



Background Checks for Firearm Transfers, 2016-2017

SUMMARY | NCJ 254757

FEBRUARY 2021

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). 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.

Firearm applications and denials in the U.S.

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. In both 2016 and 2017, about 1.4% of applications for firearm transfers and permits were denied. A felony conviction, indictment, charge, or arrest in the applicant's records prompted 42% of denials in 2016 and 46% of denials in 2017.

Denials by state and local checking agencies

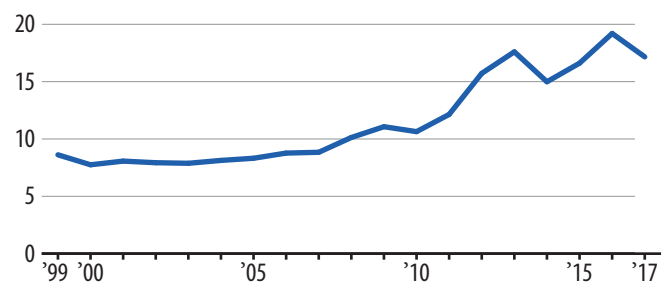
In 2017, state checking agencies denied 3.0% of purchase permits, 1.4% of instant checks, and 1.2% of exempt carry permits. Local checking agencies denied 5.6% of applications for purchase permits and 1.2% of applications for exempt carry permits in 2017.

Background checks across agencies

The FBI processes all National Instant Criminal Background Check System (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. Of those applications, the FBI denied about 120,000 in 2016 (1.3%) and 104,000 in 2017 (1.2%).

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

Applications (in millions)



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.

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.

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.

The full report ([Background Checks for Firearm Transfers, 2016-2017](#), NCJ 254757), related documents, and additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics are available on the BJS website at www.bjs.gov