

[Back to previous page](#)



document 1 of 1

LATIN AMERICA: Crime, gun demand form vicious circle

OxResearch Daily Brief Service. (Sep 03, 2014).



Find a copy



http://sfxhosted.exlibrisgroup.com/nps?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&rft_val_fmt=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:book&genre=unknown&sid=ProQ:OxResearch&atitle=&title=LATIN+AMERICA%3A+Crime%2C+gun+demand+form+vicious+circle&issn=&date=2014-09-03&volume=&issue=&spage=1&au=&isbn=&jtitle=&btittle=LATIN+AMERICA%3A+Crime%2C+gun+demand+form+vicious+circle&rft_id=info:eric/&rft_id=info:doi/

Abstract

Firearms ownership and gun-related crime in Latin America.

Most recent estimates suggest that there are approximately 63.0 million legally held firearms in circulation in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), of which 53.5 million are private guns in the hands of citizens and private security firms. The remaining 9.5 million firearms represent military, law enforcement and other state holdings.

Full text

SUBJECT:Firearms ownership and gun-related crime in Latin America.

SIGNIFICANCE:Most recent estimates suggest that there are approximately 63.0 million legally held firearms in circulation in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), of which 53.5 million are private guns in the hands of citizens and private security firms. The remaining 9.5 million firearms represent military, law enforcement and other state holdings.

ANALYSIS: Impacts.

Widespread US availability of firearms and institutional weaknesses in LAC make it difficult to stop cross-border arms flows.

The failure to tackle crime effectively will boost perceptions of insecurity and the resulting need for self-defence.

Regional cooperation on crime and trafficking, whether of drugs or arms, remains inadequate.

LAC accounts for approximately 9% of the world's population yet concentrates 27% of global homicides, while 75% of homicides in the LAC region involve firearms, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2011 (see LATIN AMERICA: Cities face persistent violence - May 2, 2013).

Firearms or guns -- also referred to as 'small arms' in military parlance -- refer to a number of different types of weapons including pistols, revolvers, shotguns, rifles, assault rifles, carbines, sub-machine guns and light machine guns.

Much of the region is adversely affected by armed violence associated with drug trafficking, organised crime and urban youth gangs (see CENTRAL AMERICA: Gangs are regional security challenge - July 2, 2014).

At present, Colombia is the only country experiencing armed conflict and the related violence -- and even in this context figures for armed violence from organised and common crime far outweigh deaths and casualties caused by political armed conflict (see COLOMBIA: Urabenos expansion increases as a threat - October 21, 2013).

Official government data for civilian weapons possession (including private security company holdings) shows a wide range of levels of firearms ownership in the region with Uruguay, a relatively peaceful country with low rates of firearms homicide, reporting 33 civilian firearms per 100 inhabitants while Trinidad and Tobago, a Caribbean country with a relatively high homicide rate, only reporting two legally registered firearms per 100 inhabitants.

For the sake of comparison, the United States and Germany report civilian firearms possession rates of 97 and 30 per 100 residents, respectively.

Legal firearms.

Arms per 100 people	
Argentina	9
Bahamas	22
Bolivia	3
Brazil	9
Chile	10
Colombia	7
Costa Rica	9
El Salvador	10
Guatemala	11
Honduras	10
Jamaica	7
Mexico	14
Paraguay	15
Peru	3
Trinidad and Tobago	2
Uruguay	33
Venezuela	9
LAC	9

Civilian firearms possession in selected Latin American countries
Civilian small arms per 100 people
Source: Aaron Karp, background paper for UNODC

The legal supply of firearms in the LAC region comes from a variety of sources including imports from within and outside the region, as well as national production and domestic consumption in the cases of Argentina, Brazil and Mexico (ammunition in the case of Mexico) (see BRAZIL: Crime trends point to state weaknesses - January 27, 2012). In addition to Brazil, the primary sources of legal firearms imports in the LAC region are the United States, Italy, Germany and the Czech Republic.

The legal demand for firearms is generated in large part by real and perceived levels of public insecurity driving civilians to purchase firearms for self-protection or hire armed private security guards to protect residential neighborhoods, commercial centres and other private spaces (see MEXICO: Kidnapping risk to keep security costs high - July 30, 2014). In Argentina, for example, off-duty police officers are required to carry their service weapons.

The LAC region reports the highest rates of armed private security in the world, with an average of 80% of all private security guards carrying weapons. This does mask national variation, with El Salvador reporting that 85% of all private security guards are armed while other countries such as The Bahamas and Bolivia prohibiting armed private security with the exception of armoured cars.

Nearly all LAC countries have national legislation governing civilian firearms possession and registration with national authorities. In some cases national firearms registration is regulated by the police (Brazil, Costa Rica, and Trinidad and Tobago), in others by autonomous civilian entities (Argentina, Jamaica and Peru) and in others

by military institutions (Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela):

Within the region, only Guatemala provides for civilian firearms possession as a right within its constitution, similar to that of the United States.

Most LAC countries grant civilians the authorisation to own and/or carry weapons as a privilege subject to certain controls and regulations.

Some LAC countries differentiate between permits for firearms ownership and public carrying (Paraguay), while others issue permits that contemplate both (El Salvador).

In Colombia and Mexico, the ministries of defence lease weapons to private citizens claiming ultimate ownership of civilian weapons and reserving the right to cancel the privilege of weapons possession.

Illegal arms.

There are no reliable figures for the number of illegal firearms circulating in the region. However, some estimates suggest that there are just as many illegal weapons in circulation as there are legally registered firearms while others suggest this figure is as high as 80 million weapons circulating outside the confines of the law.

The sources of illegal firearms and ammunition vary, but identified sources and means of illicit trafficking include:

cross-border smuggling combined with other illegal activities and contraband, including in relatively small quantities -- referred to as the 'ant trade';

firearms and ammunition, including disassembled components and parts, hidden in commercial shipping containers;

use of small-scale fishing vessels to introduce firearms and ammunition into rural coastal communities together with other illegal products and contraband;

theft and diversion from military and police stockpiles;

theft and diversion from private security stockpiles and private residence;

attacks on private security guards to steal their weapons and ammunition;

temporary rental of weapons to criminals by police officers and private security guards;

straw purchases made by legal customers then transferred to criminals, in particular for ammunition; and

undocumented sales of second-hand weapons, later reported as lost or stolen.

In the case of Mexico, for example, self-defence groups' weapons have largely come from municipal police caches or clashes with drug trafficking organisations (see MEXICO: Michoacan effects threaten reform prospects - February 10, 2014).

At present, there is little available analysis as to which of these sources of illegal firearms represent the primary problem or whether all means contribute equally. LAC governments are currently struggling to identify the key points where firearms move from the legal sphere to illegal markets. International cooperation agreements and frameworks exist at the level of the UN, Organization of American States and Interpol.

However, building national capacities within LAC governments to participate in these frameworks is a key challenge to be addressed.

CONCLUSION: The lack of institutional capacity to enforce regulation and control the trafficking of illegal arms remains a key challenge. At present, national debates within parliaments are heavily focused on further enabling citizens to purchase and own firearms for self-protection in insecure societies, although in other cases some governments are seeking to restrict civilian firearms possession to an 'acceptable' minimum.

Copyright Oxford Analytica Ltd. 2014. No publication or distribution is permitted without the express consent of Oxford Analytica.

Details

Subject	International relations; Politics; Social conditions & trends; Weapons; Crime; Guerrilla forces; Armed forces; Narcotics; Police; National security
Location	Latin America, Caribbean area, Argentina, Brazil, Central America, Colombia, Mexico, United States, US
Classification	9173: Latin America 1220: Social trends & culture
Identifier / keyword	Latin America, Caribbean area, Argentina, Brazil, Central America, Colombia, Mexico, United States, US, Industry, International relations, Politics, Social conditions & trends, Weapons, Crime, Guerrilla forces, Armed forces, Narcotics, Police, National security
Title	LATIN AMERICA: Crime, gun demand form vicious circle
Publication title	OxResearch Daily Brief Service
Pages	n/a
Publication year	2014

Publication date	Sep 03, 2014
Year	2014
Publisher	Oxford Analytica Ltd
Place of publication	Oxford
Country of publication	United Kingdom
Publication subject	Business And Economics
Source type	Reports
Language of publication	English
Document type	News
ProQuest document ID	1559542373
Document URL	http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1559542373?accountid=12702
Copyright	Copyright Oxford Analytica Ltd. 2014. No publication or distribution is permitted without the express consent of Oxford Analytica.
Last updated	2015-01-26
Database	ProQuest Central

Copyright © 2015 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved. Terms and Conditions