

# Introduction

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This report provides basic information on handgun commerce in California for the year 2000. Its principal focus is on the handguns sold that year. It also contains information on handgun purchasers, denied sales, handgun manufacturers, and commercial firearm licensees such as gun dealers and pawnbrokers. Its purpose is to inform the public, policy makers, and others about commerce in an important consumer product—the handgun—which has legitimate uses but is also frequently involved in criminal and self-inflicted violence.

*Handgun Commerce in California, 2000* relies largely on information in the Dealer's Record of Sale (DROS) archive that is maintained by the California Department of Justice. A DROS record is created each time an individual seeks to purchase a new or used handgun from a firearm licensee. The record, which contains basic identifying information on that individual and on the handgun he or she wishes to purchase, is sent to the Department of Justice for review. A small percentage of sales are denied by the Department of Justice after a mandatory background check; records for both approved and denied sales are retained by the Department.

This report does not contain information on all handgun sales in California. Some sales between private individuals are not included because there is no record of them: State law requires that nearly all such private-party transfers be routed through a firearm licensee so that a DROS record can be made and a background check can be conducted, but compliance is less than perfect. We have also excluded transactions involving the operations of the Department of Justice itself and certain other transactions. As a result of those exclusions, the sales tabulations here do not agree exactly with those provided by the Department of Justice.

With occasional exceptions, we have elected to use the information in the DROS records as originally provided by the submitting licensees, without reviewing the records and correcting errors. Some licensees did not supply complete data, particularly for handgun caliber and barrel length, and purchaser age and sex. As a result, table subtotals may not correspond exactly with totals. Information on missing data is given in Appendix III.

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## ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

This report is intended to be used as a reference, and each section is designed to stand alone.

The first section of *Handgun Commerce in California, 2000* illustrates how handgun sales were distributed through the state geographically and by month during the year. It then presents information on the number of handguns sold by handgun type, caliber, barrel length, and country of origin. New analyses for the 2000 report focus on sales at gun shows and sales between private parties. For all handguns and for each of these subgroups of handguns, this section also presents the distribution by age and sex of the persons to whom the handguns were sold. This section focuses on handgun sales; in the tables on age and sex, individuals who purchased more than one handgun are included once for each handgun they purchased. Handguns that were sold more than once in 2000 are included once for each time they were sold.

For each of the 20 manufacturers associated with the largest number of handgun sales, the second section presents a separate tabulation of the characteristics of its handguns that were sold in 2000 and gives the company's location and market share.

The third section presents information on denied sales, beginning with data on handgun characteristics and the age and sex of persons involved. Separate results are presented for prohibited-person denials and administrative denials made under California's new law restricting handgun purchases to one in any 30-day period (the "one gun a month" law). Tables rank individual manufacturers by their number of denied sales and list the reasons for which sales were denied.

The fourth section presents information on handgun purchasers. The number of handguns purchased and distributions by age and sex are presented twice: for all purchasers together and separately for purchasers of one handgun and purchasers of more than one handgun. In the data used for preparing these tables, which focus on individual persons, each purchaser was included only once, regardless of the number of handguns he or she purchased.

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The final section contains information on firearm licensees. Maps display their geographic distribution. Tables present the number of licensees by type of license and, for licensed retailers (gun dealers and pawn brokers), give more detail on the characteristics of handguns sold and volume of sales. Additional tables list the licensees with the most sales and those with the most denied sales; in the latter case, denied sales are compared to overall sales volume.

Appendix I presents tables designed to allow readers to compare subpopulations of handguns by type of sale and other characteristics. It also includes comparison tables for leading manufacturers. Appendix II presents abbreviated handgun commerce data for individual counties and for all cities with a total population greater than 100,000 persons in 2000.

Appendix III contains technical notes, and Appendix IV lists additional sources of information.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **Handgun Characteristics**

Handguns are of three principal types: semiautomatic pistols, revolvers, and derringers.

A semiautomatic pistol (referred to hereafter simply as a pistol) contains its ammunition in a detachable magazine; when a pistol is fired, some of the explosive force is used to load the next round of ammunition into firing position automatically. These are not fully automatic guns, also known as machine guns, which both load and fire automatically as long as the trigger is pulled and held depressed. For a semiautomatic pistol, each pulling of the trigger fires just one round of ammunition. Pistols typically hold six to ten rounds of ammunition, but may hold much more. (See full-size illustration on page 7.)



A Typical Semiautomatic Pistol

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A Typical Revolver

A revolver contains its ammunition in a cylinder that rotates, bringing a new round of ammunition into firing position, as the user depresses the trigger or pulls back on the hammer. Revolvers typically hold five or six rounds of ammunition. (See full-size illustration on page 8.)

A derringer is a small handgun that typically has two barrels, each of which is loaded by the user with a single round of ammunition. (See full-size illustration on page 9.)



A Typical Derringer

A significant proportion (20% to 30% in recent years) of the handguns that enter the consumer market in the United States are manufactured overseas. These imported handguns must meet a number of design and safety standards, including a minimum permissible height and length for pistols and a minimum barrel length for revolvers. In 2000, these standards did not apply to handguns made in the United States.

Handgun ammunition is produced in many sizes, or calibers; most handguns are designed to fire ammunition of just one caliber. The numeral in an ammunition caliber designation refers to the approximate diameter of the bullet, measured in inches in the American system (for example, .22, .45) and otherwise in millimeters (for example, 9mm, 10mm). Calibers



are generally grouped into three classes—small, medium, and large—based loosely on bullet size and speed. (See full-size illustration on page 10.)

## **Selling Handguns**

In 2000, California for the first time limited the number of handguns that an individual could purchase from commercial firearm licensees to no more than one in any 30-day period, with certain specified exceptions.

Persons who sell firearms as a business in California must have a federal firearms license, a state firearms license, and in many cases local certification as well. Retaining licensure requires compliance with all applicable laws and regulations, and licensees are inspected periodically to verify their compliance. As of September 1999, according to the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, there were 6,406 federal firearm licensees in California, including 4,005 gun dealers and 286 pawnbrokers. Not all licensees sell guns, however; as this report relies on information taken from sales records, licensees having no handgun sales in 2000 are not included.

One of the first steps in a handgun sale by a licensed seller is the submission of a Dealer's Record of Sale (DROS) form to the Department of Justice. There is a mandatory ten-day waiting period, after the DROS record is submitted, before the seller may transfer the gun to the prospective purchaser. This allows the Department to perform a required background check to verify that the individual seeking to purchase the gun is not prohibited from doing so. Except for transactions between immediate family members (parent to child, grandparent to grandchild) a private party may not sell a firearm directly to another private party. Such transfers must be routed through a firearm licensee, who retains the firearm during the mandatory waiting period and initiates the background check. Many, and perhaps most, private-party transfers are not conducted in compliance with this requirement. Private-party transactions are exempt from the one handgun per 30 days restriction.

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Most handgun purchasers in California are required to pass a safety course. Both state and federal laws prohibit the purchase (or possession) of firearms by felons, persons under felony indictment, persons convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence offenses or subject to domestic violence restraining orders, persons adjudicated mentally defective, addicts or unlawful users of controlled substances, illegal aliens, and certain others. Firearm licensees cannot sell handguns to persons less than 21 years of age. Since 1991, California law has also prohibited the purchase or possession of firearms by persons convicted of certain violent misdemeanors within the preceding ten years. California also prohibits the purchase or possession of firearms by persons who have been admitted to a mental health facility under certain specific circumstances within the preceding five years. Approximately two percent of handgun sales are denied after background checks have been performed.