

Central America

Data Source: Firearms Tracing System

January 1, 2019 – December 31, 2019
(As of March 10, 2020)

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) 2019, the NTC traced more than 438,000 firearms. During this time period, the NTC has traced firearms for the United States and 67 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 2019 but the trace was not initiated until 2020, the data will be organized in the year of recovery, 2019. 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 2019, the raw trace numbers for 2019 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 (Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua) were included.
- Traces with a recovery date between January 1, 2019 and December 31, 2019 were included.
 - If a recovery date was not provided, traces with an entered date between January 1, 2019 and December 31, 2019 were included.
 - In CY 2019, 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 10, 2020.

Firearms Recovered in Central America and Submitted to ATF for Tracing Calendar Year 2019

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	19	33.9		592	43.7		920	34.8		318	42.8		186	34.6	
Imported into the United States	11	19.7	53.6	129	9.5	53.2	192	7.3	42.1	77	10.4	53.2	76	14.2	48.8
Subtotal	30			721			1,112			395			262		
Category – Undetermined Source Country for Firearms															
Non-U.S. Manufacturer	26	46.4		552	40.7		1,521	57.6		288	38.8		260	48.4	
Undetermined Country of Origin	0	0.0	46.4	82	6.1	46.8	8	0.3	57.9	59	8.0	46.8	15	2.8	51.2
Subtotal	26			634			1,529			347			275		
Total	56	100	100	1,355	100	100	2,641	100	100	742	100	100	537	100	100

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

In CY 2019, 19 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.

U.S. Sourced Firearms Recovered in Central America and Submitted to ATF for Tracing Calendar Year 2019

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	12	40.0	113	15.6	134	12.1	94	23.8	44	16.8
Traced to a Foreign Country	7	23.3	304	42.2	672	60.4	81	20.5	120	45.8
Unable to Determine a Purchaser	11	36.7	304	42.2	306	27.5	220	55.7	98	37.4
Total	30	100	721	100	1,112	100	395	100	262	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 2019 is approximately 76%.)

"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

Types of Firearms Recovered in Central America and Submitted to ATF for Tracing Calendar Year 2019

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	44	78.6	736	54.3	1,333	50.5	261	35.2	291	54.2
Revolvers	7	12.5	345	25.5	552	20.9	230	31.0	158	29.4
Rifles	3	5.3	126	9.3	130	4.9	162	21.8	40	7.4
Shotguns	2	3.6	133	9.8	614	23.2	78	10.5	30	5.6
Other	0	0.0	15	1.1	12	0.5	11	1.5	18	3.4
Total	56	100	1,355	100	2,641	100	742	100	537	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).