

Central America

Data Source: Firearms Tracing System

January 1, 2018 – December 31, 2018
(As of March 8, 2019)

Office of Strategic Intelligence and Information



U.S. Department of Justice

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives

ATF Firearms Trace Data Disclaimer

- Firearm traces are designed to assist law enforcement authorities in conducting investigations by tracking the sale and possession of specific firearms. Law enforcement agencies may request firearms traces for any reason, and those reasons are not necessarily reported to the Federal Government. Not all firearms used in crime are traced and not all firearms traced are used in crime.
- Firearms selected for tracing are not chosen for purposes of determining which types, makes or models of firearms are used for illicit purposes. The firearms selected do not constitute a random sample and should not be considered representative of the larger universe of all firearms used by criminals, or any subset of that universe. Firearms are normally traced to the first retail seller, and sources reported for firearms traced do not necessarily represent the sources or methods by which firearms in general are acquired for use in crime.

Introduction

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) National Tracing Center (NTC) is the nation's only crime gun tracing facility. As such, the NTC provides critical information that helps domestic and international law enforcement agencies solve firearms crimes, detect firearms trafficking and identify trends with respect to intrastate, interstate and international movement of crime guns. For calendar year (CY) 2013, the NTC traced more than 336,000 firearms; for CY 2014, more than 351,000 firearms; for CY 2015, more than 364,000 firearms; for CY 2016, more than 364,000 firearms; for CY 2017, more than 400,000 firearms; and for CY 2018, more than 425,000. Over this time period, the NTC has traced firearms for the United States and 136 other countries.



Firearms tracing is the systematic tracking of the movement of a firearm from its first sale by a manufacturer or importer through the distribution chain in an attempt to identify the first retail purchaser, in order to provide investigative leads for criminal investigations.

Introduction (Cont'd)

After the firearm is recovered and the identifiers are forwarded to the NTC, ATF contacts the manufacturer or importer to ascertain the sale or transfer of the firearm. ATF will attempt to contact all ensuing Federal Firearms Licensees (wholesale/retail) in the distribution chain until a purchaser is identified or the trace process cannot continue due to a lack of accurate or complete information on the trace request or in the Federal Firearms Licensee's records. The success of a trace result, whether domestic or international, relies upon the accuracy of the supplied firearm identifiers. The necessary identifiers for a trace include manufacturer, importer (if applicable), model, caliber and serial number.

This report relates only to those firearms recovered in Central America and traced by ATF. The firearm trace results are based upon the supplied firearm identifiers on the Central America trace requests. The Central American trace data in this report is organized by the calendar year in which the firearm was recovered, not the year in which the trace was initiated.

Introduction (Cont'd)

For example, if a firearm was recovered in 2018 but the trace was not initiated until 2019, the data will be organized in the year of recovery, 2018. Organization by recovery date provides valuable investigative leads as well as more specific trend data. Therefore, using this example, if a firearm for which a trace is initiated in later years is determined to have been recovered in 2018, the raw trace numbers for 2018 will increase in subsequent trace data reports.

As a result, the trace numbers for each calendar year may fluctuate, necessitating changes to prior years' trace numbers in future reports.

If a recovery date is not provided for a firearm, trace data for that firearm is organized by the calendar year in which the trace was entered into the Firearms Tracing System by ATF.



Analytical Criteria Used to Compile the Central America Trace Statistics

All of the attached trace statistics had the following selection criteria in common:

- Traces with a recovery country in Central America were included.
- Traces with a recovery date between January 1, 2018 and December 31, 2018 were included.
 - If a recovery date was not provided, traces with an entered date between January 1, 2018 and December 31, 2018 were included.
 - In CY 2018, 99.9% of all Central America traces listed a recovery date.
- Duplicate traces were not included. A duplicate is a trace request for the same recovery of a firearm that was previously traced.
- All traces may not have been submitted or completed at the time of this analysis.
- Statistics are based on a query of the Firearms Tracing System on March 8, 2019.

Firearms Recovered in Central America and Submitted to ATF for Tracing Calendar Year 2018

Country Name	Belize			El Salvador			Guatemala			Honduras			Panama		
	# of Traces	% of all Traces	% by Category	# of Traces	% of all Traces	% by Category	# of Traces	% of all Traces	% by Category	# of Traces	% of all Traces	% by Category	# of Traces	% of all Traces	% by Category
Category – U.S. Sourced Firearms															
Manufactured in the United States	23	42.6		799	44.6		321	27.7		189	9.5		250	36.5	
Imported into the United States	6	11.1	53.7	76	4.3	48.9	84	7.2	34.9	39	2.0	11.5	86	12.6	49.1
Subtotal	29			875			405			228			336		
Category – Undetermined Source Country for Firearms															
Non-U.S. Manufacturer	23	42.6		883	49.3		750	64.6		1,603	81.1		332	48.5	
Undetermined Country of Origin	2	3.7	46.3	32	1.8	51.1	6	0.5	65.1	147	7.4	88.5	16	2.4	50.9
Subtotal	25			915			756			1,750			348		
Total	54	100	100	1,790	100	100	1,161	100	100	1,978	100	100	684	100	100

This chart is based upon firearms recovered in Central America in a particular year and submitted to ATF for tracing.

In CY 2018, three firearms recovered in Costa Rica were submitted to ATF for tracing; there were no firearms recovered in Nicaragua that were submitted.

Firearms Recovered in Central America and Submitted to ATF for Tracing

The category "U.S. Sourced Firearms" refers to those firearms that were determined by ATF to be manufactured in the U.S. or legally imported into the U.S. by a Federal firearms licensee.

"Manufactured in the United States" refers to those firearms that were determined by ATF to be manufactured in the U.S. by a Federal firearms licensee (manufacturer).

"Imported into the United States" refers to those firearms that were determined by ATF to be legally imported into the U.S. by a Federal firearms licensee (importer). Foreign manufactured firearms that are legally imported into the U.S. require that the importer name be stamped (impressed) on the firearm (27 C.F.R. Section 478.92). The firearm is traced by ATF through the U.S.-based importer, not the foreign manufacturer.

The category "Undetermined Source Country for Firearms" refers to those firearms in which the trace request did not provide sufficient information in order for ATF to determine a source country.

Firearms Recovered in Central America and Submitted to ATF for Tracing

"Non-U.S. Manufacturer" refers to those firearms in which the trace request indicated a non-U.S. (foreign) manufacturer and a U.S. firearms importer was either not listed (possible omission of the trace requestor) or not required (a foreign manufactured firearm that never legally entered U.S. commerce and therefore would not bear the identifying stamp of a U.S. firearms importer). ATF is unable to determine if these non-U.S. (foreign) manufactured firearms were imported directly into Central America, or if the firearms were legally imported into the U.S. or went to another country and then made their way to Central America by legal or illegal means.



Firearms Recovered in Central America and Submitted to ATF for Tracing

"Undetermined Country of Origin" refers to those firearms in which the trace request was unclear as to the manufacturer, country of origin and the importer. ATF is unable to determine the firearm's manufacturer, or if the firearms were imported directly into Central America, or if the firearms were legally imported into the U.S. or went to another country and then made their way to Central America by legal or illegal means.

"Total" refers to all firearms recovered in Central America in a particular calendar year and submitted to ATF for tracing.

Please note, changes to the trace data will occur in the future as a result of the statistics being based upon the recovery date of the firearm.

U.S. Sourced Firearms Recovered in Central America and Submitted to ATF for Tracing Calendar Year 2018

Country Name	Belize		El Salvador		Guatemala		Honduras		Panama	
	# of Traces	% of U.S. Sourced Traces	# of Traces	% of U.S. Sourced Traces	# of Traces	% of U.S. Sourced Traces	# of Traces	% of U.S. Sourced Traces	# of Traces	% of U.S. Sourced Traces
Category – U.S. Sourced Firearms										
Traced to a Retail Purchaser	10	34.5	140	16.0	70	17.3	69	30.3	82	24.4
Traced to a Foreign Country	14	48.3	407	46.5	211	52.1	36	15.8	156	46.4
Unable to Determine a Purchaser	5	17.2	328	37.5	124	30.6	123	53.9	98	29.2
Total	29	100	875	100	405	100	228	100	336	100

This chart is based upon the **U.S. sourced firearms** from the page entitled "Firearms Recovered in Central America and Submitted to ATF for Tracing". The total does not include trace numbers from the category "Undetermined Source Country for Firearms".

U.S. Sourced Firearms Recovered in Central America and Submitted to ATF for Tracing

The category "U.S. Sourced Firearms" refers to those firearms that were determined by ATF to be manufactured in the U.S. or legally imported into the U.S. by a Federal firearms licensee.

"Traced to a Retail Purchaser" refers to those traces in which ATF could determine the first retail purchaser, that is, a sale executed on an ATF Firearms Transaction Record (ATF Form 4473) from a U.S. Federal firearms licensee to a purchaser in the U.S. (As a comparison, for firearms recovered in the U.S. and traced to a retail purchaser, the average percentage for firearms traced for the time period CY 2018 is approximately 75%.)

"Traced to a Foreign Country" refers to those firearms that were determined by ATF to be transferred from a U.S. Federal firearms licensee to a foreign government, law enforcement, dealer or entity.

U.S. Sourced Firearms Recovered in Central America and Submitted to ATF for Tracing

"Unable to Determine a Purchaser" refers to those firearms that were manufactured in/imported into the U.S. but ATF was unable to determine the first retail purchaser through the trace process. Common reasons ATF is unable to identify a purchaser:

- Incomplete firearms identifying data on the trace request form
- Incomplete or never received out-of-business Federal firearms licensee records (upon discontinuance of business by a Federal firearms licensee, the records shall be delivered within 30 days to ATF or other Attorney General stipulated location (Title 18 U.S.C. 923(g)(4))
- Altered or obliterated firearm serial numbers
- The firearm is considered to be too old to trace
- Current Federal firearms licensee records are incomplete or missing, or the Federal firearms licensee was unresponsive to ATF's request for trace information

Please note, changes to the trace data will occur in the future as a result of the statistics being based upon the recovery date of the firearm.

Types of Firearms Recovered in Central America and Submitted to ATF for Tracing Calendar Year 2018

Country Name	Belize		El Salvador		Guatemala		Honduras		Panama	
	# of Traces	% of All Traces	# of Traces	% of All Traces	# of Traces	% of All Traces	# of Traces	% of All Traces	# of Traces	% of All Traces
Category – Types of Firearms										
Pistols	32	59.2	981	54.8	793	68.3	192	9.7	387	56.6
Revolvers	12	22.2	447	25.0	175	15.1	155	7.8	204	29.9
Rifles	1	1.9	127	7.1	80	6.9	1,591	80.4	42	6.1
Shotguns	8	14.8	213	11.9	104	8.9	21	1.1	42	6.1
Other	1	1.9	22	1.2	9	0.8	19	1.0	9	1.3
Total	54	100	1,790	100	1,161	100	1,978	100	684	100

This chart is based upon firearms recovered in Central America in a particular year and submitted to ATF for tracing.

Types of Firearms Recovered in Central America and Submitted to ATF for Tracing

The "Other" category refers to machineguns, destructive devices, derringers, tear gas launchers, combination guns, flare guns, receivers/frames, silencers, any other weapons and unknown types (to include trace requests that do not annotate a firearm type).

Please note, changes to the trace data will occur in the future as a result of the statistics being based upon the recovery date of the firearm.