimated 16.6 million U.S. adults bought a firearm in 2020, nearly 3 million more than in 2019, and about 3.8 million became first-time gun owners that year alone. Purchasing remained high into early 2021.[3]

Millions of new firearms have entered the market every year to supply that surge. In 2024 alone, licensed U.S. manufacturers produced about 9.5 million firearms, and they have produced more than 9 million every year since 2020, peaking at 13.8 million in 2021. In

addition, the United States had net imports of more than 8.8 million firearms in 2021. Most of those guns are bought and used lawfully. But a meaningful share are used criminally by their purchasers or are diverted (bought, resold, or stolen by someone who moves or uses them for criminal violence), as in the Georgia and Arizona cases above.

Firearm homicides rose in step: the U.S. firearm homicide rate jumped nearly 35 percent from 2019 to 2020 and climbed another 8.3 percent in 2021, when it reached 6.63 per 100,000, the highest rate documented since 1993.[4] Mexico's gun homicide rate is even higher: 16.87 per 100,000 in 2022.[5] Homicides in Mexico fell in 2025, to their lowest rate in several years,[6] but disappearances have continued to rise: 2024 saw more than 13,000 people reported disappeared, the most in a decade.[7]

In other words, the years spanned by the gun trace data analyzed in this report begin at the height of the pandemic-era surge in both U.S. gun purchasing and gun violence. The dataset captures how guns sold during that surge have continued to turn up at crime scenes in the years since, many after passing through the secondary market.

This market goes beyond the U.S. border. Most firearms recovered in Mexico and traced by ATF come from the United States: from 2020 to 2025, about two-thirds of the guns Mexico submitted for tracing, 106,710 out of 156,968, were U.S.-sourced, between 65 and 71 percent each year.[8] From 2017 to 2021, 79 percent of the crime guns recovered in Mexico and traced to a U.S. purchaser came from just five states: Texas, Arizona, California, New Mexico and Florida.

Researchers estimate that about 135,000 firearms were trafficked from the United States to Mexico in 2022, with a likely range of 72,000 to 258,000. U.S. domestic firearm policy matters for what happens south of the border. When the federal assault weapons ban expired in 2004, homicides rose significantly in Mexican municipalities near U.S. border states where the ban's expiration made assault weapons legal again, relative to municipalities near California, which kept its own state-level ban in place.[9] A separate study found that states with assault weapons bans are less likely to be the source of guns recovered in Mexico, even after accounting for other gun laws and for whether the state borders Mexico.[10]

The consequences are stark. Homicide has been the leading cause of death for Mexican children and teenagers ages 1 to 19 since 2017,[11] and the firearm death rate among Mexican youth rose by two-thirds between 2015 and 2022, from 2.90 to 4.88 per 100,000.[12] Across all ages, firearm deaths in Mexico rose from 2015 to 2018 and have remained high since.[13]

ATF's trace data record both where a recovered firearm was first sold at retail and where it was recovered, letting researchers map how guns move across state and international lines. One measure that researchers and law enforcement use to flag possible trafficking is "time-to-crime" (TTC): the time between a firearm's first retail sale and its recovery by police as a crime gun. A short time-to-crime is a widely used indicator of trafficking or straw purchasing, because it suggests the gun moved into crime soon after it was bought, rather than being diverted years into lawful ownership.[14]

This report groups traces into three bands: short TTC (recovered within one year of sale), mid TTC (one to three years), and long TTC (three years or more). A long time-to-crime reflects a more unclear path, such as theft, informal resale, or a slow drift into crime long after a lawful purchase, but it still reflects a market that feeds criminal activity or violence. Long-TTC traces make up more than half of all traces in our data (54 percent), and they grew every year, from about 182,000 in 2021 to 264,000 in 2025, even as short-TTC traces fell. Guns recovered in Mexico tend to have traveled a longer road: in 2023, the median time-to-crime for guns recovered in Mexico was 5.4 years, compared with 2.9 years for guns recovered in the United States.

ATF's trace data have long been used to study how guns move between states. A landmark study of ATF trace data found a consistent pattern: firearms tend to flow out of states with permissive gun laws and into nearby states with stricter ones.[15] A separate analysis applied the "gravity model" that economists use to study international trade to the same kind of data, treating the movement of crime guns between states like trade between countries.[16]

Until recently, trace data were publicly available only at the state level, which hid which localities trafficked firearms actually come from and where they end up. That changed when Stop US Arms to Mexico, through a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit, in 2024 obtained trace data by zip code for guns recovered in Mexico and Central America and traced to the United States, as well as by manufacturer, caliber, and type of firearm.[17]

We subsequently submitted three further requests for tracing data, and ATF supplied the data in each case.[18] After the initial data release, the organization requested counts of firearms by time-to-crime, a key indicator of guns bought with the intent to traffic them and of changes over time in the illegal gun market. It also expanded its requests to U.S. guns recovered in other Latin American countries, the Caribbean, and Canada. In some of these releases, ATF excluded data for zip codes with only one licensed dealer. These zip codes are estimated to account for 4.4 percent of firearms recovered in Mexico and traced to a U.S. purchase in 2021–2023, but only a twentieth of one percent of all gun traces in the dataset (see Methods).

In January 2026, Stop US Arms to Mexico requested data from ATF on guns recovered within the United States since 2021 and traced to a purchase, and on firearms recovered in Mexico since the beginning of 2024 and traced to a U.S. purchase, according to the time-to-crime. It also asked for data on all guns that Mexico submitted for tracing, whether they were traced to a purchase or not, and data on the caliber, manufacturer and type of firearms recovered in the United States, broken down by the city where the guns were recovered, and in Mexico, broken down by the U.S. state where they were purchased. The request also included data on the state in Mexico where guns have been recovered since 2024, according to the state in which they were purchased. The raw data from all of these releases by ATF are posted in navigable form on the Stop US Arms to Mexico website, at stopusarmstomexico.org/datasets.

This report uses zip code-level data to examine the full population of traced firearms recovered in the United States or Mexico between January 2021 and May 2026. Over this period, approximately 2.21 million firearms were traced to a first retail sale by a U.S. dealer, located in more than 19,000 zip codes across the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

2. Scale and Composition of U.S. Firearms Trafficking

In brief

- About 2.21 million firearms recovered in the United States or Mexico between January 2021 and May 2026 were traced to purchases from licensed dealers in more than 19,000 U.S. zip codes.
- More than half were recovered three or more years after sale. About one in five were recovered within a year, the strongest indicator of possible trafficking.
- Most traced firearms (1.58 million) were recovered in the state where they were sold, and 580,218 in another state or territory. More than 52,000 were recovered in Mexico.
- Traced firearms come from nearly every part of the country, but they cluster in the Southeast, Texas, Arizona, and around large metro areas.

Between January 2021 and May 2026, 2,216,052 firearms recovered in the United States or Mexico were traced to their purchase from a licensed U.S. gun dealer. For 2,214,914 of them, the data identify the dealer's zip code.[19] This report examines that population across three intervals of time-to-crime and across four types of destinations: the state where the firearm was sold (within state), a bordering state, a non-bordering state, or Mexico.[20]

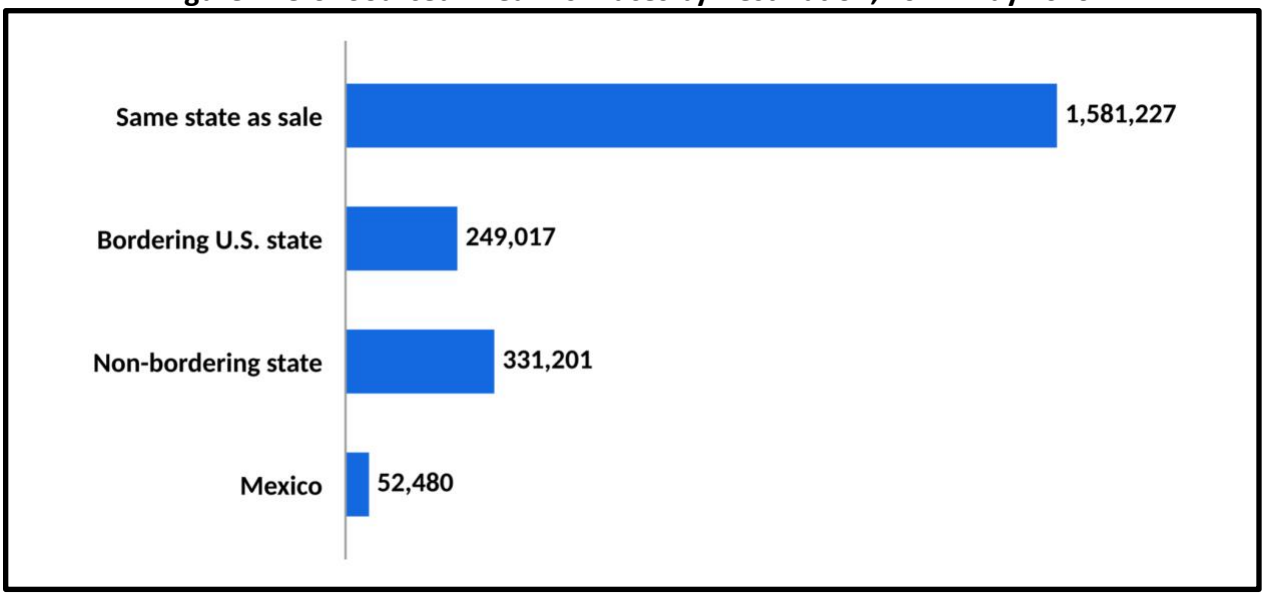
Many firearms are recovered from crime scenes and submitted for tracing, but the original legal purchase is never identified. About one third of firearms recovered in Mexico and submitted for tracing were identified either as coming from a non-U.S. country (without being imported into the United States) or the country of origin was undetermined. In addition, in both the United States and Mexico, many recovered firearms cannot be traced. In the United States, nearly one in four guns recovered and submitted for tracing are not traced to a purchase.[21] In Mexico, 41 percent of firearms submitted to ATF in 2024–2025 and identified as U.S.-sourced could not be traced to a purchase.[22] The causes of not tracing guns to a purchase vary, including obliterated serial numbers on firearms, insufficient or incorrect information from the authority submitting the trace request, missing gun dealer information, and guns too old to trace.

Figure 1: Firearm traces by time-to-crime, 2021–May 2026

Time-to-crime	Firearms	Share of total
Short (under 1 year)	484,778	21.9%
Mid (1–3 years)	541,260	24.4%
Long (3+ years)	1,188,876	53.7%
Total	**2,214,914**	**100%**

All of these time-to-crime figures describe only the guns that ATF could trace back to a retail sale. Those guns are a large and revealing share of the illegal market, but not all of it. Behind every trace that reaches a dealer are others that stop short, because a serial number was removed, a record was incomplete, or the gun was too old to follow. The patterns in this report should therefore be read as a floor, not a full count, of how U.S. guns move into crime.

Figure 2: U.S.-Sourced Firearms Traces by Destination, 2021-May 2026



Note: Excludes 989 traces with no recorded recovery location. Non-bordering states include U.S. territories. Source: ATF trace data obtained via FOIA request.

Of guns that are traced to a purchase, a short time-to-crime (TTC) is the strongest indicator of possible trafficking: a gun that moves from a retail counter into crime within a year has usually moved too fast to be explained by ordinary resale, inheritance, or theft from a long-time owner. These cases are also easier for law enforcement to investigate. But long-TTC firearms are the largest group, more than half of all traces (Figure 1). For these guns, the trace identifies only the original retail sale; it does not show whether the gun was diverted at that sale, through a straw purchase, or years later, through a private sale or a theft. What the data do show is that firearms routinely surface in crime years after their first sale, so actions taken now to curb diversion will keep paying off for years to come.

Excluding 989 traces with no recorded recovery location, 71.4 percent of traced firearms were recovered in the state where they were sold.[23] Another 26.2 percent were recovered in a different state or territory, 11.2 percent in a bordering state and 15.0 percent in a non-bordering one, and 2.4 percent were recovered in Mexico.

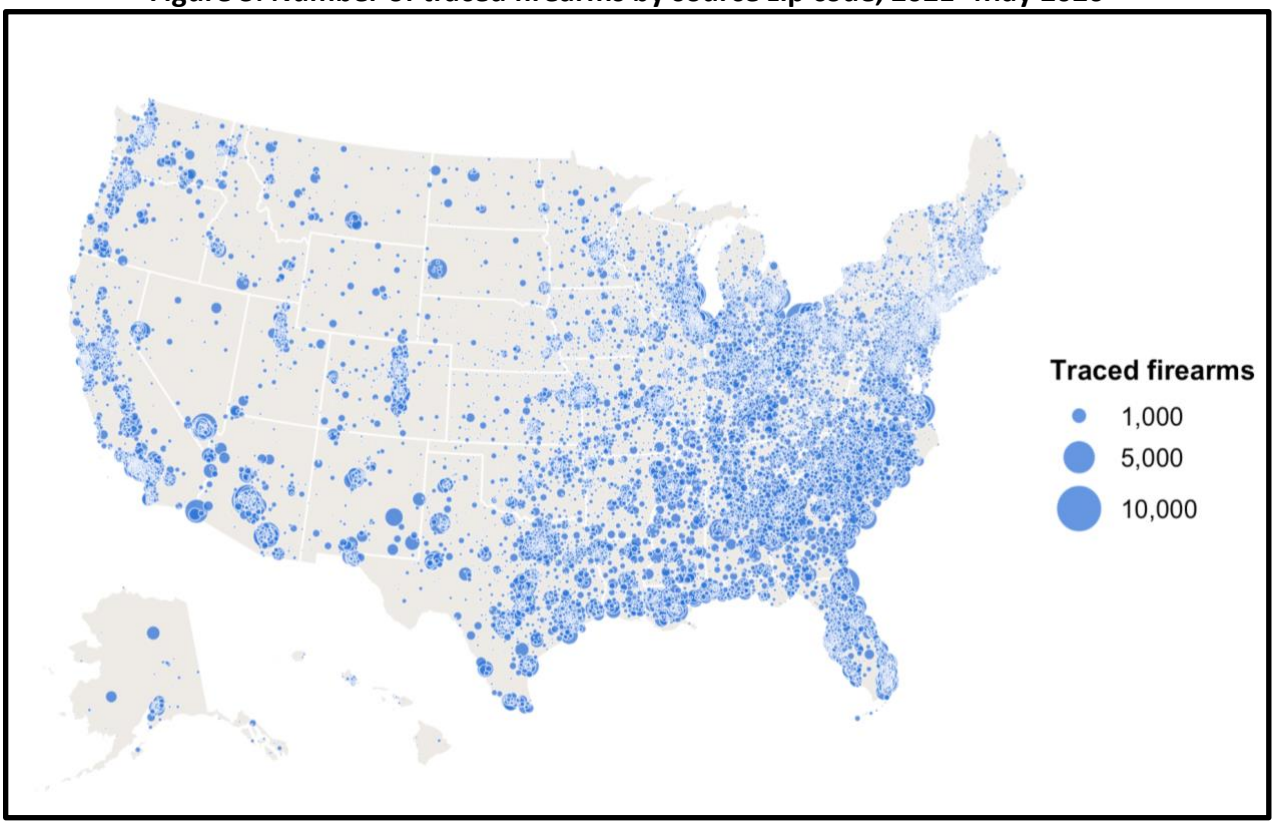
Being recovered in the state where it was sold does not mean a gun was trafficked. Some crime guns are recovered from the person who bought them: nationally, 12 percent of traced crime guns from 2017 to 2021 were in the possession of their original purchaser, and a study of crime guns in California found that about one in four recovered handguns was legally possessed.[24] These guns are concentrated among within-state recoveries: ATF found that guns recovered in the state where they were sold are typically recovered only a few miles from their purchaser,

because many are still in the purchaser's hands. Many are also recovered soon after sale: of the guns recovered from their original purchaser, 44 percent were recovered within a year.[25]

The 52,480 firearms recovered in Mexico are only part of the picture there. Recovering a gun that is submitt for tracing work differently in Mexico than in the United States, and far fewer crimes are solved: about 97 percent of intentional homicides in Mexico did not result in a judicial sentence in 2023. A gun used in a crime in Mexico is therefore much less likely to be traced than one used in the United States. Researchers estimate that about 135,000 firearms were trafficked from the United States to Mexico in 2022; the 8,243 traced to a U.S. purchase that year are about 6 percent of that number.

Even so, the types and calibers of guns that are traced indicate the impact of this flow. Rifles make up more than half of U.S. firearms recovered in Mexico with a time-to-crime of three years or less, compared with 11 to 15 percent of crime guns recovered in the United States. Forty-three percent of rifles recovered in Mexico within a year of sale are 5.56-mm, 7.62-mm (typical of assault weapons), or .50-caliber.[26] U.S.-sourced firearms likely kill at least as many people in Mexico each year as firearms kill in homicides in the United States.

Figure 3: Number of traced firearms by source zip code, 2021- May 2026



Note: Bubble area is proportional to the number of traced firearms sold in each zip code, across all destinations and times-to-crime. Zip codes with no matching U.S. Census Bureau ZIP Code Tabulation Area (mostly P.O. Box–only, single-organization, or retired zip codes) are not shown. Source: ATF trace data obtained via FOIA request.

Figure 3 shows the whole picture of crime gun sources: every source zip code with a traced firearm, sized by volume, including all destinations in the U.S. and Mexico and all time-to-crime bands. The density is the finding. Traced firearms were sold in nearly every part of the country, but they cluster heavily in the Southeast, with the single largest bubble in metro Atlanta. Large clusters also appear in Texas, the largest source state, and in Arizona, as well as around Las Vegas, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, and St. Louis. The West Coast is more scattered, concentrated mainly in Southern California, the Central Valley, and around Portland and Seattle.

3. Hotspots: How some zip codes are hubs for gun trafficking in all directions

In brief

- 456 zip codes, just 1.1 percent of all U.S. zip codes, rank in the top 20 percent of sources for every destination at once: within-state, border-state, non-border-state, and Mexico.
- These hotspots account for about one in four traced firearms nationwide (24.8 percent), and for 43.9 percent of all firearms traced to a recovery in Mexico.
- By number, hotspots cluster along the southwestern border: Texas (94) and Arizona (68) hold more than a third of them. By volume, the largest are in the Southeast and Midwest, led by Jonesboro, Georgia, with 12,280 traced firearms.
- In Yuma, Arizona, the country's largest Mexico source zip code, firearms recovered in Mexico (721) almost exactly match those recovered in neighboring states (725).
- Trafficking is also widespread: 10,316 zip codes, more than half of those in the dataset, were the source of at least ten crime guns.

The most telling localities in this dataset are the zip codes that are a significant source in all four destination categories at once: within-state, bordering-state, non-bordering-state, and Mexico. We call these gun source zip codes hotspots. A hotspot is not just a busy retail market; it looks like a hub that feeds every kind of trafficking route.

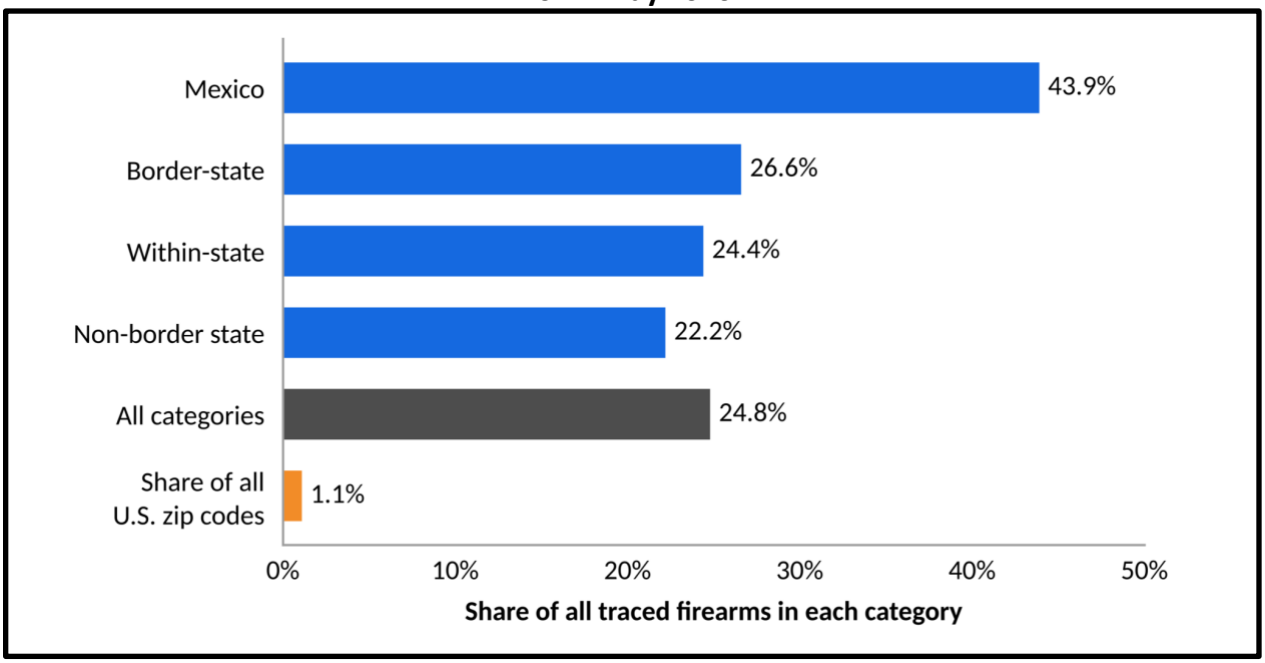
We ranked the volume in each zip code as a percentile among all zip codes with any recorded volume in that category, separately for within-state, bordering-state, non-bordering-state, and Mexico traces (for all times-to-crime, 2021–May 2026). A zip code qualifies as a hotspot if it ranks in the top 20 percent of sources in all four categories at once. Although the 456 hotspots make up only 1.1 percent of the roughly 41,500 zip codes in the U.S., they account for a disproportionate share of traced firearms: 43.9 percent of every firearm traced to a recovery in Mexico, 26.6 percent of every bordering-state trace, 24.4 percent of every within-state trace, and 22.2 percent of every non-bordering-state trace nationwide. That is 24.8 percent of all traced firearms combined, roughly one out of every four.

Geographically, these 456 zip codes are concentrated in the southwestern border corridor: 94 are in Texas and 68 are in Arizona, together 35.5 percent of the list. None of the hotspot zip codes are in the Northeastern states. Nevada (29), California (29), Oklahoma (26), New Mexico (25), Utah (20), Georgia (19), Colorado (15), and Louisiana (15) round out the next tier, mixing border-adjacent states with domestic trafficking corridor states such as Georgia and Louisiana, which later sections of this report examine in more detail.

Jonesboro, Georgia (30236) tops the full list by combined volume (12,280 firearms across all four categories), followed by Charlotte, North Carolina (7,704); Smyrna, Georgia (7,142);

Cleveland, Ohio (5,612); and Columbus, Ohio (5,290). Jonesboro leads the entire dataset in within-state and non-bordering-state volume and ranks among the top bordering-state sources, and although it sends few firearms to Mexico (18), that is still enough to place it at about the top 10 percent of Mexico-source zip codes.

Figure 4. Share of traced firearms accounted for by the 456 hotspot zip codes, by category, 2021–May 2026



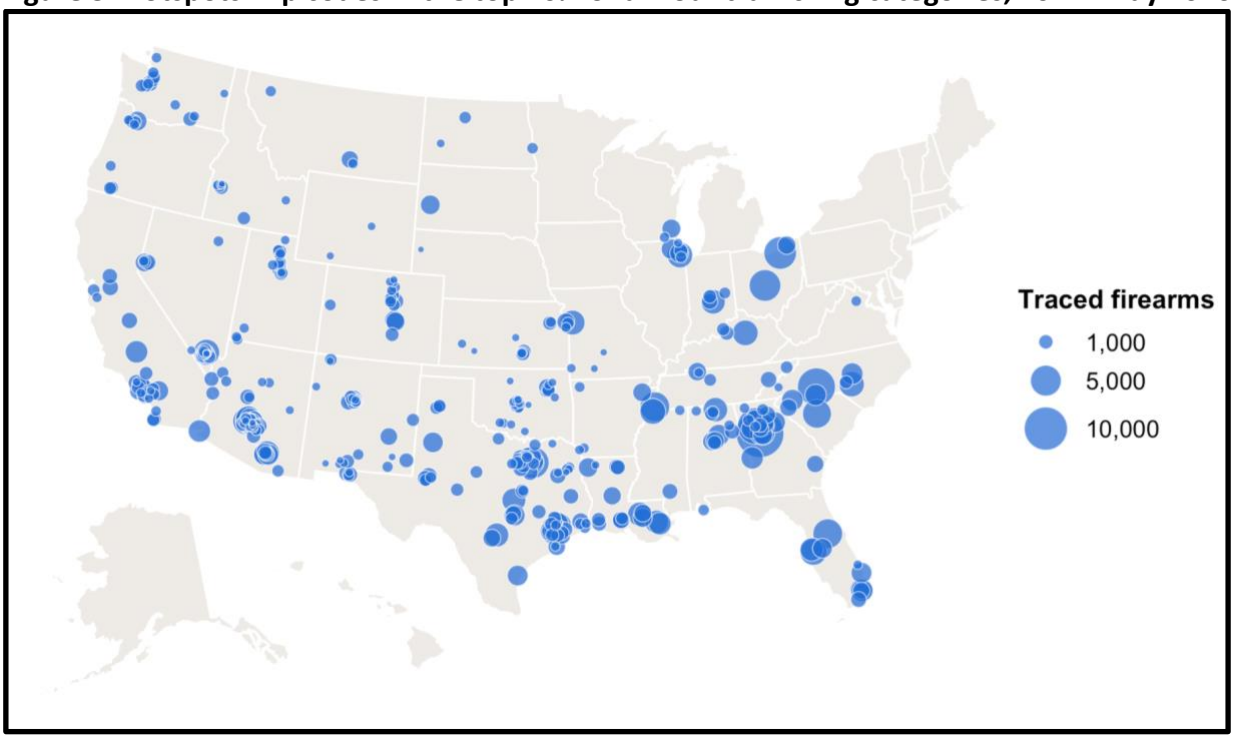
Note: Hotspot zip codes are the 456 zip codes that rank in the top 20 percent of source zip codes for each of the four destinations (within state, bordering state, non-bordering state or territory, and Mexico), among zip codes with at least one trace to that destination. Each bar shows the share of that category's traced firearms that were sold in a hotspot zip code. For example, 43.9 percent of all traced firearms recovered in Mexico were sold in one of the 456 hotspots. The hotspots are 2.4 percent of the 19,169 zip codes with at least one traced firearm and about 1.1 percent of all U.S. zip codes. Source: ATF trace data obtained via FOIA request; analysis by Stop US Arms to Mexico.

Several Arizona zip codes also stand out for their category mix rather than their overall size: in Yuma's 85364, the largest Mexico source zip in the country, Mexico traces (721) are effectively tied with border-state traces (725), a sign that this area feeds Mexico-bound trafficking on close to the same scale as it feeds neighboring states. The full list of 456 hotspot zip codes, with their volume in each destination category, is available from the authors.

A few hundred zip codes supply a quarter of all traced crime guns and nearly half of those recovered in Mexico. Of these hotspots, a smaller number of zip codes rank in the top 10 percent of all destination categories. These 120 zip codes supply more than a quarter of all Mexico gun traces, about one in eight guns recovered in bordering states, and nearly one in ten of all firearms in the dataset. About one third of these zip codes (39) are in Arizona, and 22 are in Texas, while another 13 are in New Mexico and 12 in Nevada. Gun sales in the ten largest of these zip codes accounted for more than 51,000 crime guns.

These places do not specialize in one kind of trafficking. They feed every route at once: local streets, neighboring states, distant states, and across the border. Concentration is only part of the picture, however. Trafficking is also widespread: 10,316 zip codes, more than half of those in the dataset, were the source of at least ten crime guns recovered in Mexico or the United States.

Figure 5. Hotspots: Zip codes in the top 20% of all four trafficking categories, 2021–May 2026



Note: Bubble area shows each zip code's combined within-state, border-state, non-border-state, and Mexico traces.

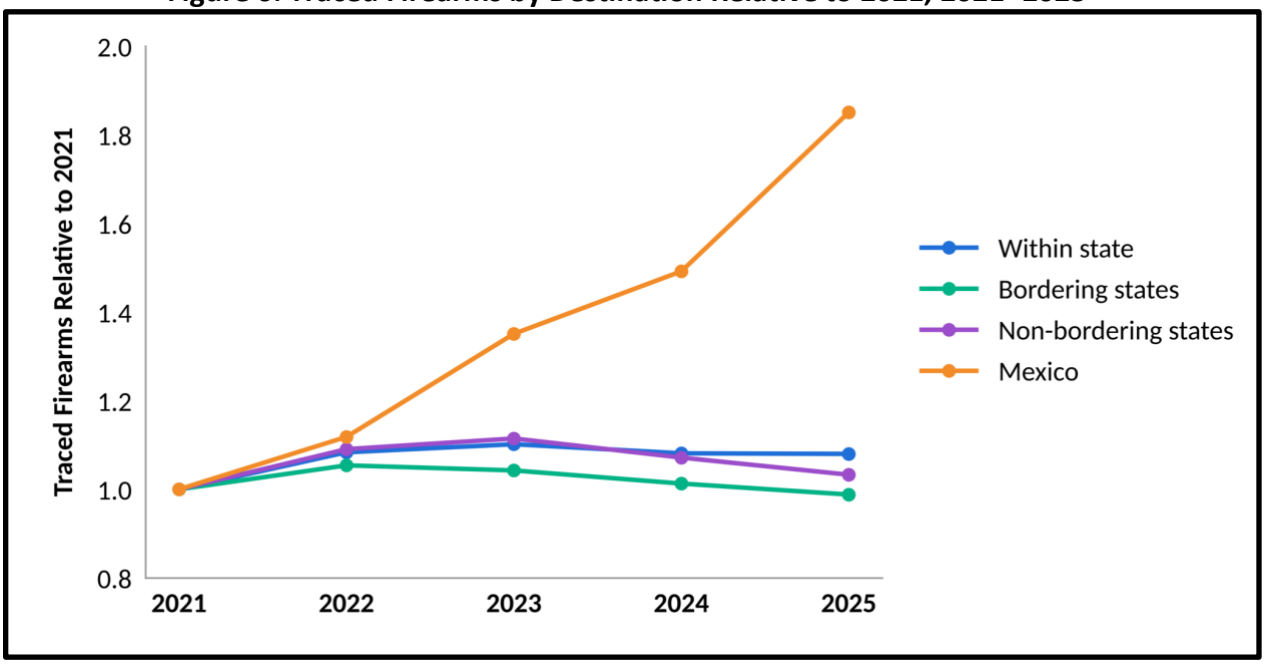
4. Trends over Time

In brief

- From 2021 to 2025, traces of firearms recovered in Mexico rose 85 percent, while traces within and between U.S. states barely changed (up 8 and 1 percent).
- In the United States, fewer traced firearms are being recovered within a year of sale: short-TTC traces fell 39 percent within states and 59 percent across state lines. Long-TTC traces, for guns sold three or more years earlier, rose instead.
- Mexico is the only one of the four destination categories where traces rose in every time-to-crime band, including firearms recovered within a year of sale (up 111 percent).
- These shifts may partly reflect changes in tracing, enforcement, or reporting, not only changes in trafficking.

The number of traced firearms has not grown evenly across destination categories. Between the full calendar years 2021 and 2025, within-state traces rose 8 percent, traces recovered in non-bordering states rose 3 percent, and traces recovered in bordering states fell 1 percent. Mexico traces, by contrast, rose 85 percent, and they increased every single year.[27] Within-state traces still far outnumber those recovered in Mexico, but the gap is closing fast: in 2021 there were 38 within-state traces for every Mexico trace, and by 2025 that ratio had fallen to 22 to 1. Because the four destination categories differ so much in size, Figure 6 shows each one relative to its own 2021 level. Each line divides a year's traces by that category's 2021 total, so all four start at 1.0. A value of 1.85 means traces were 85 percent higher than in 2021.

Figure 6: Traced Firearms by Destination Relative to 2021, 2021–2025



Note: Each line divides a year's traces by that destination's 2021 total; 1.85 means 85 percent more than in 2021. Mexico 2021–2023 counts are adjusted (see Methods). Source: ATF trace data obtained by Stop US Arms to Mexico.

The difference between Mexico and U.S. traces is even sharper once the time-to-crime intervals are separated out. In the United States, short-TTC traces fell sharply and consistently from 2021 to 2025: down 39 percent within-state, 57 percent in bordering states, and 62 percent in non-bordering states. Long-TTC traces rose just as consistently, up 51 percent within-state, 32 percent in bordering states, and 28 percent in non-bordering states. Mid-TTC traces were mixed, up 6 percent within-state but down 17 percent in bordering states and 21 percent in non-bordering states. Mexico traces, uniquely, rose across all three TTC intervals at once — short TTC up 111 percent, mid TTC up 111 percent, and long TTC up 75 percent[28] — making Mexico the only destination category where even the fastest-cycle, most trafficking-indicative traces are becoming more common rather than less.

These time-to-crime shifts are not necessarily driven by trafficking behavior alone. Gun buying surged during the COVID-19 pandemic: an estimated 16.6 million U.S. adults bought a firearm in 2020, up from 13.8 million in 2019.[29] Many firearms bought in those years would have appeared as short-TTC traces early in the period and as mid- or long-TTC traces later on. Moreover, the number of guns that Mexico submitted for tracing grew by 41 percent from 2021 to 2025, which may reflect increased operations by Mexican authorities, as well as growing firearms traffic. Changes in how quickly firearms are traced, or in enforcement and reporting priorities, can shape the mix. The data here cannot separate these possibilities from a genuine change in how quickly trafficked firearms are recovered.

Figure 7: Firearm Traces by Time-to-Crime Band and Destination, 2021 vs. 2025

Band × destination	2021	2025	Change
Short · Within-state	101,896	61,863	−39.3%
Short · Bordering states	11,820	5,091	−56.9%
Short · Non-bordering states	10,292	3,946	−61.7%
Short Mexico	814	1,717	+110.9%
Mid · Within-state	63,195	66,797	+5.7%
Mid · Bordering states	9,686	8,030	−17.1%
Mid · Non-bordering states	10,581	8,327	−21.3%
Mid Mexico	114,229	172,977	+51.4%
Long · Within-state	114,229	172,977	+51.4%
Long · Bordering states	24,727	32,565	+31.7%
Long · Non-bordering states	38,211	48,757	+27.6%
Long Mexico	5,373	9,420	+75.3%

The short-TTC decline for guns recovered in the U.S. is potentially the most encouraging pattern in this section from a trafficking-enforcement standpoint, since short TTC is the band most associated with straw purchasing and rapid diversion. But it coexists with a rising stock of long-TTC traces, meaning firearms sold years ago continue to be recovered and traced in growing numbers even as the newest sales are either being diverted into crime more slowly or taking longer to be recovered by police.

5. Firearms Trafficking to Mexico

In brief

- The number of guns recovered in Mexico and traced to a U.S. sale rose 85 percent from 2021 to 2025, more than for any other destination, and those recovered within a year of sale more than doubled.
- Texas and Arizona supply two-thirds of Mexico traces. Licensed dealers in just 50 zip codes account for more than a quarter of them, and five zip codes in Phoenix and Glendale, Arizona, account for about one in six of those recovered within a year of sale.
- The growth is concentrated in metropolitan Phoenix: between 2021–2022 and 2024–2025, Maricopa County's Mexico traces more than tripled, accounting for 41 percent of the increase. The same zip codes also supply crime guns recovered in Arizona and neighboring states.
- Inside Mexico, more than three in five Arizona guns are recovered in Sonora and Sinaloa, and Arizona supplies 65 percent of traced guns recovered in Chiapas, on the Guatemalan border. Texas guns spread more widely across northern and central Mexico, led by Nuevo León.
- Rifle calibers associated with AK-47-type weapons lead among quickly trafficked guns: of 4,027 guns recovered in Mexico within a year of sale since 2024, more than half were 7.62-caliber firearms, and more than a third were made by Century Arms, 92 percent of them bought in Arizona.
- The traces are a small, documented slice of a much larger flow: a recent study estimated that about 135,000 firearms were trafficked from the United States to Mexico in 2022.

The Human Cost: Firearm deaths in Mexico rose sharply between 2015 and 2018 and remained high through 2022. Homicides account for both the largest share of these deaths and the largest increase; about one-third of victims are aged 20 to 29, rates rose faster among women than men, and the states with the highest rates are those where organized criminal groups are in conflict.[30] Although the number of gun homicides in Mexico has fallen since 2024, to 19,812 in 2025 according to preliminary figures, firearms have remained the most common means of homicide since 2009; between 2008 and 2010 alone, the share of homicides committed with a firearm rose from 38.7 percent to 60.3 percent. Moreover, disappearances have risen: 2024 recorded the most in a decade, and the Red Lupa network's 2025 national report found a further 12 percent increase.

The toll falls heavily on young people. Homicide has been the leading cause of death among Mexican children and adolescents aged 1 to 19 since 2017,[31] and Mexico's youth firearm

mortality rate rose from 2.90 to 4.88 deaths per 100,000 between 2015 and 2022. Of the four countries in the Americas examined in that study (the United States, Mexico, Brazil, and Colombia), only Mexico and the United States saw increases.[32]

Criminal organizations drive much of this violence, and firearms are central to how they operate. Their crimes include ones that never make headlines. Of 2,619 extortions reported in Mexico's national victimization surveys from 2012 to 2021, 40 percent involved a firearm, and victims of armed extortion were more likely to comply with the offenders' demands and less likely to report the crime, mostly out of fear of reprisal.[33]

A Concentrated Gun Flow: The number of guns recovered in Mexico and traced to a U.S. sale rose 85 percent from 2021 to 2025, from 7,371 to 13,641.[34] No other destination of crime guns came close to that increase, whether measured against the four destination categories or against any U.S. state, D.C., or territory. Short-TTC Mexico traces, the strongest indicator of trafficking, more than doubled (up 111 percent), while the largest short-TTC increase in any U.S. jurisdiction was 24 percent (Alaska).

Texas and Arizona supply two-thirds of Mexico traces, and 86 percent of short-TTC Mexico traces, with the growth concentrated in metro Phoenix. At the same time, the supply of guns to Mexico is also widespread: 5,748 zip codes were the source of at least one firearm recovered in Mexico, and 960 were the source of ten or more.

Licensed dealers in just 50 zip codes account for more than a quarter of all guns recovered in Mexico and traced to a U.S. source during this period. Mexico traces are the most geographically concentrated of any destination category, led by FFLs in Texas (21,084 firearms) and Arizona (14,214). Nine of the ten zip codes with the most Mexico traces are in Arizona, led by Yuma (85364), Tucson (85713), and Glendale (85302); the other, McAllen, Texas (78501), ranks sixth. Of short time-to-crime firearms, only 36 zip codes in Arizona account for two out of every five firearms recovered in Mexico and traced to a U.S. purchase since 2021 (2,941 out of 7,357 short-TTC traces). In 2025, this became even more concentrated: just 17 Arizona zip codes accounted for nearly half of short-TTC Mexico gun traces (829 out of 1,717 short-TTC traces), all but one of them in Maricopa County. The same Phoenix-area zip codes are also among the leading sources of Arizona's in-state and California-bound traces. This is one retail market feeding several destinations, not separate pipelines.

Inside Mexico, Arizona and Texas feed two distinct corridors, with Arizona guns concentrated in the northwest and Texas guns spread more widely across northern and central Mexico (see Section 5.2). On the U.S. side, federal findings show the same concentration: Texas, Arizona, and California together accounted for 73 percent of crime guns recovered in Mexico and traced to a U.S. purchase in 2017–2021.

One study estimated that about 213,000 firearms a year were purchased in the United States to be trafficked to Mexico in 2010–2012, roughly 2.2 percent of U.S. gun sales.[35] A more recent study, co-authored by one of the same researchers, estimated that about 135,000 firearms were trafficked from the U.S. to Mexico in 2022. This means that the traces in this report are only a small, documented slice of a much larger flow: only a fraction of the firearms trafficked to Mexico are ever recovered, and fewer still are traced back to a U.S. sale.

Of the firearms recovered in Mexico and submitted for tracing, more than two-thirds originated in the United States, a share that has changed little over time: about 70 percent from 2009 to 2014, and between 65 and 71 percent each year since 2020.[36]

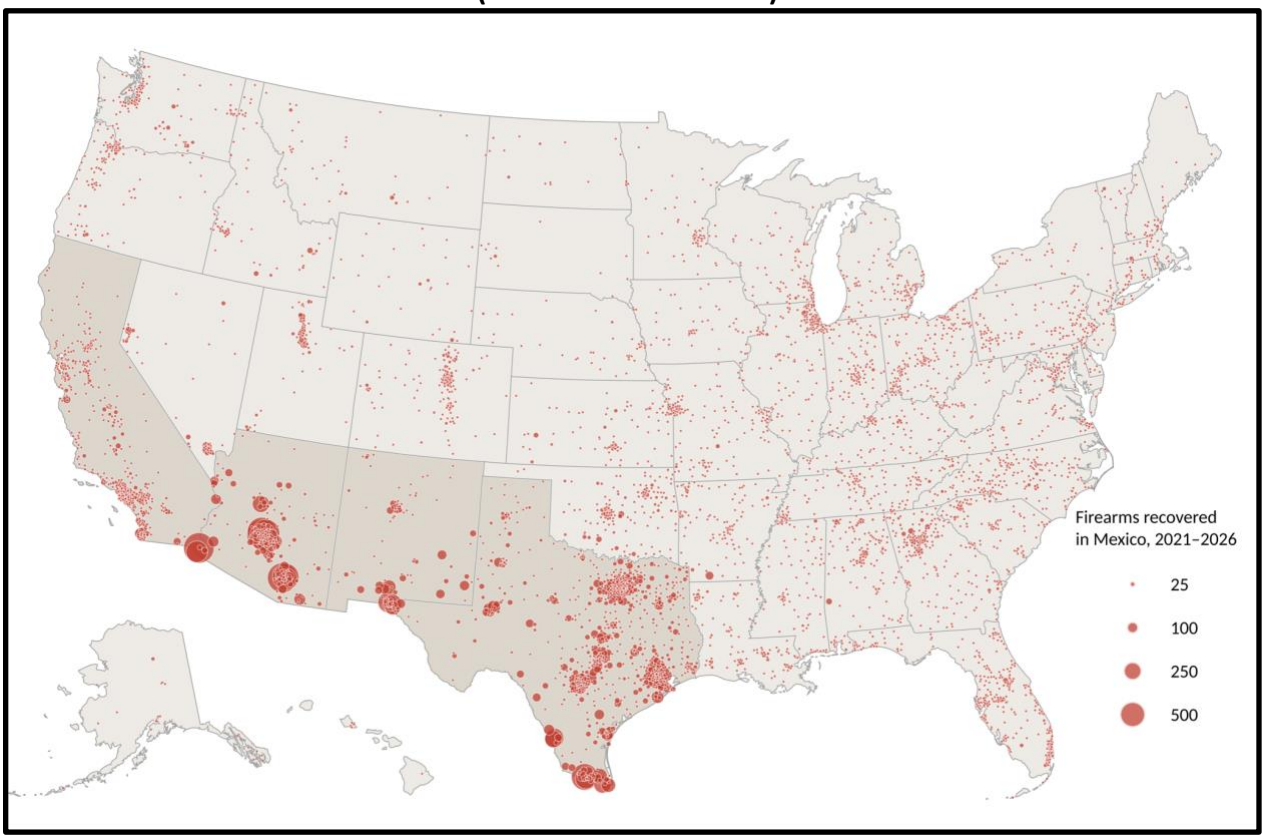
Arizona. Arizona cases mirror the geography in this report.

- In January 2026, federal prosecutors charged nine people in a conspiracy to buy guns in Arizona for smuggling into Mexico, including at least three Barrett .50-caliber rifles and ten belt-fed rifles. Mexican authorities recovered one of the guns in March 2025.
- In August 2026, a federal judge sentenced the leader of a sicario group based in San Luis, Sonora, that supplied guns to a faction of the Sinaloa Cartel, to 130 months in prison. The group carried out kidnappings, torture and murders, and its members bought guns through straw purchases at dealers in the Yuma area in 2023–2024.
- The same month, prosecutors charged 28 defendants in a 158-count indictment over straw purchases across Maricopa County and elsewhere in Arizona of guns intended for Mexico; more than 100 firearms were seized.
- Since the United States designated the Sinaloa Cartel and New Generation Jalisco Cartel as foreign terrorist organizations in February 2025, these cases can also carry terrorism charges, but we could find only one that did so. In March 2026, federal prosecutors added a charge for aiding both cartels to an earlier indictment for gun trafficking of the owner of an Arizona gun store, Grips by Larry.

Figure 8 maps every U.S. purchase zip code with at least one firearm recovered in Mexico between January 2021 and May 2026: 5,748 zip codes across all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The map is dominated by the four border states. California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas account for 40,778 of these firearms, 78 percent of the total, and nearly all of the largest bubbles.

Within the border states, the patterns differ. Arizona's traces are tightly concentrated: 244 zip codes account for 14,214 firearms, an average of 58 per zip code, and 88 percent come from three counties: Maricopa (Phoenix and Glendale), Pima (Tucson), and Yuma, though those counties account for 79 percent of the state's population. Maricopa County alone accounts for 8,634 firearms, more than any other county in the country.

Figure 8. Firearms recovered in Mexico by U.S. purchase zip code, January 2021–May 2026 (for all times-to-crime)



Note: Bubble area is proportional to the number of firearms recovered in Mexico and traced to each purchase zip code. Twenty-seven zip codes (44 firearms) without geographic coordinates are not shown; a minimum bubble size keeps zip codes with very few firearms visible. Border states are shaded. Source: ATF trace data obtained via FOIA request.

Texas traces are more widespread. Its 1,013 zip codes account for 21,084 firearms, an average of 21 per zip code, spread across Houston (Harris County, 3,626 firearms), San Antonio (Bexar County, 1,582), and Dallas–Fort Worth (Dallas and Tarrant counties, 2,586), and the border areas of El Paso (1,568) and the Rio Grande Valley (Hidalgo and Cameron counties, 2,119). California's 577 zip codes average about seven firearms each; despite being the most populous of the four states, it accounts for only 4,080 firearms. New Mexico contributes 1,400 firearms from 78 zip codes.

Outside the border states, the remaining 3,836 zip codes account for 11,702 firearms (22 percent). Most are small and widely scattered, but a few states stand out: Oklahoma (954 firearms, nearly half around Oklahoma City and Tulsa), Florida (831), Nevada (730, mostly in the Las Vegas area), Colorado (691), Georgia (669), and Utah (661, mostly around Salt Lake City and Provo). Oklahoma, Nevada, Colorado, and Utah sit along major north–south interstate routes toward the Southwest (I-35, I-15, and I-25), while Florida and Georgia show that some Mexico-bound firearms are also bought far from the border.

Short Time to Crime (within a year)

Mexico short-TTC traces, guns recovered in Mexico within a year of their retail sale, totaled 7,357 firearms since 2021. They make up a smaller share of Mexico traces than of traces overall (14 percent versus 22 percent), so most U.S. guns recovered in Mexico circulated for more than a year before recovery. The sources of guns that cross quickly, however, are far more concentrated. FFLs in Arizona and Texas account for 86 percent of them, and the five leading zip codes are all in metropolitan Phoenix: 85032 (371 firearms), 85041 (253), and 85053 (166, tied with 85713 in Tucson) in Phoenix, and 85308 (262) and 85302 (196) in Glendale. Dealers in these five zip codes accounted for 1,248 firearms, about one in six short time-to-crime guns recovered in Mexico. Two of the cases described below show how short that timeline can be: the .50-caliber rifle traced from the Villa Unión attack had been bought only eleven days earlier, and the rifle recovered in Zitácuaro had been bought just four and a half months before.

Mid Time to Crime (one to three years)

Mexico mid-TTC traces, guns recovered one to three years after purchase, total 9,966 firearms. Arizona and Texas still account for 81.5 percent of them, but the geography begins to widen beyond Phoenix. Three metropolitan Phoenix zip codes remain among the leaders, Glendale (85308, 236 firearms; 85302, 186) and Phoenix (85032, 161), but they are joined by Tucson (85713, 218) and Yuma (85364, 207), cities closer to the border. Texas also gains ground: Texas FFLs account for 4,518 mid-TTC firearms, more than Arizona's 3,608. Mid-TTC guns are also less concentrated than short-TTC guns: the top five zip codes account for 10 percent of them, compared with 17 percent of short-TTC guns.

Long Time to Crime (three years or more)

Mexico long-TTC traces, guns recovered more than three years after purchase, total 35,157 firearms, twice as many as all other time-to-crime intervals combined. Long-TTC guns make up 67 percent of Mexico traces, compared with 53 percent of traces recovered in the United States, so the U.S. guns recovered in Mexico are, on average, older than those recovered in the United States.

But recently purchased guns are a growing part of the flow. Between 2021 and 2025, short- and mid-TTC Mexico traces each more than doubled, while long-TTC traces rose by less than 90 percent. As a result, the long-TTC share of Mexico traces fell from 72 percent in 2021 to 69 percent in 2025 (after dipping to 62 percent in 2024), while for U.S. traces it rose from 46 to 62 percent. The long-TTC traces for Mexico are led by zip codes in Texas (13,921 firearms) rather than Arizona (6,898), and they are the most dispersed: long-TTC guns trace back to more than 5,300 zip codes, and the leading zip codes, McAllen, Texas, Tucson (2 zip codes), Yuma, and

Glendale together account for just 5 percent of the total. California, nearly absent among short-TTC guns (82 firearms), accounts for 3,885 long-TTC guns. These older guns may have reached Mexico through resale, theft, or stockpiles accumulated over years rather than through a purchase made specifically for smuggling.

Across the three bands, the pattern is a gradient. The guns that reach Mexico fastest come disproportionately from a handful of dealers in metropolitan Phoenix. As time-to-crime lengthens, the sources shift toward Texas and spread across thousands of zip codes nationwide.

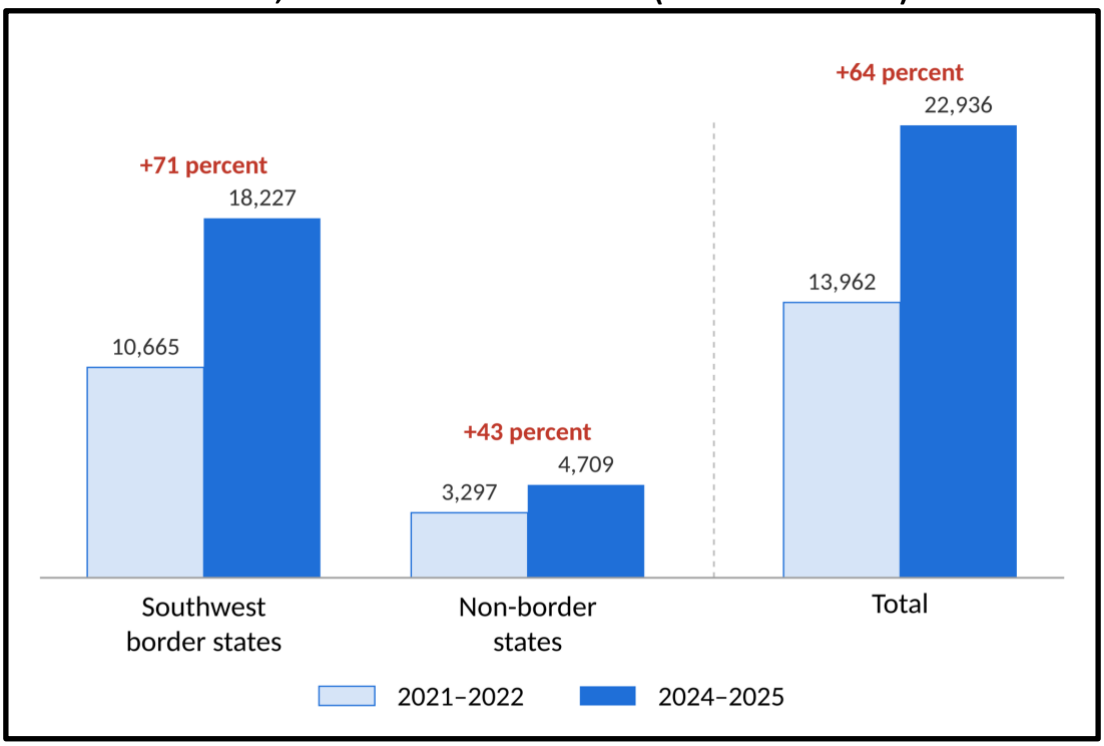
5.1 A Shifting Geography: 2021–2022 vs. 2024–2025

Mexico-bound traces have grown, and the growth has been concentrated. Total Mexico-recovery volume rose from 15,615 firearms in 2021–2022 to 24,638 in 2024–2025, a 58 percent increase. Because the 2021–2022 zip-code data appear to omit zip codes with a single dealer, we compare only zip codes with two or more dealers in both 2021 and 2022.[37] Among them, the number contributing at least one Mexico recovery grew from 2,903 to 3,485, and the growth was faster outside the Southwest border states (27 percent) than within them (10 percent). Firearms from these zip codes rose 64 percent, but fastest in the border states: up 71 percent, compared with 43 percent elsewhere (Figure 9). Of those 3,485 zip codes, 1,417 (41 percent) had no Mexico traces in 2021 or 2022.

These new zip codes are numerous but small: most (980) contributed a single firearm, and together they account for 2,247 firearms, 10 percent of their 2024–2025 total. They are also scattered nationwide rather than concentrated on the border: more than four in five are outside the four border states, in states such as Florida, Alabama, Indiana, North Carolina, and Ohio. The largest new sources are in Arizona and Texas: Litchfield Park (85340, 27 firearms) and Chandler (85226, 15) in Arizona, and El Paso (79903, 20) and Houston (77031, 17) in Texas. Meanwhile, 835 zip codes that had Mexico traces in 2021–2022 recorded none in 2024–2025; nearly all of them (792) had contributed only one or two firearms.

Among these zip codes, most of the growth came from those that were already sources. The 2,068 zip codes active in both periods went from 12,874 to 20,689 firearms, a 61 percent increase, and accounted for 90 percent of their 2024–2025 volume. That growth was itself concentrated in metropolitan Phoenix. Maricopa County's Mexico traces more than tripled, from 1,542 to 5,227, accounting for 41 percent of the increase; Arizona as a whole accounted for more than half. The ten zip codes with the largest increases are all in Arizona, led by Phoenix 85032 (from 25 to 457), Glendale 85308 (75 to 438), and Phoenix 85041 (5 to 308). Outside Maricopa County, Mexico traces rose by about two-fifths. The pattern is not new hot spots replacing old ones: it is metropolitan Phoenix intensifying sharply while the map of contributing zip codes widens at its thin edges.

Figure 9: Mexico firearms traced to U.S. purchase, Southwest border states and non-border states, 2021–2022 and 2024–2025 (all times-to-crime)



Note: Includes zip codes with two or more licensed dealers in both 2021 and 2022, because the 2021–2022 zip-code data appear to omit zip codes with a single dealer. The same pattern holds when zip codes are restricted to those with two or more dealers in all four years, when each period uses its own dealer counts, and when no restriction is applied: zip codes grow faster outside the border states, firearms grow faster within them. Border states are California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. Source: ATF trace data obtained via FOIA request.

5.2 Trafficking Routes: Mexico Traces by State

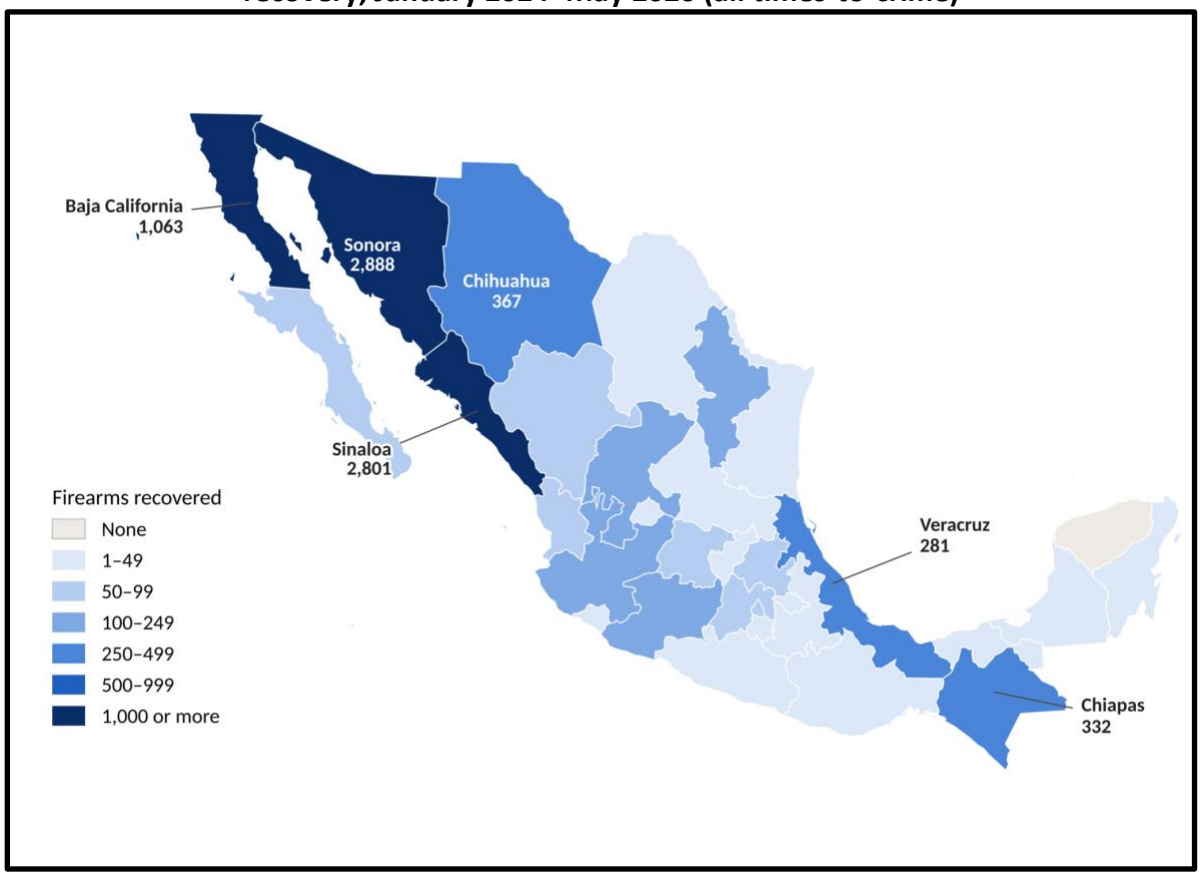
Where are U.S.-sourced firearms being recovered inside Mexico? The findings above describe where in the United States Mexico-bound firearms were purchased. A separate part of the same FOIA release identifies the Mexican state where each firearm was recovered, offering a parallel look at the destination side of this pattern. That dataset covers January 2024 through May 2026, a different window than the January 2021–May 2026 period used throughout the rest of this report, so the figures below are not directly comparable to, or additive with, the Mexico totals discussed above. Of 28,091 firearms recovered in Mexico during this period and traced to a U.S. dealer, 18,667 (66.5 percent) had a long TTC of three years or more, 5,397 (19.2 percent) a mid TTC of one to three years, and 4,027 (14.3 percent) a short TTC of under one year.

Arizona and Texas dominate this dataset just as they do the broader Mexico-recovery picture: Texas-purchased firearms account for 10,427 traces (37.1 percent) and Arizona-purchased firearms for 9,047 (32.2 percent), together 69.3 percent of the total. But as Figures 10 and 12

show, the two states feed distinct, largely separate corridors into Mexico rather than a single shared route.

Arizona's firearms are heavily concentrated in Mexico's northwest (Figure 10). The states of Sonora (2,888 firearms) and Sinaloa (2,801) alone account for 62.9 percent of all Arizona-sourced recoveries in this dataset; adding Baja California (1,063) brings the three-state share to 74.6 percent. Sinaloa had more U.S.-origin firearm traces than any other Mexican state (3,996), and 70 percent of them were purchased in Arizona. Population-adjusted, Sinaloa also has the highest U.S.-origin firearm trace rate of any Mexican state (1,255 per million residents) and Sonora the second-highest (1,088 per million). Sonora also has the highest short-TTC rate of any state (332 per million), well ahead of Sinaloa (241), meaning this concentration is not just a legacy of older firearms accumulating over years, but an active, ongoing pattern.

Figure 10: Firearms purchased in Arizona and recovered in Mexico, by Mexican state of recovery, January 2024–May 2026 (all times-to-crime)



Note: Shading shows the number of firearms purchased in the state and recovered in each Mexican state. Source: ATF trace data obtained via FOIA request.

This concentration aligns with where cartel violence in Mexico is most acute. Sinaloa is the home base of the Sinaloa Cartel, one of the most powerful criminal organizations in the world, and its homicide rate rose from 21 per 100,000 residents in 2023 to 57 in 2025 (from 653 to

1,805 homicides), well above the national rate of 21.4 in 2025.[38] The increase followed the July 2024 arrest of longtime leader Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada, after which rival factions of the cartel turned on each other.[39] This report's Mexico-by-state data cannot confirm that firearms from any specific Arizona zip code end up in Sinaloa rather than Sonora or elsewhere; it identifies only the purchase state, not the purchase zip code, of each Mexico-recovered firearm. But the domestic zip-level data presented earlier in this report show something closely related and just as important: the Phoenix-metro zip codes that dominate Arizona's Mexico-bound flow are not a separate, Mexico-only pipeline. Among short-TTC firearms, Phoenix's 85032 sent 371 firearms to Mexico, 260 to states neighboring Arizona, and 434 within Arizona; Glendale's 85308 sent 262 to Mexico, 293 to neighboring states, and 686 within Arizona; and Glendale's 85302 sent 196, 231, and 617, respectively. A single retail market concentrated in a handful of Phoenix-metro zip codes supplies firearms that end up at crime scenes in Arizona itself, in neighboring states such as California, and in Mexico. Figure 11 shows this pattern for Arizona as a whole. In 2025 alone, 1,108 Arizona-purchased firearms with a short TTC were recovered in Mexico, more than the 847 recovered in all other U.S. states combined, led by California (703).

Figure 11: Short Time-to-Crime (less than a year) Gun Traces from Arizona, 2025

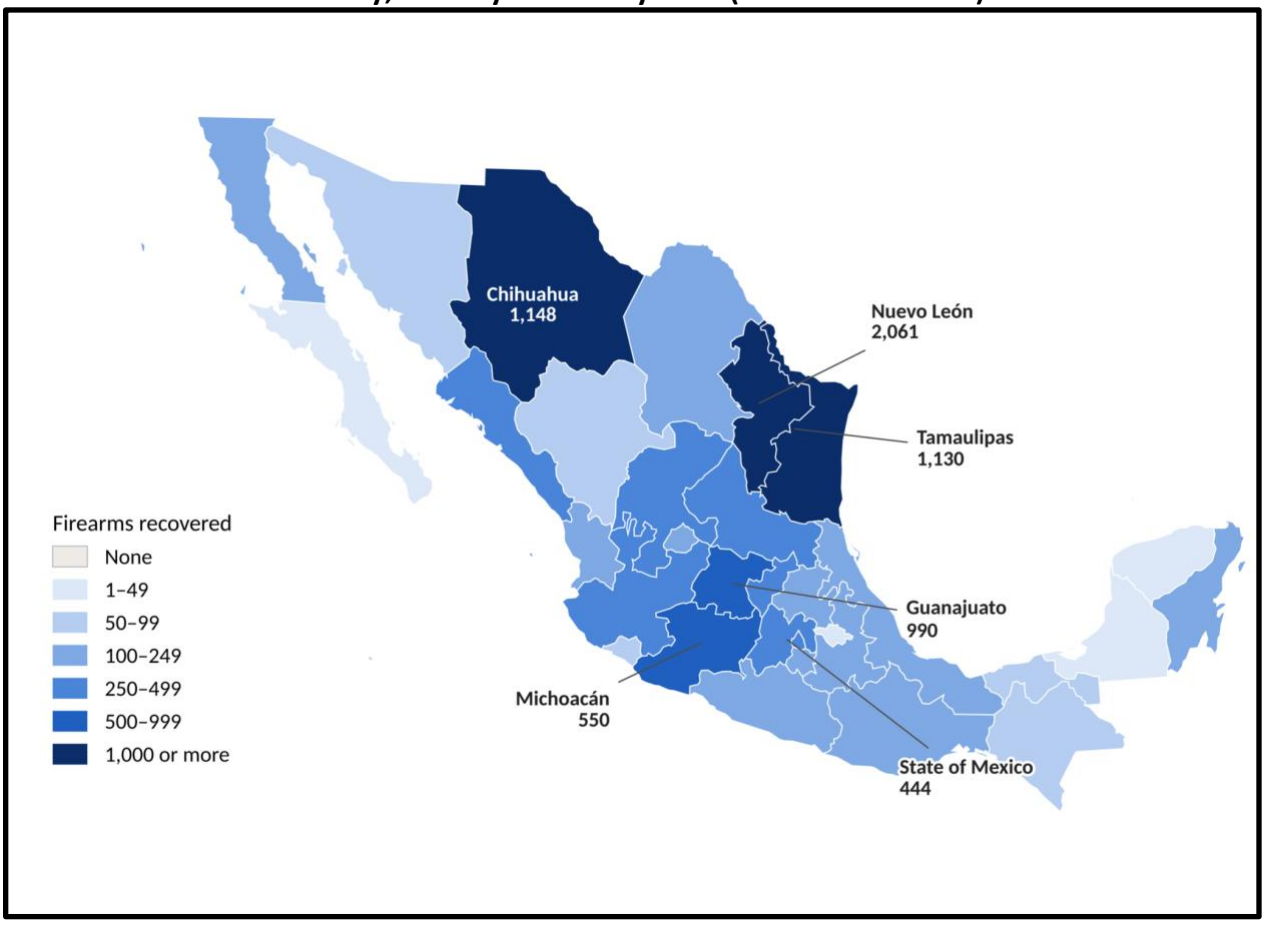


Map created by Magali Ruer, using ATF trace data

Texas's firearms follow a broader, more diffuse path through northern and central Mexico (Figure 12). Nuevo León (2,061 firearms), Chihuahua (1,148, where Arizona and New Mexico also contribute 367 and 421), Tamaulipas (1,130), and Guanajuato (990) are the largest single destinations, but Texas-origin firearms also turn up at meaningful volumes much further from the border, in Michoacán (550), the State of Mexico (444), Mexico City (405), Jalisco (394), San

Luis Potosí (365), Querétaro (344), and Zacatecas (343), a wider geographic footprint than Arizona's more concentrated northwestern pattern.

Figure 12: Firearms purchased in Texas and recovered in Mexico, by Mexican state of recovery, January 2024–May 2026 (all times-to-crime)



Note: Shading shows the number of firearms purchased in the state and recovered in each Mexican state. Source: ATF trace data obtained via FOIA request.

One of the most striking findings in this dataset involves neither state's nearest neighbors. Chiapas, Mexico's southernmost state and roughly 1,800 miles by road from the Arizona border, received 509 traced firearms, and 332 of them (65.2 percent) trace back to Arizona, not Texas, despite Texas being the geographically closer source. Just as notably, these are not simply old firearms that have had decades to migrate south: 262 of the 332 Arizona-to-Chiapas firearms (78.9 percent) had a short or mid TTC of under three years, a younger profile than Arizona's own flows into much closer Sonora (60.7 percent short or mid) or Sinaloa (48.8 percent). Chiapas's population-adjusted short-TTC rate (22.5 per million) exceeds that of several Mexican states much nearer the U.S. border, including Jalisco, Guerrero, Coahuila, and Mexico City. Taken together, this suggests Arizona-sourced firearms are reaching the far end of the country quickly and directly, rather than drifting there slowly over many years.

A methodological note applies to this subsection: the population-adjusted rates cited above are firearms recovered over the full January 2024–May 2026 window per million residents, using 2025 Mexican state population estimates from Mexico's national population council (CONAPO).

5.3. Firearms Desired by Criminal Groups in Mexico: Crime Gun Calibers and Manufacturers

Criminal organizations seek specific kinds of weapons for their violence. Much of the cartels' firepower comes from the most powerful weapons sold legally in the United States but not in Mexico: AK-47s, AR-15s, and .50-caliber Barrett rifles. Stop US Arms to Mexico requested information on the caliber, manufacturer and type of firearms recovered in Mexico and traced to a U.S. purchase since January 2024. The share of each caliber and make recovered within a year of sale offers a snapshot of which guns criminal organizations in Mexico currently want.

Century Arms International, based in Vermont and Florida, now dominates the illegal gun market in Mexico, based on the data. (The Mexican government does not purchase Century weapons, according to reports it files with the Arms Trade Treaty.) In previous years, Colt, Smith & Wesson and Glock were top weapon makes recovered in Mexico. While 13,635 firearms of these three top manufacturers were recovered and traced to a purchase since 2024 – more than one out of every five guns submitted for tracing – only 4% of those firearms were recovered less than a year after purchase. On the other hand, 36% of all the Century weapons recovered had been purchased less than a year earlier. More than 160 firearms trafficked from Arizona to Mexico and named in Arizona's October 2025 indictment of a gun trafficking group were Century rifles.[40]

The dominance of AK-47-type weapons, in which Century specializes, is also evidenced in the calibers of Mexico firearms traces. Of 4,027 short TTC guns recovered since the beginning of 2024, more than half – 2,184 – were 7.62 caliber firearms, which are typically AK-47-type rifles.

More than one third of the short TTC weapons (1,484) were produced by Century Arms, which have long been a favorite of criminal groups in Mexico. Nearly all of these quickly-trafficked Century weapons – 92% - were purchased in Arizona; another 6.6% were purchased in Texas.

Similarly, smaller makers of AK-47s were over-represented in short-TTC firearms purchased in Arizona. Fifty-five percent of the 302 Riley Defense firearms that were recovered in Mexico since 2024 and traced had been purchased less than a year earlier. Of these short TTC Riley firearms, 84% were purchased in Arizona, and another 11% were purchased in Texas.[41]

Importers of AK-47 firearms that are disproportionately trafficked to Mexico, including Century Arms, could benefit from a rule change proposed by the ATF in May 2026. Restrictions on importing AK-47 parts have raised their prices over the years. The rule change would allow gun importers to use Foreign Trade Zones (FTZ) and Customs Bonded Warehouses (CBW) to assemble or modify guns before sending them to market. "In 2023, ATF began denying import

requests for nonsporting firearms into a CBW," according to Marianna Mitchem, who headed ATF's firearms industry division at the time. "In January 2025, Century Arms applied for their licensed premise to be considered an FTZ," Mitchem said. The ATF rule change would enable companies like Century to ship parts later used for firearms that are barred from importation because they do not have a "sporting purpose."[42]

Fifty caliber rifles also continue to be trafficked into Mexico.

Barrett firearms dominate the U.S. market for .50 caliber rifles, including the illegal markets in both Mexico and the United States. As we and others have reported previously, Mexican criminal groups desire Barrett rifles, which they have used to down helicopters and pierce armored vehicles. Barretts can be fired accurately over a mile away, and can penetrate armored vehicles. 213 Barretts recovered in Mexico were traced to U.S. purchases since 2024 - more than the number recovered and traced in the United States during the same period. While Arizona purchases accounted for more than 40 percent of the Mexico Barrett traces (and 55 percent of the short time-to-crime Barretts), more than a quarter of the trafficked Barretts originated from non-border states.

Cartel gunmen in Mexico have used .50-caliber Barrett rifles to bring down helicopters, including a Mexican military helicopter in Jalisco in 2015, in an attack that killed eight soldiers and a federal police officer, and a Michoacán state prosecutor's helicopter in 2016, killing the pilot and three officers. A .50-caliber rifle was also among the weapons used in the June 2020 attempt on the life of Omar García Harfuch, then Mexico City's police chief, an attack that killed three people.

Fifty-caliber rifle ammunition also often has U.S. origins: armor-piercing .50-caliber rounds made in the U.S. Army's Lake City plant in Missouri have been recovered after cartel attacks. In one early-2024 attack on a police convoy, a round pierced an armored vehicle, killing one officer and wounding three.[43] Other cases illustrate how individual purchases end up in Mexican crime scenes.

Villa Unión, 2019. On November 30, 2019, Cartel del Noreste gunmen attacked the town of Villa Unión, Coahuila; two days of fighting left 23 people dead, including four police officers and two residents. Authorities seized 27 large-caliber weapons, including six .50-caliber Barrett rifles. ATF traced a belt-fed .50-caliber rifle recovered after the attack to a gun dealer in Pearland, outside Houston, where it had been bought eleven days earlier, and investigators found at least 45 .50-caliber casings stamped "LC," from the U.S. Army's Lake City ammunition plant.[44]

Zitácuaro, 2023. A Barrett .50-caliber rifle bought in Florida on November 8, 2022, was recovered four and a half months later, after a March 22, 2023, shootout between state police,

soldiers, and suspected CJNG members in Zitácuaro, Michoacán, that left two people dead. It was one of about 11 Barrett rifles and 16 FN M249S rifles that a Florida trafficking ring bought for Mexican cartels, removing the serial numbers before shipment. Six members were sentenced in 2025.[45]

Within the United States, 441 Barrett firearms have been recovered since the beginning of 2021. Of these, 60 had no identified city of recovery, while 82 were recovered in Arizona, 60 in California, and 41 in Texas (ten of these were recovered in the border towns of Calexico and San Ysidro, CA, and another 15 in the border towns of Nogales, San Luis, Tacna, and Yuma, AZ). Some of these Barretts may have been purchased to traffic into Mexico before being seized.

6. Firearms Traced Within States

In brief

- Most traced firearms (1,581,227, or 71.4 percent) were recovered in the same state where they were sold, matching ATF's national figure of 72 percent.
- The leading sources are suburban, not big-city cores: all of the top ten zip codes for within-state traces are suburban, as are 86 percent of the top 300.
- Within-state traces are highly concentrated. The top 300 zip codes, 1.8 percent of those with any within-state trace, supply 31 percent of within-state traced firearms.
- Concentration rises as time-to-crime shortens: the top 300 zip codes account for 28 percent of long-TTC, 35 percent of mid-TTC, and 37 percent of short-TTC within-state traces, and the suburban share rises from 84 to 89 percent.
- Largely the same small set of mostly suburban zip codes leads the short- and mid-TTC bands, with 30236 (Jonesboro, GA) first in every band.

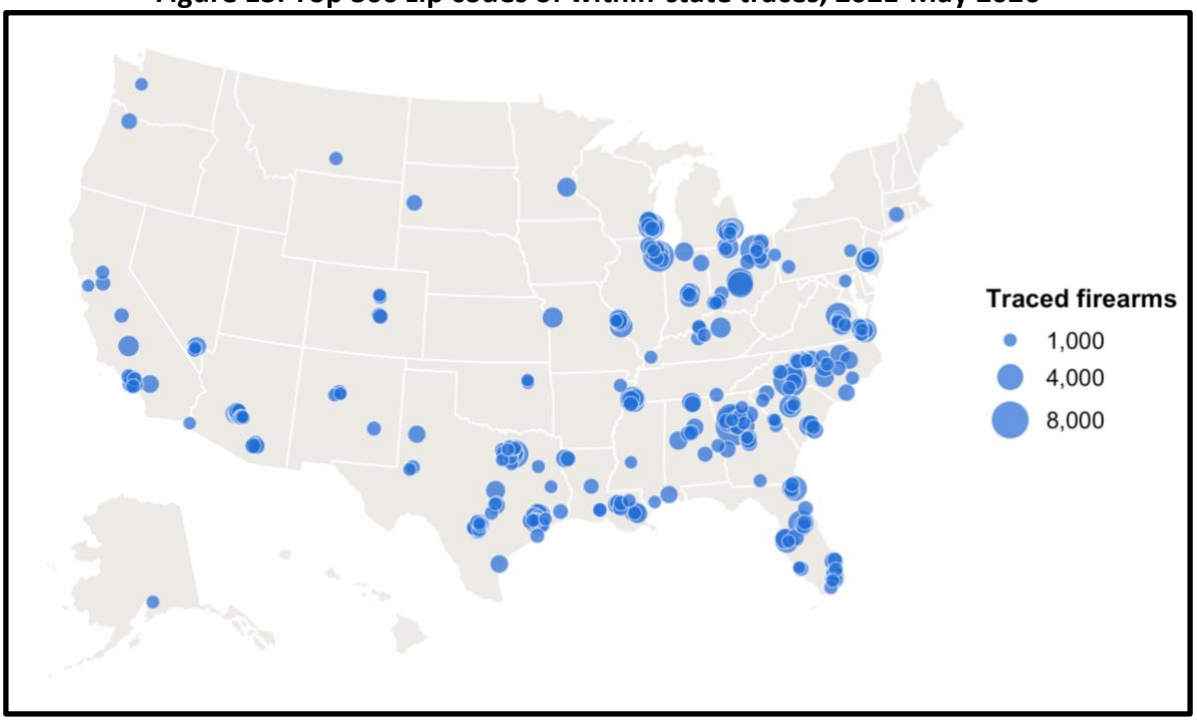
Within-state traces are not a minor category. They are the largest single component of this dataset by far, accounting for 1,581,227 of the 2,213,925 traced firearms (71.4 percent). ATF's own national data show the same pattern: 72 percent of traced crime guns recovered nationally between 2017 and 2021 were recovered in the same state where they were originally sold at retail. Not all of these firearms were trafficked; some are recovered from the person who legally bought them. Nationally, 12 percent of traced crime guns recovered from 2017 to 2021 (180,749) were in the possession of their original purchaser, and a study of crime guns in California found that about one in four recovered handguns was legally possessed.[46]

The geography of these traces points to suburbs of major metros as primary points of purchase rather than big-city cores. The five zip codes with the most within-state traces across all three bands combined are 30236 (Jonesboro, GA); 28208 (Charlotte, NC); 60452 (Oak Forest, IL); 44130 (in Cleveland, OH, including Parma, Parma Heights, and Middleburg Heights); and 30080 (Smyrna, GA). All five rank among the top twelve zip codes in every time-to-crime band. All of the top ten overall are suburban.[47]

Figure 13 shows the 300 zip codes with the most within-state traces. These zip codes make up just 1.8 percent of the 17,076 zip codes with at least one within-state trace but account for 31.0 percent of within-state traced firearms, and 86 percent of them are suburban.

The sections that follow examine each band in turn, moving from long to short time-to-crime. As time-to-crime shortens, traced firearms become more concentrated in fewer zip codes, the suburban share of the leading zip codes rises, and the leading zip codes for short and mid TTC are largely the same.

Figure 13: Top 300 zip codes of within-state traces, 2021-May 2026



Note: Bubble area is proportional to the number of traced firearms recovered in the state of sale, all time-to-crime bands combined. Source: ATF trace data by dealer zip code, obtained by Stop US Arms to Mexico.

Long TTC

Within-state long-TTC traces total 764,895 firearms, nearly half of all within-state traces and the largest of the three bands. Most within-state firearm traces therefore involve guns that had been in circulation for years, not recent purchases. 30236 (Jonesboro, GA) leads (3,579), followed by 32703 (Apopka, FL; 2,406), 43224 (Columbus, OH; 2,267), 30080 (Smyrna, GA; 2,173), 28208 (Charlotte, NC; 2,095), 32216 (Jacksonville, FL; 2,085), 44130 (Cleveland, OH; 1,872), 75150 (Mesquite, TX; 1,831), 38122 (Memphis, TN; 1,782), and 93308 (Bakersfield, CA; 1,768). Despite their city names, nine of the ten are suburban; none meets the urban threshold, and the tenth, Bakersfield, is rural. Some of these zip codes matter far less in the shorter bands. Bakersfield ranks 10th for long-TTC traces but 261st for short-TTC traces. The top 300 zip codes for within-state long-TTC traces make up just 1.8 percent of the 16,309 zip codes with at least one within-state long-TTC trace but account for 28.0 percent of within-state long-TTC traced firearms, making this the least concentrated of the three bands. Suburban zip codes make up 84 percent of these top 300.

Mid TTC

Within-state mid-TTC traces total 411,234 firearms. As time-to-crime shortens, the leading source zip codes begin to converge with those in the short-TTC band: nine of the top ten mid-TTC zip codes are also in the short-TTC top ten. 30236 (Jonesboro, GA) again leads (2,831), followed by 60452 (Oak Forest, IL; 2,099), 28208 (Charlotte, NC; 2,082), 44130 (Cleveland, OH;

1,620), and 30080 (Smyrna, GA; 1,486). Several zip codes that are prominent in the long-TTC band, including 32703 (Apopka, FL), 32216 (Jacksonville, FL), and 93308 (Bakersfield, CA), drop out of the top ten. Nine of the top ten are again suburban; the tenth, 23462 (Virginia Beach, VA), is urban. Traces are also more concentrated than in the long-TTC band: the top 300 zip codes for within-state mid-TTC traces make up just 3.0 percent of the 9,978 zip codes with at least one within-state mid-TTC trace but account for 35.0 percent of within-state mid-TTC traced firearms. Suburban zip codes make up 87 percent of these top 300.

Short TTC

Within-state short-TTC traces total 405,098 firearms, and the leading source zip codes are nearly identical to the mid-TTC list, with nine of the top ten shared between the two bands. The top ten are 30236 (Jonesboro, GA; 2,540), 28208 (Charlotte, NC; 2,356), 60452 (Oak Forest, IL; 1,973), 44130 (Cleveland, OH; 1,483), 75150 (Mesquite, TX; 1,354), 53227 (Milwaukee, WI; 1,350), 23462 (Virginia Beach, VA; 1,272), 23005 (Ashland, VA; 1,188), 43616 (Oregon, OH; 1,164), and 43207 (Columbus, OH; 1,156). Nine of the ten are suburban, and only the Virginia Beach zip code meets the urban threshold. The top 300 zip codes for within-state short-TTC traces make up just 3.3 percent of the 9,134 zip codes with at least one within-state short-TTC trace but account for 36.7 percent of within-state short-TTC traced firearms, making this the most concentrated of the three bands. Suburban zip codes make up 89 percent of these top 300, the highest share of any band. Short-TTC firearms are the clearest indicator of possible trafficking, and their sources concentrate in a small set of suburban zip codes on the lower-density edges of major metros rather than in inner cities. This suggests that much of the possible trafficking signaled by short time-to-crime is local: firearms bought at suburban stores and recovered in crime within the same state, often within months of sale.

7. Firearms Traced Between States in the U.S.

In brief

- About a quarter of traced firearms (580,218, or 26.2 percent) were recovered in a different U.S. state or territory from where they were sold: 249,017 in a bordering state and 331,201 in a non-bordering one.
- Bordering-state traces are concentrated: the ten largest state-to-state flows account for 36.4 percent of them, led by Arizona to California (23,605 firearms, about 20 for every one going the other way) and Indiana to Illinois (15,796, nearly 16 to 1).
- The 300 leading bordering-state source zip codes, 2.4 percent of those with any such trace, supply 36.8 percent of bordering-state firearms and 46.3 percent of short-TTC ones; 82 percent are suburban.
- Non-bordering traces are more dispersed and older: about 1 in 10 was recovered within a year of sale, compared with about 1 in 4 within-state. The Iron Pipeline stands out: five of the seven largest non-bordering flows run into New York, though the largest runs from Texas to California.

While within-state traces are the majority, out-of-state traces account for 580,218 firearms (26.2 percent of traced firearms): firearms sold in one state and recovered and traced in another U.S. state or territory. Splitting this category by whether the recovery state shares a land border with the state of sale reveals two distinct patterns. Bordering-state traces (249,017) are concentrated in a small number of large flows between neighbors: the ten largest account for more than a third of them, and they take three forms. Some are one-way corridors, such as Arizona to California and Indiana to Illinois. Some center on a metro area that straddles a state line, such as Charlotte, St. Louis, and Memphis. Others are two-way flows, such as Louisiana and Texas.

Non-bordering traces (331,201) are the larger group and far more dispersed. They include the best-known long-distance route, the “Iron Pipeline” from southeastern states along Interstate 95 into the Northeast. It shows up clearly in the data: five of the seven largest non-bordering flows run into New York, from Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, South Carolina, and Florida. But it is only one of several long-distance routes; the single largest non-bordering flow runs from Texas to California.

7.1 Bordering States

Guns traced to sales in a neighboring state that shares a land border account for 249,017 (42.9 percent) of the 580,218 firearms traced from out of state. These traces are not spread evenly along state lines. The 300 zip codes with the most bordering-state traces make up 2.4 percent of the 12,343 zip codes with any such trace, but account for 36.8 percent of bordering-state firearms and 46.3 percent of short-TTC bordering-state firearms. The 300 largest bordering-

state sources of crime guns thus account for a larger share of their category than the 300 largest within-state sources (36.8 versus 31.0 percent). As with sources of crime guns within-state, they are mostly suburban: 82 percent of the top 300 zip code sources of bordering-state traces are suburban.

The ten largest one-way flows between neighboring states (counting each direction separately) account for 36.4 percent of all bordering-state traces and 45.1 percent of short-TTC bordering-state traces. They take three forms. The largest are lopsided corridors, in which one state sends far more firearms to a single neighbor than it receives: Arizona to California, Indiana to Illinois, and Nevada to California alone account for 20.5 percent of bordering-state traces, and Virginia to Maryland is similarly lopsided, with about 13 times as many guns coming from Virginia as going the other way, though its sources are spread all across Virginia. Three more center on a single metro area that straddles a state line (Charlotte, St. Louis, and Memphis), with flows running mainly, but not only, in one direction. The remaining three, Georgia to Florida, Louisiana to Texas, and Virginia to North Carolina, run substantially in both directions, with roughly one firearm going in one direction for every two going in the opposite direction (two for every three between Louisiana and Texas). Each is described below in order of size.

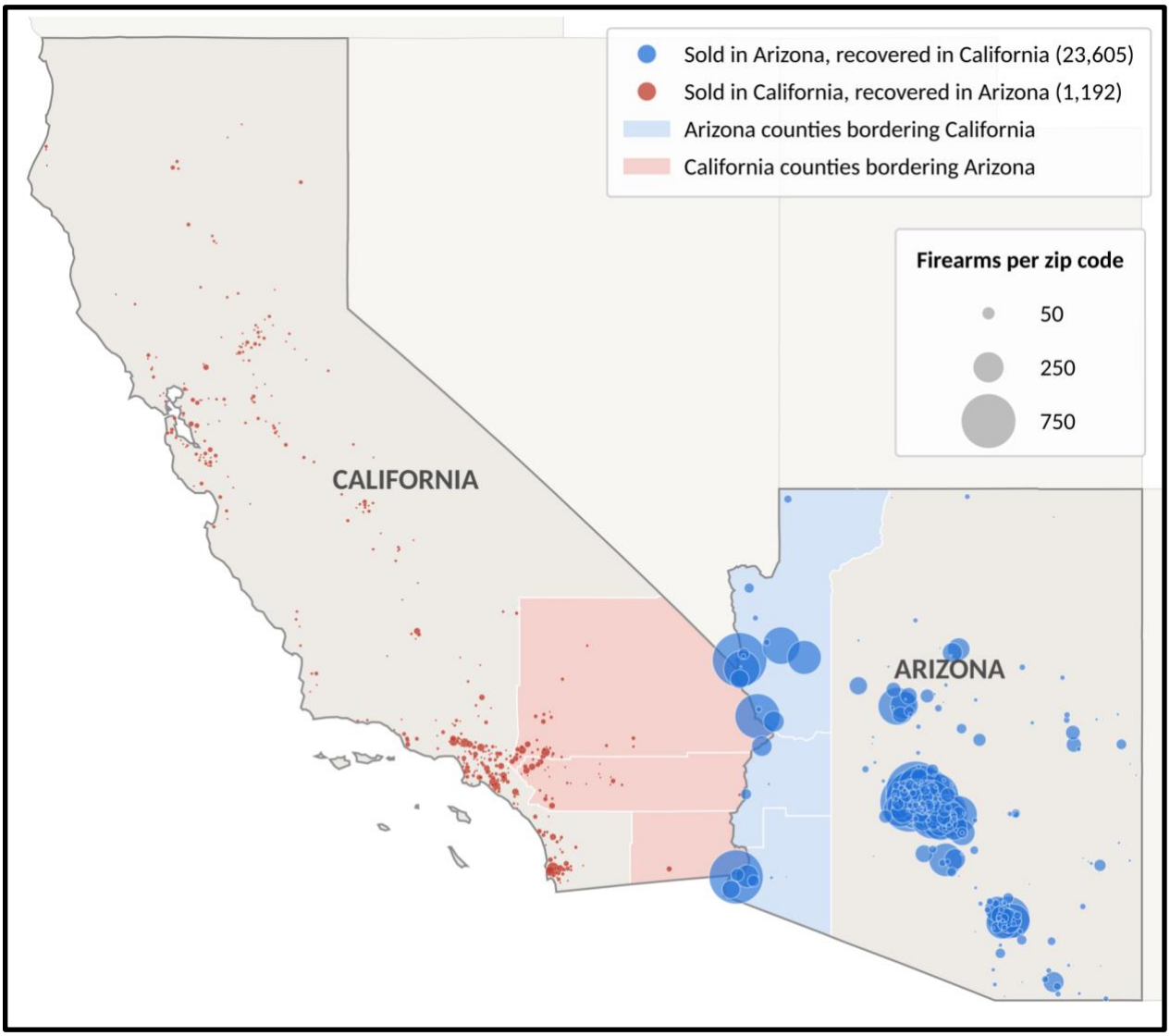
Arizona to California

Arizona to California is the largest one-way flow between neighboring states: more firearms sold in Arizona were recovered in California than for any other pair of bordering states, and others have documented the same corridor. Recent research identified it as "the largest gun trafficking corridor in North America" for crime guns with a short time-to-crime,[48] a finding California's Department of Justice has since cited. In 2023 alone, 4,372 crime guns recovered in California, 13 percent of those traced to a known source state, had first been sold in Arizona. Arizona sends 39.4 percent of its traced firearms recovered in the United States to other states, more than three times California's 11.3 percent. The flow runs almost entirely one way: 23,605 Arizona-sourced firearms were recovered in California, versus 1,192 going the other way, a ratio of about 20 to 1. California's larger size does not explain the gap: Arizona-sourced firearms make up 13.0 percent of all traced firearms recovered in California, while California-sourced firearms make up 1.9 percent of those recovered in Arizona.

For short-TTC firearms the imbalance is even more stark: 5,490 versus 41. This flow between Arizona and California accounts for 14.3 percent of all short-TTC bordering-state traces nationwide. California is also the main destination at every time-to-crime band for firearms Arizona sends to other states, receiving 61.8 percent of the long-TTC, 76.7 percent of the mid-TTC, and 83.0 percent of the short-TTC traced firearms. Remarkably, in 2025 the number of Arizona-sourced firearms recovered in Mexico (4,495) surpassed the number recovered in California (4,161).

Arizona's border counties (Yuma, La Paz, and Mohave) are disproportionate sources of guns recovered in California: 66.1 percent of these counties' traced firearms recovered in the U.S. were recovered outside Arizona, three-quarters of them in California, versus 10.1 percent for California counties bordering Arizona (Imperial, Riverside, and San Bernardino).

Figure 14: Arizona-to-California vs. California-to-Arizona Firearm Flows by Source Zip Code



Note: Each bubble represents a zip code, sized by the number of traced firearms sold there and recovered in the other state: sold in an Arizona zip code and recovered in California (blue), or sold in a California zip code and recovered in Arizona (red), January 2021–May 2026. Shaded areas mark the counties along the Arizona–California border. Source: ATF trace data by dealer zip code, obtained by Stop US Arms to Mexico.

Even so, most of the flow does not start at the state border. Maricopa County accounts for about two-thirds of the firearms Arizona sends to California, led by zip codes in Glendale (85305, 85308, and 85302) and Phoenix (85051), nearly 150 miles from the state line. Nine of the 25 largest border-state source zip codes in the country are in Arizona. For short-TTC firearms,

however, the top source is Bullhead City (86442), on the Colorado River across from California, with the largest number of these in 2025.

The Arizona towns along the state line nonetheless stand apart from their California counterparts, both in how many gun dealers they host and in how those dealers have fared under federal inspection. The five Arizona border-county zip codes that send the most firearms into California, Bullhead City, Yuma, Lake Havasu City, Kingman, and Fort Mohave, together sent 2,520 firearms across the line from 2021 to 2026 and were home to about 100 licensed dealers in an average year over that period.[49] The five California border-county zip codes that send the most firearms into Arizona sent just 64 and were home to about 24 dealers, none of them near the border; all five sit in the Inland Empire, more than 150 miles from Arizona. Across the border counties as a whole, Arizona zip codes average about three times as many licensed dealers as those on the California side (7.6 versus 2.8). Several of the largest Arizona sources were also home to dealers ATF itself had flagged: one dealer in Bullhead City and three in Yuma were in ATF's Demand 2 program, which covered dealers with 25 or more crime guns traced within three years of sale in the prior year, in every year from 2022 to 2024.[50] Demand 2 dealers were not unique to the Arizona side: two of the top California source zip codes, in San Bernardino and Corona, also had one in every year. But they sent only a few dozen firearms into Arizona, while the Arizona zip codes sent thousands into California.

Federal inspection records point in the same direction. ATF inspection reports compiled by Brady's Gun Store Transparency Project show that inspections of dealers in the five Arizona zip codes that sent the most firearms to California resulted in 113 citations for violations from 2016 to 2020, or 135 for every 100 licensed dealers, compared with 11 citations, or 29 per 100 dealers, in the five California zip codes that sent the most firearms to Arizona.[51] In Lake Havasu City (86403) alone, nine dealers were cited for a combined 70 violations, and a single Bullhead City dealer was cited for 13 violations in 2017 and 10 more in 2020.

The pattern holds beyond these towns: across the two states' border counties, inspections cited 73 violations per 100 dealers in Arizona versus 38 in California.[52] Arizona inspections were also more likely to uncover serious lapses: 26 percent cited ten or more violations, compared with 6 percent in California, though these shares rest on relatively few inspections (23 in Arizona and 32 in California). These inspections predate the 2021–2026 trace period, and Brady's database consists mainly of inspections that led to a warning letter or more serious action, with incomplete coverage after mid-2018. Still, the picture is consistent: on the Arizona side of the line, more dealers per zip code, with weaker compliance records, supply a one-way flow of guns into California.

***FROM DESERT TO SAN DIEGO*: Glendale, Arizona to San Diego, California.** *In August 2022, San Diego police found a loaded handgun in a dumpster in the city's College Grove area. ATF traced it to Randall's Sporting Goods in Glendale, Arizona, where it had been bought two days earlier. Federal prosecutors tied the gun to Jarez Roberts, a San Diego felon and known gang member, who had arranged for a Phoenix woman to buy handguns for him and drove to Arizona repeatedly to collect them. Roberts was sentenced to nine years in prison in August 2024; his supplier had pleaded guilty two months earlier. The same year, a second San Diego man pleaded guilty to buying eleven firearms in Yuma with a false Arizona ID and reselling them in San Diego. One was later recovered in Tijuana, Mexico.*

Indiana to Illinois

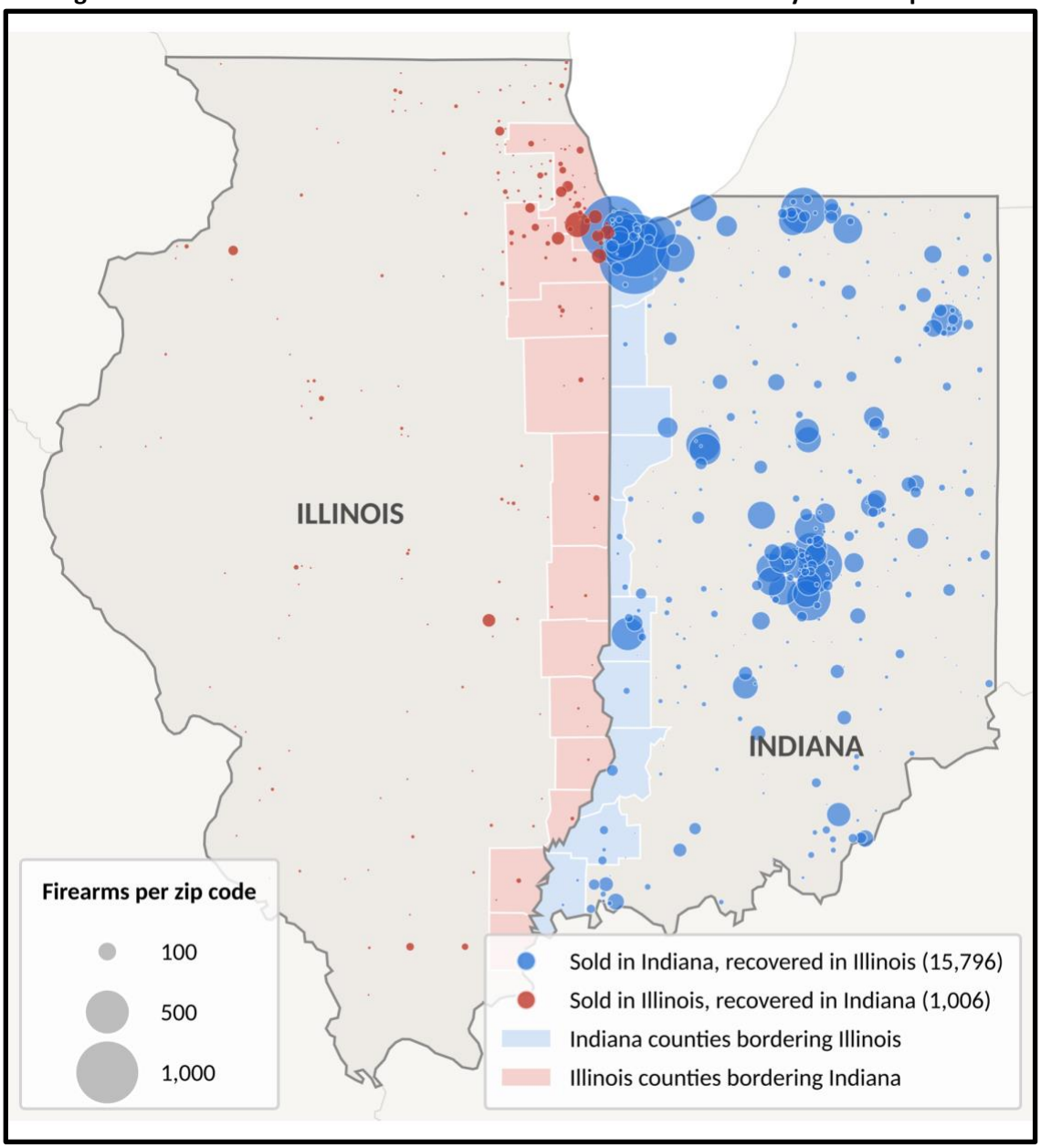
The Indiana–Illinois gun trafficking corridor is among the most documented in the country. Chicago's 2017 Gun Trace Report found that 60 percent of crime guns recovered in the city from 2013 to 2016 were traced to dealers out of state, including more than 20 percent to dealers in Indiana, and named three Lake County, Indiana, dealers among its ten leading sources. The pattern fits a broader finding by economist Brian Knight that crime guns flow from states with weak gun laws to neighboring states with strict ones.[53]

Our data show that the corridor remains as active as ever. Indiana sends 39.4 percent of its traced firearms recovered in the United States to other states, more than double Illinois's 17.4 percent. Indiana-sourced firearms recovered in Illinois totaled 15,796, versus 1,006 going the other way, a ratio of nearly 16 to 1; the short-TTC ratio is even wider (3,250 versus 174).

Unlike in Arizona, the largest single source sits right at the state line. Zip codes in Lake County, Indiana, which borders Cook and Will counties in Illinois, together sent 4,474 traced firearms into Illinois, more than a quarter of all Indiana-sourced firearms recovered there. Nearly two-thirds of all its traced firearms (63.2 percent) were recovered outside Indiana, compared with about one in ten for Illinois's border counties. Three of its zip codes, in Crown Point (46307), Hammond (46324), and Merrillville (46410), are among the five largest border-state sources in the country, and nearly all of their border-state firearms go to Illinois. Merrillville and Hammond also lead Indiana's short-TTC firearms recovered in Illinois. Indianapolis (Marion County) is the second-largest source.

The Indiana side of the line also has more gun dealers per zip code: zip codes in Indiana's border counties average about three licensed dealers each, compared with about one on the Illinois side. Six of Lake County's roughly 53 licensed dealers, in Gary, Hammond, Merrillville, and Schererville, were in ATF's Demand 2 program at some point from 2022 to 2024, four of them in all three years.[54] The program was reserved for dealers linked to 25 or more crime guns

Figure 15: Indiana-to-Illinois vs. Illinois-to-Indiana Firearm Flows by Source Zip Code



Note: Each bubble represents the number of firearms purchased in an Indiana zip code and recovered in Illinois (blue), or purchased in an Illinois zip code and recovered in Indiana (red), 2021–May 2026.

recovered within three years of sale. Statewide, Indiana had nearly three times as many Demand 2 dealers per resident as Illinois.

***GETTING GUNS TO THE WINDY CITY*: Indianapolis, Indiana to Chicago, Illinois.** *Between June and September 2021, Miesha Webster and James Osborne III ran a straw-purchasing scheme in the Indianapolis area. Osborne, who was barred from buying guns himself, chose the firearms, supplied the money, and drove Webster to licensed dealers, where she falsely claimed the guns were for her own use. Webster bought at least 51 firearms, at least 37 of them straw purchases. The pair sold the guns to a buyer from Chicago, who met them in Lafayette, Indiana, and took them back to Chicago. Of the 24 firearms police later recovered, 17 were found in Chicago or nearby Illinois cities. Both were sentenced in May 2024: Osborne to 45 months in federal prison, Webster to 18 months.*

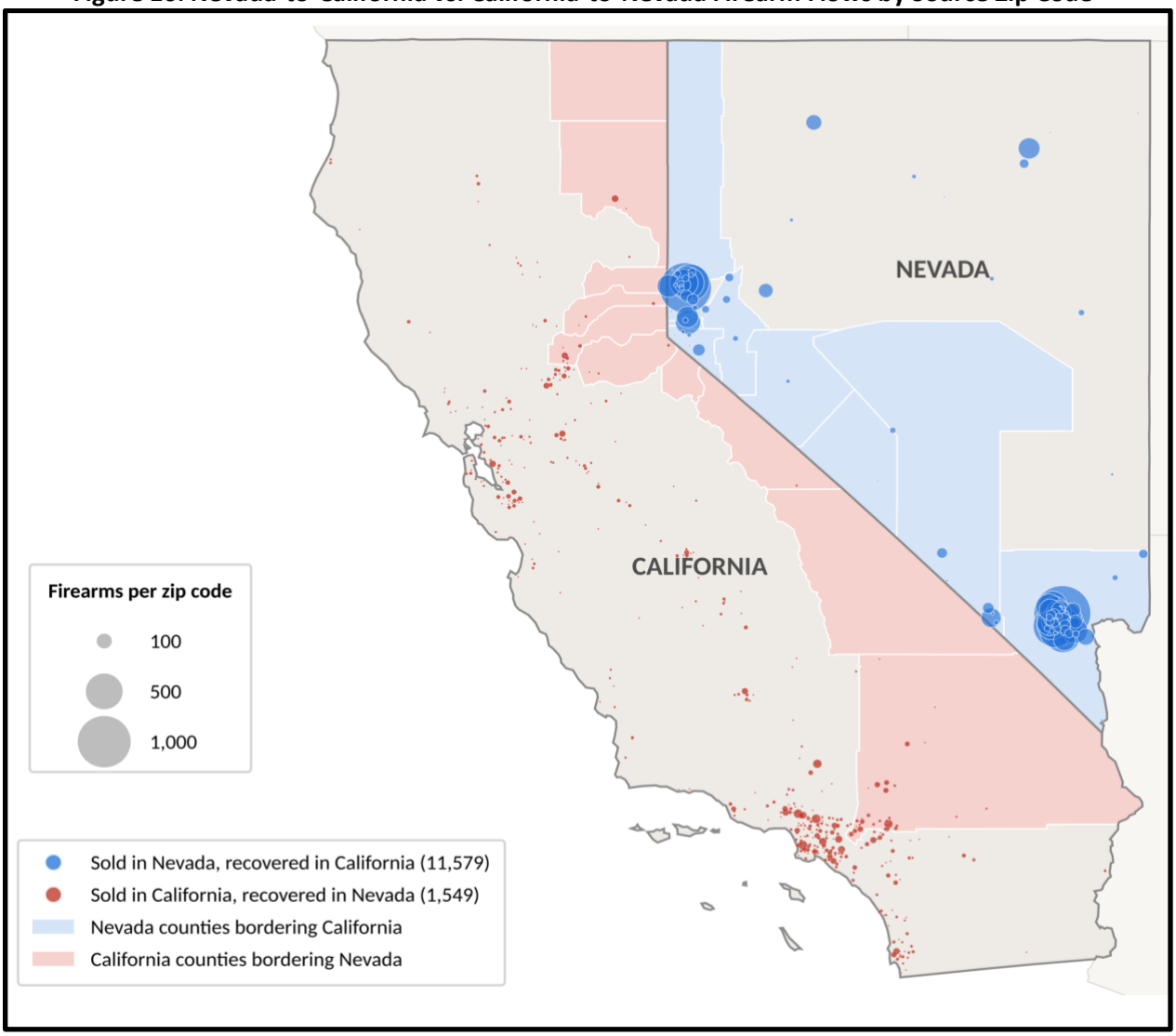
Nevada to California

The Nevada–California corridor drew national attention after the 2019 Gilroy Garlic Festival shooting, carried out with a rifle bought legally in Nevada that could not have been sold in California. In 2023 alone, 2,065 crime guns recovered in California had first been sold in Nevada. Researchers at UC Berkeley and UC Davis found that firearm deaths and injuries in nearby California communities rose about 70 percent in the two weeks after Nevada gun shows (2005–2013).[55] Nevada sends 43.4 percent of its traced firearms recovered in the United States to other states, a higher share than Arizona. It is also the fifth-largest source of firearms recovered in a bordering state, after Arizona, Indiana, Georgia and Virginia. Nevada-sourced firearms recovered in California totaled 11,579, versus 1,549 going the other way, a ratio of nearly 7.5 to 1. For short-TTC firearms the ratio is about 18 to 1.

The destination is the most concentrated of any corridor: California receives 73.8 percent of the firearms Nevada sends to other U.S. states, and the share rises as time-to-crime shortens, from 68.9 percent of long-TTC to 84.8 percent of short-TTC firearms. Because Nevada's two largest metro areas are in counties that border California, about 97 percent of the flow comes from border counties, led by Clark County (Las Vegas, 8,020 firearms) and Washoe County (Reno and Sparks, 2,417). North Las Vegas (89030) and Reno (89502) are the largest source zip codes for firearms recovered in California, and North Las Vegas is the largest border-state source zip code in the country for long-TTC firearms.

As on the Arizona border, the Nevada side of the line has far more gun dealers than the California side. Zip codes in Nevada's border counties averaged 7.3 licensed dealers each, compared with 2.3 on the California side. The two areas have similar populations, about 3 million people each,[56] yet Nevada's border counties had 26 dealers in ATF's Demand 2 program from 2022 to 2024, 16 of them in all three years, compared with nine on the California side. Demand 2 is reserved for dealers traced to 25 or more crime guns recovered within three years of sale in the previous calendar year. All five Nevada zip codes that send the most firearms into

Figure 16: Nevada-to-California vs. California-to-Nevada Firearm Flows by Source Zip Code



Note: Each bubble represents the number of firearms purchased in a Nevada zip code and recovered in California (blue), or purchased in a California zip code and recovered in Nevada (red), 2021–May 2026.

California, in North Las Vegas, Las Vegas, Reno, and Sparks, had a dealer in the program.[57] Three of the five California zip codes that send the most firearms into Nevada also had one, but all five together sent just 76 firearms into Nevada, compared with 3,496 from the top five Nevada zip codes.

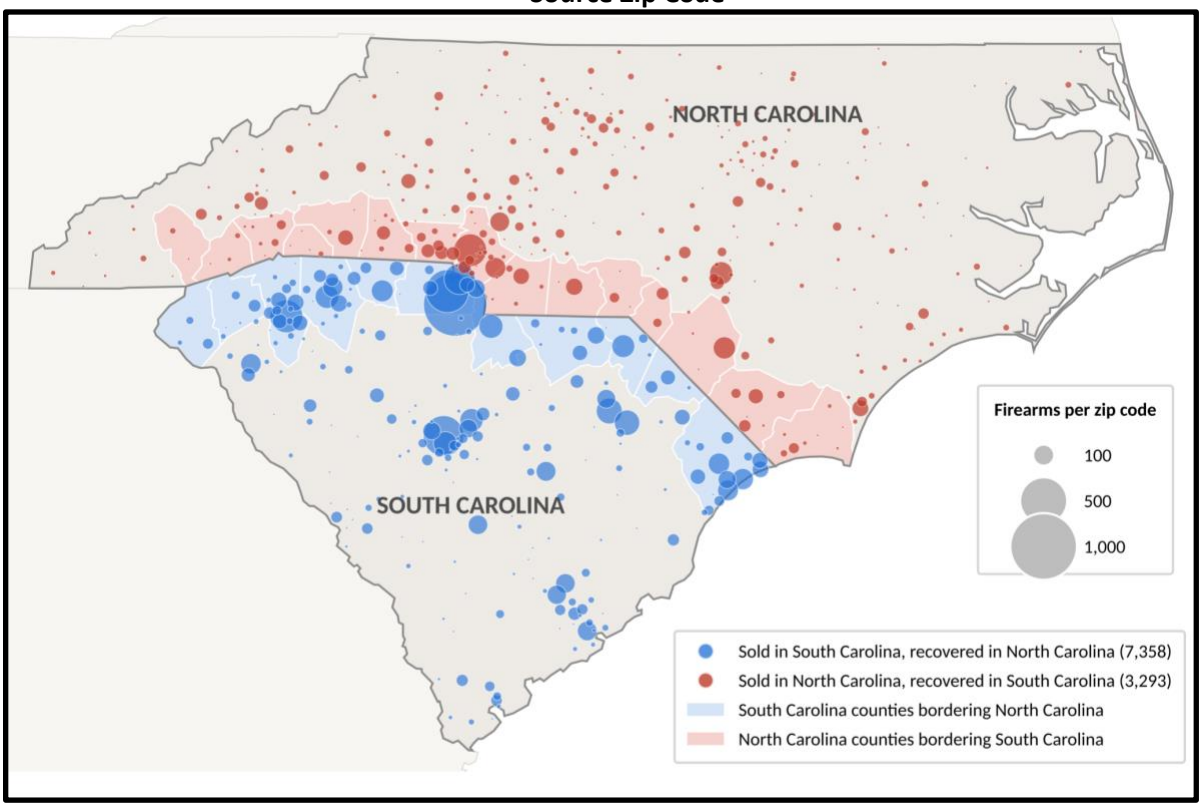
> **VEGAS VENDOR:** *A California buyer in Nevada gun stores. Kenneth Earl Smith Jr., of Lancaster, California, used fraudulently obtained driver's licenses to pose as a Nevada resident and buy firearms from licensed dealers in Las Vegas, Henderson, and Pahrump between February 2020 and October 2021. He then resold more than 50 of them without a dealer license. He was sentenced to 63 months in federal prison in October 2023.*

South Carolina to North Carolina

South Carolina to North Carolina is the fourth-largest one-way bordering-state flow: 7,358 South Carolina-sourced firearms were recovered in North Carolina, versus 3,293 going the other way, a ratio of about 2.2 to 1. An analysis of ATF's 2023 trace data conducted by the group Everytown likewise ranks South Carolina as the leading out-of-state source of crime guns recovered in North Carolina, with 6 percent of those with a known source state.

Statewide, the flow is less one-sided than other state-to-state corridors, but it is concentrated in one place: York County, on the southern edge of the Charlotte metro area, accounts for 1,647 of the firearms South Carolina sends to North Carolina. Rock Hill (29730) alone sent 891, making it the ninth-largest border-state source zip in the country, followed by two other York County zip codes, a second Rock Hill zip (29732, 413) and Fort Mill (29708, 216). Rock Hill (29730) sends over two thirds of its out-of-state firearms to North Carolina, rising to 81.1 percent for short-TTC firearms. A majority of all firearms traced to York County were recovered outside South Carolina. The opposite flow from Mecklenburg County (Charlotte) into South Carolina is just 454 firearms.

Figure 17: South Carolina-to-North Carolina vs. North Carolina-to-South Carolina Firearm Flows by Source Zip Code



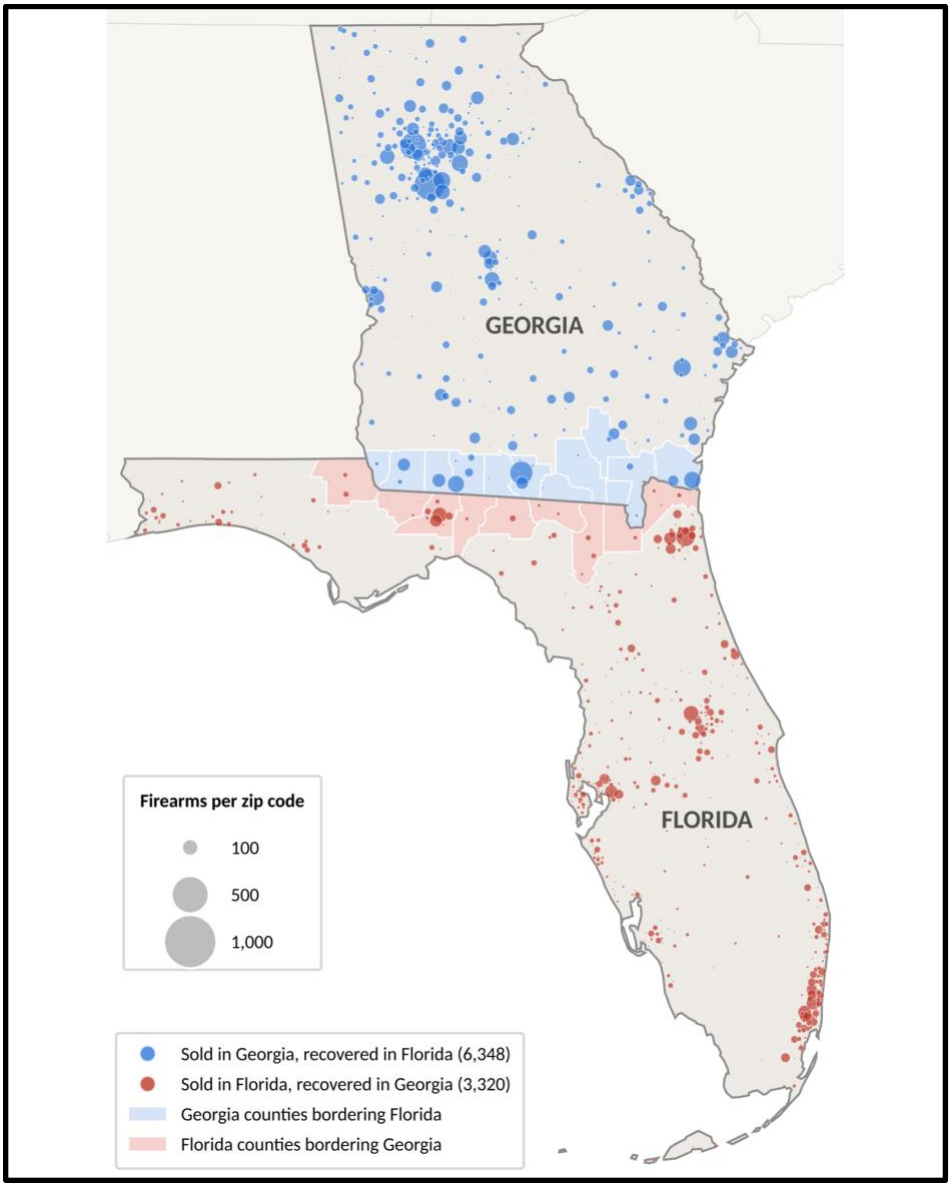
Note: Each bubble represents the number of firearms purchased in a South Carolina zip code and recovered in North Carolina (blue), or purchased in a North Carolina zip code and recovered in South Carolina (red), 2021–May 2026.

Federal prosecutors have pursued the same connection. In 2022, a Rock Hill man was sentenced to 15 years in federal prison after selling ten firearms, along with drugs, to undercover agents in Union County, North Carolina, just across the state line. In June 2026, a Fort Mill man pleaded guilty to straw purchasing firearms for a Charlotte-based trafficker who could not legally buy guns. ATF agents bought about 106 guns from that trafficker in Charlotte and Baltimore, many of them from North and South Carolina. Charlotte can be both a destination and a transit point: the trace data show where these firearms were purchased and recovered, but not other places through which they passed.

Georgia to Florida

Georgia to Florida is the fifth-largest one-way flow, but the movement of guns also runs substantially in the other direction: 6,348 Georgia-sourced firearms were recovered in Florida,

Figure 18: Georgia-to-Florida vs. Florida-to-Georgia Firearm Flows by Source Zip Code



Note: Each bubble represents the number of firearms purchased in a Georgia zip code and recovered in Florida (blue), or purchased in a Florida zip code and recovered in Georgia (red), 2021–May 2026.

while 3,320 Florida-sourced firearms were recovered in Georgia (948 versus 364 for short-TTC firearms). Georgia is the leading out-of-state source of firearms recovered in Florida, more than twice the next state, Alabama (2,768), and Florida is the leading out-of-state source of firearms recovered in Georgia, just ahead of Alabama (3,213). The Florida-to-Georgia flow is led by Jacksonville (Duval County), Miami-Dade, and Broward.

The flow from Georgia comes mainly from the Atlanta metro rather than the state border: Cobb, Clayton, Gwinnett, and Henry counties lead, and the top two source zip codes, Jonesboro (30236, 341 firearms) and Smyrna (30080, 253), are the same suburban zip codes that lead the within-state gun traces. Only one in eight of the traced guns comes from Georgia counties along the Florida line, led by Valdosta (31602). Georgia, the third-largest border-state source in the country, spreads its border-state firearms across all of its neighbors: Florida receives 39 percent, followed by North Carolina (17.3 percent), South Carolina (16.1 percent), Tennessee (15.2 percent), and Alabama (12.5 percent).

Court cases also reflect the flow from Georgia. In 2024, federal prosecutors in Miami charged two men from Atlanta and nearby Conyers with buying firearms and ammunition in Georgia, hiding them inside an air tank, and shipping them through Doral, Florida, toward the Caribbean island of Saint Martin. Here, as in the Carolinas, Florida served as a stopover as well as a destination.

Firearms also move north. In 2020, police arrested 11 Georgia residents after 44 guns were stolen from a Tallahassee gun store. In a separate case, five Florida residents pleaded guilty to bringing stolen firearms from central Florida into Charlton, Brantley, and Wayne counties in southeast Georgia.

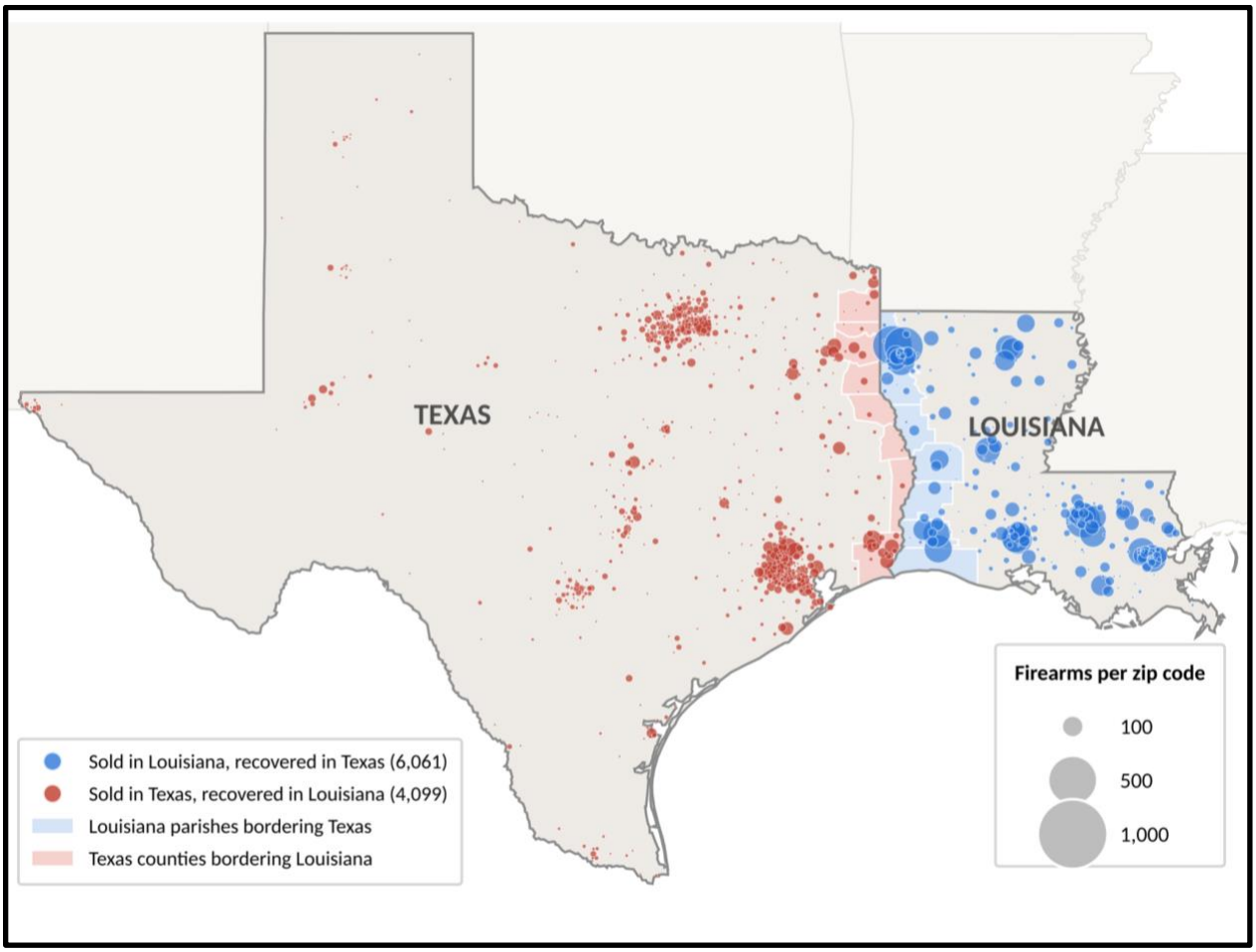
Louisiana to Texas

Louisiana to Texas is the sixth-largest one-way flow and, of the ten largest flows between neighboring states, the most balanced in each direction. Louisiana-sourced firearms recovered in Texas totaled 6,061, versus 4,099 going the other way, about 1.5 to 1 (similar to the ratio for short-TTC firearms). Texas to Louisiana is itself the eleventh-largest one-way border-state flow in the country.

Louisiana's flow into Texas is led by the Shreveport–Bossier City area, which sits near the Texas line: the top two source zip codes are in Shreveport (71107, Caddo Parish) and Bossier City (71111, Bossier Parish). They are followed by Baton Rouge, Jefferson Parish, and Lafayette. Less than a quarter of these firearms come from parishes along the Texas line. The flow toward Louisiana is led by Texas's largest metros, particularly Houston (Harris County, 1,171 firearms), Dallas, and Fort Worth. This is a two-way flow between metro areas in neighboring states, not a one-directional corridor.

This flow is not new. An investigation by The Advocate found that in 2021, 1,084 crime guns recovered in Texas had first been sold in Louisiana, more than the 724 Texas-sourced guns recovered in Louisiana, even though Texas has about seven times Louisiana's population. Texas was nonetheless the leading out-of-state source of crime guns recovered in Louisiana.

Figure 19: Louisiana-to-Texas vs. Texas-to-Louisiana Firearm Flows by Source Zip Code



Note: Each bubble represents the number of firearms purchased in a Louisiana zip code and recovered in Texas (blue), or purchased in a Texas zip code and recovered in Louisiana (red), 2021–May 2026.

Virginia to Maryland

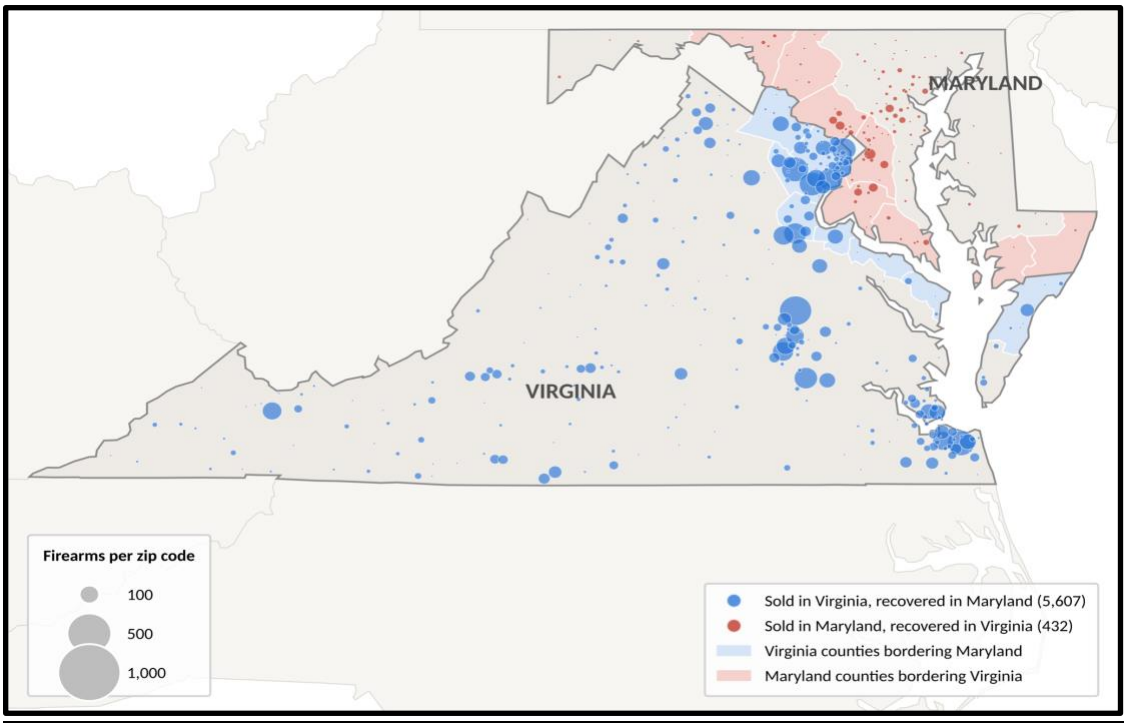
Virginia to Maryland is the seventh-largest one-way flow and the third most one-sided of the ten largest one-way flows between neighboring states, after Arizona to California and Indiana to Illinois. Virginia sent 5,607 firearms to Maryland and received 432, a ratio of nearly 13 to 1 (807 versus 58 for short-TTC firearms). Virginia also sent 3,580 firearms to Washington, D.C. while receiving just 24. Combined, 9,187 Virginia-sourced firearms were recovered in Maryland and D.C., including 1,407 short-TTC firearms.

This flow from Virginia does not start in one place. About a quarter (25.9 percent) comes from Virginia counties along the Maryland line.[58] The sources are spread across the state, from Fairfax and Prince William counties in Northern Virginia to Chesterfield, Hanover, and Virginia Beach. The small flow from Maryland to Virginia is led by Prince George's and Montgomery counties.

This pattern is part of what officials and advocates call the "Iron Pipeline," the I-95 corridor on the Eastern Seaboard along which guns bought in states with looser laws move to states with stricter ones. Out-of-state guns now make up a majority of Maryland's traced crime guns. Baltimore Magazine reported that they reached 54 percent in 2019, up from 38 percent two decades earlier, and that more than 1,000 crime guns recovered that year traced back to Virginia alone. A June 2026 Everytown fact sheet based on ATF data found that in 2023, Virginia was the source of 14 percent of crime guns recovered and traced in Maryland.

Our data tell the same story. Of the firearms recovered in Maryland, 54 percent were first sold in another state. Firearms first sold in Virginia make up 14.7 percent of all firearms recovered in Maryland and 27.2 percent of those first sold outside Maryland. Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott has argued that most guns recovered in the city come from outside Maryland.

Figure 20: Virginia-to-Maryland vs. Maryland-to-Virginia Firearm Flows by Source Zip Code



Note: Each bubble represents the number of firearms purchased in a Virginia zip code and recovered in Maryland (blue), or purchased in a Maryland zip code and recovered in Virginia (red), 2021–May 2026.

Some prosecutions involve buyers who travel deep into Virginia or recruit straw purchasers there, rather than buying just across the line. In one Eastern District of Virginia case, two half-brothers traveled to Virginia to buy guns and resold them for profit, and some were later recovered in Maryland and Washington, D.C. In another case, a Roanoke felon used straw buyers to acquire at least 25 firearms, several of which were later recovered in connection with crimes in Maryland, New York, and Washington, D.C.

The policy landscape for gun supply in Virginia is now shifting. In 2026, the state enacted a package of gun laws, including a ban on future sales and manufacture of assault-style firearms. Most of the measures took effect July 1, 2026; that same day the U.S. Department of Justice sued Virginia to block the assault-weapons ban, calling it unconstitutional. These changes took effect after the period covered by our data, which ends in May 2026.

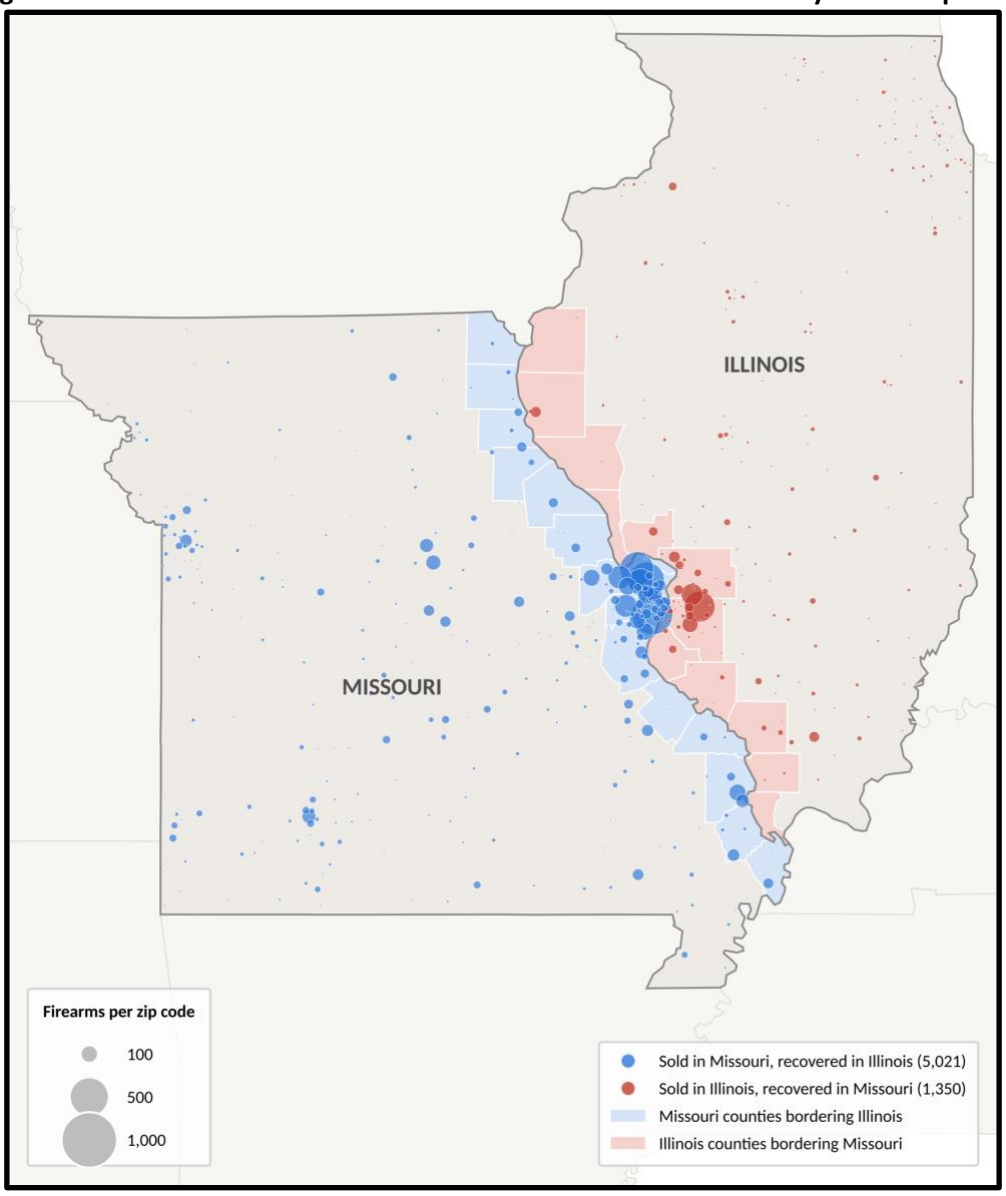
Missouri to Illinois

Missouri to Illinois is the eighth-largest one-way flow between neighboring states. Missouri-sourced firearms recovered in Illinois totaled 5,021, compared to 1,350 going the other way, a ratio of over 3.7 to 1. For short-TTC firearms the ratio is about 6.7 to 1. The movement of arms is clustered around the St. Louis area: St. Louis County, St. Charles County, Jefferson County, and the City of St. Louis account for 62 percent of firearms recovered in Illinois traced to Missouri. Most of this flow is from Missouri counties along the Illinois line. Two in five short-TTC Missouri firearms recovered outside Missouri were recovered in Illinois.

One zip code stands out: St. Louis (63123, Affton), in St. Louis County, sent 539 firearms into Illinois. The opposite flow into Missouri comes mostly from the Illinois side of the same metro area, with St. Clair and Madison counties accounting for 769 of the 1,350 firearms. Together with the Indiana corridor, this means Illinois receives lopsided flows from two neighbors: from Indiana, led by dealers near Chicago, and from Missouri, largely through dealers in the St. Louis area.

Missouri's role as a source of Illinois crime guns appears in earlier analyses of ATF data, though it gets far less attention than Indiana's. Based on 2021 ATF trace data, 24/7 Wall St. found that Missouri supplied nearly twice as many crime guns to Illinois as to Kansas, another neighboring state. From the Illinois side, Missouri ranked second among out-of-state sources, behind Indiana, in a state where 53 percent of traced guns came from outside its borders. Observers often point to the gap in the two states' laws. Illinois requires a permit and background check for every gun purchase, while Missouri requires no permit, registration, or background check for private sales. One editorial argued that none of Illinois's neighbors has looser gun laws than Missouri.

Figure 21: Missouri-to-Illinois vs. Illinois-to-Missouri Firearm Flows by Source Zip Code



Note: Each bubble represents the number of firearms purchased in a Missouri zip code and recovered in Illinois (blue), or purchased in an Illinois zip code and recovered in Missouri (red), 2021–May 2026.

The concentration in the St. Louis metro area of crime guns moving to Illinois is consistent with other reporting on St. Louis-area dealers. A USA Today investigation, as reported by FOX 2 St. Louis, used ATF records to identify more than 20 St. Louis-area gun outlets that each sold at least 25 guns traced to crimes in a single year with a time-to-crime under three years, the threshold for ATF's Demand 2 program. In Illinois, Sen. Dick Durbin met with law enforcement leaders in East St. Louis in 2013 to discuss gun trafficking. Then–St. Clair County State's Attorney Brendan Kelly described a flood of illegal firearms coming into East St. Louis.

Enforcement has continued: in July 2026, Illinois State Police ran a violent crime suppression detail in St. Clair and Madison counties in the Metro East. In June, a Ferguson man pleaded guilty after admitting he unlawfully bought firearms, including 27 later recovered in Illinois, Kentucky, and Missouri; among them were guns he bought from dealers in St. Louis County and St. Charles. On one purchase, he was accompanied by a convicted felon from Illinois who helped pay, and one of the guns was recovered in Columbia, Illinois, after a carjacking in which the victim was shot. In July, ATF and federal prosecutors in St. Louis launched a public campaign against straw purchasing. Federal cases also show that some guns move through St. Louis to destinations well beyond the area, including a St. Louis-to-Chicago trafficking ring, charged in 2021, that allegedly moved guns north for resale in Chicago.

Mississippi to Tennessee

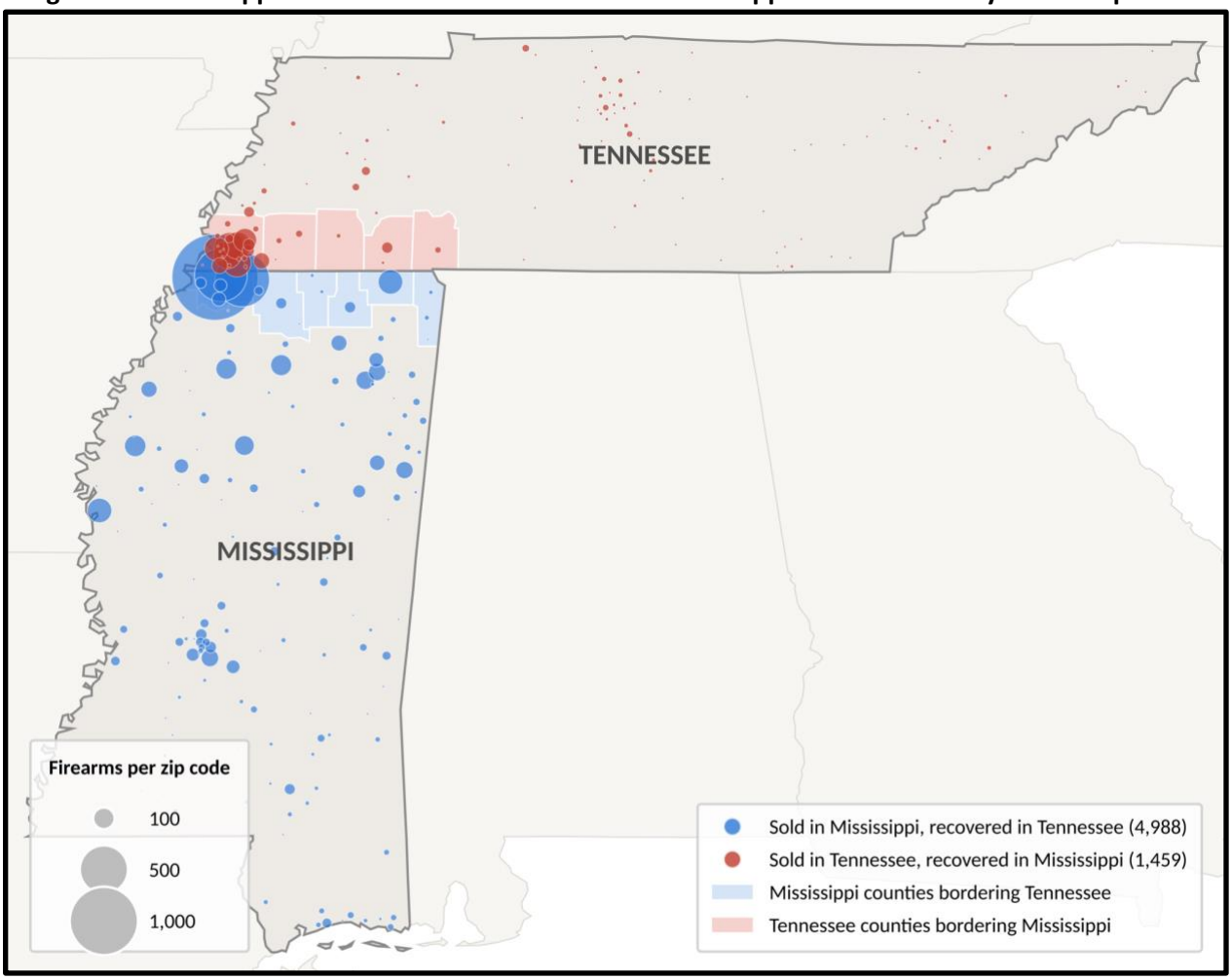
The Memphis corridor is the ninth-largest one-way flow between neighboring states by volume of crime gun traces, but the most concentrated. One zip code dominates: Horn Lake, Mississippi (38637), a Memphis suburb just across the state line, is the largest border-state source zip code in the country, both overall and for short- and mid-TTC firearms. It alone sent 1,573 firearms into Tennessee, 31.5 percent of the statewide flow. Together with two more DeSoto County suburbs, Olive Branch (625) and Southaven (593), three neighboring zip codes account for 56 percent of the entire Mississippi-to-Tennessee flow.

Mississippi-sourced firearms recovered in Tennessee totaled 4,988, versus 1,459 going the other way, a ratio of about 3.4 to 1. Two thirds of firearms traced to purchases in DeSoto County, MS were recovered outside Mississippi. The opposite flow comes mostly from the Memphis area: Shelby County accounts for 1,164 of the 1,459 firearms recovered in Mississippi and traced to a purchase in Tennessee. This is less a relationship between two states than a single suburban retail market that straddles a state line.

Unlike the Virginia–Maryland and Missouri–Illinois corridors, this flow has drawn little public attention, but ATF data has shown it for decades. An ATF crime gun trace report on Memphis from the late 1990s found Mississippi to be the city's leading out-of-state source, though Tennessee itself supplied far more. In ATF's 2019 trace data for Memphis, Mississippi accounted for 512 traced firearms, second only to Tennessee, and in ATF's statewide Tennessee data for 2020, Mississippi was the leading out-of-state source. Our data show the same pattern: Mississippi is by far the largest out-of-state source of firearms recovered in Tennessee, with about twice as many as the next state, Georgia (2,470).

Seen from the Mississippi side, the pattern is even clearer. ATF's National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment state report for Mississippi lists Memphis as the top recovery city for Mississippi-sourced crime guns over 2017–2021, with 3,006, more than Jackson,

Figure 22: Mississippi-to-Tennessee vs. Tennessee-to-Mississippi Firearm Flows by Source Zip Code



Note: Each bubble represents the number of firearms purchased in a Mississippi zip code and recovered in Tennessee (blue), or purchased in a Tennessee zip code and recovered in Mississippi (red), 2021–May 2026.

Mississippi's own capital (2,302). Unlike the Indiana–Illinois or Virginia–Maryland corridors, this flow does not move from a lax-law state into a strict-law one. Like Mississippi, Tennessee does not require background checks on private sales, has no waiting period, and does not ban assault weapons (see Methods).

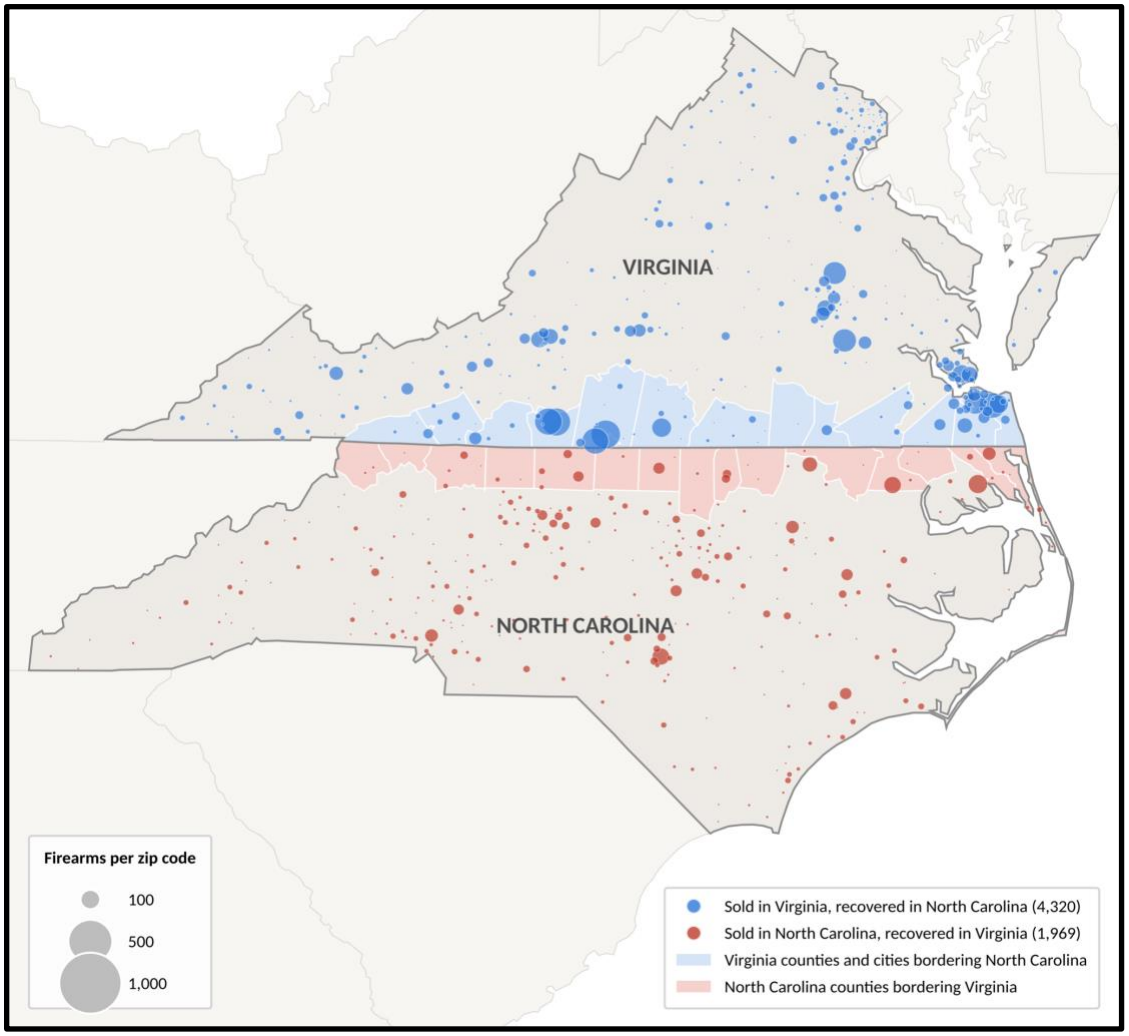
Virginia to North Carolina

Virginia to North Carolina represents the tenth largest number of border-state gun traces. Virginia-sourced firearms recovered in North Carolina totaled 4,320, versus 1,969 going the other way, a ratio of 2.2 to 1. Unlike the Maryland flow, this one is concentrated in purchases near the state border: nearly 40 percent comes from Virginia counties along the North Carolina line, led by Virginia's Southside region. Danville (24540 and 24541), Martinsville (24112), and Collinsville (24078) are four of the top five source zip codes, and Danville, Martinsville, and the surrounding Pittsylvania and Henry counties together sent about 850 firearms. Hampton Roads

(Virginia Beach and Norfolk) is the other main source. Together, Maryland, North Carolina, and Washington, D.C. receive more than 90 percent of Virginia's border-state firearms, even though Virginia shares a long border with West Virginia. Virginia is the fourth-largest border-state source in the country.

One possible factor is a difference in the two states' handgun laws. Until March 2023, North Carolina required anyone buying a handgun to first obtain a permit from the local sheriff, who conducted a character evaluation and criminal history check. Virginia had no comparable permit requirement, although since July 2020 it has required background checks on all firearm sales, including private sales (see Methods). The Republican-controlled legislature repealed North Carolina's permit system over Gov. Roy Cooper's veto in 2023. Since then, Virginia's requirements have been the stricter of the two. Whether these differences shaped this flow, and whether the repeal changed it, are questions for future study.

Figure 23: Virginia-to-North Carolina vs. North Carolina-to-Virginia Firearm Flows by Source Zip Code



Note: Each bubble represents the number of firearms purchased in a Virginia zip code and recovered in North Carolina (blue), or purchased in a North Carolina zip code and recovered in Virginia (red), 2021–May 2026

Seen from North Carolina's side, Virginia is a relatively small source. In our data, 78 percent of the firearms recovered in North Carolina were bought from North Carolina dealers, and Virginia accounts for just 3.4 percent, behind South Carolina. North Carolina is itself a major supplier of guns recovered along the I-95 corridor: New York is its largest out-of-state destination, and it ranks among the leading out-of-state sources for New York, New Jersey, and Maryland.

The border concentration of crime gun sources around Danville and Martinsville, Virginia matches what local law enforcement has described as a cross-border problem. In 2020–21, the Danville Police Department and the Caswell County, North Carolina, Sheriff's Office ran a seven-month joint investigation, with ATF and Virginia State Police support, targeting drug and firearm trafficking across state lines. Guns move both ways across this stretch of the border. In 2022, police arrested a suspect in North Carolina for a burglary at a Danville pawn shop in which seven firearms were stolen. Earlier, Danville's police chief had displayed a seized shotgun reported stolen from Burlington, North Carolina, an example of guns moving in the other direction.

7.2 Trafficking Between Non-Border States

The remaining 331,201 out-of-state gun traces, 57.1 percent of the category, travel between states that share no border, including 4,898 firearms recovered in U.S. territories. The best-known route is the so-called "Iron Pipeline," the I-95 corridor running from Southeastern states with lighter regulation through the Mid-Atlantic and into the Northeast. Previous research suggests it is only one of several. A 2024 study by researchers at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health examined 526,801 crime guns traced to interstate purchases between 2010 and 2019 and found that guns regularly moved between states along several major highways. Along I-95, northbound flows into New Jersey and Maryland were about three times higher than expected. The study also found other corridors, including I-75 and I-20 through the Southeast, that carried more guns than expected.[59]

> **MOVING IN BULK: *Georgia and South Carolina to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In April 2022, federal prosecutors unsealed two indictments charging 14 people with trafficking nearly 400 firearms up the Iron Pipeline route into Philadelphia. Eleven of those defendants were accused of moving nearly 300 firearms from the Atlanta, Georgia area, and three more of moving over 100 from the Myrtle Beach, South Carolina area, in both cases buying from licensed dealers with false statements and reselling on Philadelphia's black market. Some of the firearms had already been recovered in Philadelphia, often soon after purchase, by the time the charges were announced.***

Officials at the northern end of these routes have long named the states where the guns come from. A 2016 study by the New York Attorney General's office found that 74 percent of crime guns recovered in New York came from out of state, mainly from Pennsylvania, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, Florida, and Ohio, and warned that "the ready availability of these guns in states without these protections thwarts New York's efforts to keep its citizens safe." In 2018, New Jersey Attorney General Gurbir Grewal blamed the "weak" gun laws of Southern states such as North Carolina and Georgia.

Federal investigations show how the guns travel. In 2021, federal prosecutors in Manhattan charged nine people with running a "pipeline of illegal guns" from metro Atlanta to New York City, where a Georgia buyer's guns were carried north, mostly by bus, for resale in Brooklyn. An earlier Atlanta case ended in sentences for a crew that included straw buyers from Jonesboro and McDonough, who bought 33 guns at a single Atlanta dealer for delivery to Rochester, New York. In 2017, New York authorities seized 105 guns brought by bus from South Carolina and resold in Harlem. Georgia guns also reach the nation's capital. In 2024, two people were sentenced for trafficking more than 80 pistols bought from Georgia and Texas dealers, some of which were later linked to crimes, including an armed carjacking in D.C. In March 2026, prosecutors in Atlanta charged three people with straw-purchasing at least 68 firearms in north Georgia for delivery to Maryland and D.C. The guns also leave the mainland. In Central Florida, four men were sentenced for a scheme in which straw purchasers bought about 49 firearms from Central Florida dealers that were then shipped to buyers in Puerto Rico.

Non-border traces are more spread out than border-state traces. The 300 zip codes with the most non-border traces account for 26.9 percent of non-border firearms, compared with 36.8 percent for the top 300 border-state sources, and the ten largest one-way flows between non-bordering states account for just 11.4 percent, against 36.4 percent for the ten largest one-way flows between bordering states. Even so, a few patterns stand out.

The largest single transfer among non-border states is Texas to California: 8,708 firearms, about six times as many as go the other way, and more than 20 times as many among short-TTC firearms. California receives more non-border state firearms than any other state.

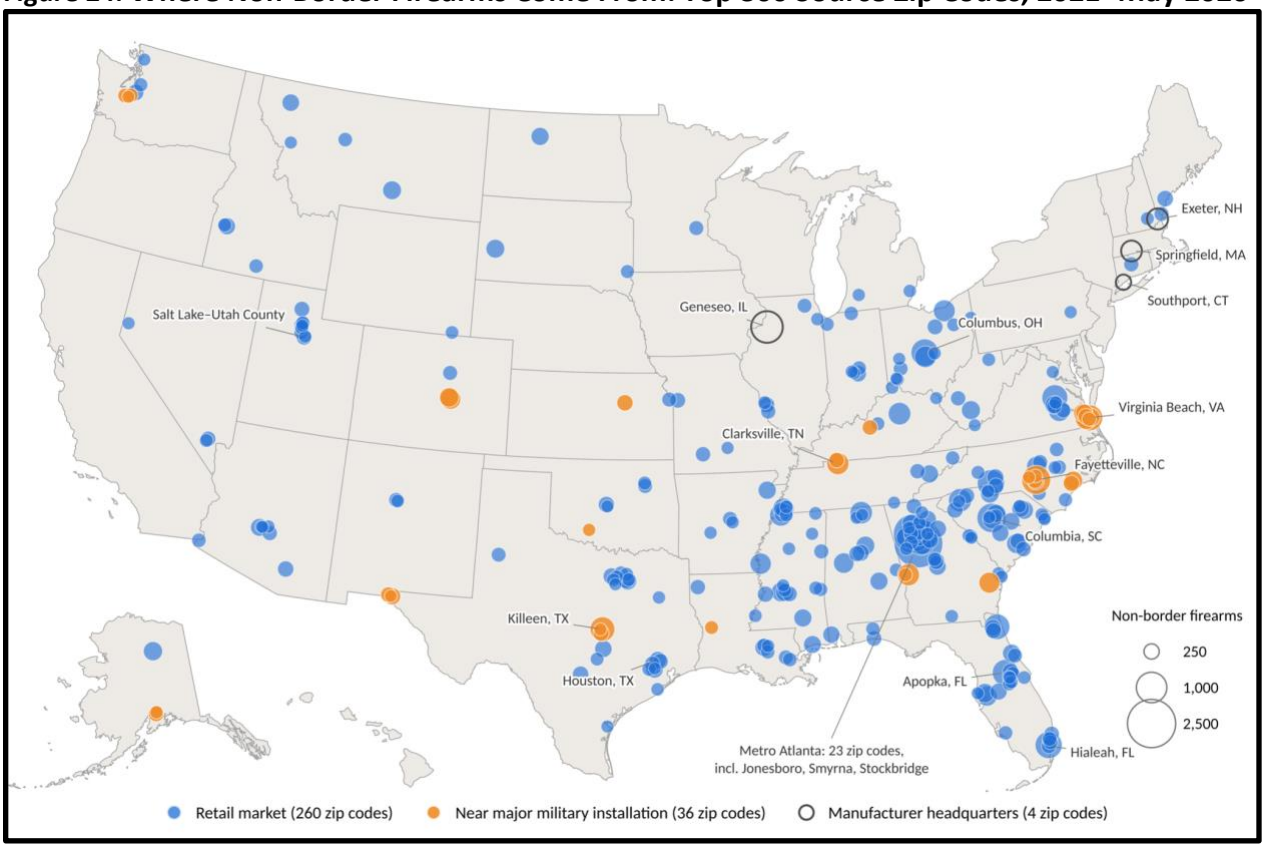
On the Iron Pipeline, New York is the clearest destination. Five of the ten largest non-border transfers end there, from Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, South Carolina, and Florida. Together these five states supply more than 60 percent of New York's non-border gun traces, and very few firearms travel in the other direction.

Two other transfers fall outside these patterns. Florida supplies more than half of the firearms recovered in Puerto Rico and traced to a U.S. state. Texas and Florida trade firearms almost evenly, the most balanced of the large non-border transfers.

Firearms that travel farther also tend to be older when they are recovered: about 1 in 10 non-border firearms was recovered within a year of purchase, compared with about 1 in 4 of those recovered in the state where they were bought, and 1 in 6.5 when recovered in border states. The fastest flows run along the Iron Pipeline. Of the firearms Georgia (13.9 percent), North Carolina (13.6 percent), and South Carolina (12.6 percent) send to non-bordering states, a higher share were recovered within a year of purchase than for any other state. Among destinations, D.C. (13.7 percent), Puerto Rico (13.3 percent), and New York (13.3 percent) have the highest share of non-border firearms recovered within a year of purchase.[60]

Goldsboro, North Carolina, illustrates how a single trafficking operation can stand out in this data. Most of its short-TTC non-border firearms were recovered in New York in a single

Figure 24: Where Non-Border Firearms Come From: Top 300 Source Zip Codes, 2021–May 2026



Top 300 zip codes by firearms recovered in non-bordering states, January 2021–May 2026. Bubble area shows the number of firearms. Color marks retail markets, zip codes near major military installations (see footnote X), and manufacturer locations. Bubbles for manufacturer sites may be the result of incomplete tracing processes. Source: ATF trace data obtained by Stop US Arms to Mexico; zip codes placed at Census ZCTA internal points.

year, 2024 (105 of 139). That same year, the New York Attorney General announced the takedown of a Queens operation that bought guns in Goldsboro and carried them to New York by bus. The trace data cannot show whether these are the same firearms.

The 300 zip codes that send the most firearms to non-bordering states are overwhelmingly suburban (84 percent), and most are in the Southeast, which holds more than half of them and 60 percent of their firearms.[61] Metro Atlanta is by far the largest cluster, with about two dozen zip codes across Clayton, Cobb, Gwinnett, Henry, DeKalb, Fulton, and nearby counties. Smaller clusters appear around Memphis and its Mississippi suburbs, Hampton Roads and Richmond in Virginia, Columbia and Charlotte in the Carolinas, Jackson, Mississippi, and Birmingham, Alabama. Non-border crime guns from Florida's zip codes are spread among Orlando, South Florida, Tampa, Jacksonville, and the Panhandle, and sources in Texas sit mainly in Houston, Dallas–Fort Worth, Killeen, and El Paso. Outside the South, the clearest groups are in Ohio, Utah's Wasatch Front, and Phoenix. The Northeast and Upper Midwest contribute only 20 zip codes, mostly in Indiana, Illinois, and northern New England, and the largest of them include the locations of four manufacturer headquarters discussed below.

Two kinds of zip codes stand apart from ordinary retail markets. The first is zip codes near major military installations. Thirty-six of the 300 zip codes that send the most firearms to non-bordering states sit next to a military base,[62] among them Fayetteville, North Carolina (Fort Bragg); Clarksville, Tennessee, and Oak Grove, Kentucky (Fort Campbell); Killeen, Texas; Colorado Springs; and Hampton and Norfolk, Virginia. These 36 zip codes account for 50,800 traced firearms, of which 11,942 were recovered in non-bordering states. The largest groups are around Naval Station Norfolk (2,782 non-border firearms across seven zip codes), Fort Bragg (1,803 across five), and Fort Cavazos in Killeen (1,119 across three), and the single largest zip code is Fayetteville's 28303 (902). Most of these firearms are older: 69 percent were recovered three or more years after purchase, and 11 percent within a year. Of all firearms traced to these 36 zip codes, about 1 in 4 was recovered in a non-bordering state, compared with about 1 in 7 nationally. Military service members are highly mobile: they typically receive orders to move to a new duty station every two to three years, often in another state. A firearm bought legally near one base may therefore move with its owner and later be recovered and traced far from where it was sold. Trafficking cases involving guns bought near these installations have also been documented. In 2022, three people stationed at Fort Campbell were charged with buying more than 90 guns from dealers in Clarksville and Oak Grove and selling them to gang members in Chicago. The trace data do not show how any given firearm reached the state where it was recovered.

The second is manufacturer headquarters. Four of the top 300 zip codes are home to major gun makers rather than retail markets: Geneseo, Illinois, home of Springfield Armory (which manufactured 183,136 firearms in 2024); Springfield, Massachusetts, the long-time headquarters of Smith & Wesson before its move to Tennessee in 2023; Exeter, New Hampshire, SIG Sauer's headquarters until 2012; and Southport, Connecticut, headquarters of Sturm, Ruger & Co. until 2026. Each company held a federal firearms license at these zip codes throughout the study period.[63] More than 80 percent of the traced firearms from each were recovered in non-bordering states, compared with about 15 percent nationally, while few were recovered soon after sale (with the exception of Southport). This suggests the trace process for these firearms ended at the manufacturer, which distributes nationwide, rather than at a local store. Data for these four zip codes should be read with that caution.

Figure 25. Top 10 Non-Border Source Zip Codes by Time-to-Crime, 2021–May 2026

Rank	Zip code	Location	Short TTC	Mid TTC	Long TTC	Total	Short TTC, % of total	Top 3 non-border destinations
1	30236	Jonesboro, GA	372	784	1,363	2,519	14.8%	NY (558), MD (303), NJ (208)
2	30080	Smyrna, GA	235	429	993	1,657	14.2%	NY (302), MD (184), CA (167)
3	61254	Geneseo, IL †	40	65	971	1,076	3.7%	TX (161), FL (123), CA (115)
4	29210	Columbia, SC	127	222	561	910	14.0%	NY (189), FL (97), MD (81)
5	28303	Fayetteville, NC *	129	194	579	902	14.3%	NY (134), FL (99), MD (84)
6	43224	Columbus, OH	61	106	630	797	7.7%	NY (134), FL (76), IL (72)
7	28208	Charlotte, NC	125	214	454	793	15.8%	NY (210), NJ (79), FL (63)
8	33014	Hialeah, FL	27	54	699	780	3.5%	TX (96), CA (67), NC (57)
9	30281	Stockbridge, GA	141	213	403	757	18.6%	NY (170), CA (96), IL (65)
10	32703	Apopka, FL	43	87	611	741	5.8%	PR (94), NY (89), CA (52)

*Note: Short TTC = recovered less than 1 year after purchase; mid = 1 to 3 years; long = 3 years or more. Destinations are non-bordering states or U.S. territories, with firearm counts in parentheses. † Manufacturer headquarters (Springfield Armory). * Next to a military installation (Fort Bragg).*

8. Gun Laws, Federal Oversight, and Firearms Trafficking

In brief

- Federal efforts against gun trafficking expanded early in the period, with new strike forces, the first federal trafficking and straw-purchasing laws, and border operations. But ATF's capacity to oversee dealers has since shrunk, to 722 inspectors for nearly 128,000 licensees in 2025.
- Mexico has pursued its own legal, enforcement and diplomatic strategies, including litigation against gun manufacturers and Arizona gun dealers, the latter of which continues in a U.S. federal court.
- States without universal background checks, assault weapons bans, or waiting periods have far more traced guns per resident recovered within a year of purchase.
- The gap is largest when the laws are combined: states with none of the three have about six times the rate of the eight jurisdictions with all three (228 versus 37 per 100,000 residents), and the gap grows for guns that cross state lines.
- Zip codes with a dealer in ATF's Demand 2 program, about 7 percent of the total, supplied two-thirds of guns recovered within a year in the state of sale and nearly three in five of those recovered in Mexico. ATF paused the program in 2025.
- The dealer-level data needed to judge which policies work remain largely out of public reach.

How do the patterns of gun trafficking relate to the rules and policies that govern gun sales and trafficking?

We start with what earlier research has found, and with how federal and Mexican efforts against gun trafficking changed between 2021 and 2026. We then look at two kinds of rules. The first is state gun laws, which vary a lot from state to state. The second is federal oversight of licensed gun dealers, which applies across the U.S. We compare states with and without key gun laws using our data (8.1), look at what ATF's own list of high-risk dealers tells us (8.2), and close with the data still needed to answer these questions (8.3). Our comparisons are descriptive: they show patterns, but they do not prove that any law causes them. U.S. territories are left out, since their legal systems are not directly comparable to the states'.

What earlier research has found

Researchers have used ATF trace data for more than two decades to ask whether state gun laws affect where crime guns come from. Their answer is consistent: guns tend to flow from states with weaker gun laws into states with stronger ones, and several specific laws are linked to fewer guns ending up in crime.

An early study of 25 cities found that in states with handgun licensing and registration, only about a third of crime guns (33.7 percent) had been sold in the same state. In states with neither, it was 84.2 percent.[64] Economist Brian Knight later showed that crime guns move from weaker-law states to stronger-law states, mostly between neighbors, and that gun possession by criminals is higher in states that border weaker-law states.[65] A study of all 50 states from 2006 to 2016 found that waiting periods, permit-to-purchase rules, and two other laws were each linked to fewer crime guns coming from in-state dealers. Each additional law meant a drop of 1.6 percentage points.[66] And a 2024 study by Columbia University researchers found that these flows follow major interstate highways, such as I-95, I-75, I-20, and I-10.[67]

Gun dealers, and the rules they follow, matter too. A study of 54 cities found two to four times more in-state trafficking in states that did little to regulate and oversee gun sellers. Gary and Indianapolis, Indiana, and Phoenix and Tucson, Arizona, were among the cities with the most.[68] When Missouri repealed its permit-to-purchase law in 2007, gun homicides rose,[69] and a later study found that more of the state's homicide guns had been bought in Missouri and recovered within a year of purchase.[70]

The same patterns reach across the southern border. One estimate found that about 213,000 guns a year were bought in the United States to be trafficked to Mexico between 2010 and 2012, roughly 2.2 percent of all U.S. gun sales.[71] When the federal assault weapons ban expired in 2004, homicides and gun seizures rose in Mexican towns near Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico, but not near California, which kept its own ban.[72] Another study found that states that limit multiple sales, require background checks on private sales, prosecute straw buyers, or restrict assault weapons send fewer crime guns to Mexico, even after accounting for distance from the border.[73] Most recently, researchers found that states with assault weapons bans are less likely to be the source of guns recovered in Mexico, especially guns recovered soon after purchase, even after accounting for other gun laws and factors.[74]

How federal and Mexican policy changed, 2021–2026

The years covered by our data, 2021 to 2026, brought their own changes in efforts against gun trafficking, on both sides of the border. In July 2021, the Department of Justice launched five regional firearms trafficking strike forces in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay Area/Sacramento, and Washington, D.C., to disrupt the flow of illegally trafficked guns into those regions from source areas. In June 2022, Congress passed the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which created the first standalone federal statutes specifically targeting

firearms trafficking and straw purchasing; by June 2023, DOJ had charged more than 100 defendants under those provisions, and more than 500 by June 2024.

DOJ's Operation Southbound, which deployed nine interagency firearms trafficking task forces to eight Southwest border cities, reported that nearly 2,000 firearms were seized in the first half of fiscal year 2023 alone — a 66 percent increase over the same period a year earlier — while a parallel DHS effort, "Operation Without a Trace," reported more than 700 arrests and more than 1,900 firearms seized since its start. The administration also expanded Mexican law enforcement's direct access to ATF's eTrace system, which by mid-2023 reached 18 Mexican states and Mexico's federal Attorney General's Office, and Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control sanctioned individuals identified as trafficking high-caliber weapons to Mexican criminal organizations. These seizures were nevertheless small compared with the scale of the trade: researchers estimate that about 135,000 firearms were trafficked from the United States to Mexico in 2022 alone.

Federal oversight is shrinking

Federal law sets a baseline for every state. Licensed dealers must run a background check on every sale, but private sellers are not required to. ATF licenses and inspects the country's gun dealers, so its capacity to do that job matters for every trafficking route described in this report.

But ATF's capacity to oversee dealers is limited, and it is shrinking. In 2024, the agency had 857 inspectors. By 2025, it was down to 722 inspectors for nearly 128,000 licensed dealers and other licensees. That year, it conducted about 8,500 inspections, enough to reach roughly one licensee in 15. In April 2025, the Justice Department ended ATF's "zero tolerance" policy toward dealers with serious violations.

Mexico Policy Actions

Mexico pursued its own legal, enforcement, and diplomatic strategies. Its leadership has publicly and repeatedly called on the United States to take action to reduce the flow of illicit weapons and placed the issue on the bilateral agenda. In 2021, the Mexican government sued seven gun manufacturers, among them Smith & Wesson, Barrett, Colt, Glock and Ruger, in federal court in Massachusetts, arguing that their marketing and distribution practices knowingly fueled cartel access to weapons.[75] The First Circuit allowed the case to proceed, but on June 5, 2025, a unanimous Supreme Court held that the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act barred the suit, concluding that Mexico had not plausibly alleged that the companies aided and abetted unlawful sales.[76]

A second suit, filed in 2022 in federal court in Tucson, targets five Arizona dealers: three in Tucson, one in Phoenix and one in Yuma.[77] Mexico alleges that each ranked among the ten dealers with the most crime guns recovered in Mexico and traced to Arizona, citing repeated sales of military-style firearms to prolific straw purchasers, guns that were subsequently trafficked to Mexico. The cities named in the suit, Tucson, Phoenix and Yuma, are the same cities whose zip codes lead Mexico gun traces. This suit continues in federal court in Tucson.

Mexico also asked the Inter-American Court of Human Rights for an advisory opinion on the human rights obligations surrounding the firearms industry; the opinion, issued in March 2026, found that states have a duty of due diligence to prevent illicit firearms trafficking, including by supervising gun manufacturers.

8.1 Background checks, assault weapon bans, and waiting periods

To see how our data compare with this research, we looked at three laws that recur in the studies reviewed earlier in this section. Each is counted if it covers handguns or all firearms (see Methods):

- Universal background checks, which extend checks to private sales, whether at the point of sale or through a permit to purchase;
- Statewide assault weapons bans; and
- Waiting periods, including waits imposed through a permit-to-purchase process.

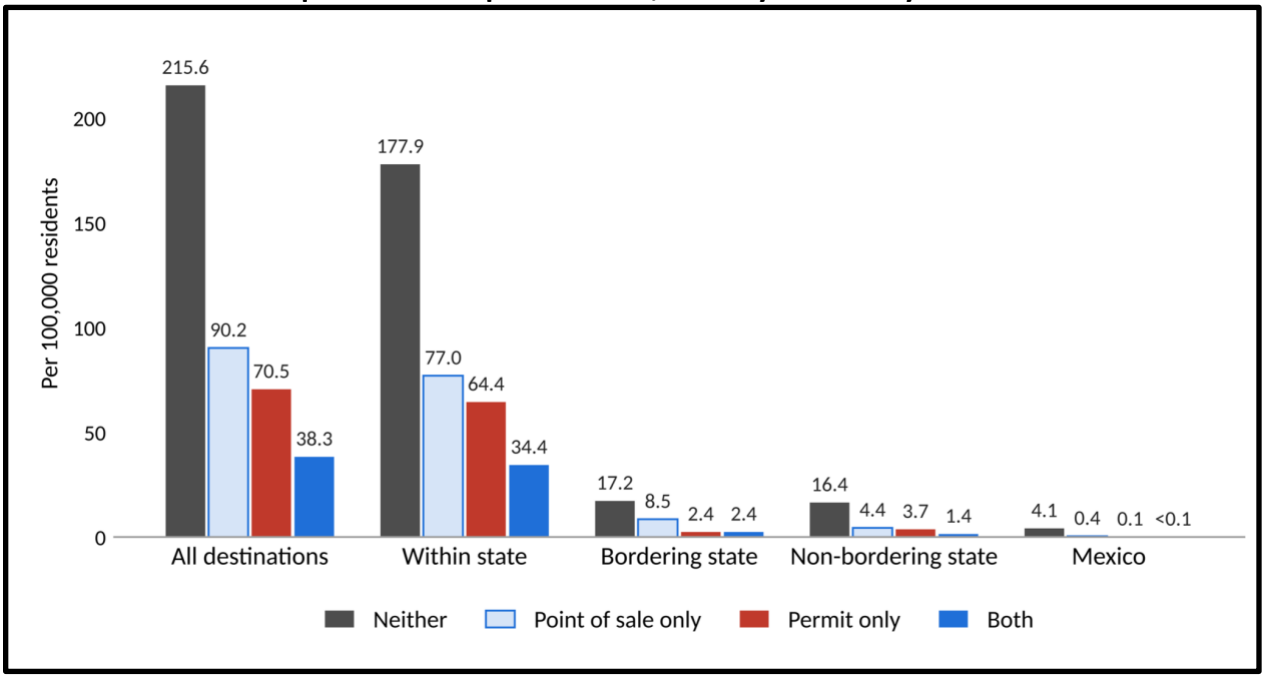
We counted a law as in place only if it was in effect for most of the period we study, January 2021 to May 2026, and based our coding on the RAND State Firearm Law Database.[78] We focus on firearms recovered within a year of their first retail sale (short time-to-crime), for two reasons. Short time-to-crime is the strongest indicator of possible trafficking, and because these guns were sold shortly before they were recovered, we can be confident they were bought under the laws in force during our study period. A gun recovered three or more years after sale may have been bought under different rules; North Carolina, for example, repealed its handgun permit requirement in 2023, and Iowa repealed its permit to acquire in 2021. For each group of states, we added up every short-TTC traced gun first sold there, wherever it was later recovered, and divided by the group's population.[79]

The clearest pattern involves background checks on private sales. States that require neither a permit to purchase nor a background check at the point of sale have 216 traced guns per 100,000 residents recovered within a year of purchase. States with point-of-sale checks only

have 90, states with a permit requirement only have 70, and the five states with both (Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey, and New York) have 38, less than one-fifth the rate of states with neither (Figure 26).

The gap is largest for guns that leave the state where they were sold. Short-TTC guns recovered in bordering states are about seven times as common from states with neither law as from states with both, and guns recovered in non-bordering states are about 11 times as common. Guns traced from states with either kind of check almost never turn up in Mexico within a year of sale: less than one per 100,000 residents, compared with four in states with neither.

Figure 26. Short-TTC traced firearms per 100,000 residents, by state background check requirement for private sales, January 2021–May 2026

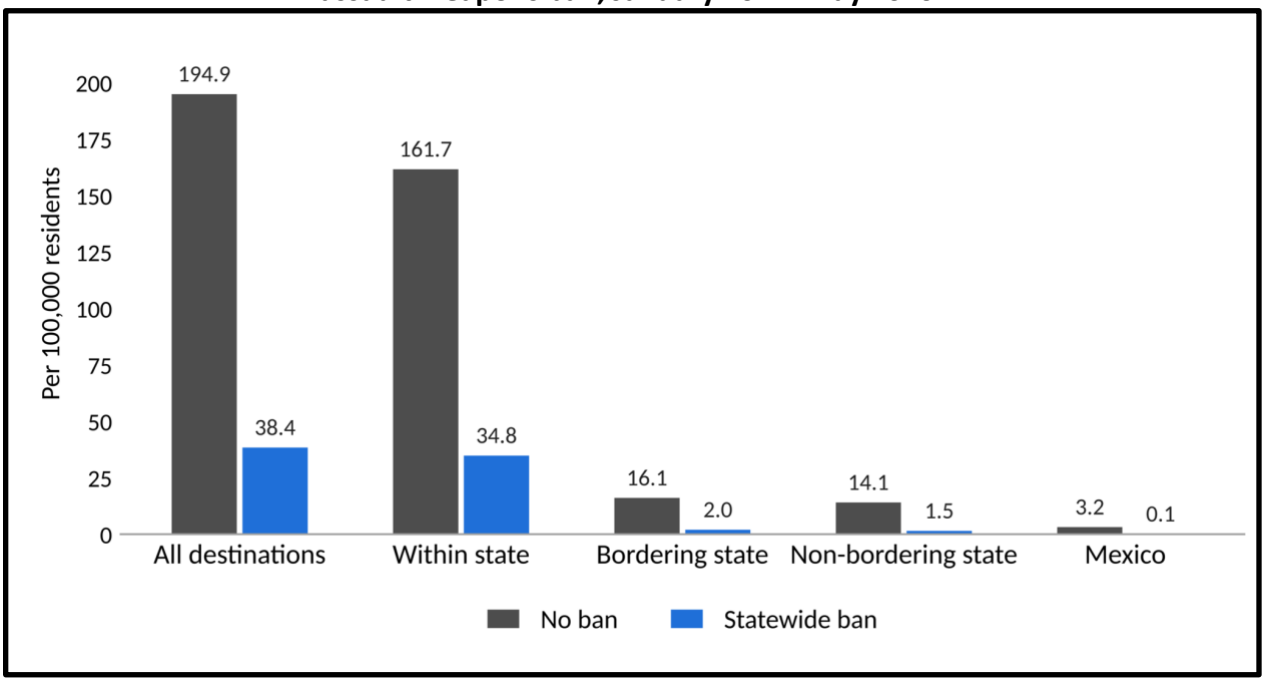


Note: Short time-to-crime (TTC) = recovered within one year of first retail sale. Firearms are counted by the state where they were first sold, regardless of where they were recovered, and rates pool all firearms and residents in each group. Groups do not overlap: "Permit only" states require a permit to purchase (issued after a background check) for handguns or all firearms but no point-of-sale check on private sales; "Point of sale only" states require a background check at the time of private sales of handguns or all firearms but no permit; states with both (CT, IL, MD, NJ, NY) appear only in "Both." Neither: 29 states; point of sale only: 11; permit only: 6; both: 5. A law counts as in place if it was in force for more than half of the period (see Methods). Bordering-state rates exclude Alaska and Hawaii, which have no neighboring states.

These patterns are consistent with the research reviewed earlier. Permit-to-purchase requirements examined in previous studies are associated with fewer crime guns coming from in-state dealers and fewer guns moving quickly from sale to crime.[80] Background checks on private sales were among the laws linked to fewer crime guns sent to Mexico.[81] And the larger

gaps we find for guns recovered across state lines are consistent with the finding that crime guns flow from states with less restrictive laws to states with more restrictive ones.[82] The difference between permit-only and point-of-sale-only states is small, and with only six and eleven states in those groups, we do not read it as evidence that one approach works better than the other. What stands out is that states with both requirements have the lowest rates, and states with neither have by far the highest.

Figure 27. Traced firearms with short TTC per 100,000 residents, by whether the state has an assault weapons ban, January 2021–May 2026



Note: Short time-to-crime (TTC) = recovered within one year of first retail sale. Firearms are counted by the state where they were first sold, wherever they were recovered, and rates pool all firearms and residents in each group. Statewide ban (11 jurisdictions): California, Connecticut, Delaware, D.C., Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Washington. A ban counts if it covers assault pistols or assault rifles; Hawaii's covers assault pistols only. Delaware, Illinois, and Washington adopted their bans in 2022–2023 and are counted because the bans were in force for more than half the period (see Methods). Colorado is counted as having no ban, because only Denver has a local ban. Bordering-state rates exclude Alaska and Hawaii, which have no neighboring states. Sources: ATF trace data by source zip code (Stop US Arms to Mexico, via FOIA); RAND State Firearm Law Database; U.S. Census Bureau population estimates.

The gap in crime gun traces is similar for states with assault weapons bans. States without a statewide ban have 195 traced guns per 100,000 residents recovered within a year of purchase, compared with 38 in the 11 jurisdictions with a ban, a ratio of about five to one (Figure 27). As with background checks, the gap grows for guns that cross state lines: about eight to one for guns recovered in bordering states and nine to one for guns recovered in non-bordering states. Short-TTC guns traced to Mexico come almost entirely from states without a ban: 3.2 per 100,000 residents, compared with 0.1 in states with one. States with assault weapons bans are

home to about a third of U.S. residents but supplied just 1.5 percent of the short-TTC guns recovered in Mexico since 2021 (107 of 7,357).

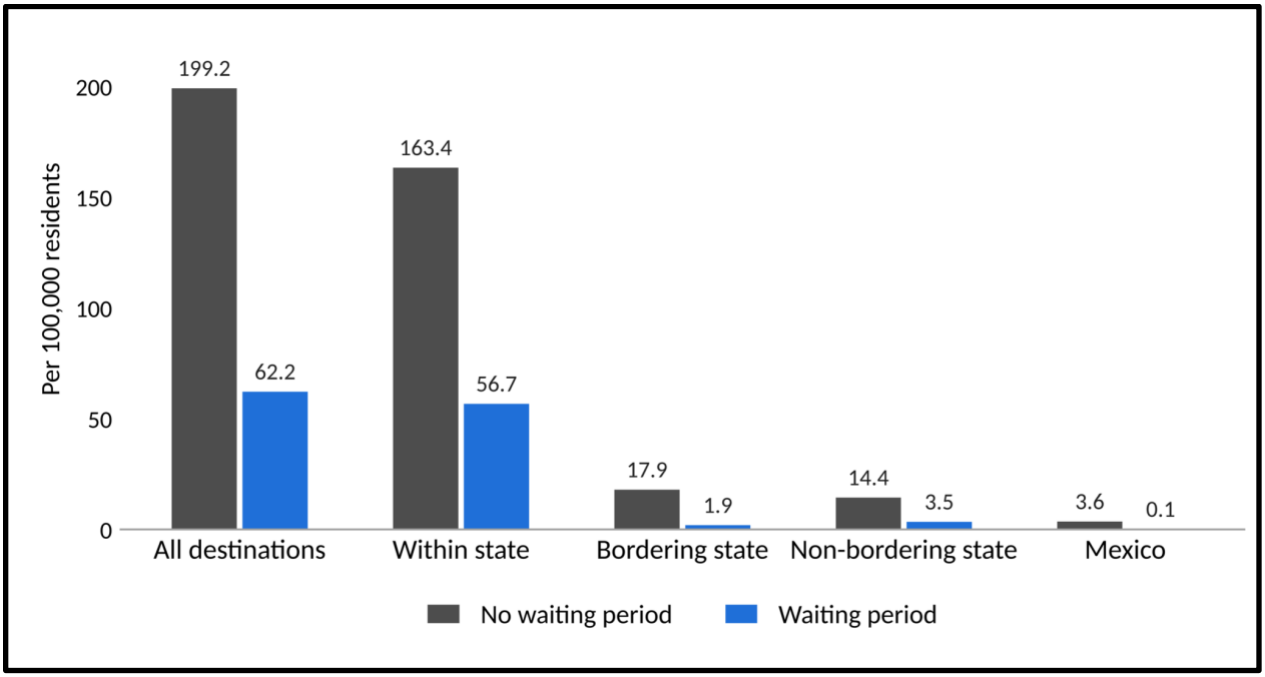
California shows the pattern most clearly. It is the third-largest source of guns recovered in Mexico overall, supplying 11 percent of those recovered three or more years after sale, but just 1 percent of those recovered within three years (82 of 7,357 short-TTC guns and 113 of 9,966 mid-TTC guns). This is consistent with research finding that the link between assault weapons bans and fewer guns trafficked to Mexico is strongest for guns recovered soon after purchase.[83] California's older guns in Mexico may reflect theft, resale, or years of movement after a lawful sale, rather than guns bought to be trafficked. California also has several other laws that may contribute, including background checks on private sales and a waiting period.

These findings match the earlier research on assault weapons and Mexico reviewed at the start of this section. Our data show the same pattern for guns recovered within a year of sale, both across the border and within the United States.[84] States that restrict assault weapons send fewer crime guns to Mexico, even after accounting for distance from the border, and states with assault weapons bans are less likely to be the source of guns recovered in Mexico, especially guns recovered soon after purchase. Our data show the same pattern for guns recovered within a year of sale, both across the border and within the United States.

Waiting periods show the same pattern. States without a waiting period have 199 traced guns per 100,000 residents recovered within a year of purchase, compared with 62 in the 14 jurisdictions with one, a ratio of about three to one (Figure 28). The gap is widest for guns that cross state lines: about nine to one for guns recovered in bordering states and four to one for guns recovered in non-bordering states. And states with a waiting period are home to about 40 percent of U.S. residents but supplied just 2 percent of the short-TTC guns recovered in Mexico (158 of 7,357).

These results add to the evidence that waiting periods make a difference. The 50-state study referenced earlier found that waiting periods were among the laws linked to fewer crime guns coming from in-state dealers,[85] and our data point the same way for guns that moved into crime within a year of sale. The mechanism is straightforward. A waiting period puts time between the decision to buy a gun and the moment the buyer walks out with it, which deters impulsive purchases and makes it harder for traffickers and straw buyers to acquire guns quickly and in volume. In five states (Connecticut, Michigan, Nebraska, New Jersey, and New York), that wait comes through the permit process, a reminder that these laws often come as a package. That raises the question we turn to next: whether states with more of these laws see fewer guns move quickly into crime.

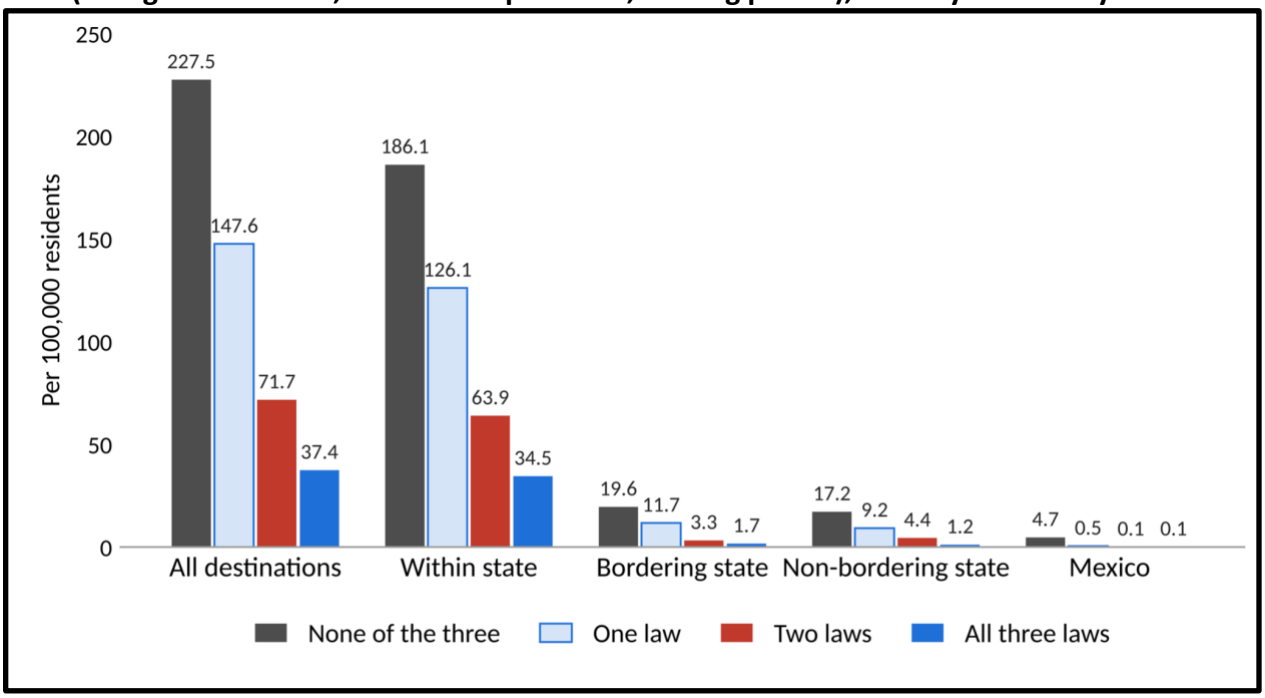
Figure 28. Traced firearms with short TTC per 100,000 residents, by whether the state has a waiting period, January 2021–May 2026



Note: Short time-to-crime (TTC) = recovered within one year of retail sale. Firearms are counted by the state where they were first sold, wherever they were recovered, and rates pool all firearms and residents in each group. Waiting period (14 jurisdictions): California, Connecticut, D.C., Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont. A waiting period counts if it covers handguns or all firearms, including waiting periods built into a permit-to-purchase system. Vermont's (2023) is counted because it was in force for more than half the period; Colorado's (2023), Washington's (2024), Maine's (2024), and New Mexico's (2024) are not (see Methods). Bordering-state rates exclude Alaska and Hawaii, which have no neighboring states. Sources: ATF trace data by source zip code (Stop US Arms to Mexico, via FOIA); RAND State Firearm Law Database; U.S. Census Bureau population estimates.

Taken together, the three laws show a clear gradient (Figure 29). States with none of them have 228 traced guns per 100,000 residents recovered within a year of purchase. The rate falls to 148 in states with one of the laws, 72 in states with two, and 37 in the eight jurisdictions with all three, about one-sixth the rate of states with none of these laws. The gradient is steepest for guns that cross state lines: guns recovered in bordering states are about 12 times as common from states with none of the laws as from states with all three, and guns recovered in non-bordering states about 15 times as common. The 28 states with none of the three laws are home to 44 percent of U.S. residents but supplied 94 percent of the short-TTC guns recovered in Mexico.

Figure 29. Traced firearms with short TTC per 100,000 residents, by number of laws in place (background checks, assault weapons ban, waiting period), January 2021–May 2026



Note: Short time-to-crime (TTC) = recovered within one year of first retail sale. Firearms are counted by the state where they were first sold, wherever they were recovered, and rates pool all firearms and residents in each group. Laws counted: background checks on private sales (permit to purchase or point-of-sale check), a statewide assault weapons ban, and a waiting period, each counted if it covers handguns or all firearms and was in force for more than half the period (see Methods). All three (8): CA, CT, DC, HI, IL, MD, NJ, NY. Two (8): DE, MA, MI, MN, NE, RI, VT, WA. One (7): CO, FL, NM, NV, OR, PA, VA. None: the other 28 states. Bordering-state rates exclude Alaska and Hawaii, which have no neighboring states.

There is good reason to think laws like these work best together. Each one covers a different step between a legal sale and a crime: background checks screen buyers, including in private sales; waiting periods slow purchases down; and assault weapons bans limit which guns can be sold at all. A state with only one of these laws leaves the other paths open. A buyer stopped by one rule may find a way around it, or simply cross into a neighboring state, which is exactly the movement of firearms that our data capture. The background check comparison points the same way: states that require both a permit and a point-of-sale check have the lowest rates of any group. Earlier research found that each additional law is linked to fewer crime guns coming from in-state dealers,[86] and our data show the same step-by-step decline for guns that moved quickly from a retail counter into crime.

8.2 Federal oversight of dealers: ATF's Demand 2 program

What is the Demand 2 program?

ATF has long kept track of the dealers whose guns most often turn up quickly in crimes. Under its Demand 2 program, any retail dealer or pawnbroker with 25 or more guns traced in crimes within three years of sale, in a single calendar year, received a letter adding new reporting requirements. The main one: after an initial report, these dealers had to report every three months each used gun they acquired from someone who was not a licensed dealer, including its serial number, until ATF told them to stop.[87] The rationale is that a normal trace only leads back to the dealer who first sold a gun. With these reports, ATF could also trace used guns to the dealers who later acquired and resold them. Being in the program did not mean a dealer had broken the law. It meant that many of the dealer's guns had later been traced to crimes, which can reflect high sales, poor sales practices, or both.

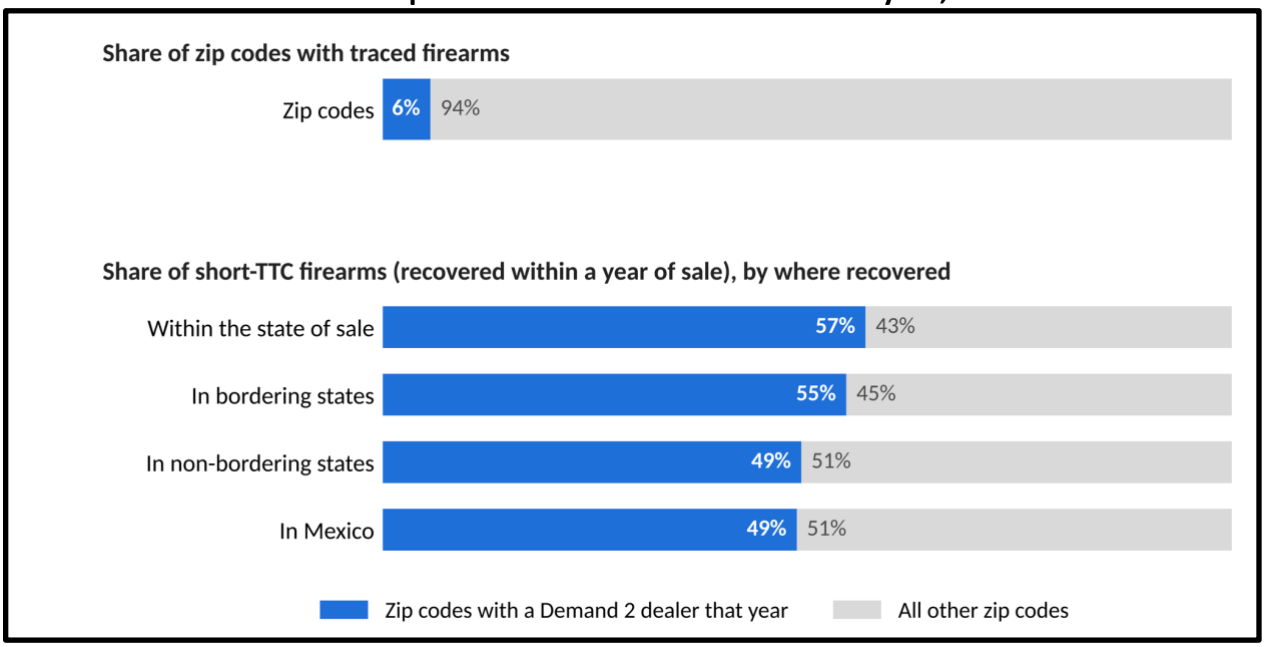
Through the Freedom of Information Act, Brady United Against Gun Violence obtained the letters sent from 2022 to 2024, plus an incomplete list for 2021, covering 1,724 dealers. We matched these dealers to the zip codes in our data. All figures below refer to guns recovered within a year of their sale (short time-to-crime), the clearest sign that a gun moved quickly from a store into crime.

The program pointed ATF at the right places. From 2021 to 2024, the 1,426 zip codes with at least one Demand 2 dealer made up about 7 percent of zip codes where traced guns were sold, yet they supplied two-thirds of the guns recovered within a year in the state of sale, 61 percent of those recovered in other states, and 58 percent of those recovered in Mexico.[88]

The list was also a reliable guide from one year to the next: in each year from 2022 to 2024, zip codes with a dealer on that year's list, about 5 to 6 percent of the total, supplied roughly half of the short-TTC guns in every destination. And about seven in ten of these zip codes were in states that require neither a permit to purchase nor point-of-sale background checks on private sales.[89]

Figure 30 shows the three years combined: zip codes with a Demand 2 dealer made up 6 percent of zip codes, but accounted for 49 to 57 percent of short-TTC guns, depending on where they were recovered. The pattern held every year: in 2022, 2023, and 2024, zip codes with a dealer in the program that year made up only 5 to 6 percent of all zip codes, yet they accounted for more than half of the short-TTC guns traced within the state of sale and in bordering states, and about half of those traced in non-bordering states and in Mexico. The list was therefore a consistent guide to where short-TTC crime guns came from. Most dealers also stayed on the list from one year to the next: 837 dealers were in the program in all three years, and 72 percent of those in it in 2024 had also been in it in 2022.

Figure 30. Share of zip codes and of traced firearms with short TTC, by recovery destination and whether the zip code had a Demand 2 dealer that year, 2022-2024



Note: Bars combine 2022–2024. "Demand 2 zip codes" are zip codes with at least one dealer in ATF's Demand 2 program in a given year, compared with all 19,169 zip codes with at least one traced firearm. The top bar shows their share of zip codes; the lower bars show their share of firearms recovered within one year of retail sale (short time-to-crime), by where the firearms were recovered. Non-bordering states include U.S. territories.

Measuring effects of the program

Our data does not identify firearms traces for individual dealers, and so cannot measure changes in crime gun outcomes for specific dealers after they received Demand 2 letters. Most zip codes have several dealers, so these figures describe the places where Demand 2 dealers were located, not the dealers themselves. Other factors besides Demand 2 letters may also have influenced any changes in the number of crime gun traces in a zip code.

In the United States as a whole, the observable effects of the program were negligible. In zip codes with a Demand 2 dealer, quickly recovered crime guns fell after the letters went out, but generally no faster than in similar zip codes outside the program.[90] The number of short-TTC firearms traced to purchases from all dealers declined between 2021 and 2025 by 42 percent, while the same number for zip codes with Demand 2 dealers fell by 45 percent.[91] On the other hand, short-TTC Mexico traces as a whole more than doubled during this period, while such gun traces from zip codes with Demand 2 dealers grew by 95 percent.

However, the changes in these short time-to-crime traces were not uniform across zip codes. Dealers in Jonesboro, Georgia, for example, were the source of the largest number of short-TTC guns of any zip code in 2021, and received multiple Demand 2 letters in 2021–2024. By 2025, there were fewer than one-sixth as many short-TTC gun traces to Jonesboro as in 2021. In one

zip code in the north of Phoenix (85027), where one of the more than 40 dealers received a Demand 2 letter for four years, short-TTC traces overall fell by 58 percent, from 144 to 60, while on the other side of the city, in zip code 85041, where no dealer was in the Demand 2 program, short-TTC traces grew in 2025 to 29 times what they were in 2021 (from 6 to 176).

And while short-TTC Mexico gun traces grew dramatically overall from 2021 to 2025, such traces declined between 32 and 89 percent in the eight zip codes with Demand 2 dealers among the 11 largest sources of such traces in 2021, all in Arizona and Texas: in Tucson (three zip codes); Yuma; San Antonio; Pharr, TX; Mesa, AZ; and El Paso. The other three zip codes among the 11, none with a Demand 2 dealer, declined as well, and the numbers involved are small, so these declines cannot be attributed to the program.

The program itself could have increased the number of traced guns for some Demand 2 letter dealers: because these dealers reported used guns they bought (unlike other dealers), more of those guns could be traced back to them.[92]

A program on pause

ATF reportedly paused the program in 2025, before that year's letters were sent. Since June 2025, no dealer has had to file Demand 2 reports.[93] Robert Cekada, now ATF's director, told Congress the pause would let the agency evaluate the program's effectiveness, but ATF has not said what data or method it would use, and no evaluation has been made public.

What our data do show is that the program was pointed in the right direction: year after year, it identified the small number of places supplying roughly half or more of the guns quickly diverted to crime, including guns trafficked across state lines and into Mexico.

Better data availability: Any assessment of the effects of specific laws and of the Demand 2 letter program on firearms trafficking is limited without dealer-specific data. ATF publishes trace data only in aggregate, mostly as state totals, and since 2003 a set of federal budget provisions known as the Tiahrt Amendments has limited the release of dealer-specific trace records.[94]

Regularly releasing trace data by zip code and time-to-crime, publishing the results of dealer inspections, and releasing the data collected under the Demand 2 program, along with any evaluation of it, would let researchers, policymakers, and the public see which policies reduce the flow of guns into crime, both in the United States and across the border into Mexico. Meanwhile, we encourage researchers to dig further into these datasets to understand how Demand 2 letters may affect traces.

9. Future Directions for Research

Stop US Arms to Mexico is making this dataset publicly available so that researchers and scholars can use it to inform policy and practice and, ultimately, to reduce the flow of firearms from legal sales to crime. This report offers a first look at what zip-code-level and other detailed firearms trace data can show about where crime guns are sold, where they are recovered, what kinds of guns are trafficked over the border, and how all of this is changing over time. Much more can be done with these data. Because each traced firearm is tied to the zip code where it was first sold, the dataset can be linked to local information on licensed dealers, population, income, poverty, urban or rural setting, and highway access, and it can follow changes from year to year and by time-to-crime. For example, lists of licensed gun dealers in each zip code, which are published regularly by the ATF, can be used to examine firearms traced to purchases in specific zip codes.

Another research path would examine the relationship between crime gun traces and the monthly number of firearms sales background checks by state. An inquiry could examine how the mix of license types in each zip code (retail dealers, pawnbrokers, and manufacturers) relates to changes in firearms traced to that zip code. Public records of prosecutions for straw purchases and firearms trafficking offer an opportunity to assess what impacts such prosecutions have had on firearms traces in the zip codes where those illegal transactions occurred. One could also use the data to measure what effects, if any, Mexico's litigation against gun manufacturers had on trafficking of weapons produced by those companies.

Another line of inquiry concerns U.S. territories. Trace data indicate that 4,898 firearms recovered in Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands were traced to U.S. states, more than half of them to Florida. Firearms flowing to and from the territories have received little attention, and the dataset allows a closer look at which source zip codes supply them and how quickly those firearms are recovered after sale.

A further line of inquiry would follow U.S. firearms to other countries. Firearms sold in the United States are also recovered in crimes in Canada and across the Caribbean. Trace data on those recoveries would allow the same analysis of where those firearms are first sold.[95] Other questions can build on the existing data, such as whether zip codes with more reported gun thefts also supply more trafficked firearms, or how dealer density and local demographics relate to short time-to-crime traces.

Separate from this report, we are conducting a policy analysis of how changes in state law affect firearms trafficking. Two recent changes offer natural test cases. In April 2023, Washington State banned the sale of assault weapons, and in March 2023, North Carolina repealed its pistol purchase permit requirement. Comparing trace patterns in zip codes in these states before and after each change, and against zip codes elsewhere, can show whether the laws changed how often firearms sold there are recovered in crimes, both in the state and beyond its borders.

10. Conclusions

Detailed trace data changes what can be seen about gun trafficking. State totals have long shown that guns flow from states with weak laws to states with strong ones. The data analyzed here shows which communities they leave from, where they end up, and how quickly they get there. Three themes run through the findings.

First, firearms sales that flow into trafficking are concentrated enough to target through regulation, enforcement and social norms. Gun trafficking runs through specific places. Now that those places can be named, they can be acted on. The same suburban retail markets appear again and again, across every time-to-crime and every destination: metro Atlanta, Glendale and Phoenix, Lake County, Indiana, North Las Vegas, and the Mississippi suburbs of Memphis. Several of them host dealers that ATF itself flagged for supplying guns recovered in crimes soon after sale. Along the Arizona–California border, where we compared federal inspection records, inspections of Arizona dealers cited nearly twice as many violations per dealer as inspections of California dealers. Dealer oversight and straw-purchasing enforcement can be focused on the areas where data points to trafficking hot spots.

Second, firearms trafficking over the U.S. border with Mexico is getting worse. In the United States, crime guns recovered soon after sale are becoming less common. But in Mexico they are becoming more common, driven above all by a single retail market in metro Phoenix, which accounts for nearly all of the increase. Arizona-purchased guns reach from communities in northern Sonora on the Arizona border to Chiapas on the Guatemalan border. Sales decisions made in U.S. gun stores are shaping violence far beyond U.S. borders.

Third, today's choices will have effects that last for years. More than half of the traced guns were sold at least three years before they were recovered, and that number is growing, from about 182,000 in 2021 to about 264,000 in 2025. Guns diverted now will keep turning up at crime scenes, in the United States and in Mexico, long after they leave the counter.

In 2025, the Supreme Court unanimously held that the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (PLCAA) barred Mexico's lawsuit against U.S. gun manufacturers. The ruling sharply limits the ability to hold the gun industry accountable through the courts. With that route closed, change depends on legislation, regulation, enforcement, and public pressure on the retail end of the market that this report documents.

A next phase of research will test whether specific state laws, prosecutions and policies cause these patterns. Making this dataset public makes it possible to see how firearms are moving out of our communities at a local and regional level. The information provides an opportunity to promote dialogue about the causes of gun trafficking, and to engage our neighbors, elected officials, local businesses, and advocates on what can be done. Stop US Arms to Mexico invites researchers, journalists and policymakers to take up those questions, too, and act on them.

11. Recommendations

To the U.S. Congress:

1. Reintroduce and approve legislation to **prohibit the sale to civilians of .50 caliber rifles**, known as the Stop Arming Cartels Act, H.R. 923 and S. 367.
2. Reintroduce and approve legislation to **universally require background checks** for the purchase of firearms in all states, H.R. 18 and S. 3214.
3. Reintroduce and approve legislation to **prohibit the sale to civilians of assault weapons and high-capacity magazines**, H.R. 3115 and S. 1531.
4. Reintroduce and approve the **Americas Regional Monitoring of Arms Sales (ARMAS) Act**, H.R. 6736 and S. 3508.
5. Reintroduce and advance bills to **repeal the Tiahrt amendments**, H.R. 4223 and S. 4776, to facilitate publication of the type of data in this report.

To the federal executive branch:

1. **Speak publicly about the role of firearms** in the violent operations of criminal organizations that have been designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations.
2. **Actively support Congressional passage** of legislation to prohibit .50 caliber rifles and assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, and enact universal background checks.
3. **Provide greater funding and authority to the ATF** to:
    a) Carry out inspections of gun dealers with large or new instances of crime gun traces, and regularly monitor gun shows where straw sales may be occurring.
    b) Provide greater incentives for ATF agents to conduct investigations of illicit conduct by licensed gun dealers.
    c) Focus on firearms regulation and enforcement, rather than immigration.
    d) Affirm the 2024 ATF guidance to prevent the use of Foreign Trade Zones and Customs Bond Warehouses as sites for reconfiguring prohibited firearms.
    e) Resume and build on the Demand 2 Letter program notifying dealers of large numbers of firearms trafficked from their sales.

To state governments:

States can act where Congress has not. Specifically, we urge state governments to:

1. Collect and publish crime gun trace data by dealer location, so that each state can see its own hot spots.
2. Require background checks on all firearm sales, through point-of-sale checks or a permit-to-purchase system.
3. Prohibit the sale of assault weapons and high-capacity magazines.
4. Establish waiting periods between purchase and transfer.

5. Strengthen state laws against straw purchasing and firearms trafficking, and fund state and local enforcement focused on the dealers and zip codes this report identifies.

To the government of Mexico:

Use this data and persist in litigation against gun dealers in the United States where there is evidence of facilitating trafficking or gross negligence in supplying the flow of firearms used in violence in Mexico.

To the gun violence prevention community:

Treat the U.S. gun market as a whole, and as an international problem. The same suburban retail markets supply crime guns to neighboring states, to distant cities, and to Mexico. Domestic and cross-border trafficking are one problem, not separate ones. Paths for this include:

1. Make measures to ban the circulation among civilians of assault weapons and .50-caliber rifles a shared priority. These are the weapons criminal organizations in Mexico seek most, and assault weapons are most often used in mass shootings in the United States. This is all the more critical as the U.S. Supreme Court weighs state and local assault weapons bans in 2027.
2. Just as gun violence prevention within the United States encompasses research, narratives, and advocacy on domestic violence, police accountability, mental health, and other issues, it should also address the ways that U.S.-sourced guns leaving the United States drive narcotics trafficking, forced displacement and migration, economic harms, human rights abuses, and other ills that we have a profound stake in curing.

To U.S. community advocates, U.S. local elected officials and law enforcement, Mexican government authorities, and journalists:

Use localized data on crime gun traces originating from gun dealers to ask questions, encourage dialogue, inform community members, and suggest solutions that stem the use of firearms in violence at home and beyond. In the zip codes identified in this report, that can include working with local dealers on stronger sales protocols, such as declining sales with signs of straw purchasing, training staff, and securing inventory, and asking local officials and law enforcement how they are responding to the trace patterns in their communities.

12. Methods

Data source. This report is based on firearm trace data that Stop US Arms to Mexico obtained from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. The data cover firearms recovered in the United States and Mexico between January 1, 2021 and May 6, 2026 and traced to a licensed U.S. dealer. They are aggregated by the zip code of the Federal Firearms Licensee (FFL) that made the first retail sale, the state or country of recovery, the year of recovery, and time-to-crime. A trace identifies only that first retail sale; it does not show later private transfers, thefts, or other changes of possession. Data for 2026 cover January 1 through May 6 only. Data files released by ATF can be accessed at stopusarmstomexico.org/datasets

Scope. These data include only firearms that were recovered, submitted to ATF for tracing, and successfully traced to a purchase. They are not the full universe of recovered firearms, much less of trafficked firearms. Many recovered firearms are never submitted for tracing, and submission practices vary across law enforcement agencies and between the United States and Mexico. Many submitted firearms cannot be traced, because of obliterated serial numbers, incomplete or incorrect information in the trace request, missing dealer records, or firearms too old to trace. A trace is not evidence that the dealer or purchaser acted unlawfully.

Destinations. Throughout the report, we classify each traced firearm by where it was recovered relative to the state where it was first sold. The four destinations are:

- Within state: recovered in the state where the firearm was sold.
- Bordering state: recovered in a state that shares a land border with the state of sale.
- Non-bordering state: recovered in any other state, the District of Columbia, or a U.S. territory.
- Mexico: recovered in Mexico.

The complete data obtained from ATF breaks down traces by each specific state where firearms originating were recovered (by zip code of purchase). Alaska and Hawaii have no bordering states. The District of Columbia borders Maryland and Virginia.

U.S. territories and invalid zip codes. We excluded firearms traced to dealers in U.S. territories (Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands) from our analysis. Firearms recovered in these territories and traced to dealers in the 50 states and the District of Columbia are included and counted as recovered in non-bordering states. We also exclude two traces to invalid zip codes.

Time-to-crime. Time-to-crime (TTC) is the time between a firearm's first retail sale and its recovery by law enforcement. ATF provided five TTC categories, which we combined into three:

- Short TTC: under one year (under 90 days; 90 days to under 180 days; 180 days to under one year).
- Mid TTC: one year to under three years.
- Long TTC: three years or more.

A short TTC is the strongest single indicator of possible trafficking.

Missing recovery location. A total of 989 traces had no recorded recovery location. They are included in overall totals and in the time-to-crime breakdown (Figure 1). They are excluded from all analyses by destination and from the state law comparisons. Including them, the dataset contains 2,214,914 traces; excluding them, 2,213,925. As a check, we reran the state law comparisons for all destinations combined with the 306 short-TTC traces that have no recovery location. No rate changed by more than 0.2 traces per 100,000 residents, and no result changed.

Mexico trace data. Traces of firearms recovered in Mexico came from two ATF extracts with overlapping coverage of 2024. We use the older extract for 2021–2023 and the newer extract for January 2024 through May 6, 2026, so that 2024 is not counted twice. The older extract appears not to include traces to zip codes with only one FFL; the newer extract appears to include them. Comparing the older extract with ATF state-level data for the same years, we estimate that 1,138 traces are missing (397 in 2021, 372 in 2022, and 369 in 2023): 4.4 percent of Mexico traces in 2021–2023 and about 2 percent of all Mexico traces in the study period. Most are mid- or long-TTC traces; about 60 are short TTC. These traces are handled as follows:

- When we describe the change in Mexico recoveries over time (for example, the 85 percent increase from 2021 to 2025), we use the state-level totals that ATF provided to us, which appear to include traces to single-FFL zip codes.
- Totals for the full study period and all figures by zip code, county, or state use the zip-code data and do not include these traces, because they cannot be assigned to a zip code. Zip-code-level Mexico counts for 2021–2023 are therefore slightly understated. Including these traces would not change any destination share reported at one decimal place.
- Comparisons between 2021–2022 and 2024–2025 (Section 6.1 and Figure 9) are restricted to zip codes with two or more dealers in both 2021 and 2022, so that both periods are measured the same way. The results hold when the comparison is restricted to zip codes with two or more dealers in all four years, when each period uses its own dealer counts, and when no restriction is applied.

Comparison with ATF published data. ATF produces annual tables in its published trace data a few months after the calendar year ends. ATF updates its data as additional traces occur. Our extract was produced later and includes traces completed after ATF published its reports. We compared our counts with ATF's published annual tables of firearms recovered in the United

States and traced to each source state. Our counts were 6.4 percent higher than ATF's for 2021, and the difference narrowed each year, to 0.5 percent lower for 2025.

Data accuracy and revisions. ATF trace data are not fixed. Counts change as pending traces are completed, records are corrected, and data are re-queried, so figures for the same period can differ between extracts and between our data and ATF's published tables. Extracts can also follow different disclosure rules, as with the apparent omission of single-dealer zip codes from the 2021–2023 Mexico data. Supplementary data, such as counts of licensed dealers by zip code, have similar gaps. Our results reflect the data as provided at the time of extraction; small differences from other published figures are expected and do not change our findings.

Zip code rankings and hotspots. For each destination, we ranked zip codes by number of traces and computed each zip code's percentile among zip codes with at least one trace to that destination. Hotspots are zip codes in the top 20 percent in all four destinations (456 zip codes). We also identify zip codes in the top 10 percent in all four destinations (120 zip codes).

Urbanicity. We classified zip codes as rural, suburban, or urban by household density (households per square mile), using the thresholds developed by Jed Kolko (FiveThirtyEight, 2015): under 102 households per square mile is rural, 102 to 2,213 is suburban, and more than 2,213 is urban. Household counts come from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2020–2024 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, and land area from the Census Bureau's 2024 ZIP Code Tabulation Area Gazetteer file. For 396 zip codes without usable Census household data, we used the U.S. Department of Agriculture's 2020 Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) codes instead (codes 1–3 urban, 4–6 suburban, 7–10 rural). We could not classify 213 zip codes.

Maps. Place names. Zip codes are identified by their U.S. Postal Service mailing name (the default city name for the zip code) and assigned to the county containing most of the zip code. Because zip codes do not follow city or county boundaries, a mailing name may include areas outside the named city, and county totals assign all firearms from a zip code to a single county. Border counties are those whose Census boundaries touch the neighboring state.

State firearm laws. We coded three laws for each state: a background check requirement (at the point of sale, through a permit to purchase, or both), a waiting period, and an assault weapons ban. Our coding followed these rules:

- Sources: the RAND State Firearm Law Database was the primary source, cross-checked against Giffords Law Center and Everytown for Gun Safety, with effective dates verified against statutes and news reports.
- Coverage: a law counts if it covers handguns or all firearms.
- Timing: a law counts only if it was in effect for more than half of the study period (January 1, 2021 to May 6, 2026).

- Permit waits: states whose permit-to-purchase process imposes a waiting period are coded as having a waiting period.
- Departures from RAND: where state law or effective dates warranted.

To match the timing of the laws to the timing of sales, the law analysis uses short-TTC traces only; firearms with longer TTCs may have been sold before a law took effect. Rates are traces per 100,000 residents. Population is the average of the April 1, 2020 estimates base and July 1, 2025 estimate of the U.S. Census Bureau. For rates of firearms recovered in bordering states, Alaska and Hawaii are excluded from the denominator. These are descriptive comparisons, not causal estimates.

Demand 2. Data identifying dealers in ATF's Demand 2 program by year (2021–2024; the 2021 list is not complete) come from Brady United Against Gun Violence's Gun Store Transparency project (Demand 2 Letter Sheet, public version updated with March 2026 data). We matched program dealers to trace data by the zip codes of dealer physical premises. Inclusion in Demand 2 reflects the number of a dealer's guns traced in crimes, not a finding of wrongdoing.

Credits

This report was written by Eugenio Weigend Vargas and John Lindsay-Poland, who also coordinated the project. We express our thanks to the Fund for a Safer Future and Open Society Foundations for their financial support, and to Marianna Mitchem of Everytown USA for her suggestion to request U.S. trace data. The authors take responsibility for all errors.

ATF trace data can be consulted on the Data page of Stop US Arms to Mexico: www.stopusarmstomexico.org/datasets

Previous reports, based on ATF trace data for firearms trafficked to Mexico and other countries, are at: stopusarmstomexico.org/iron-river

Interactive maps using zip code-level trace data can be accessed at: https://stopusarmstomexico.org/map-gun-traces-2021-2026/

Stop US Arms to Mexico is a project of Global Exchange.

Notes

[1] M. Degli Esposti et al., "Youth Firearm Mortality in the Americas From 2015 to 2022," *JAMA Network Open* 7, no. 10 (2024): e2437395, https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.37395.
[2] J. E. Goldstick, R. M. Cunningham, and P. M. Carter, "Current Causes of Death in Children and Adolescents in the United States," *New England Journal of Medicine* 386, no. 20 (2022): 1955–56, https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2201761.
[3] M. Miller, W. Zhang, and D. Azrael, "Firearm Purchasing During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Results From the 2021 National Firearms Survey," *Annals of Internal Medicine* 175, no. 2 (2022): 219–25, https://doi.org/10.7326/M21-3423.
[4] T. R. Simon et al., "Notes from the Field: Increases in Firearm Homicide and Suicide Rates — United States, 2020–2021," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 71, no. 40 (2022): 1286–87, https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7140a4.
[5] E. Weigend Vargas et al., "Examining Firearm-Related Deaths in Mexico, 2015–2022," *Injury Epidemiology* 11 (2024): 33, https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-024-00519-z.
[6] INEGI recorded 33,550 homicides in 2024 (25.6 per 100,000) and 27,989 in 2025 (21.4 per 100,000).
[7] Informe Nacional de Personas Desaparecidas 2025 (Red Lupa), based on the Registro Nacional de Personas Desaparecidas y No Localizadas: 13,106 people reported disappeared in 2024.
[8] Data as of March 27, 2026. U.S.-sourced firearms: 14,243 of 21,117 (2020), 15,084 of 22,846 (2021), 17,849 of 27,444 (2022), 17,999 of 26,658 (2023), 18,718 of 26,759 (2024), and 22,817 of 32,144 (2025). About half of the remaining firearms were made by a non-U.S. manufacturer, while the other remaining half had an undetermined country of origin.
[9] A. Dube, O. Dube, and O. García-Ponce, "Cross-Border Spillover: U.S. Gun Laws and Violence in Mexico," *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 3 (2013): 397–417, http://odube.net/papers/Cross_border_spillover.pdf.
[10] E. Weigend Vargas, P. M. Carter, and J. E. Goldstick, "State Level Bans on Assault Weapons and Firearms Trafficking to Mexico, 2015–2024," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 41, no. 17–18 (2026): 6844–65, https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605261455838.
[11] M. F. Castilla-Peón, P. L. Rendón, and N. González-García, "The Leading Causes of Death in the US and Mexico's Pediatric Population Are Related to Violence: A Note on Secondary Analyses of Registered Deaths from 2000 to 2022," *Frontiers in Public Health* 12 (2024), https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1428691.
[12] M. Degli Esposti et al., "Youth Firearm Mortality in the Americas From 2015 to 2022," *JAMA Network Open* 7, no. 10 (2024): e2437395, https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.37395.
[13] E. Weigend Vargas et al., "Examining Firearm-Related Deaths in Mexico, 2015–2022," *Injury Epidemiology* 11 (2024): 33, https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-024-00519-z.
[14] A. A. Braga et al., "Interpreting the Empirical Evidence on Illegal Gun Market Dynamics," *Journal of Urban Health* 89, no. 5 (2012): 779–93, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-012-9681-y. There is no single standard cutoff. Researchers often treat three years or less as short, but recent work uses a stricter one-year threshold. E. Weigend Vargas and J. E. Goldstick, "Geographic Patterns of Firearms with Short Time-to-Crime in the U.S. and the Americas, 2015–2023," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 108 (2026): 108310, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2026.108310.
[15] B. G. Knight, "State Gun Policy and Cross-State Externalities: Evidence from Crime Gun Tracing," *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 5, no. 4 (2013): 200–229, https://doi.org/10.1257/pol.5.4.200.
[16] L. H. Kahane, "Understanding the Interstate Export of Crime Guns: A Gravity Model Approach," *Contemporary Economic Policy* 31, no. 3 (2013): 618–34, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1465-7287.2012.00324.x.
[17] J. Lindsay-Poland v. U.S. Department of Justice et al., No. 22-cv-07663-EMC (N.D. Cal. Dec. 19, 2023) (order granting in part plaintiff's motion for summary judgment), https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/24235452/can-32022cv07663-opinion.pdf.
[18] Stop US Arms to Mexico, *The Iron River of Weapons to Mexico: Its Sources and Contents*, June 2024, https://stopusarmstomexico.org/iron-river/; Stop US Arms to Mexico, *No Shelter from the Storm: Update on Iron River of Guns*, January 2025, https://stopusarmstomexico.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/No-Shelter-from-

Storm_New-Data-on-Trafficked-Weapons.pdf; Stop US Arms to Mexico, *Corridors of Violence: More Data on Guns Trafficked to Mexico and Beyond*, February 2026, https://stopusarmstomexico.org/corridors-of-violence/.

[19] For firearms recovered in Mexico in 2021–2023, ATF's zip-code data do not include traces to zip codes with only one Federal Firearms Licensee. Based on state-level data for the same years, these are estimated at 1,138 traces, 4.4 percent of Mexico traces in those years. Data for 2024 through May 2026 include them.

[20] Throughout the report, "destination" refers to one of these four categories. This report does not include firearms traced to purchases in U.S. territories (Puerto Rico, Guam, U.S. Virgin Islands). Firearms recovered in these territories and traced to U.S. zip codes are included and counted as recovered in non-bordering states.

[21] ATF determined the purchaser for 77 percent of the 1,922,577 crime guns submitted for tracing in 2017–2021. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, *National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment*, (hereafter ATF NFCTA), Vol. II, Part III, 2, https://www.atf.gov/media/15426/download.

[22] The portion of firearms recovered in Mexico in 2024–2025 that were U.S.-sourced but not traced to a purchase is similar to that of guns recovered in Baltimore, Hawaii, and San Diego in 2017–2021. ATF NFCTA, Vol. II, Part III, 4, https://www.atf.gov/media/15426/download. See also ATF, "Firearms Trace Data: Mexico – 2020–2025," https://www.atf.gov/firearms/report/firearms-trace-data/firearms-trace-data-mexico-2020-2025.

[23] These shares do not include the 1,138 firearms recovered in Mexico in 2021–2023 that ATF's zip-code data appear to omit (see note 1 and Methods). Including them would not change any share at one decimal place.

[24] H. S. Laqueur and S. L. Robinson, "Firearm Acquisition and Criminal Use: Legal and Illegal Possession of Crime Guns in California (2010–2021)," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 99 (2025): 102457, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2025.102457.

[25] ATF NFCTA, Vol. II, Part III, 28, https://www.atf.gov/media/15426/download.

[26] E. Weigend Vargas et al., "State Level Bans on Assault Weapons and Firearms Trafficking to Mexico, 2015–2024," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2026), https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605261455838.

[27] For 2021–2023, ATF's zip-code data on firearms recovered in Mexico do not include traces to zip codes with only one licensed dealer; data for 2024 through May 2026 do. To keep years comparable, Mexico counts for 2021–2023 in this section use ATF's state-level counts for those years, which include these traces (7,371 in 2021, 8,243 in 2022, and 9,958 in 2023, excluding traces to dealers in U.S. territories). Using the zip-code data alone, the increase would appear to be 96 percent. ATF's published annual figures show a 79 percent increase over the same period (see Methods).

[28] Mexico counts for 2021 use ATF's state-level data, which include traces to zip codes with a single licensed dealer that the zip-code data for that year omit (see Methods).

[29] M. Miller, W. Zhang, and D. Azrael, "Firearm Purchasing During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Results From the 2021 National Firearms Survey," *Annals of Internal Medicine* 175, no. 2 (2022): 219–25, https://doi.org/10.7326/M21-3423.

[30] E. Weigend Vargas, M. Degli Esposti, S. Hargarten, L. Vargas, and J. E. Goldstick, "Examining Firearm-Related Deaths in Mexico, 2015–2022," *Injury Epidemiology* 11 (2024): 33, https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-024-00519-z.

[31] M. F. Castilla-Peon, P. L. Rendón, and N. Gonzalez-Garcia, "The Leading Causes of Death in the US and Mexico's Pediatric Population Are Related to Violence: A Note on Secondary Analyses of Registered Deaths from 2000 to 2022," *Frontiers in Public Health* 12 (2024): 1428691, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1428691.

[32] M. Degli Esposti et al., "Youth Firearm Mortality in the Americas From 2015 to 2022," *JAMA Network Open* 7, no. 10 (2024): e2437395, https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.37395.

[33] E. Weigend Vargas, C. Pérez Ricart, J. Portugal, and J. E. Goldstick, "Firearms and Extortions in Mexico, 2012 to 2021," Journal of Interpersonal Violence 40, no. 1–2 (2025): 204–19, https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605241246005.

[34] Mexico counts for 2021 use ATF's state-level data rather than the zip-code data. Comparing the two, we infer that the 2021–2023 zip-code data omit traces to zip codes with only one licensed dealer, which the state-level data appear to include. 2025 counts exclude five traces to dealers in U.S. territories or to invalid zip codes. ATF's published annual figures show a 79 percent increase over the same period (7,608 to 13,609). The same adjustment is used for national year-to-year Mexico trends throughout this section; totals for the full period and figures by state or zip code use the zip-code data. See Methods.

[35] T. L. McDougal, D. A. Shirk, R. Muggah, and J. H. Patterson, "The Way of the Gun: Estimating Firearms Trafficking across the US–Mexico Border," Journal of Economic Geography 15, no. 2 (2015): 297–327, https://doi.org/10.1093/jeg/lbu021.

[36] From 2020 through 2025, ATF identified 106,710 firearms recovered in Mexico as U.S.-sourced (manufactured in or imported into the United States), 68 percent of all firearms Mexico submitted for tracing; in 2025, the share was 71 percent. The remaining firearms were either manufactured outside the United States or of undetermined origin; many of those of undetermined origin may have originated in the United States. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, "Firearms Trace Data: Mexico – 2020–2025," https://www.atf.gov/firearms/report/firearms-trace-data/firearms-trace-data-mexico-2020-2025. For 2009–2014, when 73,684 firearms (about 70 percent) were U.S.-sourced, see U.S. Government Accountability Office, Firearms Trafficking: U.S. Efforts to Combat Firearms Trafficking to Mexico Have Improved, but Some Collaboration Challenges Remain, GAO-16-223, January 11, 2016, https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-16-223.

[37] The pattern does not depend on this choice. Restricting the comparison to zip codes with two or more dealers in all four years (2021, 2022, 2024, and 2025), using each period's own dealer counts, or applying no restriction at all yields the same result: the number of contributing zip codes grew faster outside the border states (25 to 34 percent, versus 8 to 21 percent within them), while firearms grew faster within the border states (70 to 72 percent, versus 41 to 47 percent elsewhere).

[38] Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI), "Defunciones por homicidio, enero a diciembre de 2025 (preliminar)," press release, August 3, 2026; "Homicidios en México bajaron en 2025: INEGI reporta la tasa más baja en varios años," *El Imparcial*, August 3, 2026. 2023 figures: INEGI, "Defunciones por homicidio, enero a diciembre de 2023 (preliminar)," 2024. *[Confirm the 2023 source for 653 and 21; INEGI's preliminary 2023 figures are 618 and 20.]*

[39] U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, "Sinaloa Cartel Leaders Arrested in El Paso, Texas," press release, July 25, 2024.

[40] *State of Arizona v. Victor Manuel Garcia et.al.*, 97 SGJ 57, October 21, 2025, accessed at: https://www.azag.gov/press-release/attorney-general-mayes-announces-indictments-firearms-trafficking-conspiracy

[41] Zastava, producer of another common AK-47 rifle, had a greater volume of firearms traced from Mexico (457) since 2024, but only 9% had been purchased less than a year earlier, suggesting declining preference for them among cross-border traffickers. The portion of Zastava crime guns since 2024 originating from purchases in Texas - 35% - is similar to more common firearm makes. Two other AK-47 producers, Arsenal Inc. and Israeli Weapons Industries, had relatively small numbers of firearms recovered in Mexico and traced to U.S. purchases: 55 (only one with a short TTC) and 62 (two with a short TTC), respectively. Some of these manufacturers' rifles are more expensive than Century Arms rifles.

[42] See comment on proposed regulation by Everytown and Giffords, at: https://www.regulations.gov/docket/ATF-2026-0069/comments?filter=Everytown

[43] Ben Dooley, Isabella Cota and Emiliano Rodríguez Mega, "Mexican Cartels Overwhelm Police With Ammunition Made for the U.S. Military," *The New York Times*, Feburary 7, 2026, at: https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/07/us/lake-city-army-ammunition-plant-missouri-mexico.html

[44] A Shootout in Mexico Left 23 Dead and Led ATF Agents to Houston," *Houston Chronicle*, republished by Borderland Beat, August 16, 2020, https://www.borderlandbeat.com/2020/08/a-shootout-in-mexico-left-23-dead-and.html; S. Campbell and T. L. McDougal, "US Gun Trafficking to Mexico: Independent Gun Shops Supply the Most Dangerous Weapons," *The Conversation*, May 2025, republished by *Cobb County Courier*, https://cobbcountycourier.com/?p=83532; "Ammunition Made for the United States Army Ended Up in Armed Attacks in Coahuila," *Mexico Daily Post*, February 9, 2026, https://mexicodailypost.news/2026/02/09/ammunition-made-for-the-united-states-army-ended-up-in-armed-attacks-in-coahuila/.

[45] U.S. Attorney's Office, Middle District of Florida, "Six DeLand Men Sentenced For Trafficking Military-Grade Firearms To Mexican Drug Cartels," press release, August 1, 2025, https://www.justice.gov/usao-mdfl/pr/six-deland-men-sentenced-trafficking-military-grade-firearms-mexican-drug-cartels.

[46] H. S. Laqueur and S. L. Robinson, "Firearm Acquisition and Criminal Use: Legal and Illegal Possession of Crime Guns in California (2010–2021)," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 99 (2025): 102457, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2025.102457.

[47] Zip codes are classified by household density, calculated from Census data, using thresholds developed by economist Jed Kolko: urban (more than 2,213 households per square mile), suburban (102 to 2,213), or rural (fewer than 102). J. Kolko, "How Suburban Are Big American Cities?," FiveThirtyEight, May 21, 2015, https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/how-suburban-are-big-american-cities/; J. Kolko, Datasets, https://jedkolko.com/datasets/. Zip codes are identified by their U.S. Postal Service mailing name, but they do not follow municipal boundaries; a zip code's classification depends on its household density, not its name.
[48] E. Weigend Vargas and J. E. Goldstick, "Geographic Patterns of Firearms with Short Time-to-Crime in the U.S. and the Americas, 2015–2023," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 70, no. 6 (2026): 108310, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2026.108310.
[49] Numbers of licensed dealers were calculated from yearly snapshots of ATF's lists of Federal Firearms Licensees (2018, and 2020 through May 2026). Dealer averages in this section are the mean of the 2021–2026 snapshots, matching the trace period; violations per 100 dealers use the 2018 snapshot, matching the 2016–2020 inspection period.
[50] Mr Pawn LLC in Bullhead City (zip code 86442), and C-A-L Ranch Stores, LLC; Sprague's Sports LLC; and EZPawn Arizona Inc. ("USA Pawn and Jewelry") in Yuma (zip code 85364). On the California side, Turners Operations Inc. ("Turners Outdoorsman") in San Bernardino (zip code 92408) and Corona (zip code 92879). Inclusion in the Demand 2 program reflects the number of a dealer's guns traced in crimes, not a finding of wrongdoing. Source: Brady United Against Gun Violence, Demand 2 Letter Sheet: 2022–24 Demand 2 Letters (Public Version, updated with March 2026 Gun Store Transparency data), 2026.
[51] Brady United Against Gun Violence, Gun Store Transparency Project, ATF inspection reports, https://gunstoretransparency.org/. Violations per 100 dealers divide violations cited in 2016–2020 inspections by the number of licensed dealers in the 2018 ATF list.
[52] Brady United Against Gun Violence, *Gun Store Transparency Project*, ATF inspection reports, https://gunstoretransparency.org/. Border counties are Mohave, La Paz, and Yuma in Arizona and San Bernardino, Riverside, and Imperial in California. Violations per 100 dealers divide violations cited in 2016–2020 inspections by the number of licensed dealers in the 2018 ATF list.
[53] B. G. Knight, "State Gun Policy and Cross-State Externalities: Evidence from Crime Gun Tracing," *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 5, no. 4 (2013): 200–229, https://doi.org/10.1257/pol.5.4.200.
[54] Inclusion in the Demand 2 program reflects the number of a dealer's guns traced in crimes, not a finding of wrongdoing. Source: Brady United Against Gun Violence, *Demand 2 Letter Sheet: 2022–24 Demand 2 Letters* (Public Version, updated with March 2026 Gun Store Transparency data), 2026.
[55] E. C. Matthay et al., "In-State and Interstate Associations Between Gun Shows and Firearm Deaths and Injuries: A Quasi-experimental Study," *Annals of Internal Medicine* 167, no. 12 (2017): 837–844, https://doi.org/10.7326/M17-1792. The increase applies to California regions within driving distance of Nevada shows, relative to the two weeks before each show.
[56] U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census: County Population Totals, 2021, https://data.census.gov. Nevada border counties: Carson City, Clark, Douglas, Esmeralda, Lyon, Mineral, Nye, and Washoe. California border counties: Alpine, El Dorado, Inyo, Lassen, Modoc, Mono, Nevada, Placer, San Bernardino, and Sierra.
[57] Inclusion in the Demand 2 program reflects the number of a dealer's guns traced in crimes, not a finding of wrongdoing. Source: Brady United Against Gun Violence, Demand 2 Letter Sheet: 2022–24 Demand 2 Letters (Public Version, updated with March 2026 Gun Store Transparency data), 2026.
[58] Virginia counties along the Maryland line are Loudoun, Fairfax, Prince William, Stafford, King George, Westmoreland, and Northumberland along the Potomac River, the city of Alexandria, and Accomack County on the Eastern Shore. The independent city of Manassas, which lies within Prince William County but does not border Maryland, is not included; including it would raise the share to 29.2 percent.
[59] L. Roberts et al., "Interstate Highway Connections and Traced Gun Transfers Between the 48 Contiguous United States," *JAMA Network Open* 7, no. 4 (2024): e245662, https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.5662.
[60] The U.S. Virgin Islands is not included because of the low volume of firearms recovered there (172 non-border firearms).
[61] Here the Southeast means Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. These states account for 161 of the 300 zip codes.
[62] Zip codes whose center lies within 15 miles of one of 21 major installations: Fort Bragg, NC; Fort Campbell, KY–TN; Fort Cavazos (formerly Hood), TX; Fort Bliss, TX; Fort Carson, CO; Fort Stewart, GA; Fort Moore (formerly

Benning), GA; Fort Riley, KS; Fort Drum, NY; Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA; Fort Johnson (formerly Polk), LA; Fort Sill, OK; Fort Leonard Wood, MO; Fort Knox, KY; Fort Wainwright, AK; Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, AK; Schofield Barracks, HI; Camp Lejeune, NC; Camp Pendleton, CA; Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, CA; and Naval Station Norfolk, VA. Air Force bases and smaller installations are not included.

[63] Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Federal Firearms Licensee lists, August 2018 through May 2026.

[64] D. W. Webster, J. S. Vernick, and L. M. Hepburn, "Relationship between Licensing, Registration, and Other Gun Sales Laws and the Source State of Crime Guns," *Injury Prevention* 7, no. 3 (2001): 184–89, https://doi.org/10.1136/ip.7.3.184.

[65] Knight, "State Gun Policy and Cross-State Externalities."

[66] T. Collins et al., "State Firearm Laws and Interstate Transfer of Guns in the USA, 2006–2016," *Journal of Urban Health* 95 (2018): 322–36, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-018-0251-9.

[67] L. Roberts et al., "Interstate Highway Connections and Traced Gun Transfers Between the 48 Contiguous United States," *JAMA Network Open* 7, no. 4 (2024): e245662, https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.5662.

[68] D. W. Webster, J. S. Vernick, and M. T. Bulzacchelli, "Effects of State-Level Firearm Seller Accountability Policies on Firearm Trafficking," *Journal of Urban Health* 86, no. 4 (2009): 525–37, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-009-9351-x.

[69] D. W. Webster, C. K. Crifasi, and J. S. Vernick, "Effects of the Repeal of Missouri's Handgun Purchaser Licensing Law on Homicides," *Journal of Urban Health* 91, no. 2 (2014): 293–302, https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3978146/.

[70] M. Li et al., "Examining a Hypothesized Causal Chain for the Effects of the 2007 Repeal of the Permit-to-Purchase Licensing Law in Missouri: Homicide Guns Recovered in State and within a Year of Purchase," *Journal of Urban Health*100, no. 3 (2023): 425–30, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-023-00739-6.

[71] T. L. McDougal et al., "The Way of the Gun: Estimating Firearms Trafficking across the US–Mexico Border," *Journal of Economic Geography* 15, no. 2 (2015): 297–327, https://doi.org/10.1093/jeg/lbu021.

[72] A. Dube, O. Dube, and O. García-Ponce, "Cross-Border Spillover: U.S. Gun Laws and Violence in Mexico," *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 3 (2013): 397–417, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055413000178.

[73] Jessica A. Eby, "Fast and Furious, or Slow and Steady? The Flow of Guns from the United States to Mexico," *UCLA Law Review* 61 (2014): 1081, https://www.uclalawreview.org/fast-and-furious-or-slow-and-steady-the-flow-of-guns-from-the-united-states-to-mexico-2/.

[74] E. Weigend Vargas, P. M. Carter, and J. E. Goldstick, "State Level Bans on Assault Weapons and Firearms Trafficking to Mexico, 2015–2024," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 41, no. 17–18 (2026): 6844–65, https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605261455838.

[75] *Estados Unidos Mexicanos v. Smith & Wesson Brands, Inc.*, No. 1:21-cv-11269 (D. Mass. filed Aug. 4, 2021).

[76] *Smith & Wesson Brands, Inc. v. Estados Unidos Mexicanos*, No. 23-1141 (U.S. June 5, 2025).

[77] *Estados Unidos Mexicanos v. Diamondback Shooting Sports, Inc.*, No. 4:22-cv-00472 (D. Ariz. filed Oct. 10, 2022).

[78] Law coding is based on the RAND State Firearm Law Database, with each law's effective or repeal date verified against state statutes, Giffords Law Center, and contemporaneous news reports. A law counts as in place only if it was in force for more than half of January 1, 2021–May 6, 2026, and if it covers handguns or all firearms. Universal background checks cover 22 jurisdictions (including D.C.), statewide assault weapons bans 11, and waiting periods 14. See Methods for the full coding rules, exceptions, effective dates, and sources.

[79] Traced firearms: firearms traced to a source zip code, recovered within one year of their first retail sale between January 1, 2021, and May 6, 2026 (484,472 firearms, excluding 306 with an unknown recovery location), obtained by Stop US Arms to Mexico through the Freedom of Information Act. Population: average of the 2020 Census count and the Census Bureau's July 2025 estimate for each state, as a mid-period approximation. Rates are cumulative over the period.

[80] Webster, Vernick, and Hepburn, "Relationship between Licensing, Registration, and Other Gun Sales Laws"; Collins et al., "State Firearm Laws and Interstate Transfer of Guns"; Webster, Crifasi, and Vernick, "Effects of the Repeal of Missouri's Handgun Purchaser Licensing Law"; Li et al., "Examining a Hypothesized Causal Chain"; Eby, "Fast and Furious, or Slow and Steady?"; Knight, "State Gun Policy and Cross-State Externalities."

[81] Jessica A. Eby, "Fast and Furious, or Slow and Steady?" *op. cit.* note 73.

[82] Knight, "State Gun Policy and Cross-State Externalities"; Collins et al., "State Firearm Laws and Interstate Transfer of Guns."

[83] Weigend Vargas, Carter, and Goldstick, "State Level Bans on Assault Weapons and Firearms Trafficking to Mexico."
[84] Dube, Dube, and García-Ponce, "Cross-Border Spillover"; Eby, "Fast and Furious, or Slow and Steady?"; Weigend Vargas, Carter, and Goldstick, "State Level Bans on Assault Weapons and Firearms Trafficking to Mexico."
[85] Collins et al., "State Firearm Laws and Interstate Transfer of Guns."
[86] Ibid.
[87] 18 U.S.C. § 923(g)(5); 27 C.F.R. § 478.126.
[88] Authors' analysis of ATF trace data by source zip code, recovery years 2021–2024, matched to dealer premises zip codes in Brady's Demand 2 dataset. Of the 1,429 zip codes in Brady's list, 1,426 appear in the trace data, out of 19,168 source zip codes in total. The 2021 Demand 2 list is missing a small number of dealers. "Out of state" includes guns recovered in any other U.S. state or territory. Figures describe the zip codes where Demand 2 dealers were located, not the dealers themselves. Brady United Against Gun Violence, Demand 2 Letter Sheet: 2022–24 Demand 2 Letters (public version, updated with March 2026 Gun Store Transparency data).
[89] Authors' analysis. About 71 percent of zip codes with a Demand 2 dealer were in states that require neither a permit to purchase nor point-of-sale background checks on private sales (as coded in Section 9.1); 9.1 percent of zip codes in those states had a Demand 2 dealer, compared with 5.1 percent in states with either requirement. States without these laws also sell more guns, so the difference partly reflects sales volume.
[90] Authors' analysis. For each group of zip codes defined by the year their first dealer entered the program (2021, 2022, or 2023), we compared the change in guns traced within one year of sale, from the letter year through 2024, with the change in zip codes never in the program that had a similar number of such traces in the letter year (the middle half of the program group's range). In all three comparisons, program zip codes declined less than comparison zip codes, by 4 to 7 percentage points.
[91] Includes guns recovered in Mexico. For guns recovered in the United States only, the declines were 43 and 46 percent.
[92] This is our inference from the reporting requirement described above: reporting used-gun acquisitions allows ATF to trace secondhand guns to the dealers that resold them, which can increase the number of traces attributed to those dealers.
[93] The National Shooting Sports Foundation first announced on June 13, 2025, that ATF would end the program (The Smoking Gun, June 25, 2025); Brady's Demand 2 Letter Sheet describes it as "paused."
[94] The Tiahrt Amendments were first attached to the Consolidated Appropriations Resolution, 2003, Pub. L. No. 108-7, § 644, 117 Stat. 11, and have been revised several times; the current version is in the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2012, Pub. L. No. 112-55, 125 Stat. 552, 609–10 (2011).
[95] A FOIA request for trace data for guns recovered in Canada is pending as of publication. For an analysis of trace data for firearms recovered in Haiti from 2015 to 2024, based on Caribbean trace data released to Stop US Arms to Mexico, see International Human Rights Clinic, Harvard Law School, "A Country in Crisis: Disrupting U.S. Arms Trafficking to Haiti," policy brief, June 2026, https://humanrightsclinic.law.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Disrupting-U.S.-Arms-Trafficking-to-Haiti_Policy-Brief26.pdf.