



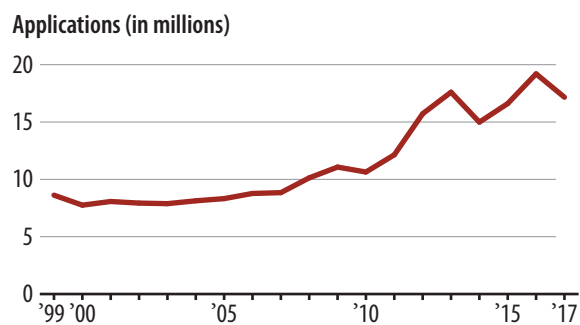
Background Checks for Firearm Transfers, 2016-2017

Connor Brooks, *BJS Statistician*

From 2016 to 2017, more than 36 million applications for firearm transfers and permits were subject to background checks under the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (Brady Act) (figure 1). About 500,000 (1.4%) of the applications were denied during that time. From the time that the Brady Act went into effect in 1994 to 2017, about 233 million applications were subject to background checks and 3.5 million applications (1.5%) were denied.

Findings in this report are based on the Firearm Inquiry Statistics (FIST) program, administered by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). FIST collects information on firearm applications, denials, and reasons for denial from state and local checking agencies and combines it with data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) Section. FIST also collects data on denials that the FBI referred to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' (ATF) Denial Enforcement and NICS Intelligence (DENI) Branch for investigation and possible prosecution.

FIGURE 1
Estimated number of applications for firearm transfers and permits since the first full year of the Brady Act's permanent provisions, 1999-2017



Note: The National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) began operations in 1998. Under that system, checks on handgun and long gun transfers are conducted by the FBI and state and local agencies. From February 28, 1994 to November 29, 1998, background checks on applicants were conducted by state and local checking agencies, mainly on handgun transfers. See *Presale Handgun Checks, the Brady Interim Period, 1994-98* (NCJ 175034, BJS, June 1999). The law's permanent provisions took effect when the NICS began operation on November 30, 1998. Totals for 2011 and 2013 were estimated. See *Methodology*. See table 1 for totals.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 1999-2017; and Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Instant Criminal Background Check System Transaction Statistics, 1999-2017.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and state and local checking agencies received about 17.2 million applications for firearm transfers and permits in 2017, an 11% decrease from the 19.2 million applications in 2016.
- About 1.4% of applications for firearm transfers and permits in both 2016 and 2017 were denied.
- From when the Brady Act became effective in 1994 to 2017, about 233 million applications were subject to background checks and 3.5 million (1.5%) applications were denied.
- In 2017, state checking agencies denied 3.0% of purchase permits, 1.4% of instant checks, and 1.2% of exempt carry permits.
- Local checking agencies denied 5.6% of applications for purchase permits and 1.2% of applications for exempt carry permits in 2017.
- A felony conviction, indictment, charge, or arrest in the applicant's records prompted 42% of denials in 2016 and 46% in 2017.

List of tables

TABLE 1. Estimated number of firearm applications and denials since the Brady Act's effective date, 1994-2017

TABLE 2. Firearm applications and denials, by type of checking agency and permit or check, 2016 and 2017

TABLE 3. Firearm applications and denials reported by state agencies, by type of permit or check and jurisdiction, 2016 and 2017

TABLE 4. Firearm applications and denials reported by local agencies, by type of permit or check and size of population served, 2016 and 2017

TABLE 5. Reasons for denial of applications for firearm transfers and permits, by type of checking agency, 2016

TABLE 6. Reasons for denial of applications for firearm transfers and permits, by type of checking agency, 2017

TABLE 7. Percent change in applications, denials, and reasons for denial, 1999-2016 and 1999-2017

TABLE 8. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives investigation of denials referred by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016 and 2017

TABLE 9. Number of reporting agencies that participated in the Firearm Inquiry Statistics survey, 2016 and 2017

TABLE 10. Final weights, by state and population category, 2016 and 2017

List of figures

FIGURE 1. Estimated number of applications for firearm transfers and permits since the first full year of the Brady Act's permanent provisions, 1999-2017

List of appendix tables

APPENDIX TABLE 1. Firearm applications and denials reported by state and local agencies, by jurisdiction and type of permit or check, 2016

APPENDIX TABLE 2. Firearm applications and denials reported by state and local agencies, by jurisdiction and type of permit or check, 2017

APPENDIX TABLE 3. Standard errors for table 2: Firearm applications and denials reported by local agencies, by type of permit or check, 2016 and 2017

APPENDIX TABLE 4. Standard errors for table 4: Firearm applications and denials reported by local agencies, by type of permit or check and size of population served, 2016 and 2017

APPENDIX TABLE 5. Standard errors for local agencies in tables 5 and 6: Reasons for denial of applications for firearm transfers and permits, by type of checking agency, 2016 and 2017

Terms and definitions

Application—information submitted to a checking agency about a prospective firearm purchaser to determine if the individual is disqualified from receiving a firearm or obtaining a permit to receive a firearm under state or federal law. A prospective firearm purchaser or a firearm seller may submit the information to a checking agency.

Checking agency—the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) or a state or local governmental agency that conducts background checks in the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) or state records. Checking agencies are typically law enforcement agencies.

Denial—a decision by a checking agency to prohibit an applicant from receiving a firearm or a state permit to receive a firearm because a disqualifying factor was found during the background check.

Federal Firearms Licensee (FFL)—a firearm seller, also known as a federally licensed firearms dealer, that is licensed by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) to buy, sell, and transfer firearms. All entities that regularly engage in firearms sales must be FFLs. They must also enroll in NICS if they reside in states where FFLs contact the FBI, instead of state points of contact (POCs), to request NICS checks.

Firearm—any weapon that is designed or may readily be converted to expel a projectile by the action of an explosive.

Handgun—a firearm that has a short stock and is designed to be held and fired using a single hand, such as a pistol or revolver.

Long gun—a firearm that has a barrel length of about 30 inches to improve accuracy and range, commonly has a shoulder butt, and is designed to be fired with two hands, such as a rifle or shotgun.

National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS)—a national system administered by the FBI that checks available federal, state, local, and tribal records to determine if prospective firearm purchasers are disqualified from receiving firearms.

Private transfer—a firearm transfer between two people who are not FFLs.

State permit or check types: States use four methods to approve a prospective purchaser to receive a firearm. A state may use one or more of these methods depending on the type of firearm being transferred and relevant state law.

Exempt carry permit—a permit issued by a state or local checking agency after a successful NICS check that exempts the holder (for up to 5 years under an ATF regulation or state law) from a new background check when presented to a seller (an FFL or, in some states, a non-FFL seller) for a firearm transfer.

Instant check—a background check system that requires a seller to transmit a prospective purchaser's information to a checking agency by telephone or computer and the agency to respond immediately or as soon as possible.

Other approval—a background check system that requires the seller to transmit the prospective purchaser's information to a state or local checking agency by telephone or other means and the agency to respond within an established time limit.

Purchase permit—a government-issued document (such as a permit, a license, or an identification card) that is issued by a state or local checking agency after a background check and must be presented to a seller for a firearm transfer.

State point of contact (POC)—An agency designated by state law to access NICS to check applications originating in its state.

Transaction—an inquiry to NICS about a prospective firearm purchaser.

Transfer—the physical change of possession of a firearm from one person to another, whereas a purchase is the exchange of money for a firearm.

In 2017, there were about 17.2 million applications for firearm transfers and 237,000 denials

State and local checking agencies and the FBI received about 17.2 million applications for firearm transfers and permits in 2017, marking an 11% decrease from the peak of 19.2 million applications in 2016 (table 1). They denied about 265,000 applications in 2016 and 237,000 applications in 2017, a denial rate of 1.4% in each year.

State and local checking agencies conducted background checks for 9.8 million applications in 2016 and 8.5 million in 2017

The FBI processes all NICS checks for federal firearms licensees (FFLs) in 30 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories. It also processes NICS checks on only long-gun applications for FFLs in seven other states. As such, the FBI conducted NICS checks for 9.4 million applications for firearm transfers and permits in 2016 and 8.6 million in 2017, or about half of all applications in both years (table 2). Of those applications, the FBI denied about 120,000 in 2016 (1.3%) and 104,000 in 2017 (1.2%).

State and local checking agencies conducted background checks for the remaining 9.8 million applications in 2016 and 8.5 million in 2017. State checking agencies received 8.3 million applications and denied about 115,000 (1.4%) in 2016. They received 7.3 million applications in 2017 and denied about 100,000 (1.4%). Local checking agencies received 1.5 million applications and denied 30,000 (1.9%) in 2016. They received 1.3 million applications and denied about 33,000 (2.6%) in 2017.

TABLE 1
Estimated number of firearm applications and denials since the Brady Act's effective date, 1994-2017

	Number of—		Percent denied
	Applications	Denials	
Total	233,221,000	3,545,000	1.5%
Brady interim period^a			
1994-1998	12,740,000	312,000	2.4%
Permanent Brady^b	220,481,000	3,233,000	1.5%
1998 ^c	893,000	20,000	2.2
1999	8,621,000	204,000	2.4
2000	7,753,000	153,000	2.0
2001	8,068,000	150,000	1.9
2002	7,926,000	136,000	1.7
2003	7,883,000	126,000	1.6
2004	8,133,000	126,000	1.6
2005	8,324,000	132,000	1.6
2006	8,772,000	135,000	1.6
2007	8,836,000	136,000	1.6
2008	10,131,000	147,000	1.5
2009	11,071,000	150,000	1.4
2010	10,643,000	153,000	1.5
2011 ^d	12,135,000	160,000	1.3
2012	15,718,000	192,000	1.2
2013 ^d	17,602,000	193,000	1.1
2014	14,993,000	193,000	1.3
2015	16,610,000	226,000	1.4
2016	19,203,000	265,000	1.4
2017	17,163,000	237,000	1.4

Note: Totals are rounded to the nearest 1,000. Details may not sum to totals due to rounding. For information on sample design and agencies that reported data, see *Methodology*.

^aFrom February 28, 1994 to November 29, 1998, background checks on applicants were conducted by state and local checking agencies, mainly on handgun transfers. See *Presale Handgun Checks, the Brady Interim Period, 1994-98* (NCJ 175034, BJS, June 1999)

^bThe National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) began operations in 1998. Under that system, checks on handgun and long gun transfers are conducted by the FBI and state and local agencies.

^cIncludes counts from November 30, 1998 to December 31, 1998 that are based on the Federal Bureau of Investigation's *1998-1999 NICS Operations Report* and may include multiple transactions for the same application.

^dTotals for 2011 and 2013 were estimated. See *Methodology*.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 1995-2017; and Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Instant Criminal Background Check System Transaction Statistics, 1998-2017.

TABLE 2**Firearm applications and denials, by type of checking agency and permit or check, 2016 and 2017**

Type of checking agency and permit/check	2016				2017			
	States ^a	Applications	Denials	Percent denied	States ^a	Applications	Denials	Percent denied
National total		19,203,215	265,117	1.4%		17,162,987	236,527	1.4%
FBI total ^b	43	9,360,833	120,497	1.3%	43	8,638,246	103,985	1.2%
State and local total ^c	43	9,842,382	144,620	1.5%	44	8,524,741	132,542	1.6%
State agencies		8,301,657	115,108	1.4		7,252,338	99,783	1.4
Instant check	13	5,078,840	72,661	1.4	13	4,772,693	66,070	1.4
Exempt carry permit	16	1,294,455	14,637	1.1	16	1,100,243	13,644	1.2
Purchase permit	8	524,031	15,099	2.9	8	428,756	12,885	3.0
Other approval	3	1,404,331	12,711	0.9	3	950,646	7,184	0.8
Local agencies		1,540,725	29,512	1.9		1,272,403	32,759	2.6
Exempt carry permit	8	930,563	10,353	1.1	9	744,316	9,261	1.2
Purchase permit	5	396,770	17,871	4.5	5	356,154	19,914	5.6
Other approval	1	213,392	1,288	0.6	1	171,933	3,585	2.1

Note: See *Terms and definitions* for explanations of types of checks. See appendix table 3 for standard errors.

^aNumber of states or equivalent jurisdictions for which data were reported. A state may be included in more than one category.

^bIncludes the District of Columbia and the five U.S. territories for which the Federal Bureau of Investigation processed all background checks in the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS).

^cIncludes NICS checks that state and local checking agencies conducted.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2016 and 2017; and Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Instant Criminal Background Check System Transaction Statistics, 2016 and 2017.

Background-check law and procedures

Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act

The Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (Brady Act) mandates background checks of any person attempting to purchase a firearm from a Federal Firearms Licensee (FFL). The law established the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), which the FBI administers. The Brady Act took effect on February 28, 1994 with the implementation of interim provisions that required FFLs to obtain background checks from state and local checking agencies and to wait 5 days before transferring a firearm. The 5-day federal waiting period was eliminated on November 30, 1998, when the law's permanent provisions took effect with the launch of NICS.

NICS contains data on persons who are prohibited by state or federal law from purchasing or possessing a firearm. The Brady Act enforces prohibitions previously established by the Gun Control Act (GCA), 18 U.S.C. § 922, which prohibits the transfer of a firearm to a person who—

- is under indictment for, or has been convicted of, a crime punishable by imprisonment for more than one year
- is a fugitive from justice
- is an unlawful user of, or addicted to, a controlled substance
- has been adjudicated as a mental defective or committed to a mental institution
- is illegally or unlawfully in the United States or has been admitted to the U.S. under a non-immigrant visa
- has been discharged from the U.S. Armed Forces under dishonorable conditions
- has renounced U.S. citizenship
- is subject to a court order that restrains such person from harassing, stalking, or threatening an intimate partner or a child

- has been convicted in any court of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence
- is younger than age 18 for long guns or age 21 for handguns.

Further, states enforce any additional prohibitions, specifications, requirements, or waiting periods they have for the purchase or possession of firearms.

Background-check and permit procedures

An FFL initiates a background check of an applicant for a firearm transfer or permit by contacting either the FBI or a state point of contact (POC) to query NICS. Such a query searches for records about the applicant in the FBI's Interstate Identification Index (III), National Crime Information Center (NCIC), and NICS Index, as well as U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) databases. The FBI or POC then informs the FFL that the transaction may proceed, is denied, or is delayed for further review. Some states require a person attempting to receive a firearm through a private transfer to obtain a purchase permit or undergo an instant check.

While the Brady Act requires NICS checks of all prospective firearm purchasers who apply for a firearm transfer from an FFL, prospective purchasers can bypass the check if they hold a state permit (to receive, possess, or carry a firearm) that the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives has qualified as a valid alternative to the NICS check. An ATF-qualified permit is issued after a state or local checking agency has conducted a NICS check and verified that the applicant's possession of a firearm would not violate state or federal law. The permit is valid for a maximum of 5 years from its issuance date and only for firearm transfers in the state where the permit is issued.

In 2017, state agencies reported about 4.8 million applications for instant checks, 1.1 million for exempt carry permits, 429,000 for purchase permits, and 951,000 for other approvals

Instant checks were the most common type of background check for firearm transfer applications reported by state agencies that conducted or compiled local-agency data on background checks. These agencies reported 5.1 million applications for instant checks in 2016 and 4.8 million in 2017 (table 3). About 1.4% of instant checks were denied in 2016 and 2017.

State agencies reported about 524,000 applications for purchase permits in 2016 and 429,000 in 2017, with about 2.9% in 2016 and 3.0% in 2017 being denied. They also reported 1.3 million applications for exempt carry permits in 2016 and 1.1 million in 2017, with about 1.1% denied in 2016 and 1.2% denied in 2017.

Checking agencies in California, Maryland, and Rhode Island used other approval systems to process applications for firearm transfers. These agencies reported 1.4 million applications for firearm transfers in 2016 and 951,000 in 2017, of which 0.9% were denied in 2016 and 0.8% were denied in 2017.

TABLE 3
Firearm applications and denials reported by state agencies, by type of permit or check and jurisdiction, 2016 and 2017

Type of permit/check and jurisdiction	2016			2017		
	Applications	Denials	Percent denied	Applications	Denials	Percent denied
All permit/check types and jurisdictions	8,301,657	115,108	1.4%	7,252,338	99,783	1.4%
Instant check	5,078,840	72,661	1.4%	4,772,693	66,070	1.4%
Colorado	389,491	8,704	2.2	367,695	7,227	2.0
Connecticut	134,000	200	0.1	130,719	104	0.1
Florida	1,037,483	14,048	1.4	990,081	12,498	1.3
Illinois	458,653	3,137	0.7	431,000	2,900	0.7
Nevada	116,220	2,721	2.3	102,254	1,806	1.8
New Hampshire	59,600	570	1.0	55,526	627	1.1
New Jersey	125,810	691	0.5	107,814	634	0.6
Oregon	302,726	1,641	0.5	287,080	1,050	0.4
Pennsylvania	1,137,975	13,198	1.2	1,055,451	11,749	1.1
Tennessee	541,002	20,443	3.8	504,540	20,982	4.2
Utah	113,957	2,335	2.0	104,770	1,584	1.5
Virginia	505,722	3,503	0.7	487,846	3,584	0.7
Wisconsin	156,201	1,470	0.9	147,917	1,325	0.9
Exempt carry permit	1,294,455	14,637	1.1%	1,100,243	13,644	1.2%
Alaska	2,702	4	0.1	2,610	5	0.2
Arizona	81,932	842	1.0	77,278	606	0.8
Arkansas	48,037	1,565	3.3	41,815	1,585	3.8
Kansas	20,196	86	0.4	25,885	83	0.3
Kentucky	64,140	1,090	1.7	34,134	775	2.3
Louisiana	15,277	588	3.8	17,167	1,707	9.9
Michigan ^a	179,940	3,040	1.7	137,345	2,387	1.7
Minnesota ^a	73,880	585	0.8	58,219	592	1.0
Mississippi	24,078	47	0.2	20,000	12	0.1
Nebraska	17,939	168	0.9	24,183	77	0.3
North Dakota	13,000	700	5.4	11,600	500	4.3
Ohio ^a	160,691	1,634	1.0	132,639	1,216	0.9
South Carolina	95,952	1,075	1.1	74,219	926	1.2
Texas	343,415	1,534	0.4	306,661	1,894	0.6
Utah	145,672	1,583	1.1	132,095	1,225	0.9
Wyoming	7,604	96	1.3	4,393	54	1.2
Purchase permit	524,031	15,099	2.9%	428,756	12,885	3.0%
Connecticut	56,500	90	0.2	54,831	12	0.0
District of Columbia	1,219	19	1.6	1,724	20	1.2
Hawaii ^a	21,408	328	1.5	16,443	283	1.7

Continued on next page

TABLE 3 (continued)**Firearm applications and denials reported by state agencies, by type of permit or check and jurisdiction, 2016 and 2017**

Type of permit/check and jurisdiction	2016			2017		
	Applications	Denials	Percent denied	Applications	Denials	Percent denied
Illinois	187,947	10,095	5.4	153,800	8,600	5.6
Maryland	28,039	574	2.0	23,888	561	2.3
Massachusetts ^a	84,149	1,966	2.3	78,029	1,741	2.2
Michigan ^a	42,248	998	2.4	35,975	933	2.6
New Jersey ^a	102,521	1,029	1.0	64,066	735	1.1
Other approval	1,404,331	12,711	0.9%	950,646	7,184	0.8%
California	1,331,322	12,321	0.9	882,585	6,834	0.8
Maryland	52,434	261	0.5	51,851	208	0.4
Rhode Island ^a	20,575	129	0.6	16,210	142	0.9

Note: Counts are from state agencies that reported data on firearm transfers or permits from their own background checks, unless otherwise noted. For information on sample design and agencies that reported data, see *Methodology*.

^aCounts are from a state agency that compiled data on firearm transfers or permits from local checking agencies in the jurisdiction.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2016 and 2017.

Local checking agencies processed about 356,000 applications for purchase permits and 744,000 applications for exempt carry permits in 2017

Local checking agencies in 12 states in 2016 and in 13 states in 2017 processed applications and denials, issued permits, or conducted background checks for various types of firearm transfers or permits.¹ These agencies did not report counts to a state-level entity.²

¹Local checking agencies in South Dakota began issuing exempt carry permits for handgun and long-gun transfers in 2017.

²In Minnesota, Nebraska, and Nevada, both state and local agencies reported various types of firearm transfers or permits.

Local checking agencies processed about 397,000 applications for purchase permits in 2016 and 356,000 in 2017, denying about 4.5% in 2016 and 5.6% in 2017 (table 4). Local checking agencies processed about 931,000 applications for exempt carry permits in 2016 and 744,000 in 2017, of which about 1.1% were denied in 2016 and 1.2% were denied in 2017. In Washington state, local checking agencies processed 213,000 applications for other approvals required by state law in 2016 and 172,000 in 2017, denying 0.6% in 2016 and 2.1% in 2017.

TABLE 4
Firearm applications and denials reported by local agencies, by type of permit or check and size of population served, 2016 and 2017

Type of permit/ check and population served	2016				2017			
	Number of local checking agencies ^a	Applications	Denials	Percent denied	Number of local checking agencies ^a	Applications	Denials	Percent denied
All permit/check types and population sizes	~	1,540,725	29,512	1.9%	~	1,272,403	32,759	2.6%
Exempt carry permit	597	930,563	10,353	1.1%	662	744,316	9,261	1.2%
9,999 or less	134	24,625	159	0.6	180	18,932	172	0.9
10,000-99,999	381	432,673	3,771	0.9	397	341,831	3,106	0.9
100,000-199,999	48	160,506	1,907	1.2	51	140,165	1,744	1.2
200,000 or more	34	312,760	4,517	1.4	34	243,388	4,239	1.7
Purchase permit	738	396,770	17,871	4.5%	728	356,154	19,914	5.6%
9,999 or less	354	34,235	528	1.5	343	25,236	458	1.8
10,000-99,999	318	157,646	6,111	3.9	320	128,987	5,544	4.3
100,000-199,999	35	78,383	4,556	5.8	34	57,897	3,924	6.8
200,000 or more	31	126,507	6,676	5.3	31	144,034	9,988	6.9
Other approval ^b	168	213,392	1,288	0.6%	165	171,933	3,585	2.1%
9,999 or less	70	6,748	52	0.8	67	4,035	7	0.2
10,000-99,999	86	76,860	549	0.7	86	68,552	526	0.8
100,000-199,999	6	21,912	103	0.5	6	19,745	67	0.3
200,000 or more	6	107,871	584	0.5	6	79,601	2,984	3.7

Note: Totals are from local agencies that reported data on firearm transfers or permits from their own background checks. Details may not sum to totals due to rounding. For information on sample design and agencies that reported data, see *Methodology*. See appendix table 4 for standard errors.

~Not applicable. Agencies may be included in more than one category.

^aSome agencies may be included in more than one permit category.

^bAll other approvals were processed by local checking agencies in Washington state.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2016 and 2017.

A felony conviction was the most common reason for denial in 2016 and 2017

Among agencies that reported reasons for denying firearm transfers or permits, a felony conviction in the applicant's history was the most common reason in both 2016 (34% of all denials) and 2017 (36%) (tables 5 and 6). Felony convictions accounted for about 41% of denials by the FBI, 26% by state agencies, and 16% by local agencies in 2016. In 2017, they accounted for about 45% of denials by the FBI, 26% by state agencies, and 14% by local agencies.

An applicant who was a fugitive from justice or evading a warrant was the second-most common reason for denial in 2016 (15% of all denials). In 2017, the FBI issued guidance interpreting the fugitive-from-justice prohibition.³ Fugitive-from-justice status or evading a warrant accounted for 6% of denials by all agency types

³Stark-Nutter, R. A. (2017, February 15). *New guidance regarding persons who are fugitives from justice* [Federal Bureau of Investigation memorandum to CJIS systems officer and state points of contact]. <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/3493269-Fugitive-From-Justice-Guidance-State.html>

TABLE 5
Reasons for denial of applications for firearm transfers and permits, by type of checking agency, 2016

Reason for denial	All checking agencies	FBI ^a	State	Local
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
Felony reasons				
Felony conviction	33.7%	41.1%	26.4%	16.5%
Felony arrest with no disposition ^b	4.5	~	10.8	2.2
Under felony indictment/information ^c	3.7	5.3	1.8	3.2
Non-felony reasons				
Fugitive from justice/warrant	14.7%	20.3%	8.9%	4.3%
State-law prohibition ^d	11.8	6.4	17.7	20.5
Misdemeanor conviction of domestic violence	7.5	7.3	6.3	16.2
Drug use/addiction	7.4	9.4	5.2	4.7
Other prohibitions ^e	5.7	0.2	11.3	16.2
Mental-health commitment/adjudication	5.3	4.7	5.8	7.0
Protection/restraining order	3.4	2.7	3.8	5.6
Illegal/unlawful entry into U.S.	2.2	2.6	2.0	0.8
Local-law prohibition ^d	0.2	~	~	2.7

Note: Reasons for denial were based on 18 U.S.C. § 922 or state law. Totals were based on state and local agencies that reported reasons for denial and on information from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) National Instant Criminal Background Check System Transaction Statistics. Details may not sum to totals due to rounding. For more information on sample design and agencies that reported data, see *Methodology*. See appendix table 5 for standard errors for local checking agencies.

~Not applicable.

^aThe FBI began a new classification system in 2008 and reclassified all its denials from 1999 to 2008. FBI counts of denials should not be compared to counts in reports in the *Background Checks for Firearm Transfers* series that were published before 2008.

^bThis is a not a federal prohibition but one used by certain states.

^cAn information is a formal accusation of a crime. It differs from an indictment because it is made by a prosecuting attorney rather than a grand jury.

^dState and local laws may impose prohibitions in addition to the federal prohibitions. Examples of these include prohibitions based on juvenile-offense records, adjudications of delinquency, misdemeanor convictions for an offense other than domestic violence, and mental-health orders that do not cause a federal prohibition.

^eIncludes juveniles, persons dishonorably discharged from the U.S. Armed Forces, persons who renounced U.S. citizenship, and other unspecified persons.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2016; and Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Instant Criminal Background Check System Transaction Statistics, 2016.

in 2017 and was the sixth-most common reason for denial. State-law prohibitions (prohibitions in state law beyond those specified in federal prohibitions, such as juvenile-offense records, delinquency adjudications, and misdemeanor convictions for offenses other than domestic violence) accounted for 12% of denials in 2016 and 14% of denials in 2017.

In 2016 and 2017, a conviction for a domestic-violence misdemeanor in the applicant’s history made up 8% of

all denials. These convictions accounted for about 7% of denials reported by the FBI, 6% by state agencies, and 16% by local agencies in 2016. In 2017, they accounted for about 8% of denials reported by the FBI, 6% by state agencies, and 12% by local agencies. In 2017, a mental-health commitment or adjudication was the reason for 6% of all denials (6% reported by the FBI, 7% by state checking agencies, and 7% by local checking agencies).

TABLE 6
Reasons for denial of applications for firearm transfers and permits, by type of checking agency, 2017

Reason for denial	All checking agencies	FBI ^a	State	Local
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
Felony reasons				
Felony conviction	35.6%	45.4%	26.0%	13.6%
Felony arrest with no disposition ^b	5.1	~	13.3	1.7
Under felony indictment/information ^c	5.0	7.0	2.3	3.2
Non-felony reasons				
Fugitive from justice/warrant	5.8%	6.6%	5.3%	3.0%
State-law prohibition ^d	13.7	8.1	17.6	34.6
Misdemeanor conviction of domestic violence	7.6	8.3	5.7	11.9
Drug use/addiction	9.8	12.2	7.0	6.3
Other prohibitions ^e	4.3	0.2	8.7	12.5
Mental-health commitment/adjudication	6.4	5.9	6.9	6.6
Protection/restraining order	4.0	3.0	5.6	2.7
Illegal/unlawful entry into the U.S.	2.4	3.2	1.6	0.4
Local-law prohibition ^d	0.3	~	~	3.6

Note: Reasons for denial were based on 18 U.S.C. § 922 or state law. Totals were based on state and local agencies that reported reasons for denial and on information from the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) National Instant Criminal Background Check System Transaction Statistics. Details may not sum to totals due to rounding. For more information on sample design and agencies that reported data, see *Methodology*. See appendix table 5 for standard errors for local checking agencies.

~Not applicable.

^aThe FBI began a new classification system in 2008 and reclassified all its denials from 1999 to 2008. FBI counts of denials should not be compared to counts in reports in the *Background Checks for Firearm Transfers* series that were published before 2008.

^bThis is a not a federal prohibition but one that certain states use.

^cAn information is a formal accusation of a crime. It differs from an indictment because it is made by a prosecuting attorney rather than a grand jury.

^dState and local laws may impose prohibitions in addition to the federal prohibitions. Examples of these include prohibitions based on juvenile-offense records, adjudications of delinquency, misdemeanor convictions for an offense other than domestic violence, and mental-health orders that do not cause a federal prohibition.

^eIncludes juveniles, persons dishonorably discharged from the U.S. Armed Forces, persons who renounced U.S. citizenship, and other unspecified persons.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2017; and Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Instant Criminal Background Check System Transaction Statistics, 2017.

The number of firearm applications doubled from 1999 to 2017

Checking agencies received 123% more applications for firearm transfers and permits in 2016 (19.2 million) and 99% more in 2017 (17.1 million) than in 1999 (8.6 million), the first full year that NICS was in operation (table 7). Over the 1999-2017 time period, the number of people age 18 or older in the 50 states and the District of Columbia increased by 21%.⁴ The growth in applications outpaced growth in denials during this

⁴See National Center for Health Statistics [NCHS]. (2004). *Bridged-race intercensal population estimates for July 1, 1990-July 1, 1999* [Data set]. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC]. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/bridged_race/data_documentation.htm#july1990-1999; NCHS. (2012). *July 1, 2000-July 2009 revised bridged-race intercensal population estimates* [Data set]. CDC. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/bridged_race/data_documentation.htm#july2000-2009; and NCHS. (2019). *Vintage 2018 bridged-race postcensal population estimates* [Data set]. CDC. Retrieved March 31, 2020 from <http://wonder.cdc.gov/bridged-race-v2018.html> [Also available at https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/bridged_race/data_documentation.htm#Vintage2018]

period, resulting in a 42% decline in the denial rate, from 2.4% of applications denied in 1999 to 1.4% in both 2016 and 2017.

About 42% of all denials in 2016 and 46% in 2017 were due to a felony reason (a felony conviction, a charge from an indictment or information, or an arrest with no disposition), compared to 73% in 1999. About 0.6% of all applications in 2016 and 2017 were denied for a felony reason, marking a roughly 65% decrease from the 1.7% denied in 1999.

About 0.8% of all applications were denied for non-felony reasons, such as a misdemeanor conviction of domestic violence, drug use or addiction, or a mental-health commitment or adjudication, in both 2016 and 2017. This was about a 23% increase in the non-felony denial rate from 1999 to 2016 and 16% from 1999 to 2017. More than half of denials in 2016 (58%) and in 2017 (54%) were for non-felony reasons.

TABLE 7
Percent change in applications, denials, and reasons for denial, 1999-2016 and 1999-2017

	1999	2016	2017	Percent change, 1999-2016	Percent change, 1999-2017
Number of applications	8,621,000	19,203,000	17,163,000	122.7%	99.1%
Number of denials ^{a,b}	204,000	265,000	237,000	29.9%	16.2%
Felony	148,000	111,000	108,000	-25.0	-27.0
Non-felony	56,000	154,000	129,000	175.0	130.4
Percent of all applications denied ^b	2.4%	1.4%	1.4%	-41.7%	-41.6%
Felony	1.7	0.6	0.6	-66.3	-63.3
Non-felony	0.6	0.8	0.8	23.5	15.7
Percent of denials ^b	100%	100%	100%		
Felony ^c	72.5%	41.9%	45.6%	-42.3%	-37.2%
Non-felony	27.5	58.1	54.4	111.7	98.3

Note: Applications are for firearm transfers and permits. Totals are rounded to the nearest 1,000 and may not sum to totals in other tables. Estimates were based on data reported by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and by state agencies that reported reasons for denial to the Firearm Inquiry Statistics program. For information on sample design and agencies that reported data, see *Methodology*.

^aThe FBI began a new classification system for federal prohibitions on firearm transfers in 2008 and reclassified all its denials from 1999 to 2008. FBI counts of denials should not be compared to counts in reports in the *Background Checks for Firearm Transfers* series that were published before 2008.

^bSee tables 5 and 6 for types of felony and non-felony reasons for denial.

^cNot all reporting agencies reported reasons for denial. The percentage of denials for felony reasons is estimated by dividing the reported number of denials for felony reasons by the total number of denials. The total number of felony denials is estimated by multiplying the percentage of denials for felony reasons by the total number of denials.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 1999, 2016, and 2017; and Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Instant Criminal Background Check System Transaction Statistics, 1999, 2016, and 2017.

13,000 denials were referred to ATF field divisions for further investigation in 2017

The FBI's NICS Section refers all firearm applications that it denies to the ATF's DENI Branch for further screening. The DENI Branch, in turn, refers denials that may merit prosecution (under ATF or U.S. attorney guidelines) to ATF field divisions for further investigation. The DENI Branch referred 11,000 denials (9% of all FBI denials) to ATF field divisions in 2016 and 13,000 (12% of all FBI denials) in 2017 (table 8).

If the FBI finds a record that prohibits a firearm transfer to an applicant within 3 business days of initiating the NICS check, it issues a standard denial. When the FBI needs more than 3 business days to determine if the applicant is prohibited from a firearm transfer, the FFL may transfer the firearm to the applicant under the

Brady Act (unless state law prohibits such transfers) while awaiting the results of the NICS check. In such instances where a firearm has been transferred but the FBI later finds that the transfer should not have occurred, the FBI issues a delayed denial. In 2016, the DENI Branch referred about 3,600 delayed denials (3% of all FBI denials) and 7,500 standard denials (6% of all FBI denials) to ATF field divisions. In 2017, the DENI Branch referred about 4,400 delayed denials (4% of all FBI denials) and 8,700 standard denials (8% of all FBI denials) to ATF field divisions.

The most common reason for referring a denial to a field division in 2017 was a felony conviction in the denied person's record (35%), followed by a misdemeanor conviction of domestic violence (21%) and the denied person being subject to a protective order (14%).

TABLE 8
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives investigation of denials referred by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016 and 2017

	2016		2017	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total FBI denials referred to ATF's DENI Branch	124,486	100%	110,922	100%
DENI Branch referrals to ATF field divisions ^a				
Referred to field	11,128	8.9%	13,163	11.9%
Delayed denials ^b	3,663	2.9	4,449	4.0
Standard denials ^c	7,465	6.0	8,714	7.9
Not referred to field	110,254	88.6	93,540	84.3
Not referred and overturned	3,049	2.4	4,195	3.8
Canceled ^d	55	<0.1	24	<0.1
Reasons for referrals to ATF field divisions				
Convicted felon	4,031	36.2%	4,651	35.3%
Domestic-violence misdemeanor	2,062	18.5	2,770	21
Subject to protective order	2,016	18.1	1,852	14.1
Unlawful user of controlled substance	953	8.6	1,324	10.1
Fugitive from justice	793	7.1	713	5.4
Under felony indictment/information ^e	570	5.1	843	6.4
Adjudicated mentally defective	505	4.5	729	5.5
State prohibition	90	0.8	84	0.6
Illegal/unlawful alien	73	0.7	102	0.8
Career armed-criminal	15	0.1	60	0.5
Insufficient evidence of prohibition provided	14	0.1	32	0.2
Dishonorable discharge	5	<0.1	3	<0.1
Renounced U.S. citizenship	1	<0.1	0	<0.1

Note: Details may not sum to totals due to rounding.

^aA denial is referred if it is likely to merit prosecution under Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) criteria or U.S. attorney criteria.

^bDenials that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) issued after a federal firearms licensee (FFL) transferred a firearm to an applicant. An FFL may transfer a firearm to an applicant under an "open transaction" if the FBI needs more than 3 business days to complete a background check in the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS).

^cDenials that the FBI issued within 3 business days of a NICS check because the FBI found a record that prohibits the applicant from a firearm transfer.

^dNICS checks that should not have been conducted and were canceled by the FBI.

^eAn information is a formal accusation of a crime. It differs from an indictment because it is made by a prosecuting attorney rather than a grand jury.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, based on data from Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Denial Enforcement and NICS Intelligence Branch, Firearm Denial Statistics, 2016 and 2017.

Methodology

Data in this report come from the Bureau of Justice Statistics' (BJS) Firearm Inquiry Statistics (FIST) program. FIST is an annual data collection conducted by the Regional Justice Information Service Commission (REJIS) through a cooperative agreement with BJS.

FIST frame

FIST collected data from three types of reporting sources to generate the 2016 and 2017 estimates for firearm transfer applications and denials:

- the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
- state agency reporters (state agencies that conduct background checks or compile data from local checking agencies within the state)
- local reporting agencies (local agencies that track applications or conduct background checks for firearm permits or transfers) but do not report to a state agency.

In 32 states, more than one source was used due to multiple types of checks conducted in the state.

FIST sample

State statutes determine which governmental agencies conduct background checks for a firearm transfer or permit. FIST distinguishes between local agencies that are authorized by statute to conduct background checks and local agencies that actually conduct them. For example, local agencies in certain states may be legally authorized, but not required, to conduct background checks for firearm transfers or permits. BJS identified a few local agencies (usually municipal police departments) within the 2016 and 2017 frames that were legally authorized by state statute to conduct background checks but did not conduct checks. Instead, transfer or permit applicants who might use such a local agency were directed to another local authority (usually the county sheriff) with jurisdiction to conduct a transfer check or issue a permit.

For the purpose of FIST, BJS determined that eligible reporting agencies are those that were authorized and known to conduct background checks or maintained information on critical FIST data elements, which included applications, denials, and reasons for denial. Agencies that delegated background-check functions to other checking agencies were considered out-of-scope for

FIST because they neither conducted checks nor tracked information on such activities. Other out-of-scope agencies were those that had closed since the 2016 FIST sampling frame was constructed and those that employed only part-time employees who worked less than 35 hours per week combined.

The 2016 and 2017 FIST sampling frames used multiple data sources and a large known pool of past FIST respondents. This included local reporting agencies from the 2015 frame that had responded to the FIST survey at least once in the previous 3 years and had a verified status of conducting background checks or processing or tracking applications for firearm transfers or permits. To verify the frame, BJS used the 2014 Census of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies (CSLLEA), the FBI's 2011 Originating Agency Identifier file of law enforcement agencies, and published lists of law enforcement agencies from professional officer associations.

The majority of FIST data consisted of counts obtained from the FBI and counts collected from state agency reporters. A small proportion (less than 10%) of the FIST national estimate was derived from estimates for local reporting agencies. BJS obtained FIST data from local reporting agencies in 12 states in 2016 and 13 states in 2017.⁵

BJS conducted a census of local reporting agencies in Alabama, Idaho, Iowa, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, and West Virginia for 2016 and in the same states plus South Dakota for 2017.

In 3 states (Georgia, Minnesota, and Washington), BJS sampled local reporting agencies for 2016 and 2017 due to the large number of potentially eligible local reporting agencies (ranging from 159 in Georgia to more than 300 in Minnesota). BJS created a stratified sample based on population that resulted in four strata:

- Stratum 1: rural—population of less than 10,000
- Stratum 2: small cities—population from 10,000 to 99,999
- Stratum 3: small metropolitan areas—population from 100,000 to 199,999
- Stratum 4: large metropolitan areas—population of 200,000 or more.

⁵Alabama and Ohio were added to the FIST data collection in 2016. FIST surveys local reporting agencies in Alabama and collects data from a state agency reporter in Ohio. Local reporting agencies in South Dakota were added for the 2017 data collection.

BJS took several steps to determine if correlates could be found between population size and the number of applications, including several variables (such as the number of sworn personnel) from BJS's 2008 CSLLEA and 2016 Law Enforcement Agency Roster. BJS determined that using the four standard categories for census-place populations correlated with the number of applications better than other variables did. Sampling was done for local reporting agencies in strata 1 and 2, while local reporting agencies in strata 3 and 4 were kept in the sample with certainty.

For the 2016 collection, the final designated sample included 629 enumerated (self-representing, or SR) local reporting agencies in states where all local reporting agencies were enumerated, and 357 sampled (non-self-representing, or NSR) local reporting agencies in three states where strata 1 and 2 were sampled. For the 2017 collection, the final sample included 693 SR and 353 NSR local reporting agencies in the states where strata 1 and 2 were sampled. After adjusting for local agencies that were ineligible to participate in the survey, the final sample consisted of 1,020 state agency reporters and local reporting agencies in 2016 and 1,080 in 2017. In 2016, the overall response rate was 81%, with 97% of state agency reporters and 81% of local reporting agencies responding to the survey (table 9). In 2017, the overall response rate was 83%, with 97% of state agency reporters and 83% of local reporting agencies responded to the survey.

BJS updated the 2016 and 2017 FIST surveys with clearer instructions than in past surveys by using terminology tailored to individual state agency reporters to describe the applicable transfers or permits and minimize respondent burden. To increase the response rate, BJS used multiple survey modes (e.g., online form, paper survey, and fax) and a rigorous strategy for following up with reporting agencies that did not respond.

Estimation

BJS summed counts from state agency reporters, state-level estimates (for states with local reporting agencies), and the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) federal transaction data to estimate the total number of applications for firearm transfers and permits received and denied across the country. BJS applied design weights and non-response adjustment factors for enumerated and sampled local reporting agencies to generate estimates of the number of applications and denials at the state level.

Only one state with a state agency reporter (Connecticut) required estimation in 2016. Applications and denials for transfers and purchase permits in Connecticut were estimated using proportional adjustments borrowed from each permit category.⁶ This method was also used to estimate Illinois' counts of applications and denials and Mississippi's counts of applications for 2017.

Weighting for local reporting agencies

The 2016 and 2017 FIST data collections provide for two basic weighting structures for local reporting agencies: a weight applied to SR agencies and a weight applied to NSR agencies.

⁶The average increases in applications and denials from 2015 to 2016 within the different categories of transfers and purchase permits (outliers excluded), along with a media report of increases in applications, were used to calculate an average rate of increase to be applied to transfers and purchase permits for Connecticut. A similar method was used to produce estimates for Illinois and Mississippi in which adjustments were made to reflect changes in the number of applications and denials in each permit category. In all cases, estimates were compared to trends in NICS state-level data to ensure the reasonableness of the estimates.

TABLE 9
Number of reporting agencies that participated in the Firearm Inquiry Statistics survey, 2016 and 2017

Reporting agencies	2016				2017			
	Total	Sample	Responses	Response rate	Total	Sample	Responses	Response rate
Total	1,341	1,020	830	81%	1,394	1,080	900	83%
State agency reporters	34	34	33	97%	34	34	33	97%
Local reporting agencies	1,307	986	797	81%	1,360	1,046	867	83%
Population served								
9,999 or less	532	349	289	83		344	289	84
10,000-99,999	648	510	409	80	669	573	472	82
100,000-199,999	69	69	57	83	71	71	60	85
200,000 or more	58	58	42	72	58	58	46	79

Note: Agencies that were ineligible to participate in the Firearm Inquiry Statistics survey were deemed out-of-scope and removed from all counts of reporting agencies.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2016 and 2017.

SR agencies (enumerated)

Local reporting agencies in strata 3 and 4 (large agencies) were selected with certainty and were given a design weight of 1 ($w_1 = 1$). A non-response adjustment (w_2) was applied to responding agencies to compensate for the agencies that did not respond.

NSR agencies (sampled)

The process for calculating weights for NSR agencies was similar to that for SR agencies, except NSR agencies (the small agencies in strata 1 and 2 of the sampled states) received a design weight of greater than 1 ($w_1 > 1$) according to the population-based stratum and the state in which they resided. This weight reflected the inverse of the probability of selection for the state and stratum size (cell) in which the agency resided. Weights were adjusted for any agencies that were out-of-scope in the sampled states.

Non-response adjustment

The non-response adjustment accounted for agencies that were ineligible (out-of-scope) and for non-responding agencies. It consisted of a ratio adjustment of the sum of the weighted eligible agencies (per state and population size stratum) to the sum of weighted responding agencies (also per state and population size stratum). A non-response adjustment was applied to each cell (stratum within state) if there was any non-response. This created a specific adjustment for each cell that applied to all states, whether enumerated or sampled.

Partial-year reporting adjustment

A weight consisting of a small ratio adjustment to account for missing months of data was applied to adjust for any agency that reported only partial-year data. This adjustment to account for missing months was necessary for three local reporting agencies. The use of this adjustment occurred prior to the calculation of the final weight.

Final weights

The final weights (F_w) applied to each FIST case were the product of a design weight (w_1) and a non-response adjustment weight (w_2), for $F_w = w_1 \times w_2$. (See table 10.)

Item non-response imputation for local reporting agencies

For the 2016 and 2017 FIST data collections, there were few instances of missing data on applications for firearm transfers or permits, compared to other missing data (e.g., reasons for denial). Partial responses were counted when respondents reported either the number of applications received or the number of denials issued. If neither type of data was provided, the respondent was classified as a non-respondent. When data were missing for only applications or only denials, BJS used a conditional mean imputation to estimate the number of applications or denials. In 2016, a total of 21 responding local reporting agencies (2.1%) did not provide counts of applications, while 18 (1.8%) did not provide counts of denials. In 2017, a total of 13 responding local reporting agencies (1.4%) had missing data on applications, and 20 (2.2%) had missing data on denials.

TABLE 10
Final weights, by state and population category, 2016 and 2017

State	2016				2017			
	Less than 10,000	10,000-99,999	100,000-199,999	200,000 or more	Less than 10,000	10,000-99,999	100,000-199,999	200,000 or more
Alabama	1.00	2.41	1.67	1.75	2.00	1.96	1.67	1.40
Georgia	1.83	1.66	1.36	2.00	3.30	1.60	1.25	1.67
Idaho	1.15	1.47	1.00	1.00	1.36	1.67	1.00	1.00
Iowa	1.04	1.06	1.00	1.00	1.09	1.08	1.00	1.00
Minnesota	3.40	2.82	1.00	1.00	3.84	1.60	1.00	1.00
Montana	1.35	1.20	1.00	~	1.25	1.13	1.33	~
Nebraska	1.17	1.14	1.00	1.00	1.12	1.14	1.00	1.00
Nevada	1.60	1.40	~	1.00	1.14	1.40	~	2.00
New York	2.00	1.32	1.83	1.56	2.00	1.38	1.38	1.17
North Carolina	1.00	1.19	1.00	1.10	1.33	1.17	1.07	1.38
South Dakota	~	~	~	~	1.42	1.31	1.00	~
Washington	2.18	1.83	1.20	1.50	3.72	1.59	1.20	1.00
West Virginia	1.20	1.33	1.00	~	1.20	1.25	1.00	~

~Not applicable. No weights were applied because no agencies were within the population cell.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2016 and 2017.

In stratum 1, missing values were replaced with the mean number of applications of other agencies in the same state that were in the same population category. In stratum 2, BJS employed a basic multiple-imputation strategy for agencies with complete data, accounting for the number of denials, the actual size of the population served, and the number of applications. The result was a within-state and stratum-based sum of imputed values proportionate to the population allocation of imputed applications or denials per agency.

Standard errors

BJS computed standard errors for the estimates of total applications, total denials, and the ratio of denials to total applications across states and size of region for local reporting agencies. The standard-error computations accounted for various aspects of the FIST design, including stratification of data collection by a combination of state and population-served categories and finite population sampling (without replacement) across the states and population categories of interest.

BJS approximated the FIST design by using an SPSS Complex Samples module that generated final strata reflective of the various combinations of state and population categories in the sample design. Data from SR agencies were treated as certainty samples with an initial selection probability of 1. For these states and population-category combinations, complete responses would have a negligible contribution to the overall standard errors for a given estimate. To account for this and the fact that finite-population-correction (FPC) factors for the samples generated by the FIST design were small, FPCs were directly incorporated into the standard-error computations. Finally, estimates for local reporting agencies included one additional subdomain of agency type: local or state (centralized reporting).

All computations were generated using the final sampling weight, which incorporated adjustments for missing values, non-response, and population eligibility or coverage. In some cases, standard-error computations were not possible, as only one local reporting agency reported information for a given type of application in areas where more than one local reporting agency was queried (in a sample or census). In these cases, no standard error was calculated.

Reasons for denial

BJS has collected information about reasons for denying applications for firearm transfers and permits since FIST's inception in 1995. The FIST survey includes

12 categories that reflect the most common reasons for denial and closely match the categories of federal prohibitions on the purchase or possession of firearms by certain persons. The categories are broad enough to include state prohibitions that may not be identical to the federal prohibitions. Respondents were asked to record their denials in the most appropriate categories. When denial data from an agency's website or internal report did not closely match a FIST category, REJIS determined which denial category best matched the reported reason and verified the classification with the responding agency.

The FBI, 25 (76.5%) state agency reporters, and 453 (56.8%) local reporting agencies provided at least some reasons for denial in 2016. Similarly, the FBI, 25 (76.5%) state agency reporters, and 473 (54.6%) local reporting agencies provided at least some reasons for denial in 2017. Another 153 local reporting agencies in 2016 and 160 in 2017 reported no denials but said they would have been able to report a reason for a denial had one occurred.

Survey responses presented two main challenges to reporting reasons for denial. First, while BJS has observed an increase in responses to survey questions about reasons for denial, a relatively high degree of item non-response and incomplete responses has persisted. For example, some respondents provided more than one reason for some denials, others provided reasons for only some denials, and yet others did not provide reasons for any denials.

Second, the method by which agencies record or track reasons for denial varies. The FBI reports one reason for each denial, based on the first prohibition found during a background check. By comparison, BJS has observed variations in how reasons for denial are provided by state agency reporters and local reporting agencies. Of local reporting agencies that provided any reasons for denial in 2016 and 2017, approximately three-quarters reported all reasons found during a background check, while about one-quarter reported only one reason for each denial or stated they did not know how a reason for a denial was tracked. Conversely, about one-third of state agency reporters provided all reasons for denial in 2016, and one-quarter of them did so in 2017. About two-thirds of state agency reporters provided only one reason for each denial in 2016 and 2017. In 2017, more state agency reporters indicated they did not know how denials were tracked. This may be due to changes in personnel who respond to the FIST survey. Some respondents reported only the most serious offense found during a background

check, while others reported the first reason found or did not indicate how they determined which reason to report.

Due to the high item non-response and variation in the way reasons for denial were reported, BJS calculated a simple estimation for the number of reasons for denial by local reporting agencies. Estimates used the base weight

rather than the final weight that was applied to all other estimates for local reporting agencies. This was done to better align responses from sampled local reporting agencies with those from states in which a census of local reporting agencies was conducted. Counts of reasons for denial from the FBI and state agency reporters were reported, and no estimates were generated for them.

APPENDIX TABLE 1**Firearm applications and denials reported by state and local agencies, by jurisdiction and type of permit or check, 2016**

Jurisdiction	Applications		Denials		Percent denied	
	Number	Standard error	Number	Standard error	Percent	Standard error
Alabama^a						
Exempt carry permit	360,954	45,244	5,222	739	1.4%	0.19%
Alaska						
Exempt carry permit	2,702	~	4	~	0.1%	~
Arizona						
Exempt carry permit	81,932	~	842	~	1.0%	~
Arkansas						
Exempt carry permit	48,037	~	1,565	~	3.3%	~
California						
Other approval	1,331,322	~	12,321	~	0.9%	~
Colorado						
Instant check	389,491	~	8,704	~	2.2%	~
Connecticut	190,500		290		0.2%	
Instant check	134,000	~	200	~	0.1	~
Purchase permit	56,500	~	90	~	0.2	~
District of Columbia						
Purchase permit	1,219	~	19	~	1.6%	~
Florida						
Instant check	1,037,483	~	14,048	~	1.4%	~
Georgia						
Exempt carry permit ^a	213,102	11,713	2,237	140	1.0%	0.09%
Hawaii						
Purchase permit	21,408	~	328	~	1.5%	~
Idaho						
Exempt carry permit ^a	24,690	1,103	201	21	0.8%	0.09%
Illinois	646,600		13,232		2.0%	
Instant check	458,653	~	3,137	~	0.7	~
Purchase permit	187,947	~	10,095	~	5.4	~
Iowa	123,798	1,373	1,047	28	0.8%	0.02%
Exempt carry permit ^a	106,533	1,176	565	16	0.5	0.01
Purchase permit ^a	17,265	229	482	13	2.8	0.05
Kansas						
Exempt carry permit	20,196	~	86	~	0.4%	~
Kentucky						
Exempt carry permit	64,140	~	1,090	~	1.7%	~
Louisiana						
Exempt carry permit	15,277	~	588	~	3.8%	~
Maryland	80,473		835		1.0%	
Purchase permit	28,039	~	574	~	2.0	~
Other approval	52,434	~	261	~	0.5	~
Massachusetts						
Purchase permit	84,149	~	1,966	~	2.3%	~
Michigan	222,188		4,038		1.8%	
Exempt carry permit	179,940	~	3,040	~	1.7	~
Purchase permit	42,248	~	998	~	2.4	~
Minnesota^b	142,822		2,500		1.8%	
Exempt carry permit	73,880	~	585	~	0.8	~
Purchase permit ^a	68,942	1,963	1,915	161	2.8	0.19%
Mississippi						
Exempt carry permit	24,078	~	47	~	0.2%	~
Montana						
Exempt carry permit ^a	19,553	1,254	171	9	0.9%	0.06%

Continued on next page

APPENDIX TABLE 1 (continued)

Firearm applications and denials reported by state and local agencies, by jurisdiction and type of permit or check, 2016

Jurisdiction	Applications		Denials		Percent denied	
	Number	Standard error	Number	Standard error	Percent	Standard error
Nebraska^b	59,935		1,065		1.8%	
Exempt carry permit	17,939	~	168	~	0.9	~
Purchase permit ^a	41,996	553	897	28	2.1	0.06%
Nevada^b	145,776		3,057		2.1%	
Instant check	116,220	~	2,721	~	2.3	~
Exempt carry permit ^a	29,556	998	336	5	1.1	0.05%
New Hampshire						
Instant check	59,600	~	570	~	1.0%	~
New Jersey	228,331		1,720		0.8%	
Instant check	125,810	~	691	~	0.5	~
Purchase permit	102,521	~	1,029	~	1.0	~
New York						
Purchase permit ^a	81,390	10,767	1,893	178	2.3%	0.33%
North Carolina	332,793	8,138	14,181	662	4.3%	0.15%
Exempt carry permit ^a	145,616	2,639	1,498	107	1.0	0.06
Purchase permit ^a	187,177	5,901	12,683	598	6.8	0.25
North Dakota						
Exempt carry permit	13,000	~	700	~	5.4%	~
Ohio						
Exempt carry permit	160,691	~	1,634	~	1.0%	~
Oregon						
Instant check	302,726	~	1,641	~	0.5%	~
Pennsylvania						
Instant check	1,137,975	~	13,198	~	1.2%	~
Rhode Island						
Other approval	20,575	~	129	~	0.6%	~
South Carolina						
Exempt carry permit	95,952	~	1,075	~	1.1%	~
Tennessee						
Instant check	541,002	~	20,443	~	3.8%	~
Texas						
Exempt carry permit	343,415	~	1,534	~	0.4%	~
Utah	259,629		3,918		1.5%	
Instant check	113,957	~	2,335	~	2.0	~
Exempt carry permit	145,672	~	1,583	~	1.1	~
Virginia						
Instant check	505,722	~	3,503	~	0.7%	~
Washington						
Other approval ^a	213,392	10,184	1,288	107	0.6%	0.03%
West Virginia						
Exempt carry permit ^a	30,560	1,611	123	10	0.4%	0.03%
Wisconsin						
Instant check	156,201	~	1,470	~	0.9%	~
Wyoming						
Exempt carry permit	7,604	~	96	~	1.3%	~

Note: For information on sample design and agencies that reported data, see *Methodology*.

~Not applicable. No sampling error was present because complete counts were reported.

^aTotals were estimated. See *Methodology*.

^bStandard errors are not applicable because a portion of the estimate came from a state agency reporter that provided complete counts.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2016.

APPENDIX TABLE 2
Firearm applications and denials reported by state and local agencies, by jurisdiction and type of permit or check, 2017

Jurisdiction	Applications		Denials		Percent denied	
	Number	Standard error	Number	Standard error	Percent	Standard error
Alabama^a						
Exempt carry permit	298,133	29,339	4,164	487	1.4%	0.15%
Alaska						
Exempt carry permit	2,610	~	5	~	0.2%	~
Arizona						
Exempt carry permit	77,278	~	606	~	0.8%	~
Arkansas						
Exempt carry permit	41,815	~	1,585	~	3.8%	~
California						
Other approval	882,585	~	6,834	~	0.8%	~
Colorado						
Instant check	367,695	~	7,227	~	2.0%	~
Connecticut	185,550		116		0.1%	
Instant check	130,719	~	104	~	0.1	~
Purchase permit	54,831	~	12	~	0.0	~
District of Columbia						
Purchase permit	1,724	~	20	~	1.2%	~
Florida						
Instant check	990,081	~	12,498	~	1.3%	~
Georgia						
Exempt carry permit ^a	178,138	7,214	2,853	172	1.6%	0.09%
Hawaii						
Purchase permit	16,443	~	283	~	1.7%	~
Idaho						
Exempt carry permit ^a	20,945	870	367	7	1.8%	0.06%
Illinois	584,800		11,500		2.0%	
Instant check	431,000	~	2,900	~	0.7	~
Purchase permit	153,800	~	8,600	~	5.6	~
Iowa	75,512	993	933	22	1.2%	0.02%
Exempt carry permit ^a	62,614	824	531	12	0.8	0.01
Purchase permit ^a	12,899	200	402	11	3.1	0.06
Kansas						
Exempt carry permit	25,885	~	83	~	0.3%	~
Kentucky						
Exempt carry permit	34,134	~	775	~	2.3%	~
Louisiana						
Exempt carry permit	17,167	~	1,707	~	9.9%	~
Maryland	75,739		769		1.0%	
Purchase permit	23,888	~	561	~	2.3	~
Other approval	51,851	~	208	~	0.4	~
Massachusetts						
Purchase permit	78,029	~	1,741	~	2.2%	~
Michigan	173,320		3,320		1.9%	
Exempt carry permit	137,345	~	2,387	~	1.7	~
Purchase permit	35,975	~	933	~	2.6	~
Minnesota^b	111,092		2,078		1.9%	
Exempt carry permit	58,219	~	592	~	1.0	~
Purchase permit ^a	52,873	1,009	1,486	51	2.8	0.07%
Mississippi						
Exempt carry permit	20,000	~	12	~	0.1%	~
Montana						
Exempt carry permit ^a	23,022	3,961	173	15	0.8%	0.08%

Continued on next page

APPENDIX TABLE 2 (continued)

Firearm applications and denials reported by state and local agencies, by jurisdiction and type of permit or check, 2017

Jurisdiction	Applications		Denials		Percent denied	
	Number	Standard error	Number	Standard error	Percent	Standard error
Nebraska^b	57,493		865		1.5%	
Exempt carry permit	24,183	~	77	~	0.3	~
Purchase permit ^a	33,310	2,162	788	37	2.4	0.09%
Nevada^b	115,775		1,864		1.6%	
Instant check	102,254	~	1,806	~	1.8	~
Exempt carry permit ^a	13,521	512	58	10	0.4	0.07%
New Hampshire						
Instant check	55,526	~	627	~	1.1%	~
New Jersey	171,880		1,369		0.8%	
Instant check	107,814	~	634	~	0.6	~
Purchase permit	64,066	~	735	~	1.1	~
New York						
Purchase permit ^a	91,766	13,650	2,312	189	2.5%	0.41%
North Carolina	288,894	15,434	15,937	1,825	5.5%	0.43%
Exempt carry permit ^a	123,587	5,430	1,012	40	0.8	0.02
Purchase permit ^a	165,307	11,587	14,926	1,793	9.0	0.82
North Dakota						
Exempt carry permit	11,600	~	500	~	4.3%	~
Ohio						
Exempt carry permit	132,639	~	1,216	~	0.9%	~
Oregon						
Instant check	287,080	~	1,050	~	0.4%	~
Pennsylvania						
Instant check	1,055,451	~	11,749	~	1.1%	~
Rhode Island						
Other approval	16,210	~	142	~	0.9%	~
South Carolina						
Exempt carry permit	74,219	~	926	~	1.2%	~
South Dakota						
Exempt carry permit ^a	1,659	117	15	4	0.9%	0.19%
Tennessee						
Instant check	504,540	~	20,982	~	4.2%	~
Texas						
Exempt carry permit	306,661	~	1,894	~	0.6%	~
Utah	236,865		2,809			
Instant check	104,770	~	1,584	~	1.5%	~
Exempt carry permit	132,095	~	1,225	~	0.9	~
Virginia						
Instant check	487,846	~	3,584	~	0.7%	~
Washington						
Other approval ^a	171,933	3,088	3,585	24	2.1%	0.03%
West Virginia						
Exempt carry permit ^a	22,698	944	88	5	0.4%	0.02%
Wisconsin						
Instant check	147,917	~	1,325	~	0.9%	~
Wyoming						
Exempt carry permit	4,393	~	54	~	1.2%	~

Note: For information on sample design and agencies that reported data, see *Methodology*.

~Not applicable. No sampling error was present because complete counts were reported.

^aTotals were estimated. See *Methodology*.

^bStandard errors are not applicable because a portion of the estimate came from a state agency reporter that provided complete counts.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2017.

APPENDIX TABLE 3**Standard errors for table 2: Firearm applications and denials reported by local agencies, by type of permit or check, 2016 and 2017**

Type of permit/check	2016			2017		
	Applications	Denials	Percent denied	Applications	Denials	Percent denied
National total	49,824	1,037	<0.01%	37,030	1,907	0.01%
State and local total	49,824	1,037	0.01%	37,030	1,907	0.02%
Local agencies	49,824	1,037	0.07%	37,030	1,907	0.14%
Exempt carry permit	46,892	760	0.07	30,994	519	0.06
Purchase permit	12,448	646	0.17	18,064	1,804	0.46
Other approval	10,184	107	0.03	3,088	24	0.03

Note: No sampling error was present for totals from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and state agency reporters in table 2 because they reported complete counts.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2016 and 2017.

APPENDIX TABLE 4**Standard errors for table 4: Firearm applications and denials reported by local agencies, by type of permit or check and size of population served, 2016 and 2017**

Type of permit/check and population served	2016			2017		
	Applications	Denials	Percent denied	Applications	Denials	Percent denied
Purchase permit	12,448	646	0.17%	18,064	1,804	0.46%
9,999 or less	944	27	0.07	749	26	0.07
10,000-99,999	4,712	297	0.18	3,695	232	0.18
100,000-199,999	801	39	0.09	1,840	219	0.47
200,000 or more	11,455	571	0.53	17,570	1,775	1.14
Exempt carry permit	46,892	760	0.07%	30,994	519	0.06%
9,999 or less	427	8	0.04	415	12	0.06
10,000-99,999	36,952	303	0.05	24,501	179	0.05
100,000-199,999	4,916	335	0.19	7,684	70	0.10
200,000 or more	28,445	611	0.17	17,353	482	0.15

Note: No sampling error was present for totals of other approvals in table 4 because Washington state reported complete counts.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2016 and 2017.

APPENDIX TABLE 5**Standard errors for local agencies in tables 5 and 6: Reasons for denial of applications for firearm transfers and permits, by type of checking agency, 2016 and 2017**

Reason for denial	All checking agencies		Local	
	2016	2017	2016	2017
Felony reasons				
Felony conviction	0.09%	0.19%	0.60%	0.77%
Felony arrest with no disposition	0.02	0.04	0.33	0.29
Under felony indictment/information	0.03	0.04	0.43	0.41
Non-felony reasons				
Fugitive from justice/warrant	0.05%	0.03%	0.39%	0.26%
State-law prohibition	0.19	0.40	2.69	3.63
Misdemeanor conviction of domestic violence	0.05	0.03	0.90	0.26
Drug use/addiction	0.02	0.05	0.28	0.64
Other prohibitions	0.12	0.09	1.64	1.59
Mental-health commitment/adjudication	0.02	0.03	0.46	0.44
Protection/restraining order	0.06	0.03	0.91	0.26
Illegal/unlawful entry into U.S.	0.01	0.02	0.09	0.06
Local-law prohibition	0.05	0.06	0.80	0.77

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2016 and 2017.



The Bureau of Justice Statistics of the U.S. Department of Justice is the principal federal agency responsible for measuring crime, criminal victimization, criminal offenders, victims of crime, correlates of crime, and the operation of criminal and civil justice systems at the federal, state, tribal, and local levels. BJS collects, analyzes, and disseminates reliable statistics on crime and justice systems in the United States, supports improvements to state and local criminal justice information systems, and participates with national and international organizations to develop and recommend national standards for justice statistics. Doris J. James is the acting director.

This report was written by Connor Brooks, Ronald J. Frandsen and Jennifer C. Karberg of REJIS and Trent D. Buskirk, Ph.D., of Bowling Green State University developed the tables for the report under the supervision of BJS. Leonardo Antenangeli, Ph.D., verified the report.

Edrienne Su edited the report. Carrie Epps-Carey produced the report.

February 2021, NCJ 254757



NCJ 254757

Office of Justice Programs
Building Solutions • Supporting Communities • Advancing Justice
www.ojp.gov