

The 90% Myth

A widely reported myth is that 90 percent of the firearms misused by the drug cartels in Mexico were sold by federally licensed firearms retailers (FFLs) in the United States.[1] This myth was born out of Congressional testimony by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) wherein the ATF misstated, and quickly attempted to clarify, that 90 percent of the firearms recovered in Mexico in 2008 came from the United States. Since then, the myth has been propagated by the media and members of our government such as Sens. Dick Durbin (D- Ill.) and Diane Feinstein (D- Ca)[2] and even Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.[3]

The truth is that less than 12 percent of the guns Mexico seized in 2008, for example, have been verified as coming from the U.S. In 2008, approximately 30,000 firearms were seized from criminals in Mexico. Of these 30,000, only 7,200 (24 percent) were submitted to the ATF for tracing. This is because only these firearms were likely to have come from the U.S., a determination made by the presence of a U.S. mandated serial number and the firearm's make and model – requirements under federal law as part of the Gun Control Act of 1968. Of the 7,200 firearms submitted for tracing, only about 4,000 (13 percent) could be traced by the ATF

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of which roughly 3,480 (12 percent) came from the U.S. Although 3,480 is approximately 90 percent of the firearms successfully traced, it is hardly the mythical 90 percent of the total firearms recovered.

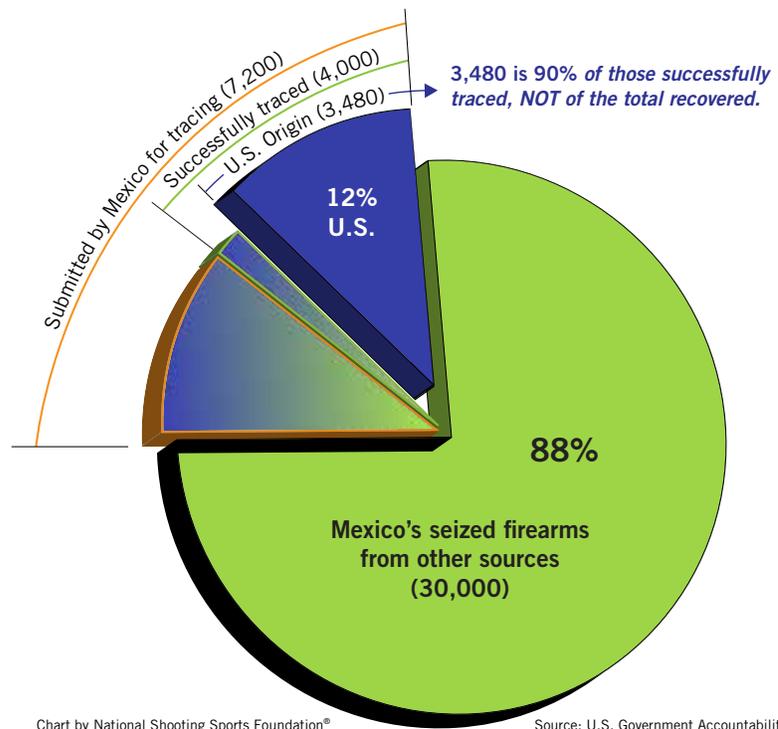
In reality, even the more accurate 12 percent figure overestimates the true number of firearms from the United States.

FAST FACTS

The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (Mexico Institute) points out that many of the serial numbers submitted for tracing were submitted to the ATF multiple times, some as many as five times each.[4] In fact, ATF has noted that more than 20 percent of the firearms submitted for tracing are in fact duplicates. With such errors distorting the statistics it is clear that even fewer

continued on back →

ONLY 12% OF FIREARMS RECOVERED IN MEXICO IN 2008 WERE TRACED TO THE UNITED STATES



than 12 percent of these firearms originated in the U.S. And of the small number that did come from the U.S., many did not come from FFLs. The U.S. Government also sells firearms directly to the Mexican Government. Mexican soldiers continue to defect to work for the drug cartels, taking their American-made service rifles with them. In recent years the number of defections has soared to more than 150,000.[5] Furthermore, of those successfully traced, on average they were sold at retail 14[6] years earlier – and following an FBI background check. This dispels the notion often repeated by the press that there is a flood of recently purchased firearms heading into Mexico from the United States.

Where do the guns come from?

According to U.S. State Department cables, the most lethal weapons used by Mexican cartels come from Central American arsenals. Grenades, now the number one choice of the cartels to attack military, police and civilians,

come mainly from Mexico itself and Guatemala.[7] Another significant source of weaponry is Colombia and its Revolutionary Armed Forces (“FARC”). And according to a 2006 report by Amnesty International, China was actively supplying arms to Latin American countries, which have subsequently been seized in Mexico. Clearly FFLs in the U.S. are not the main source of Mexico’s gun-related violence problem.

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Firearms industry cooperation with law enforcement

In 2009, in response to concerns over the violence in Mexico, the ATF conducted more than 2,000 inspections of firearms retailers in Texas and Arizona. These inspections did not result in a single dealer being charged with a crime.

The firearms industry, through NSSF, has supported and funded the Don’t Lie for the Other Guy anti-straw purchasing campaign for over a decade. This joint effort between the ATF and NSSF helps to educate firearms retailers on how to better detect and deter illegal purchases of firearms and warns the public that it is a serious crime to engage in a straw purchase.

Furthermore, according to ATF, federally licensed firearms retailers serve as a primary source of information for law enforcement combating illegal firearm trafficking and routinely report questionable transactions to authorities, including the ATF.

We respect and applaud President Calderon’s willingness take on his country’s powerful drug cartels, and we agree that crime needs to be addressed in Mexico; however, diminishing the civil rights of law-abiding Americans is neither an option nor a solution.

[1] See, e.g., Tim Johnson, Mexican Cartels Amass Better Arsenals, Mostly Bought in U.S., McClatchy, Nov. 18 2010, <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2010/11/18/104010/mexican-cartels-amass-better-arsenals.html#ixzz15jurWlbo>

[2] D’Angelo Gore, Counting Mexico’s Guns, FactCheck.Org, Apr. 22, 2009, <http://www.factcheck.org/2009/04/counting-mexicos-guns/>.

[3] Clinton: Mexico Violence Could “Mushroom”, CBSNews.com, Mar. 26, 2009, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/03/26/earlyshow/main4894068.shtml>

[4] Colby Goodman, Update on U.S. Firearms Trafficking to Mexico Report, 7, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Mexico Institute, April 2011

[5] CNN, http://articles.cnn.com/2009-03-11/world/mexico.desertions_1_desertions-drug-cartels-gulf-cartel?_s=PM:WORLD

[6] ATF Manufacturer’s Conference 2008

[7] Jorge Alejandro Medellin, The Grenades and Arms Market, Milenio Semanal Magazine, Oct. 10, 2010, available at <http://www.groundreport.com/article.php?articleID=2930260&action=pri>



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7/13

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