

# Firearms Seizures and Trafficking: A «Local» Phenomenon

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## Abstract

*This article presents findings from the 2015 UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Study on firearms trafficking, which was based upon information collected from 48 governments. It outlines the methodology and sources used in the UNODC Study, and discusses their strengths and limitations. The UNODC Study is then located within three wider bodies of research on firearms trafficking. Three key findings from data reported by the states that took part in the Study are summarized. In those states firearms trafficking is mostly small scale and local – occurring across neighbouring borders or within regions. Trafficked firearms tend to be obtained by people engaged in other forms of criminal activity. In many states there is a marked lack of capacity to collect and analyse data on firearms trafficking. These findings suggest the need to re-evaluate how firearms trafficking is often perceived.*

## Keywords

Firearms, small arms, illicit, trafficking, United Nations, arms trade

## Introduction

The illicit trade in firearms, also referred to as ‘small arms’ and often combined in policy processes with light weapons, and their parts and ammunition, has been a key area of international concern since the late 1990s. For example, in a 2015 resolution the United Nations Security Council notes that it is:

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<sup>2</sup> The author gratefully acknowledges the work of all the other people involved in the 2015 UNODC Study, insightful comments by Aaron Karp and the anonymous reviewers, and all the work carried out by the editor of the Strategic Trade Review. All opinions expressed in this article about the UNODC Study, and any errors herein, are solely the responsibility of the author.

*Gravely concerned that the illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons in many regions of the world continue to pose threats to international peace and security, cause significant loss of life, contribute to instability and insecurity*<sup>3</sup>

The illicit acquisition of firearms has been described as facilitating acts of violence committed by both non-state groups fighting in civil wars and by criminals engaged in committing violent crime.<sup>4</sup> Overall, firearms are estimated to account for 41 per cent of all homicides in 2012, or about 180 000 deaths in a single year.<sup>5</sup> Added to that total would be deaths in warfare that were caused by firearms.<sup>6</sup> While it is not possible to state what proportion of those deaths were caused by firearms that had been illicitly trafficked, one can assume that trafficked firearms account for a significant proportion. In addition to mortality, use of trafficked firearms results in (often irrecoverable) injury<sup>7</sup> and other negative consequences of crime.

In 2015 the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) produced the extensive Study on Firearms 2015 – henceforth referred to as the Study.<sup>8</sup> The Study was conducted and prepared under the coordination of the Global Firearms Programme, Division for Treaty Affairs, with overall support from the Research and Trend Analysis Branch, Division for Policy Affairs of UNODC. Aaron Karp, Nicholas Marsh and Giorgio Ravagli worked as external consultants and were the principle authors of the text of the report discussed in this article; twelve others made substantive contributions to the Study.<sup>9</sup> All aspects of the Study are copyright of the UNODC.

The Study is a ground-breaking piece of research on firearms trafficking in that it is based upon information on seizures and trafficking in firearms provided by 48 states to the UNODC. No other piece of pre-existing data focused research on firearms trafficking has such a wide geographical scope. Perhaps as importantly, the Study represents a commitment by states to better understand firearms trafficking, something that is one of the first steps toward actually reducing its prevalence.

This article is written by one of the three expert consultants that supported UNODC in the development of the Study. It provides an overview of the Study's sources and methods and explains why they were chosen. It then summarises existing research on firearms trafficking and three of the Study's findings. Commentary on the Study is provided throughout. A tentative conclusion is that among the states that reported data, firearms trafficking is mostly a local phenomenon, occurring among neighbours and countries in the same region. Trafficking in firearms, and the seizure of firearms, is something that is often associated with other forms of criminal activity. During the data collection phase it was apparent that many states, including developed and developing countries, lacked the capacity to collect and analyse data on firearms seizures or trafficking.

## **Mandate, Data Sources and Methods**

The means of collecting data used in the UNODC Study are different to those commonly found in social science research (on arms trafficking and on other subjects). The Study was based upon a mandate from a

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Security Council 1540, S/RES/1540, New York, April 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Greene, Owen and Nicholas Marsh, "Conclusions and Priorities for Further Research," in Greene, Owen and Marsh, Nicholas eds., *Small Arms Crime and Conflict Global Governance and the Threat of Armed Violence* (London: Routledge, 2012) pp. 248–262.

<sup>5</sup> UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). *Global Study on Homicide 2013*. Vienna: UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Kreutz, Joakim and Nicholas Marsh, "Lethal instruments small arms and death in armed conflict," in Greene, Owen and Marsh, Nicholas eds., *Small Arms Crime and Conflict Global Governance and the Threat of Armed Violence* (London: Routledge, 2012) pp. 43–63.

<sup>7</sup> Buchanan, Cate. *Gun Violence, Disability and Recovery*. Sydney: Surviving Gun Violence Project, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC Study on Firearms 2015, Vienna: UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Simonetta Grassi was the overall coordinator of the Study within the UNODC. More information on the Global Firearms Programme can be found via: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/gfp.html>.

UN conference, which specified how data was to be collected. The context of the mandate is described in the following description of the relevant UN Convention and conference resolution; and there follows a description of how the data was collected.

The mandate for the UNODC's work on firearms trafficking is based upon the Firearms Protocol of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC). The UNTOC was adopted UN General Assembly resolution 55/25 of 15 November 2000 and entered into force on 29 September 2003. States Parties to the UNTOC are committed to a series of measures to combat transnational organized crime, including criminalizing specific activities,<sup>10</sup> facilitating extradition and cooperation among law enforcement agencies, and providing assistance to improve the capability of law enforcement agencies. The Firearms Protocol to the UNTOC was adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 55/255 of 31 May 2001, and the Protocol entered into force on 3 July 2005. The Protocol contains a framework for States Parties to prevent the illicit traffic in firearms and their parts and components, and ammunition. It includes articles concerning illicit manufacturing and trafficking in firearms (as defined by the Protocol) as national criminal offences, criminalizing illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, having adequate security measures over stored firearms, establishing a system of authorization or licensing concerning legitimate manufacturing and commerce, marking, recording and tracing firearms, and international cooperation.

The implementation and application of the Firearms Protocol is discussed at regular Conferences of States Parties (CSP) of the UNTOC, and at other meetings. At the fifth CSP in 2010 resolution 5/4 was adopted, and included in Paragraph 7:<sup>11</sup>

*Requests the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [...] to conduct a study of the transnational nature of and routes used in trafficking in firearms, based on the analysis of information provided by States on confiscated weapons and ammunition, for consideration by the Conference at its sixth session.*

The Study was to be based upon data provided by States. This meant that some common methods used to research arms trafficking could not be used in the collection and analysis of data – in particular fieldwork interviews with people associated with trafficking; analysis of press articles and other primary written materials not published by governments; and findings and data from secondary publications written on arms trafficking by other researchers.<sup>12</sup>

A subsequent resolution at the sixth CSP in 2012 took note of information gathered by the UNODC and requested the UNODC “to improve methodology, in close consultation with Member States, and to complete the study in accordance with the given mandate” and called upon states “to participate in and contribute to the study, as appropriate.”<sup>13</sup> As a consequence, the UNODC Secretariat, in consultation with Member States, developed a refined concept note.<sup>14</sup> The refined methodology focused upon seizures rather than confiscated arms. This was because data on judicial confiscation or forfeiture orders was found to be not readily available, and where it was the lack of a standardization meant that it was too difficult to

<sup>10</sup> Activities to be criminalized include membership of an organized crime group, money laundering and corruption.

<sup>11</sup> Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, Report of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime on its fifth session, Vienna October 18-22 2010, CTOC/COP/2010/17. Vienna: United Nations, 2010, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> See “Conducting a Comprehensive Study On Firearms Trafficking, Its Transnational Nature, Routes And Modus Operandi (Unodc-Sft),” United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Vienna: UNODC, undated. Accessed August 14, 2015 from <https://www.unodc.org/documents/dcm-firearmstrafficking/Conceptnoterev.pdf>, p.4. In the event, a small number of other publications were referred to in when providing background information.

<sup>13</sup> Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, 6/2 2012, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> “Conducting a Comprehensive Study On Firearms Trafficking, Its Transnational Nature, Routes And Modus Operandi (Unodc-Sft),” United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Vienna: UNODC, undated. Accessed August 14, 2015 from <https://www.unodc.org/documents/dcm-firearmstrafficking/Conceptnoterev.pdf>.

analyse the data.<sup>15</sup> Instead, aggregated records of seizures were found to be kept by a large number of countries (where records of seizures are kept by law enforcement agencies such as the police or customs). Therefore, in order to facilitate data gathering and ensure standardisable data the study focussed upon national data on seized firearms, their parts and ammunition.

A seizure is defined in the UNTOC in Article 2 as “temporarily prohibiting the transfer, conversion, disposition or movement of property or temporarily assuming custody or control of property on the basis of an order issued by a court or other competent authority.” There are several caveats concerning seizure data:<sup>16</sup>

- A seizure is a temporary measure, and seized goods may or may not be returned;
- Firearms can be seized for reasons not directly related to illicit trafficking (for example use in criminal acts);
- Data on seizures reflects different capabilities, policies and priorities of law enforcement agencies;
- Seizure data may also reflect different legal and regulatory frameworks concerning firearms.

To mitigate some of these problems with data from seizures the UNODC also requested data on the context of the seizures; and data obtained from tracing firearms, and other intelligence, on the routes and methods used by firearms traffickers (see below).

To facilitate data collection, the UNODC developed two questionnaires. One questionnaire was on annual seizures for each year over the four year period 2010-2013, and the second requested information on significant individual seizures involving trafficked firearms.

The UNODC provided detailed guidance notes on the definition of types of firearms, and other concepts used in the Study. The annual seizure questionnaire requested data on the following subjects: the quantity and type of seized firearms, parts and ammunition; other countries involved in trafficking; whether trafficking took place by land, sea or air, or by post; citizenship of traffickers; other items and criminal offences associated with seized firearms; whether the firearm had been registered, and if so in which country; and on international cooperation concerning requests to trace firearms.<sup>17</sup> Finally, states were asked to provide written notes and comments on trafficking trends and methods.

Far fewer States provided data via the significant seizures questionnaire (as compared to the annual seizures questionnaire). The significant seizures questionnaire requested information on seized firearms, trafficking routes and methods, tracing, items seized in connection with firearms, and other information on trafficking trends and routes and modus operandi.

In 2013 the UNODC developed a web portal to enable Member States to easily download and return the two questionnaires.<sup>18</sup> The web portal also contained information on the Study, including definitions and classifications used. The UNODC Secretariat also held regional meetings and training sessions related to the Study in Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Senegal.

In total, responses were received from 48 states.<sup>19</sup> Of those 48, three (Nigeria, Sweden and Russia)

<sup>15</sup> Ibid; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC Study on Firearms 2015, Vienna: UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> For more on the caution needed when analysing seizure data see United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC Study on Firearms 2015, Vienna: UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015, p. 86.

<sup>17</sup> For a list of all questions asked see United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC Study on Firearms 2015, Vienna: UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015, pp. 99-103.

<sup>18</sup> The portal is available at <https://firearmstrafficking.unodc.org/>, but a username and password are required for access.

<sup>19</sup> The 48 states are: Argentina, Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, Colombia, Czech Republic, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Iraq, Italy, Kenya, Kuwait, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, Netherlands, Niger, Nigeria, Panama, Peru, Poland, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Spain, Sweden, Tajikistan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uruguay, Zimbabwe.

submitted data from customs or border authorities, the remainder submitted information from the police. Eight states only provided qualitative comments rather than quantitative data.<sup>20</sup>

The reliance upon official data in the report has benefits and drawbacks. The benefits are clear. The Study was able to collect an unprecedented quantity of cross-national data related to seizures and trafficking in firearms, their parts and ammunition. The reported data had all been verified by national authorities. While simple statistics on seizures may not provide much information on trafficking, the additional contextual information (see above) requested in the questionnaires provides key information on the nature and extent of firearms trafficking.

Unusually, states – the parties that provided data – were key participants in the design of the questionnaires. The study design ensured that the questionnaires requested information that could actually be provided by the states that cooperated with the Study. Allowing states to submit only aggregated statistics reduced the administrative load in replying to the annual seizures questionnaire. Doing so also helped to anonymize the data and alleviate concerns about releasing sensitive information (for example relating to ongoing criminal cases). The provision of aggregated annual data did though lead to it usually being impossible to cross refer information from different questions. For example, we might know that a State seized 603 pistols and 832 shotguns in 2013, and that in 2013 427 firearms had been transported by land. But the data would not allow the authors of the Study to discern how many pistols had been transported by land. Obtaining such a level of granularity in the data would have required that contextual information be provided on every seized firearm, rather than aggregate statistics.

Another drawback of relying upon sources provided by governments is that it was also not possible to check the data received by cross referring information with that found in other sources. In addition, in the main study at least, beyond a short introduction containing background information, there was not an opportunity to provide the reader with additional contextual information from other sources that might have enriched the report.

More fundamentally, as noted in the Study, “official data on firearms and trafficking mostly serve administrative or legal purposes, including the monitoring of law enforcement performance and priorities.”<sup>21</sup> As such the data reported will inevitably be affected by national differences concerning political priorities, regulations and the capacity of law enforcement to collect and report information on firearms trafficking.

### **Pre-existing Research on Firearms Trafficking**

Concerning the methods and data sources used, the UNODC Study is by no means the first to analyze data obtained from seized firearms (and their parts and ammunition). It is the first multi-country UN survey on firearms since the 1998 *United Nations International Study on Firearm Regulation*. The 2015 Study is the first since 1998 to be based upon official data from so many countries.<sup>22</sup> It is also innovative in that the 2015 Study attempts to develop a routine of institutional submission of official data on firearms seizures and trafficking.<sup>23</sup>

That earlier UN study was based upon a survey that included 12 questions on illicit firearms, that focused upon whether illicit trafficking or manufacturing occurred in a country either: frequently,

<sup>20</sup> The eight states that only submitted qualitative information were Italy, Moldova, Morocco, Netherlands, Senegal, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan.

<sup>21</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC Study on Firearms 2015, Vienna: UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015, p. 85.

<sup>22</sup> After 1998 studies using official data were based upon single countries or a small number of them.

<sup>23</sup> The UNODC has been mandated to continue data collection after the publication of the 2015 Study.

sometimes, few times, or not at all; and requested illustrative examples.<sup>24</sup> The questions in the 1998 survey requested far less information on illicit activities, and much less detailed information, than in the 2015 Study.

In addition, there have been numerous scholarly works that gain insights on trafficking firearms, their parts and ammunition from data on seizures on the USA, Mexico, Philippines, and Brazil.<sup>25</sup> Outside of research on areas affected by warfare the geographical balance of research on firearms trafficking resembles the geographical balance of wider academic research on domestic gun control and firearms availability – in which the great majority of research has been about developed countries, in particular the USA.<sup>26</sup>

Research has, in general, been conducted upon firearms trafficking in very different contexts, and we can point to three separate bodies of research. The first is mainly located within Criminology and wider debates over domestic gun control and firearms availability and concerns firearms trafficking in developed countries with comparatively low levels of violence such as Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, Italy, the UK and the USA. It has tended to use both quantitative and qualitative approaches (such as analysis of police seizure data and interviews with convicted criminals).

Research on firearms trafficking in developed countries has usually emphasised how the people involved in selling, transporting, dealing, broking and acquiring trafficked firearms are quite distinct from the general population.<sup>27</sup> For example, research in Australia suggests that illicit firearms acquisition is carried out by:

*persons, gangs, or more sophisticated entities acquiring firearms to commit crime, for protection of themselves or their assets, to perpetuate gang rivalry and violence and/or for stockpiling purposes. It is fair to assume that few, if any, consumers of illicit firearms sit outside criminal networks.*<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> For the 1998 Study survey questions 43-54 concerned illicit trafficking and manufacturing, theft and tracing.

<sup>25</sup> Schroeder Matt, “Captured and Counted Illicit Weapons in Mexico And The Philippines,” in Le Brun, Emile et al., *Small Arms Survey 2013: Everyday Dangers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) pp. 282–317; Schroeder, Matt, “On the Record Illicit Weapons in The United States,” in McDonald, Glenn et al., *Small Arms Survey 2014: Women and Guns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 244-273; Dreyfus, Pablo and Nicholas Marsh, *Tracking the Guns: International Diversion of Small Arms to Illicit Markets in Rio de Janeiro* (Oslo and Rio de Janeiro, PRIO and Viva Rio, 2006).

<sup>26</sup> Greene, Owen and Nicholas Marsh, “Armed Violence within Societies,” in Greene, Owen and Marsh, Nicholas eds., *Small Arms Crime and Conflict Global Governance and the Threat of Armed Violence* (London: Routledge, 2012b) pp. 85-5.

<sup>27</sup> For examples from Europe overall see Eurobarometer, “Firearms in the European Union,” Flash Eurobarometer no. 383. Brussels: Eurobarometer, 2013; Eurobarometer, Firearms in the European Union, Flash Eurobarometer no. 383. Brussels: Eurobarometer, 2013; Spapens, T. “Trafficking in illicit firearms for criminal purposes within the European Union,” *European Journal of Crime, Criminal Law and Criminal Justice* 15 (2007), pp.359–381; for Canada see: Boyce, J. and Cotter, A. “Homicide in Canada 2012,” Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2013; Cotter, A. “Firearms and violent crime in Canada, 2012,” Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2014; Hemmati, T. “The Nature of Canadian Urban Gangs and Their Use of Firearms: A Review of the Literature and Police Survey,” Ottawa: Department of Justice of Canada, 2006; for the USA see Schroeder, Matt. “On the Record Illicit Weapons in The United States,” in Glenn McDonald et al, *Small Arms Survey 2014: Women and Guns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 244-273; Wright, M, Wintermute, G. and Webster, D. “Factors Affecting a Recently Purchased Handgun’s Risk for Use in Crime under Circumstances that Suggest Gun Trafficking,” *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 87:3 (2010), pp.352–36; Braga, Anthony, Wintermute, Garen J., Pierce, Glenn L., Cook, Philip J. and Ridgeway, Greg. “Interpreting the Empirical Evidence on Illegal Gun Market Dynamics,” *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 89:5 (2012), pp. 779-793; Pierce, Glenn, Braga, Anthony, Hayatt, Raymond and Koper, Christopher. “Characteristics and Dynamics of Illegal Firearm Markets: Implications for a Supply-side Enforcement Strategy,” *Justice Quarterly* 21:2 (2003), pp. 391–422; for the UK, see the slightly less recent Hales, G., Lewis, C and Silverstone, D. “Gun Crime: The Market in and Use of Illegal Firearms,” Home Office Research Study 298, London: Home Office, 2006; research on Australia is captured in Bricknell, S. “Firearm Trafficking and Serious and Organised Crime Gangs,” AIC Report no. 116, Canberra: Australian Institute for Criminology, 2012; for Japan see some basic information in National Police Agency. “Police of Japan 2014,” Tokyo: National Police Agency, 2014; recent studies on Italy are included in Massari, M. “Guns in the Family Mafia Violence in Italy,” in Le Brun, E., *Small Arms Survey 2013 Everyday Dangers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 74-101.

<sup>28</sup> Bricknell, S. “Firearm Trafficking and Serious and Organised Crime Gangs,” AIC Report no. 116, (Canberra: Australian Institute for Criminology, 2012).

Generally, in such contexts firearms are illicitly acquired by people who are likely to be involved in criminal violence in order to fulfil specific roles, such as in armed robbery or illicit drug distribution.<sup>29</sup> Research in the UK found two different types of gun use by criminals.<sup>30</sup> The first is instrumental use in which firearms are obtained to play a specific role in a planned crime. Similarly, research in Australia

finds that people planning an armed robbery deliberately selected firearms “precisely because of the instrumental advantages in their work.”<sup>31</sup> A second use of firearms by criminals has been found in research in the UK, Canada and Italy. The use is more complex and is motivated by both the need for personal protection and the symbolic value of owning a firearm. Such complex use is often associated with gang membership and participation in the market for illicit drugs.<sup>32</sup> The symbolic value of firearms can be powerful – for example, just an awareness or acknowledgement of firearm possession by a criminal can be sufficient to intimidate, and the gun itself does not need to be shown.<sup>33</sup>

The second, and much smaller, body of research has focused upon firearms trafficking in regions of developing countries that are affected by violence (but where there is not a generally recognised armed conflict) such as Brazil, Kenya, Mexico or Nepal (after the Comprehensive Peace Accord).<sup>34</sup> This research has usually employed qualitative methods such as interviews conducted during fieldwork.<sup>35</sup> As noted by Greene and Marsh in such countries there is a complex relationship between illicit firearms acquisition, governance and violence.<sup>36</sup> Unlike in developed countries, government forces are not able to command a Weberian monopoly of legitimate force. Instead they must contend with, or accommodate, numerous other armed actors, such as militias, traditional authority, private security employed by local notables, and even warlords that carve out autonomous enclaves of national territory. Areas of the country, such as urban slums or remote areas far from the capital, may have little or no presence from law enforcement agencies.

<sup>29</sup> Jackson, Thomas and Marsh, Nicholas. “Guns and Deaths a Critical Review.” in Greene, Owen and Marsh, Nicholas eds., *Small Arms Crime and Conflict Global Governance and the Threat of Armed Violence* (London: Routledge, 2012b) pp. 111–112.

<sup>30</sup> Hales, G., C. Lewis and D. Silverstone. “Gun crime: The Market In and Use of Illegal Firearms,” Home Office Research Study 298, (London: Home Office, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> Harding, R. “Gun Use in Crime, Rational Choice and Social Learning Theory.” in Clarke, R. and Felson, Marcus, *Routine Activity and Rational Choice* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1993), pp. 85–102.

<sup>32</sup> See for further details: Hales, G., C. Lewis and D. Silverstone. “Gun crime: The Market In and Use of Illegal Firearms,” Home Office Research Study 298, (London: Home Office, 2006); Morselli, Carlo, Petit, Sévrine, Turcotte, Mathilde and Gagnon, Claudine. “Identifying Illegal Firearm Market Acquisition Patterns,” Ottawa: Public Safety Canada, Firearms and Operational Policing Policy Division, 2010; and Massari, M. “Guns in the Family Mafia Violence in Italy,” in Le Brun, E., *Small Arms Survey 2013 Everyday Dangers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 74–101.

<sup>33</sup> Ashkenazi, Mike. “What do the natives know? Societal Mechanisms for Controlling Small Arms” in *Small Arms Crime and Conflict Global Governance and the Threat of Armed Violence* (London: Routledge, 2012), 228–247.

<sup>34</sup> See for example: On Nepal, Paudel, Lekh Nath. “The Highway Routes Small Arms Smuggling in Eastern Nepal,” Issue Brief Number 4. Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2014; On Kenya Wepundi, Manasseh, Nthiga; Kabuu, Eliud; Murray, Ryan and Alvazzi del Frate, Anna. “Availability of Small Arms and Perceptions of Security in Kenya: An Assessment,” Special Report 16. Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2012; Wepundi, Manasseh. “Political Conflict and Vulnerabilities Firearms and Electoral Violence in Kenya,” Issue Brief No. 2. Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2012 and Mkutu, K. “Small Arms and Light Weapons Among Pastoral Groups in the Kenya–Uganda Border,” *African Affairs* 106: 422, (2007), pp. 47–70.; concerning flows into Mexico, McDougal, Topher; Shirk, David; Muggah, Robert and Patterson, John H. “The Way of the Gun: Estimating Firearms Trafficking across the US–Mexico Border,” *Journal of Economic Geography* (2014). Accessed 17 August 2015, doi: 10.1093/jeg/lbu021; Chu, V. and Krouse, W. “Gun Trafficking and the Southwest Border,” Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, 2009; on Mexico and the Philippines Schroeder, Matt. “On the Record Illicit Weapons in The United States,” in Glenn McDonald et al, *Small Arms Survey 2014: Women and Guns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 244–273; and on Nigeria Onuoha, G. “Contextualising the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria’s Niger Delta,” *African Security Review* 15:2, (2006), pp. 08–114. and Duquet, Nils, “Arms Acquisition Patterns and the Dynamics of Conflict, Lessons from the Niger Delta” *International Studies Perspectives* 10:2 (2009), pp. 169–185.

<sup>35</sup> Some quantitative analysis of firearms trafficking into Mexico can be found in McDougal, Topher; Shirk, David; Muggah, Robert and Patterson, John H. “The Way of the Gun: Estimating Firearms Trafficking across the US–Mexico Border,” *Journal of Economic Geography* (2014). Accessed 17 August 2015, doi: 10.1093/jeg/lbu021.

<sup>36</sup> Greene, Owen and Nicholas Marsh, “Conclusions and Priorities for Further Research,” in Greene, Owen and Marsh, Nicholas eds., *Small Arms Crime and Conflict Global Governance and the Threat of Armed Violence* (London: Routledge, 2012a) pp. 255–260.

In such a context, the acquisition of weapons is often a key means by which different groups, and the state, jockey for power and control over the population and economic resources. States may, through lack of capacity and other reasons, tolerate the illicit acquisition and use of firearms if they have made a formal or informal accommodation with a group or its leader.<sup>37</sup> For example, in many countries elections feature armed intimidation of voters by armed gangs associated with rival politicians. The acquisition and use of such weapons may well not be in accordance with national law and regulations, but the people carrying out the violence are able to act with impunity.

The final body of research concerns flows of weapons into areas of armed conflict. It is most often located within Peace and Conflict research, and International Relations. In addition, it carried out by people working in think tanks, NGOs and International Organizations (such as UN Security Council investigations into arms embargo violations). In general it uses qualitative methods, such as interviews conducted during fieldwork, and publications are usually based upon case studies. This research usually does not primarily examine firearms trafficking, as warfare typically requires a wide variety of weapons and their ammunition. Firearms are though a ubiquitous element of any military campaign, and such small arms are, along with light weapons such as mortars, rockets and grenades, a key form of military technology used by non-state armed opposition groups.<sup>38</sup> In addition to non-state groups, governments under arms embargoes have also been an important subject of research on firearms trafficking. Groups engaged in warfare have different needs compared to most groups engaged in crime. Warfare is usually conducted openly, so there is little imperative to obtain guns that can easily be concealed about the person. Instead, warfare emphasises firepower found in automatic firearms, and usually the consumption of vast quantities of ammunition.<sup>39</sup> The need to develop reliable sources of logistic supply (especially of arms and ammunition). Key sources of arms supply are captured stocks from the government they fight, cross border smuggling often organised by illicit dealers and brokers, and donations by sponsor governments.

The most important work on arms trafficking and warfare is by Bourne.<sup>40</sup> Bourne notes that many commentators presume the existence of a global homogenized ‘black market’ in arms in which access to guns depends mainly upon financial resources, and arms are easily moved from one area to another.<sup>41</sup> Instead, he shows that “illicit markets exist at a regional level as discretely constructed sectors of availability and flow.” A key factor is the role played by states in arms flows to conflict areas. They may encourage arms trafficking – as an active participant when supplying proxies, or through tolerating the activities of traffickers – or their law enforcement and arms forces may lack the capacity to prevent trafficking through their territory or across porous borders. There are few wholly illicit intercontinental arms shipments. Instead arms are usually transported via the State authorized trade and later diverted into war zones.

There are, of course, not clear divisions between these three fields of research and the countries being studied (and some works have focused upon a variety of contexts.<sup>42</sup> Some forms of violence

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Marsh, Nicholas. “Two Sides of the Same Coin: the legal and illicit trade in small arms,” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 9:1, (2002), pp. 217–228.

<sup>39</sup> Corney, Neil and Nicholas Marsh, “Aiming for Control: The Need to Include Ammunition in the Arms Trade Treaty,” PRIO Report, (Oslo: PRIO, 2013), pp. 9–19.

<sup>40</sup> See Bourne, Mike. “Small Arms and Light Weapons Spread and Conflict” in Greene, Owen and Marsh, Nicholas, *Small Arms Crime and Conflict Global Governance and the Threat of Armed Violence* (London: Routledge, 2012), 29–42; Bourne, Mike. *Arming Conflict: The Proliferation of Small Arms* (London: Palgrave 2007).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 2012, p. 29.

<sup>42</sup> See Marsh, Nicholas. “Two Sides of the Same Coin: the legal and Illicit Trade in Small Arms,” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 9:1, (2002), pp. 217–228; Killicoat, Phillip. “What Price the Kalashnikov? The Economics of Small Arms,” in Berman, Eric et al., *Small Arms Survey 2007 Guns and the City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 257–287; Florquin, N, “Price Watch Arms and Ammunition At Illicit Markets.” in Le Brun, E et al., *Small Arms Survey 2013 Everyday Dangers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 250–281.



that are commonly defined as being ‘crime’ may be of greater intensity than wars, for example the violence carried out between drug cartels and the Mexican state.<sup>43</sup> Organized criminal activity often occurs in the same location as warfare, and same people may be involved in both activities. In many cases the sharp distinction usually found in developed countries between legality and illegality is not present in developing countries. In underprivileged areas like slums high levels of violence may be tolerated by a government which does not prioritise apprehending criminals or citizen safety.<sup>44</sup> Sometimes, governments may tolerate the existence of, or actively supply weapons to, pro-government militias and other allied groups.<sup>45</sup> They need to develop reliable sources of logistics supply, including large quantities of weapons and ammunition.<sup>46</sup> Cultural norms and traditional forms of governance may have a greater effect upon the governance of firearms than national legislation.<sup>47</sup>

## Key findings from the UNODC Firearms Study

This section outlines three of the key findings of the Study. It is not intended to provide an overview of all its notable findings, and for that readers would be advised to read the full Study.

### *Reported Trafficking is Mostly Local*

The 30 states that provided quantitative information on contextual factors related to trafficking in firearms (see above) reported that in general most firearms trafficking appeared to be local – involving neighbouring countries or other states within a region. This conclusion is drawn from several indicators, including: the country of manufacture of the firearm, the nationality of the trafficker, where seized firearms had been trafficked from, and whether trafficked firearms had been transported by air, sea, land or via mail services.

States were asked to report on the country of manufacture of seized firearms. National regulations usually require that lawfully produced firearms are marked with the manufacturer’s brand, symbols, serial numbers, and other information. Using this information it is possible to identify the country of manufacture. Several states with firearms manufacturing industries reported that the majority of seized firearms had been made in that country. It is possible that a firearm had been trafficked out of the manufacturing country, and then back in prior to the seizure. But the preponderance of seizures of firearms manufactured ‘in country’ is strongly suggestive of the owners of seized firearms having obtained them domestically.

In particular, Brazil reported that about 87 per cent of seized firearms had been manufactured in Brazil – something also found in earlier research on seized firearms in Brazil by Dreyfus and Marsh who found that 82 per cent of firearms seized in the state of Rio de Janeiro had been made in Brazil.<sup>48</sup> The Czech Republic, another major producer of firearms, reported to the UNODC that 95 per cent of seized firearms had been made there. Similarly, Spain reported that 99 per cent of seized firearms had been domestically

<sup>43</sup> For example, the violence in Mexico is not classified as being a civil war by the Uppsala Conflict Data Project.

<sup>44</sup> For more on role of illicit arms and the blurred distinction between ‘crime’ and ‘conflict’ see Greene and Marsh 2012.

<sup>45</sup> Hazen, J. “Force Multiplier Pro-Government Armed Groups,” in Eric Berman et al., *Small Arms Survey 2010: Gangs, Groups, and Guns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 254–275.

<sup>46</sup> Paul, Christopher; Clarke, Colin, Grill, Beth and Dunigan, Molly. *Paths to Victory Lessons from Modern Insurgencies* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2013); Bourne, Mike. “Small Arms and Light Weapons Spread and Conflict” in Greene, Owen and Marsh, Nicholas, *Small Arms Crime and Conflict Global Governance and the Threat of Armed Violence* (London: Routledge, 2012), 29–42; Bourne, Mike. *Arming Conflict: The Proliferation of Small Arms* (London: Palgrave 2007).

<sup>47</sup> M. Ashkenazi “What do the natives know? Societal mechanisms for controlling small arms” In Greene, O and Marsh, N eds., *Small Arms Crime and Conflict Global Governance and the Threat of Armed Violence* (London: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>48</sup> Dreyfus, Pablo and Nicholas Marsh, *Tracking the Guns: International Diversion of Small Arms to Illicit Markets in Rio de Janeiro* (Oslo and Rio de Janeiro, PRIO and Viva Rio, 2006), p. 24.

manufactured.<sup>49</sup>

The preponderance of locally manufactured firearms also appeared to apply to craft production by artisans. Ecuador and Ghana reported high levels of firearms made by local artisans. Ecuador reported that 80 per cent of seized firearms had been made in Ecuador. Similarly, Ghana reported that between 20 and 50 per cent of seized firearms had been made in Ghana.<sup>50</sup>

In those states that are not large manufacturers, the majority of seized firearms were usually made in neighbouring countries, or within the region. For example, Estonia reported that 23 per cent of seized firearms were made in neighbouring Russia, and a further 23 per cent were made in the Czech Republic (with Austria and Germany each accounting for a further 4 per cent). Seized firearms manufactured outside Europe were made in Israel (19 per cent), and the United States (6 per cent).<sup>51</sup>

Guatemala was one country that did not report a preponderance of firearms made ‘in country,’ in neighbouring countries, or in the region. It reported significant seizures of firearms manufactured in Argentina and the USA, and a majority were collectively manufactured in the Czech Republic, Israel, Korea and Turkey.<sup>52</sup>

A second indicator of the locality of trafficking is the nationality of people accused of firearms trafficking. The citizenship of accused firearms traffickers was reported by 18 countries. In 10 of those 18, nationals of the country in which the seizure took place were the majority of identified firearms traffickers. Brazil reported that 90 per cent of identified traffickers were Brazilian, all traffickers reported by Lithuania were citizens of that country, and Romania reported that over the four years covered by the Study, between 69.8 and 88.1 per cent of traffickers were Romanians.<sup>53</sup> In a further two countries (FYR Macedonia and Ecuador) nationals were reported, but as a minority of identified traffickers.

When traffickers were identified as foreign nationals they were usually citizens of either neighbouring countries or countries in the same region (that were not neighbouring). Fifteen countries reported firearms traffickers that were foreign citizens. Of those 15, in 10 all the identified traffickers were from neighbouring countries, or others countries in the same region.<sup>54</sup> For example, Montenegro reported that the citizenship of traffickers was of neighbouring: Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo, and Serbia; and also from Slovenia which is in the region. Traffickers from outside the region were reported by five states. For example, the Netherlands reported traffickers that were citizens of neighbouring Belgium and Germany, and also from extra-regional Turkey, United States and Morocco. All states that reported extra regional traffickers also reported traffickers from neighbouring countries or countries within the region.<sup>55</sup>

Fourteen states reported data in the annual seizures questionnaire on the top five countries of departure of seized firearms, and eight of those reported the percentage of seizures (the remainder just listed the countries of departure). The country of departure is the source country from which a seized firearm had been trafficked. Data provided on country of departure would only concern those firearms whose history had been traced (so it would usually not apply to all seized firearms). The information reported shows that the most commonly reported source countries were neighbouring states sharing a common border. A country of departure in the same region (but not sharing a common border) was also frequently reported.<sup>56</sup> For example, Lithuania reported that in 2012 neighbouring Belarus was the country of departure of all

<sup>49</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC Study on Firearms 2015, Vienna: UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015, pp. 40-42.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 41.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 42.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 60.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 44.

seized trafficked firearms, and Latvia reported that in 2013 the Netherlands was the country of departure of all seized firearms. Perhaps due to its geographical position as an island in the Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago was one of two states that reported that the most common countries of departure were from outside the region in which it is located. It reported that in 2013 (expressed as a percentage of seizures) the countries of departure were: United States (55 per cent), Venezuela (25 per cent), Brazil (10 per cent) Dominican Republic (5 per cent) and Mexico (5 per cent). In addition to Trinidad and Tobago, Guatemala, Brazil and Finland reported the United States as a country of departure.

Eighteen countries reported on whether seized firearms had been transported by air, land, sea or via mail services. Trafficking by land was reported as the only route by 10 of them, and as the most common route by another five.<sup>57</sup> For example, Ecuador reported that in 85 per cent of seizures the transportation method was by land, and the remainder was by sea, (8 per cent), mail services (4 per cent) and by air (3 per cent). Trafficking by land suggests that it is more likely that firearms are being moved relatively short distances (across common borders or within regions) rather than between continents or regions which would be associated with sea or air transport. Almost all countries reported that trafficking by mail services was a small, or non-existent, proportion of seizures. The exception was Sweden, and it reported that overall the most common form of transport was via mail services.

Concerning states that reported to the Study, collectively, the country of manufacture of firearms, the country of departure and the means of transport are suggestive of trafficking that is carried out within a close geographical area to the place in which the firearms have been seized. As noted by the UNODC Study, “Reports of more complex trafficking between continents or by nationals from outside the region may attract more attention, but are much rarer in country responses to the questionnaires.”<sup>58</sup> This emphasis upon firearms trafficking being a local phenomenon (at least in the countries that reported to the Study) suggests the need for a re-evaluation of the conventional wisdom surrounding firearms trafficking. Firearms trafficking is often depicted as involving intercontinental movements of arms carried out by criminals with a global presence. The UNODC Study suggests that the reality is much more prosaic:

*The apparent prevalence of localized trafficking discovered here suggests that the more complex networks associated with some other forms of illicit transnational commerce may be less important for the overall illegal trade in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition.*

It is important here to reiterate that this finding only concerns the countries that reported data to the Study. This self-selecting group is not representative of all states. In particular, aside from Colombia, Iraq and Nigeria, the participating countries were not involved in armed conflict. As noted by Bourne, embargoed states or rebel groups do attempt to develop much more complex arms acquisition networks than were apparent in the UNODC Study.<sup>59</sup>

The differences between firearms trafficking and other forms of trafficking will be a fruitful area of further research. Two preliminary explanations for the difference between firearms and illicit narcotics such as cocaine or opioids can be mentioned in this article. The first is that in terms of their financial value per weight smuggled, firearms are certainly a much less profitable cargo. Smuggling USD 100 000 worth of Kalashnikovs (at USD 500 each the shipment would be of 200 guns) would be much heavier and take up far more space than a shipment of cocaine or heroin worth an equivalent value. The smuggled firearms would be far more difficult to conceal from law enforcement agencies.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, pp. 55-57.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

<sup>59</sup> See Bourne, Mike. “Small Arms and Light Weapons Spread and Conflict” in Greene, Owen and Marsh, Nicholas, *Small Arms Crime and Conflict Global Governance and the Threat of Armed Violence* (London: Routledge, 2012), 29–42; Bourne, Mike. *Arming Conflict: The Proliferation of Small Arms* (London: Palgrave 2007).

Second, as is shown in the next section, in the countries that reported to the Study, there did not appear to be a mass consumer market for illicit firearms (in the way that there is for illicit narcotics). Instead, illicit firearms were associated with people engaged in other forms of criminal activity. The lack of large scale consumer demand for illicit firearms in the reporting countries suggests that firearms trafficking is mostly a small scale niche activity (the exception being areas in which there is large scale organized violence such as warfare).

It is important to note that the sensitivity of firearms trafficking is not directly related to either the complexity of trafficking, the total financial value, or even to the number of firearms being trafficked. A single gun illicitly obtained would have devastating consequences if it was acquired by someone intent upon committing mass murder. Large numbers of small scale transactions, often known as the ‘ant trade’, can overall be responsible for the movement of large quantities of firearms, ammunition and parts.<sup>60</sup>

### *Reported Seizures are Associated with Other Forms of Criminal Activity*

The annual seizures questionnaire asked states to report up to the five most frequent offences associated with seized firearms (by choosing from a list), and replies were received from 24.

Unsurprisingly, several states mentioned offences specifically related to firearms. Eight states listed ‘illicit trafficking in firearms’, and five listed ‘illicit manufacturing of firearms’. In addition, other offences related to laws and regulations concerning firearms were listed by several states, eleven listed ‘illicit possession’, eight listed ‘carrying without a license’, five listed ‘illicit use’ and two listed ‘falsifying the marking on firearms’. It is noticeable that compared to other crimes (outlined below), there were comparatively few offences specifically related to firearms trafficking. The UNODC Study suggests that “it may be that trafficking in firearms is not consistently emphasized as a criminal offence in cases involving seized firearms, possibly because law enforcement focuses on more serious offences, such as drug trafficking or violent acts.”<sup>61</sup>

A large number of offences were related to criminal activity. Seven states listed ‘robbery’, six listed ‘homicide’, six listed ‘participation in organised crime group,’ five states listed ‘drug trafficking’ and five listed other ‘contraband/smuggling’ offences. Only one state listed ‘terrorist offences’. Among the states that reported data, there is a clear impression that seized firearms are associated with an instrumental use of a weapon in criminal activity involving violence (or at least the threat of violence) – most obviously homicide and robbery, but also membership of organized crime groups or activities often associated with them such as or drug trafficking or other forms of smuggling.

Something suggestive of a link between seizures and criminality is the types of firearms seized. Thirty-five states reported disaggregated information on the types of firearms seized.<sup>62</sup> Among all these states, handguns (pistols and revolvers) were the type most frequently reported as being seized, and were the most common type seized in 21 states. In addition, in most of the states with the highest absolute seizures of all firearms types, handguns were the most prevalent. Seizures of over 10,000 handguns per year were reported in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico. While they have a use in target shooting, the technical qualities of pistols or revolvers are of a gun designed for personal protection (it can easily be carried and concealed about the person). Shotguns or rifles designed for hunting can, of course, be used for personal protection, but their size limits the occasions in which this is

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Marsh, Nicholas. “Two Sides of the Same Coin: the legal and illicit trade in small arms,” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 9:1, (2002), pp. 217–228; McDougal, Topher; Shirk, David; Muggah, Robert and Patterson, John H.. “The Way of the Gun: Estimating Firearms Trafficking across the US–Mexico Border,” *Journal of Economic Geography* (2014). Accessed 17 August 2015, doi: 10.1093/jeg/lbu021.

<sup>61</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC Study on Firearms 2015, Vienna: UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015, p. 57.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 14-23.

practical (for example, they are very hard to conceal about the person). States with both large quantities of seizures and a predominance of seizures of handguns are therefore suggestive of seized firearms having been acquired because the owner anticipated being involved in acts of violence. It is of course possible that the seized handguns had been acquired because the acquirer anticipated being a victim of crime as well as a perpetrator. But such acquisition by potential victims would also be suggestive of firearms being used in criminal activities.

In contrast to the large seizures of handguns, in most countries that participated in the Study there were few seizures of machineguns (either smaller sub-machineguns or larger models).<sup>63</sup> Five states – Dominican Republic, Estonia, Ghana, Peru and Romania – did not report any seizures of machineguns during the four-year reporting period. A further 10 states – Argentina, Chile, Czech Republic, Ecuador, France, Greece, Latvia, Niger, Turkey and Uruguay – reported fewer than 10 seizures of machineguns per year. The lack of numerous seizures of powerful military guns such as machineguns is striking, and is counter to many media portrayals of firearms trafficking. It is likely that it is explained by both supply and demand factors. Relatively small scale criminal organizations may not demand machineguns for activities such as robbery or drug trafficking. Most models are difficult to conceal and the illicit possession and use of such a powerful weapon might attract unwanted attention from law enforcement agencies<sup>64</sup> In addition, as possession of machine guns is, in almost all countries, reserved for government military or law enforcement forces the supply to illicit markets can in most cases be expected to be much more restricted than firearms that can be purchased from retail outlets.

The three exceptional countries were Iraq (1,749 machine guns reported seized over a two year period), Saudi Arabia with (1,185 sub-machine guns reported seized over a two-year period) and Mexico (with 1,102 sub-machine guns and 275 machine guns reported seized over the four year period). All three states reported large seizures of firearms and machineguns did not account for more than 5 per cent of all seizures in any of the three states. Iraq was the location of a civil war at the time, and Mexico also experienced levels of violence that have been compared to warfare (between 2010 and 2012 over 25 000 homicides were reported per year in Mexico).<sup>65</sup> It is therefore likely that the higher numbers of machineguns seized in Mexico and Iraq reflect intensity of violence in those countries.<sup>66</sup> The factors that led to the high machinegun seizures in Saudi Arabia deserve more attention by researchers.

#### *Lack of National Capacity to Collect and Analyse Data*

The Study revealed widespread national problems in data collection and analysis on firearms trafficking. A lack of capacity in data collection is a common problem in many areas of public policy, especially in developing countries. The Study on firearms trafficking revealed in both developed and developing countries a lack of capacity to collect and analyse data on firearms seizures and trafficking.<sup>67</sup> Data was reported by some of the world's poorest countries, such as by Burkina Faso, but most of the states that reported data were high or middle income.<sup>68</sup> The Study is suggestive of problems in data collection and analysis being experienced by developed and developing countries alike, but with the necessary capacity more likely to be lacking in the least developed countries.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 21. The study questionnaire did not disaggregate between automatic and non-automatic rifles. So seizures of rifles may have also included fully automatic varieties.

<sup>64</sup> For more on this point see: Greene, Owen and Nicholas Marsh, "Conclusions and Priorities for Further Research," in Greene, Owen and Marsh, Nicholas eds., *Small Arms Crime and Conflict Global Governance and the Threat of Armed Violence* (London: Routledge, 2012a), pp.255-258.

<sup>65</sup> Homicide statistics from the Homicide Monitor accessed 25 August 2015, <<http://homicide.igarape.org.br/>>

<sup>66</sup> Though lower seizures of machineguns were reported in Colombia, another country experiencing civil war, during the period of the Study, of between 100 – 200 per year.

<sup>67</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC Study on Firearms 2015, Vienna: UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015, p. ix.

<sup>68</sup> For information on the geographical coverage of the Study see United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC Study on Firearms 2015, Vienna: UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015, pp. 3-4.

The Study notes that, “even within countries, criminal analysis on trafficking in firearms does not appear to be produced regularly and is not widely disseminated.”<sup>69</sup> The Study pointed to specific difficulties encountered by law-enforcement officials that hindered effective data collection and analysis on firearms trafficking.<sup>70</sup> It was difficult for officers to participate in international law-enforcement networks concerned with firearms trafficking. There was a lack of “registries and software applications” that are needed for systematic data collection. Decentralized data collection resulted in difficulties in collating national level statistics. Governments that lacked a standardized data collection and reporting system found that different agencies produced incompatible data, impeding producing national level analysis.

The policy implications of such problems are profound. Without comprehensive intelligence on the extent and nature of firearms trafficking it is difficult to develop adequate law-enforcement responses or formulate effective government policies. At a basic level, if governments are not aware of the extent of the problem they might not even prioritize the resources needed to monitor firearms trafficking.

The Study included recommendations for how states could assist one another to address shortcomings in data collection and analysis mentioned above. Key forms of assistance include providing training and infrastructure (such as databases). A part of providing that assistance could well involve progress in reaching internationally agreed terms, definitions and reporting procedures.<sup>71</sup> Doing so would make it much easier for law enforcement agencies in different countries to share information and analysis on firearms trafficking.

There are already three global mechanisms through which states can provide assistance in improving data collection and analysis: the UN Programme of Action on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, the Firearms Protocol of the UNTOC, and the Arms Trade Treaty all contain articles concerning the provision of international assistance. The UNODC Study notes that, “Almost fifteen years after the world agreed on the Firearms Protocol and the Programme of Action on Small Arms, the international community still lacks sufficient tools to determine what policies actually work to prevent trafficking in firearms and where trafficking is increasing or decreasing.”<sup>72</sup>

The national capacity to collect and analyse data on firearms trafficking should be at the heart of international activity to implement these two measures, and the more recent Arms Trade Treaty. The widespread difficulties experienced in the production of this Study shows that much more needs to be done.

The above finding that trafficking, as reported, is often local suggests that an important priority for future assistance in implementing global level agreements would be to focus upon networking and coordination among law enforcement agencies in neighbouring countries and within regions.

## Conclusions

The Study has provided a wealth of data, many of it from countries that had been the focus of little or no attention from scholars working on firearms trafficking. The Study’s mandate precluded cross-referring the data reported by states with other sources. But now that the Study has been published, with its extensive annexes containing the information reported by states, it will hopefully serve as a resource for other scholars working on firearms trafficking.

<sup>69</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC Study on Firearms 2015, Vienna: UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015, pp. 65-66.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 66.

<sup>72</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC Study on Firearms 2015, Vienna: UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015, p. ix.

The Study helped to fill in numerous gaps in existing research on firearms trafficking. In particular, it provides information on many developing and middle income countries, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, where there had been little or no prior research on firearms trafficking (especially with a data focus).

Overall, the findings from all countries echo Bourne's observation that there is not a single homogeneous black market in illicit small arms.<sup>73</sup> The UNODC Study emphasises how firearms trafficking is intimately related to local patterns of criminality, conflict and governance. In particular, a key factor in any country is the capacity of law enforcement to prevent firearms trafficking, and part of that capacity is the ability to collect and analyze data on the nature and extent of firearms trafficking. Unfortunately, many states lack the ability to systematically collect and analyse available data on where and how trafficking occurs within their territories.

The Study challenges some widely held conventional wisdoms. Instead of 'Lord of War' types who flew planeloads of arms across continents, the Study presents picture of firearms trafficking in the states that reported data that is much smaller in scale (though large numbers of small scale transfers can result in significant flows). In the states that reported data, for the most part, trafficking in machineguns is very rare and handguns far more prevalent. Traffickers tended to operate close to where the arms were seized, in most cases it is rare to find firearms trafficked from outside neighbouring countries or the region a State making a seizure is located. Where information was available, firearms trafficking appeared to be associated with other forms of criminality. Research on arms trafficking into war zones does show much larger scale and more complex shipments. The Study highlights that the situation in the rest of the world is quite different.

If the Study presents a somewhat prosaic picture, unlike what is often seen in the media, that is an opportunity for hope that firearms trafficking can be curtailed. The Study suggests that in many countries laws and regulations do limit the extent and scope of illicit firearms and demand for them. There is clearly much more that can be done to improve law enforcement (and its ability to collect data), but at least among the states that reported data to the Study, in general they were not 'awash' with illicit firearms, and instead trafficking appeared to be interlinked with people already involved in criminal activity.

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<sup>73</sup> See Bourne, Mike. "Small Arms and Light Weapons Spread and Conflict" in Greene, Owen and Marsh, Nicholas, *Small Arms Crime and Conflict Global Governance and the Threat of Armed Violence* (London: Routledge, 2012), 29–42; Bourne, Mike. *Arming Conflict: The Proliferation of Small Arms* (London: Palgrave 2007).