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Stolen Guns in America

A State-by-State Analysis

By Chelsea Parsons and Eugenio Weigend Vargas July 2017

Center for American Progress



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Introduction and summary

In the early morning hours of July 5, 2017, New York Police Department officer Miosotis Familia was ambushed as she sat in a marked NYPD command truck with her partner while providing additional security to a Bronx neighborhood after Fourth of July festivities. In an attack that police officials described as an assassination, Officer Familia was fatally shot in the head with a gun that had been stolen in Charleston, West Virginia, four years earlier.¹ Less than a month earlier on the other side of the country, a UPS driver in San Francisco shot and killed three co-workers and injured two others using a gun that had been stolen in Utah. The shooter was also armed with a gun that had been stolen in Napa County, California.²

Stolen guns pose a significant risk to community safety. Whether stolen from a gun store or an individual gun owner's collection, these guns often head straight into the illegal underground gun market, where they are sold, traded, and used to facilitate violent crimes. Gun theft is not a minor problem in the United States. According to data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), during the four-year period from 2012 to 2015, nearly half a billion dollars worth of guns were stolen from individuals nationwide, amounting to an estimated 1.2 million guns.³ Twenty-two thousand guns were stolen from gun stores during this same period.⁴ A gun is stolen in the U.S. every two minutes.⁵

This problem does not affect all states equally. The rate and volume of guns stolen from both gun stores and private collections vary widely from state to state. From 2012 through 2015, the average rate of the five states with the highest rates of gun theft from private owners—Tennessee, Arkansas, South Carolina, Oklahoma, and Alabama—was 13 times higher than the average rate of the five states with the lowest rates—Hawaii, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, and Massachusetts.⁶ Similarly, from 2012 through 2016, the average rate of the five states with the highest rates of guns stolen from gun stores was 18 times higher than the average rate the five states with the lowest rates.⁷

Gun owners and dealers have a substantial responsibility to take reasonable measures to protect against theft and help ensure that their guns do not become part of this illegal inventory. This report analyzes data from the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) to provide state-by-state data on the frequency with which guns are stolen from licensed gun dealers and individual gun owners in communities across the country. It then offers a number of policy solutions to help prevent future gun thefts.

States that are in the top 10 for highest number of guns stolen from both gun stores and private owners

- Alabama
- California
- Florida
- Georgia
- North Carolina
- Ohio
- South Carolina
- Texas

Stolen guns pose substantial risks to public safety

Guns stolen from gun stores and the private collections of individual gun owners pose a substantial risk to public safety. Stolen guns often end up being used in the commission of violent crime. During the six-year period between January 2010 and December 2015, 9,736 guns that were recovered by police in connection with a crime and traced by ATF had been reported stolen or lost from gun stores.⁸ A recent investigation by the Commercial Appeal of stolen guns in Memphis, Tennessee, found that of the roughly 9,100 guns reported stolen in the city between January 2011 and June 2016, 21 were later connected to homicides, 27 to robberies, 62 to aggravated assaults, and 64 to drug crimes.⁹

Theft is also one of the key ways that guns are diverted from the lawful market and into illegal gun trafficking networks. ATF describes burglaries of gun stores as “a significant source of illegally trafficked firearms” and has noted that “investigative experience shows that each of those stolen firearms is almost assuredly destined for criminal use in the immediate area of the theft.”¹⁰ A 2000 ATF report that reviewed all firearms trafficking investigations undertaken by the agency between July 1996 and December 1998—the most recent such study the agency has conducted—found that nearly 14 percent of those cases involved guns stolen from licensed gun dealers and another 10 percent involved guns stolen from private residences.¹¹ These investigations involved more than 9,300 illegally trafficked guns.¹² Another study analyzed data on 893 guns recovered by the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police Firearms Trafficking Unit in 2008 and found that for close to 32 percent of these firearms, their original owners claimed they had been stolen.¹³

Stolen guns become untraceable and thwart the ability of law enforcement officers to solve violent crimes. When a gun is recovered in connection with a crime, local police departments can submit identifying information about the gun to ATF for tracing—a process that allows ATF to identify the licensed gun dealer that originally counted the gun as part of its inventory. When a gun is lawfully purchased from a gun dealer, the dealer retains paperwork that identifies this first retail purchaser. The dealer can then provide this information to law enforcement

upon request as part of a crime gun trace. This can be a crucial investigatory lead for local investigators working to solve a violent crime. When a gun is stolen from a gun dealer's inventory, however, this investigative lead immediately goes cold, making it more difficult to identify potential suspects. Guns that are stolen from individual gun owners are similarly untraceable. While ATF can identify the first retail purchaser of a gun, the investigative trail ends when that person reports that the gun has been stolen.

Gun dealers as a prime target

Gun stores are obvious targets for criminals looking to steal guns. Indeed, ATF has reported a substantial increase in robberies and burglaries of gun stores over the past five years. Between 2012 and 2016, burglaries of licensed gun dealers increased 48 percent, and robberies of licensed gun dealers increased 175 percent.¹⁴ During this period, nearly 31,500 guns were stolen from gun stores nationwide.¹⁵ However, these thefts are not evenly distributed across the country. Thefts from gun stores are more prevalent in the South, with seven of the 10 states with the highest number of firearms stolen from gun dealers located in the southern region of the United States. Some states also experienced a sharp increase in the number of guns stolen from dealers in 2016. These thefts increased 122 percent in Georgia from 2015 to 2016, from 515 guns to 1,144 guns. California and South Carolina saw a 174 percent increase and a 383 percent increase, respectively, during the same period.¹⁶ A nonexhaustive list of examples of gun store thefts from nearly every state are included in the Appendix of this report.

TABLE 1
Total firearms stolen from licensed gun dealers, 2012 through 2016

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Texas	688	337	591	725	930	3,271
Georgia	389	466	393	515	1,144	2,907
Florida	233	248	341	448	662	1,932
California	298	127	120	252	690	1,487
North Carolina	192	223	400	241	402	1,458
Alabama	231	272	338	204	340	1,385
Ohio	282	158	198	308	325	1,271
South Carolina	210	104	88	128	618	1,148
Mississippi	148	141	308	237	228	1,062
Indiana	148	165	213	251	217	994
Pennsylvania	191	183	129	241	193	937
Illinois	282	100	77	127	296	882
Missouri	161	127	219	178	179	864
Michigan	295	141	86	120	199	841
Tennessee	101	159	190	137	237	824
Virginia	116	74	124	210	281	805
Arkansas	132	125	140	197	204	798
Louisiana	107	126	150	183	152	718
Arizona	201	129	102	112	106	650
Kentucky	48	83	193	62	242	628
Colorado	109	59	56	121	273	618
Oklahoma	72	162	84	120	77	515
New Mexico	111	31	40	130	87	399
Kansas	54	23	188	87	40	392
Washington	14	71	87	145	68	385
New York	99	105	129	7	43	383
Minnesota	88	35	73	26	132	354
Maryland	98	35	97	56	55	341
Nevada	12	5	41	131	152	341
Wisconsin	120	37	57	37	61	312
West Virginia	77	59	31	56	81	304
Massachusetts	197	7	2	20	19	245
Iowa	58	67	44	45	29	243
Utah	8	43	71	17	82	221
Alaska	11	25	18	95	51	200

Oregon	17	14	57	63	25	176
Delaware	28	62	13	22	49	174
South Dakota	1	53	23	22	36	135
Montana	13	32	30	15	31	121
Maine	23	19	3	0	72	117
Idaho	6	27	13	10	52	108
North Dakota	23	8	58	5	13	107
Nebraska	6	24	9	16	51	106
Vermont	17	18	39	12	4	90
Wyoming	20	11	3	12	19	65
New Hampshire	7	1	14	1	29	52
Connecticut	4	2	17	10	3	36
Hawaii	0	0	18	0	0	18
Rhode Island	15	0	2	0	1	18
New Jersey	0	1	2	6	1	10

Sources: Center for American Progress analysis of Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, *Summary: Firearms Reported Lost and Stolen* (Department of Justice, 2012–2016), available at <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/data-statistics>. The authors are not including firearms reported lost.

Gun owners at risk

Individual gun owners are also targets for thieves. It is difficult to ascertain the exact number of guns that are stolen from individuals in the United States because many of these thefts are not reported to law enforcement. However, estimates from a number of survey studies indicate that roughly 200,000 to 400,000 guns are stolen from individuals each year.¹⁷ The most recent study by researchers at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and the Northeastern University Department of Health Sciences found that approximately 380,000 firearms are stolen from gun owners each year, two-thirds of which are stolen in the southern region of the United States.¹⁸ This study identified a few common traits of gun owners who are victimized by theft: Those who own many guns, those who regularly carry their guns outside their homes, and those who do not employ safe storage practices while at home face a higher risk of gun theft.¹⁹

The most comprehensive repository of data on the number of guns stolen from individuals—as opposed to gun stores—comes from the FBI’s Uniform Crime Report. Most individual police agencies in almost every state submit data annually to the FBI on the dollar value of many types of personal property reported stolen in their jurisdiction, including firearms. The FBI then aggregates these data to

report on the total value of guns reported stolen in the United States each year. For many states, these numbers are likely an undercount because gun owners are not required by law to report gun thefts; moreover, police agencies from state to state have inconsistent reporting practices. In 2015, the FBI reported that \$164 million worth of guns were reported stolen nationwide.²⁰ As with theft from gun stores, however, the problem of guns stolen from private collections does not affect every state equally. For this report, the Center for American Progress went back to the stolen gun data submitted by local police agencies, then aggregated those data per state to arrive at state totals of the value of guns reported stolen in the most recent four years for which these data were available: 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015.²¹ CAP then subtracted the value of firearms later recovered by police to obtain an adjusted value of stolen firearms. Because the data reported by jurisdictions provide only the dollar amount of the value of the guns reported stolen, CAP used an average price of \$450 per gun to calculate a rough estimate of the number of guns stolen in each state during this period, which is consistent with the average price per gun used by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics in a 2012 report.²²

TABLE 2
Estimated value and number of firearms stolen from individual gun owners, 2012 through 2015

Adjusted value of firearms stolen, in dollars

	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total value	Estimated number of firearms stolen, 2012 through 2015
Texas	\$17,935,110	\$19,250,055	\$18,730,248	\$23,759,004	\$79,674,417	177,054
California	\$13,124,804	\$18,263,367	\$12,196,377	\$15,842,389	\$59,426,937	132,060
Florida	\$9,335,340	\$8,784,322	\$8,734,924	\$9,226,008	\$36,080,594	80,179
Georgia	\$6,478,973	\$7,308,423	\$7,155,610	\$8,282,102	\$29,225,108	64,945
North Carolina	\$7,443,234	\$7,577,930	\$7,058,471	\$6,663,415	\$28,743,050	63,873
Tennessee	\$6,679,000	\$6,756,143	\$6,773,059	\$7,632,178	\$27,840,380	61,868
South Carolina	\$5,016,535	\$4,992,021	\$4,885,405	\$4,931,873	\$19,825,834	44,057
Alabama	\$4,275,589	\$4,998,588	\$4,098,477	\$3,722,079	\$17,094,733	37,988
Ohio	\$4,275,100	\$4,383,778	\$4,134,831	\$3,978,167	\$16,771,876	37,271
Washington	\$3,484,654	\$3,838,509	\$3,424,717	\$4,176,133	\$14,924,013	33,164
Oklahoma	\$3,592,254	\$3,929,062	\$3,540,483	\$3,224,593	\$14,286,392	31,748
Arizona	\$3,570,790	\$3,848,386	\$3,526,019	\$3,302,018	\$14,247,213	31,660
Louisiana	\$2,799,141	\$3,582,624	\$3,516,747	\$4,215,577	\$14,114,089	31,365
Missouri	\$3,274,114	\$3,401,110	\$3,276,788	\$3,861,438	\$13,813,450	30,697

Pennsylvania	\$3,079,036	\$3,182,181	\$3,119,884	\$3,518,200	\$12,899,301	28,665
Arkansas	\$2,684,657	\$4,321,961	\$2,543,502	\$2,776,241	\$12,326,361	27,392
Virginia	\$3,181,298	\$3,167,396	\$2,830,652	\$3,141,126	\$12,320,472	27,379
Kentucky	\$3,303,070	\$3,136,331	\$2,999,899	\$2,798,732	\$12,238,032	27,196
Michigan	\$2,840,379	\$2,756,989	\$2,289,904	\$2,365,202	\$10,252,474	22,783
Indiana	\$2,399,384	\$2,275,457	\$2,271,618	\$2,421,465	\$9,367,924	20,818
Colorado	\$1,732,569	\$2,964,408	\$2,020,400	\$2,116,127	\$8,833,504	19,630
Nevada	\$1,585,817	\$1,903,046	\$2,607,937	\$2,419,051	\$8,515,851	18,924
Oregon	\$2,418,693	\$2,016,086	\$1,697,662	\$1,653,303	\$7,785,744	17,302
New Mexico	\$1,543,332	\$1,465,166	\$1,787,904	\$1,656,202	\$6,452,604	14,339
Mississippi	\$1,500,219	\$1,474,701	\$1,636,117	\$1,816,855	\$6,427,892	14,284
Kansas	\$1,332,410	\$1,332,623	\$1,193,729	\$1,318,991	\$5,177,753	11,506
West Virginia	\$1,405,987	\$1,209,299	\$1,211,869	\$1,329,468	\$5,156,623	11,459
Wisconsin	\$1,185,590	\$1,296,951	\$1,251,917	\$1,261,660	\$4,996,118	11,102
Maryland	\$1,150,734	\$1,312,181	\$1,360,098	\$1,062,514	\$4,885,527	10,857
New York	\$1,254,509	\$1,077,829	\$999,633	\$493,233	\$3,825,204	8,500
Minnesota	\$867,586	\$845,674	\$767,761	\$951,669	\$3,432,690	7,628
Utah	\$819,420	\$810,882	\$917,798	\$851,918	\$3,400,018	7,556
Idaho	\$772,488	\$782,098	\$792,596	\$776,683	\$3,123,865	6,942
Iowa	\$726,664	\$581,919	\$724,571	\$866,458	\$2,899,612	6,444
Montana	\$445,241	\$655,632	\$637,579	\$820,378	\$2,558,830	5,686
Alaska	\$303,027	\$456,948	\$411,509	\$823,855	\$1,995,339	4,434
Delaware	\$349,661	\$351,290	\$357,957	\$342,206	\$1,401,114	3,114
North Dakota	\$266,904	\$291,384	\$327,792	\$445,073	\$1,331,153	2,958
Connecticut	\$406,705	\$272,641	\$240,840	\$271,469	\$1,191,655	2,648
South Dakota	\$149,605	\$227,642	\$574,361	\$237,359	\$1,188,967	2,642
Massachusetts	\$343,578	\$286,936	\$208,760	\$313,051	\$1,152,325	2,561
Nebraska	\$245,361	\$236,043	\$264,982	\$283,546	\$1,029,932	2,289
Maine	\$246,043	\$222,313	\$205,713	\$252,232	\$926,301	2,058
Wyoming	\$169,612	\$188,501	\$173,458	\$368,128	\$899,699	1,999
New Hampshire	\$195,414	\$192,333	\$209,559	\$194,893	\$792,199	1,760
Vermont	\$233,036	\$171,762	\$222,639	\$139,766	\$767,203	1,705
Hawaii	\$171,506	\$114,065	\$82,035	\$207,726	\$575,332	1,279
Rhode Island	\$83,808	\$68,931	\$77,650	\$165,828	\$396,217	880

Note: To obtain the adjusted value for each state and year, the authors subtracted the value of firearms recovered from the value of firearms reported stolen. The authors then used the \$450 average cost to obtain the estimated number of firearms. Due to a lack of information, the states of New Jersey and Illinois are not included in the analysis.

Sources: Center for American Progress analysis of data from Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Uniform Crime Reporting Program Data: Property Stolen and Recovered, 2015* (U.S. Department of Justice, 2017), available at <https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/studies/36792>; Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Uniform Reporting Program Data: Property Stolen and Recovered, 2014* (U.S. Department of Justice, 2016), available at <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/NACJD/studies/36392>; Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Uniform Reporting Program Data: Property Stolen and Recovered, 2013* (U.S. Department of Justice, 2015), available at <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/NACJD/studies/36123>; and Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Uniform Reporting Program Data: Property Stolen and Recovered, 2012* (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014), available at <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/NACJD/studies/35022>.

The numbers are staggering and vary widely from state to state. In Texas alone during this four-year period, more than \$79 million worth of guns were stolen, amounting to roughly 177,000 guns. Certainly, Texas' large population contributes to this number; however, a comparison between two other states with a similar population size highlights the disparity among states. Georgia and Michigan have a roughly similar population size, yet more than three times as many guns were stolen in Georgia from 2012 to 2016 than in Michigan.²³ Similarly, gun thefts were 24 times higher in Tennessee than in Massachusetts, two other states with similar population sizes.²⁴ The vast majority of these guns are never found. On average, states recovered around 11 percent of stolen firearms from 2012 to 2016.²⁵ These percentages also vary across states. While Maine recovered 28 percent of stolen guns during this period, Ohio and Tennessee only recovered 5 percent.²⁶

Enforcement and policy approaches to reducing gun theft

Law enforcement officials across the country have become increasingly concerned about gun thefts from both gun stores and individual gun owners. These organizations have proposed several policies and actions that can be implemented to mitigate the number of stolen firearms.

Reducing thefts from gun stores

ATF has grown increasingly concerned about burglaries and robberies of licensed gun dealers. In its fiscal year 2018 budget request, ATF identified the increasing number of burglaries and robberies from gun dealers as one of the primary “external challenges” that are straining the agency’s limited resources.²⁷ In addition to investigating each of these incidents, in January 2017 ATF launched a new system called flAlert to notify gun stores of thefts in the area.²⁸ ATF has also issued guidance to licensed gun dealers on steps they can take to “diminish risk” of theft or loss of guns in their inventory, such as evaluating potential security weaknesses with entrances, windows, and locks; installing an alarm system and video cameras; conducting a regular inventory reconciliation; and storing guns in a secure manner when the store is closed.²⁹ Gun industry experts, such as the National Shooting Sports Foundation, a trade association for the gun industry, offer similar guidance to gun dealers.³⁰

Under current law, however, ATF can do little more than offer voluntary suggestions to improve security at gun stores. Although ATF is the federal agency charged with licensing and regulating the gun industry, including licensed gun dealers, it does not have the authority to mandate that dealers implement any specific security measures designed to prevent theft. Andy Graham, ATF deputy assistant director for field operations, recently described this dynamic in an interview with *The Trace*: “We can suggest all day long, but ultimately, it comes down to the dealer taking responsibility for their facility and inventory.”³¹ John Ham, senior investigator and public information officer for the ATF Kansas

City field division, similarly described the lack of authority to require certain measures as having a detrimental impact on the agency's ability to prevent theft. In an interview with *The Kansas City Star*, he said, "We as an agency don't have the regulatory authority to come in and say you have to have an alarm system, bars on the windows, cameras. ... And while the vast majority of the industry has gone that direction themselves, it still hampers our ability to combat this as effectively as we'd like."³²

Nine states and Washington, D.C., have enacted laws to partially fill this gap and require gun dealers to implement some specific security measures, but such steps fall short of a comprehensive solution to the rising rate of firearm theft from gun stores.³³ Congress should enact legislation that mandates certain security requirements for licensed gun dealers and gives ATF the authority to ensure compliance with these requirements. In July 2017, Rep. Brad Schneider (D-IL) introduced legislation that would require licensed gun dealers to store guns in a secure manner when their stores are closed and also would direct the U.S. attorney general to promulgate regulations requiring additional security measures.³⁴ In addition to passing this legislation, Congress should remove the rider on ATF's budget that prevents the agency from requiring gun dealers to conduct an annual inventory reconciliation, a commonsense business practice that would help ensure that dealers are keeping track of their dangerous inventory.³⁵ Finally, Congress should provide ATF with the resources required to conduct regular compliance inspections of gun dealers to ensure that all dealers are complying with applicable laws and regulations and to help dealers identify potential security weaknesses before thefts occur.³⁶

Reducing thefts from gun owners

Local law enforcement agencies across the country also are becoming increasingly concerned about gun thefts from individual gun owners, particularly thefts from vehicles. Police in Peoria, Illinois, saw a 27 percent increase in the number of guns reported stolen in just the first six months of 2017, with 76 guns reported stolen from homes or vehicles.³⁷ Law enforcement in Memphis, Tennessee, found that gun thefts from vehicles had increased 38 percent from 2015 to 2016, with 851 guns stolen out of vehicles in 2016.³⁸ In Gallatin County, Montana, gun thefts increased 50 percent from 2016 to 2017.³⁹ An investigation in southwest Florida found that at least 625 guns were reported stolen in just three counties in 2016.⁴⁰ An investigation by The Trace of data provided by police departments

in 25 large U.S. cities found that parked cars have become a top target for gun thieves. In 2015, these 25 police departments reported roughly 4,800 guns stolen from vehicles, with many of these jurisdictions seeing a rise in these thefts over the previous year.⁴¹

Local police officials offer a few recommendations to gun owners for preventing gun theft, including not storing guns in vehicles or—if it is necessary to do so—storing them in a locked compartment in the vehicle.⁴² Only four states have enacted laws requiring gun owners to keep guns locked in certain circumstances, although 27 states have enacted laws designed to prevent children from accessing guns stored in the home, which generally impose civil or criminal liability for failure to do so.⁴³ States should consider implementing laws or policies that require or incentivize gun owners to store guns securely to help protect against theft. Police also recommend that gun owners take note of the make and serial numbers of all guns in their possession so that they could help with an investigation should the guns be stolen.⁴⁴ Additionally, law enforcement officials have expressed concern that expansive state gun laws that allow guns to be carried in more locations create additional opportunities for guns to be stolen.⁴⁵

In addition, collecting comprehensive data on the number of guns stolen in the United States poses a substantial challenge, as there is no federal law requiring gun owners to report such thefts to law enforcement. Only nine states and Washington, D.C., have enacted state laws mandating that gun owners report when guns in their possession are stolen or lost.⁴⁶ As a result, the data available to local law enforcement—which are then collected and aggregated by the FBI—are undoubtedly an undercount of the problem, as not all gun owners report these losses. An analysis of the National Crime Victimization Survey reveals that, from 2011 to 2015, 23 percent of crimes where guns were stolen from individuals—as opposed to gun dealers—were not reported to police.⁴⁷ Similarly, a report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics estimated that household burglaries involving stolen firearms were reported to police in only 86 percent of the cases, suggesting that 14 percent were not reported.⁴⁸

The lack of mandatory reporting of stolen guns also enables gun trafficking and straw purchasing by eliminating accountability and allowing individuals whose guns end up used in connection with crime to simply say that the guns were stolen. To help ensure a more accurate assessment of the prevalence of gun theft in the United States, Congress and state legislatures should enact laws requiring all gun owners to promptly report stolen or lost guns to law enforcement. This provision

was included in a number of bills introduced in the last Congress, including the Fix Gun Checks Act of 2016, which was introduced by Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and Rep. Jackie Speier (D-CA).⁴⁹ A June 2016 poll commissioned by *The New York Times* found that 88 percent of voters support this policy.⁵⁰

Recommendations to reduce gun theft

1. Enact federal legislation to require licensed gun dealers to implement certain minimum security measures, such as securely storing guns after business hours and installing alarm systems and cameras.
2. Eliminate the rider on ATF's budget that prevents the agency from requiring licensed gun dealers to conduct an annual inventory reconciliation.
3. Provide ATF with additional resources to conduct more frequent gun dealer compliance inspections.
4. Implement laws or policies that require or incentivize gun owners to store firearms securely.
5. Enact federal and state legislation requiring gun owners to promptly report all stolen or lost guns to law enforcement.

With close to 300 million guns circulating in the United States, gun owners and dealers have a substantial obligation to ensure that they are not vulnerable to theft. While there are many factors that contribute to firearms being trafficked to secondary markets, thefts play an important role. Lawmakers should look at the high number of stolen guns and consider implementing these smart laws and actions to reduce theft.

Conclusion

The number of stolen guns in the United States is staggering. Whether taken from gun stores or from individual gun owners, a firearm is stolen every 2 minutes. These stolen guns are often diverted directly into illegal trafficking networks and end up being used in the commission of violent crimes.

Gun owners and gun dealers therefore have a compelling responsibility to take measures to help ensure that all guns in their possession are not vulnerable to theft. Implementing the policy recommendations in this report would be a smart and commonsense step forward in helping to reduce gun thefts and protect community safety.

Appendix

Below is a nonexhaustive list of incidents of gun store burglaries and robberies across the states. The authors looked at online news sources to identify recent cases.

ALABAMA

Guns & Ammo, Tuscaloosa, July 2016⁵¹

Forty-five guns were stolen during a burglary of this gun store.

Patriot Gun Sales, Montgomery, March 2016⁵²

Eighteen guns were stolen during a burglary of this gun store.

ALASKA

Mat-Su Tactical, LLC, Wasilla, March 2014⁵³

A lone perpetrator stole three pistols and a rifle from this gun store.

ARIZONA

Black Rock Arms, Mesa, December 2016⁵⁴

A group of perpetrators stole 23 guns from this gun store.

ARKANSAS

Turtle Creek Pawn, Jonesboro, February 2017⁵⁵

A truck was used to smash through the back entrance of this pawn store, allowing four perpetrators to steal 64 guns.

CALIFORNIA

Seven gun stores, Southern California, August–November 2015⁵⁶

A group of perpetrators burglarized seven different gun stores in Orange, Riverside, and Los Angeles counties during a four-month period, stealing a total of 128 guns.

Fresno Firearms, Fresno, December 2014⁵⁷

Armed perpetrators stole 13 handguns and critically injured an 85-year-old man during a robbery of this gun store.

COLORADO

Four gun stores, Denver and Colorado Springs, April–June 2017⁵⁸

A group of perpetrators broke into four gun stores during a three-month period and stole a total of more than 45 guns.

Colorado Gun Broker, Jefferson County, June 2016⁵⁹

Thirty-five guns were stolen during a burglary of this gun store.

RJC Firearms, Pueblo, September 2015⁶⁰

A group of four perpetrators broke into this gun store and stole 12 guns.

CONNECTICUT

Woodbridge Firearms Trading Post, Woodbridge, June 2015⁶¹

Perpetrators used a stolen car to drive through the window of this gun store and steal an unspecified number of weapons.

DELAWARE

Southern Delaware Shooters Gun Shop, Laurel, February 2011⁶²

Three perpetrators stole 14 firearms from this gun store.

FLORIDA

Sunshine State Armory, Zephyrhills, April 2017⁶³

Robbers drove a truck through the window of this gun store and stole an unspecified number of firearms before driving away.

Guns Galore, Lakeland, January 2017⁶⁴

Nearly 50 guns were stolen during the second burglary of this gun store in just over a month.

Tampa Arms Company, Tampa, November 2016⁶⁵

A group of more than 10 suspects broke into this gun store around 3:00 a.m. and stole approximately 40 guns. They gained entry to the store by ramming a truck through the storefront.

Shooting Sports, Tampa, October 2015⁶⁶

Perpetrators used heavy machinery to break a hole in the concrete wall of this gun store, then stole 42 handguns in a burglary that took only 60 seconds.

GEORGIA

Backwoods Armory, Statesboro, June 2016⁶⁷

A thief stole 55 guns from this gun store.

Shots Fired, Covington, February 2016⁶⁸

Four thieves stole more than 40 guns during a burglary of this gun store.

HAWAII

Blue Water Hunter, Kona, January, 2015⁶⁹

Seventeen guns were stolen by an unknown number of perpetrators from this hunting supply store.

IDAHO

Bargain Barn, Plummer, July 2016⁷⁰

Two guns were stolen from this pawn shop.

ILLINOIS

Eagle Sports Range, Oak Forest, April 2017⁷¹

Perpetrators used a cinder block to break the window of this gun store and range, then stole at least 40 firearms.

Buchheit of Centralia, Centralia, November 2014⁷²

A pair of perpetrators used a stolen truck to smash through the security gates in the parking lot of this general retailer, then broke the store's windows and stole 39 guns and at least 1,000 rounds of ammunition.

INDIANA

Gunslingers, Anderson, May 2016⁷³

Two perpetrators stole three guns, ammunition, and accessories during a burglary of this gun store.

KS & E Sports, Lawrence, November 2015⁷⁴

Armed robbers stole 43 guns from this gun store during a robbery that occurred during business hours.

IOWA

America's Second Amendment Firearms, Cedar Rapids, June 2017⁷⁵

An unknown number of firearms was stolen from this gun store.

KANSAS

Signature Manufacturing, Merriam, April 2017⁷⁶

A thief stole thousands of dollars worth of firearms from this gun store.

KENTUCKY

111 Gun Shop, Louisville, July 2016⁷⁷

Perpetrators drove a vehicle into the front of this gun store, then stole an unknown number of guns.

LOUISIANA

Meaux Guns and Ammo, Baton Rouge, July 2015⁷⁸

Three perpetrators stole more than 50 guns from this gun store.

MAINE

Center Street Pawn Shop, Bangor, October 2016⁷⁹

A lone thief stole 16 handguns in a smash-and-grab robbery of this pawn shop.

MARYLAND

United Gun Shop, Rockville, March 2017⁸⁰

A pair of perpetrators stole 30 guns during a 90-second burglary of this gun store.

Blue Fins, Dundalk, August 2016⁸¹

Five perpetrators stole 36 guns, cash, and other items from this bait and gun store during an armed robbery.

Fred's Sports and Furniture, Waldorf, February 2014⁸²

Perpetrators broke into this gun store, stole more than 70 handguns, then set the store on fire, destroying it.

MASSACHUSETTS

Hitman Firearms, Tyngsborough, February 2016⁸³

Thieves stole four handguns from this gun shop.

MICHIGAN

Felix's Marina and Guns, Robinson Township, October 2014⁸⁴

Approximately 30 handguns were stolen from this sporting goods and gun store during a burglary in which the perpetrator used a hammer to smash through a glass display case.

U.S. Lumber Company, Battle Creek, September 2014⁸⁵

Three armed perpetrators stole 26 guns from this building materials store during an after-hours burglary.

MINNESOTA

Millville Rod and Gun Shop, Millville, September 2016⁸⁶

A group of three perpetrators broke into this gun store and stole approximately 75 guns.

MISSISSIPPI

Cook's Gun Shop, D'Iberville, February 2014⁸⁷

A thief used a truck to ram through the front of this gun store and stole nine handguns.

MISSOURI

Eagle Armory, O'Fallon, June 2017⁸⁸

Thieves used a U-Haul truck to back into the front of this gun store and escaped with at least 20 guns.

MONTANA

All Season Motorsports, Sidney, August 2014⁸⁹

Thirteen guns were stolen during a burglary of this sporting goods store.

NEBRASKA

Archer Arms Pawn Shop and BigShots Indoor Range and Gun Store, Lincoln, February 2017⁹⁰

Two thieves stole 39 handguns in two separate robberies.

NEVADA

New Frontier Armory, North Las Vegas, August 2016⁹¹

An unknown number of perpetrators stole 27 firearms from this gun store.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Wicked Weaponry Firearms, Hooksett, February 2016⁹²

A pair of thieves stole four firearms from this gun store.

NEW MEXICO

Bull Dog Firearms, Warriors Edge Armory, and Butch's Guns, Albuquerque, December 2016⁹³

Four thieves used an SUV to ram into the storefronts of three gun stores in a three-hour span and stole an unspecified number of firearms.

NEW YORK

Intimidator Sports, Syracuse, November 2014⁹⁴

Two perpetrators smashed the front doors of this gun store with a sledgehammer, then stole nine handguns.

D&M Shooting Sports, Palmyra, January 2013⁹⁵

Twenty-five guns were stolen from this gun store during a burglary.

NORTH CAROLINA

Trigger Happy Guns, Clayton, June 2017⁹⁶

Five rifles were stolen from this store during a burglary.

Tamz Guns & Ammo and Mackey's Landing Firearms, Jamesville, April 2017⁹⁷

A group of perpetrators broke into these two gun stores on two separate occasions and stole multiple firearms from each store.

NORTH DAKOTA

NAPA/Myers Auto Parts, Williston, September 2014⁹⁸

Four thieves stole at least 44 guns from this store.

OHIO

Center Mass Defense, Hamilton, March 2017⁹⁹

A group of three perpetrators broke into this gun store by shooting out the glass in the front door and stole a total of six guns.

J&D Firearms, Warren, March 2016¹⁰⁰

A pair of perpetrators stole 30 guns from this gun store.

Vandalia Range and Armory, Palmer Firearms, and the Miami Armory, Dayton, August 2015¹⁰¹

A team of perpetrators burglarized three gun stores during a four-day period, stealing a total of 77 guns.

OKLAHOMA

Tulsa Firearms, Tulsa, September 2011¹⁰²

An unknown number of perpetrators stole 26 guns from this store.

OREGON

Advanced Firearms Training, Gresham, April 2017¹⁰³

Four revolvers, two semi-automatic handguns, and one AR-15 assault rifle were stolen by a perpetrator from this gun store.

PENNSYLVANIA

R&J Welch, Muncy, February 2017¹⁰⁴

Eleven handguns were stolen during a burglary of this gun store.

Arrowhead Outdoors, GNR Sporting Goods, and Fulmer's Sporting Goods, north-central Pennsylvania, May–June 2016¹⁰⁵

A pair of perpetrators burglarized three gun stores during a two-month period, stealing a total of 93 guns.

Walmart, Waynesboro, October 2015¹⁰⁶

A pair of perpetrators stole five rifles during two separate robberies of this store.

Delaware Valley Sports Center, Bustleton, June 2014¹⁰⁷

Two perpetrators stole seven firearms and critically wounded one person in a robbery of this gun store.

SOUTH CAROLINA

Five Star Gun, Longs, October 2016¹⁰⁸

An unknown number of perpetrators stole 229 firearms from this gun store during Hurricane Matthew.

SOUTH DAKOTA

The Rooster Store, Rapid City, April 2016¹⁰⁹

An unknown number of perpetrators stole 25 guns from this gun shop, three of which were later connected to a homicide and a police shooting in Denver.

TENNESSEE

The Tactical Edge, Clarksville, June 2017¹¹⁰

An unknown number of perpetrators conducted a smash-and-grab robbery and stole 45 handguns and rifles from this gun store, marking the first of two gun store robberies in this area in two weeks.

Guns and Ammo, Mount Juliet, June 2017¹¹¹

Thieves stole 15 handguns and a rifle from this gun store, marking the second gun store robbery in the area in a two-week span.

TEXAS

R&G Guns, Alvin, May 2017¹¹²

A group of perpetrators used a stolen truck to pull the door off of this gun store, then stole more than a dozen guns.

Shooter's Edge, Waxahachie, July 2016¹¹³

Perpetrators drove a stolen truck through the brick wall of this gun store, then stole multiple guns.

Webshops, Arlington, April 2016¹¹⁴

A pair of perpetrators broke into this outdoor sports store and stole more than 50 guns.

Carter's Country Guns and Ammo, Houston, March 2016¹¹⁵

A group of roughly 10 perpetrators stole more than 50 firearms during a burglary of this gun store.

UTAH

Flawless Firearms, West Jordan, November 2016¹¹⁶

Two thieves stole nine firearms, including two machine guns, from this gun shop.

VERMONT

R&L Archery, Barre, March 2015¹¹⁷

A perpetrator broke into this gun store and stole 12 handguns from a display case, then drove to Hartford, Connecticut, and traded the guns to a drug dealer in exchange for heroin and cocaine.

Rite Way Sports Shop, Hardwick, April 2014¹¹⁸

Thirty-two guns were stolen during a burglary of this gun store.

VIRGINIA

50 West Armory, A.S.H. Tactical, and SSG Tactical, Chantilly and Fredericksburg, March 2017¹¹⁹

Three perpetrators robbed three gun stores over a four-day period, stealing more than 35 semi-automatic handguns.

Gail's Bait & Tackle, Chesapeake, November 2016 and January 2017¹²⁰

A perpetrator broke into this gun store on two separate occasions and stole a total of four rifles.

TNT Outfitters, Appomattox, January 2016¹²¹

Four perpetrators burglarized this gun store and stole 56 firearms.

WASHINGTON

Federal Way Indoor Range LLC, Federal Way, January 2017¹²²

Four thieves stole 31 firearms from a gun range during this burglary.

WEST VIRGINIA

Sportsmen's Gun and Pawn, Barboursville, May 2017¹²³

An unspecified number of thieves stole more than 100 firearms from this gun store.

WISCONSIN

Armageddon Supplies, Janesville, April 2017¹²⁴

An anti-government extremist used a hammer to break through the front windows of this gun store; stole 18 guns, two silencers, and ammunition; then led authorities on a manhunt. The store had been burglarized less than a year prior to this incident.

Jon's Gun Shop, Oshkosh, May 2015¹²⁵

Eleven semi-automatic guns were stolen during a burglary of this gun store.

WYOMING

Dragoon Armory, Cheyenne, May 2017¹²⁶

Three perpetrators broke into this gun store and stole an unspecified number of firearms.

About the authors

Chelsea Parsons is the vice president of Guns and Crime Policy at the Center for American Progress. Her work focuses on advocating for progressive laws and policies relating to gun violence prevention and the criminal justice system at the federal, state, and local levels. In this role, she has helped develop measures to strengthen gun laws and reduce gun violence that have been included in federal and state legislation and as part of then-President Barack Obama's January 2016 executive action announcement on gun violence prevention. Prior to joining the Center, Parsons was general counsel to the New York City criminal justice coordinator, a role in which she helped develop and implement criminal justice initiatives and legislation in areas including human trafficking, sexual assault, family violence, firearms, identity theft, indigent defense, and justice system improvements. She previously served as an assistant New York state attorney general and a staff attorney clerk for the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

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Acknowledgments

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Endnotes

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