



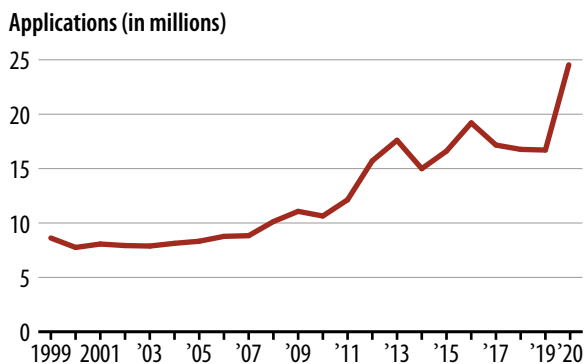
Background Checks for Firearm Transfers, 2019–2020

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In 2020, almost 25.0 million applications for firearm transfers and permits were subject to background checks under the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (Brady Act) (figure 1; table 1). This was a nearly 50% increase from about 16.7 million applications in 2019. Approximately 400,000 applications were denied in 2020. From the time that the Brady Act went into effect in 1994 to 2020, almost 291.7 million applications were subject to background checks and about 4.4 million (1.5%) applications 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 FBI's 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, 1999–2020



Note: The National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) began operations in 1998. From February 28, 1994 to November 29, 1998, state and local checking agencies conducted background checks on applicants, 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 NICS began operations 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, 1999–2020; and Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Instant Criminal Background Check System Transaction Statistics, 1999–2020.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The FBI and state and local checking agencies received about 16.7 million applications for firearm transfers and permits in 2019 and 25.0 million applications in 2020.
- From 1994, when the Brady Act became effective, to 2020, about 291.7 million applications were subject to background checks and 4.4 million (1.5%) applications were denied.
- About 243,000 (1.5%) applications for firearm transfers and permits were denied in 2019, and 398,000 (1.6%) were denied in 2020.
- The FBI received about 12.8 million applications in 2020 and denied 185,000 (1.5%), while state and local checking agencies received more than 12.2 million applications and denied about 212,000 (1.7%).
- In 2020, state checking agencies denied 2.7% of purchase permits, 1.8% of instant checks, 1.2% of exempt carry permits, and 0.2% of other approvals.
- ATF's Denial Enforcement and NICS Intelligence Branch referred 10% of denials to the field for further investigation in both 2019 and 2020.

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.

Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (Brady Act)—An act passed by the United States Congress that mandated federal background checks on prospective firearm purchases and established the National Instant Criminal Background Check System. The Brady Act took effect on February 28, 1994. For more information, see *Background Check Laws and Procedures*.

Checking agency—The 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. For more information, see *Background Check Laws and Procedures*.

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 for checks for applications originating in its state.

Transaction—An inquiry by NICS staff to NICS about a prospective firearm purchaser.

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

There were nearly 25.0 million applications for firearm transfers and 398,000 denials in 2020

State and local checking agencies and the FBI received about 25.0 million applications for firearm transfers and permits in 2020, 30% more than in 2016, the year with the second-largest number of applications (19.2 million) (**table 1**). Checking agencies denied about 398,000 applications in 2020, for a denial rate of 1.6%. From 1994, when the Brady Act became effective, to 2020, about 291.7 million applications were subject to background checks and 4.4 million (1.5%) applications were denied.

State and local checking agencies received more than 12.2 million applications for background checks in 2020, and the FBI received 12.8 million

The FBI processed all NICS checks for federal firearms licensees (FFLs) in 30 states, the District of Columbia, and the five U.S. territories in 2019 and 2020. (See *Methodology* for more details.) In seven other states, it processed NICS checks for FFLs only for long gun applications. The FBI conducted NICS checks for 12.8 million applications for firearm transfers and permits in 2020 and denied about 185,000 (1.5%) of those applications (**table 2**). In comparison, the FBI conducted NICS checks for 8.2 million applications in 2019 and denied about 106,000 (1.3%). From 2019 to 2020, the number of applications for which the FBI conducted NICS checks increased by 56%.

State and local checking agencies conducted background checks for 8.5 million applications in 2019 and 12.2 million applications in 2020, for an increase of about 43% in the number of applications from 2019 to 2020. In 2020, state checking agencies received more than 10.5 million applications and denied about 162,000 (1.5%). Local checking agencies received more than 1.7 million applications and denied about 50,000 (2.9%).

TABLE 1
Estimated number of firearm applications and denials since the Brady Act's effective date, 1994–2020

	Applications	Denials	Percent denied
Total	291,686,000	4,416,000	1.5%
Brady interim period^a			
1994–1998	12,740,000	312,000	2.4%
Permanent Brady^b	278,946,000	4,104,000	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	1.5
2005	8,324,000	132,000	1.6
2006	8,772,000	135,000	1.5
2007	8,836,000	136,000	1.5
2008	10,131,000	147,000	1.5
2009	11,071,000	150,000	1.4
2010	10,643,000	153,000	1.4
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
2018	16,765,000	230,000	1.4
2019	16,706,000	243,000	1.5
2020	24,994,000	398,000	1.6

Note: Totals are rounded to the nearest 1,000. Details may not sum to totals due to rounding. For information on sample design and checking 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 FBI'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, 1995–2020; and Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Instant Criminal Background Check System Transaction Statistics, 1998–2020.

TABLE 2**Firearm applications and denials, by type of checking agency and type of permit or check, 2019 and 2020**

Type of checking agency and permit/check	2019				2020			
	States ^a	Applications	Denials	Percent denied	States ^a	Applications	Denials	Percent denied
National total		16,706,478	243,278	1.5%		24,993,621	397,877	1.6%
FBI total ^b	43	8,177,732	103,592	1.3%	43	12,761,328	185,384	1.5%
State and local total ^c	44	8,528,746	139,686	1.6%	43	12,232,293	212,493	1.7%
State agencies		7,347,844	106,926	1.5		10,517,829	162,306	1.5
Instant check	13	4,671,558	66,906	1.4	13	6,848,138	120,543	1.8
Exempt carry permit	16	1,097,888	11,990	1.1	16	1,520,543	17,711	1.2
Purchase permit	8	730,022	26,902	3.7	8	794,000	21,806	2.7
Other approval	3	848,376	1,128	0.1	3	1,355,148	2,246	0.2
Local agencies ^d		1,180,902	32,760	2.8		1,714,464	50,187	2.9
Exempt carry permit	9	706,255	12,130	1.7	8	710,783	10,052	1.4
Purchase permit	5	278,481	19,265	6.9	5	605,697	36,475	6.0
Other approval	1	196,166	1,365	0.7	1	397,983	3,660	0.9

Note: See *Terms and definitions* for explanations of types of permits and checks. Details may not sum to totals due to rounding. See appendix table 3 for standard errors for local checking agencies.

^aA state or equivalent jurisdiction may be included in more than one category.

^bThese numbers come from the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) section. Includes the District of Columbia and the five U.S. territories, for which the FBI processed all background checks in the NICS.

^cThese estimates are collected through BJS's Firearm Inquiry Statistics program. Includes NICS checks that state and local checking agencies conducted. The District of Columbia is included in the number of states under state and local total and state purchase permit.

^dTotals were estimated because local agencies were sampled. See *Methodology*.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2019 and 2020; and Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Instant Criminal Background Check System Transaction Statistics, 2019 and 2020.

In 2020, state agencies reported about 6.8 million applications for instant checks, 1.5 million for exempt carry permits, 794,000 for purchase permits, and 1.4 million for other approvals

Thirteen of the 34 jurisdictions where state-level agencies did background checks (or compiled local agency data on background checks) conducted instant checks in 2020. These agencies received about 6.8 million applications for instant checks, the most common type of application, and denied 1.8% (121,000) (table 3). In 2019, they received 4.7 million applications for instant checks and denied about 1.4% (107,000).

In 2020, state checking agencies in 16 states conducted background checks for exempt carry permits, the second-most common type of check that states conducted. These agencies reported about 1.5 million

applications for exempt carry permits and a denial rate of 1.2% (18,000 denied) in 2020. In 2019, these agencies received 1.1 million applications for exempt carry permits and denied 1.1% (12,000).

State checking agencies in seven states and the District of Columbia conducted background checks for purchase permits in 2020. These agencies received 794,000 applications and denied 2.7% (22,000). In 2019, they received 730,000 applications and denied 3.7% (27,000).

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 2020 and denied 0.2%. In 2019, they received 848,000 applications and denied 0.1% (1,000).

TABLE 3**Firearm applications and denials reported by state agencies, by type of permit or check and jurisdiction, 2019 and 2020**

Type of permit/check and jurisdiction	2019			2020		
	Applications	Denials	Percent denied	Applications	Denials	Percent denied
All permit/check types and jurisdictions	7,347,844	106,926	1.5%	10,517,829	162,306	1.5%
Instant check	4,671,558	66,906	1.4%	6,848,138	120,543	1.8%
Colorado	342,439	7,069	2.1	501,324	14,227	2.8
Connecticut	126,458	100	0.1	169,113	200	0.1
Florida	942,052	12,500	1.3	1,526,556	20,323	1.3
Illinois	553,933	3,200	0.6	385,770	2,200	0.6
Nevada	101,783	1,637	1.6	184,822	3,151	1.7
New Hampshire	52,000	500	1.0	93,000	900	1.0
New Jersey	89,776	398	0.4	178,396	350	0.2
Oregon	276,912	2,258	0.8	418,061	3,363	0.8
Pennsylvania	982,036	12,436	1.3	1,445,910	23,220	1.6
Tennessee	484,778	20,212	4.2	740,694	37,512	5.1
Utah	95,722	1,330	1.4	180,252	2,136	1.2
Virginia	484,550	3,781	0.8	781,910	9,767	1.2
Wisconsin	139,119	1,485	1.1	242,330	3,194	1.3
Exempt carry permit	1,097,888	11,990	1.1%	1,520,543	17,711	1.2%
Alaska	2,325	6	0.3	2,617	0	0
Arizona	65,000	600	0.9	83,000	800	1.0
Arkansas	34,990	1,135	3.2	51,442	2,328	4.5
Kansas	21,278	52	0.2	17,048	43	0.3
Kentucky	14,500	378	2.6	15,824	441	2.8
Louisiana	11,456	856	7.5	13,764	925	6.7
Michigan ^a	141,393	1,936	1.4	182,721	2,367	1.3
Minnesota ^{a,b}	53,310	656	1.2	101,897	1,472	1.4
Mississippi	19,455	1	<0.1	23,465	8	<0.1
Nebraska	13,325	178	1.3	22,212	299	1.3
North Dakota	4,300	150	3.5	6,000	200	3.3
Ohio ^a	133,912	1,310	1.0	171,182	1,777	1.0
South Carolina	85,803	1,706	2.0	104,468	2,733	2.6
Texas	353,580	1,755	0.5	567,981	2,422	0.4
Utah	140,845	1,238	0.9	153,291	1,866	1.2
Wyoming	2,416	33	1.4	3,631	30	0.8
Purchase permit	730,022	26,902	3.7%	794,000	21,806	2.7%
Connecticut	14,255	10	0.1	17,096	20	0.1
District of Columbia	6,000	10	0.2	13,000	10	0.1
Hawaii ^a	16,098	256	1.6	26,122	741	2.8
Illinois	483,041	20,500	4.2	309,176	13,100	4.2
Maryland	20,083	769	3.8	67,752	2,118	3.1
Massachusetts ^a	105,506	1,573	1.5	108,962	2,100	1.9
Michigan ^a	30,625	906	3.0	33,155	1,065	3.2
New Jersey ^a	54,414	2,878	5.3	218,737	2,652	1.2
Other approval	848,376	1,128	0.1%	1,355,148	2,246	0.2%
California	781,000	700	0.1	1,221,000	1,100	0.1
Maryland	53,726	245	0.5	104,440	594	0.6
Rhode Island ^a	13,650	183	1.3	29,708	552	1.9

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.

^bThe state's concealed carry permits are exempt only under state law.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2019 and 2020.

Local checking agencies processed about 1.7 million applications for firearm transfers, including 711,000 applications for exempt carry permits and 606,000 for purchase permits in 2020

Local checking agencies in 13 states in 2019 and 12 states in 2020 processed applications and denials, issued permits, or conducted background checks for various

types of firearm transfers or permits. In 2020, local checking agencies processed about 711,000 applications for exempt carry permits and denied 1.4% (table 4). Local checking agencies processed almost 606,000 purchase permits and denied 6%. Local checking agencies processed 398,000 applications for other approval types and denied 0.9%.

TABLE 4
Firearm applications and denials reported by local agencies, by type of permit or check and size of population served, 2019 and 2020

Type of permit/check and population served	2019				2020			
	Number of local agencies ^a	Applications	Denials	Percent denied	Number of local agencies ^a	Applications	Denials	Percent denied
All permit/check types and population sizes	~	1,180,902	32,760	2.8%	~	1,714,464	50,187	2.9%
Purchase permit	715	278,481	19,265	6.9%	715	605,697	36,475	6.0%
9,999 or fewer	332	22,422	365	1.6	332	36,316	590	1.6
10,000–99,999	317	103,803	5,046	4.9	317	197,860	9,083	4.6
100,000–199,999	34	42,188	3,926	9.3	34	93,691	9,624	10.3
200,000 or more	32	110,068	9,929	9.0	32	277,831	17,178	6.2
Exempt carry permit	663	706,255	12,130	1.7%	596	710,783	10,052	1.4%
9,999 or fewer	183	18,517	269	1.5	180	26,709	245	0.9
10,000–99,999	394	327,762	4,385	1.3	342	314,664	3,367	1.1
100,000–199,999	50	125,390	1,295	1.0	45	137,385	1,919	1.4
200,000 or more	36	234,585	6,181	2.6	29	232,025	4,521	1.9
Other approval^b	167	196,166	1,365	0.7%	167	397,983	3,660	0.9%
9,999 or fewer	65	7,560	20	0.3	65	10,565	71	0.7
10,000–99,999	90	86,060	641	0.7	90	164,405	1,474	0.9
100,000–199,999	6	21,803	128	0.6	6	43,400	487	1.1
200,000 or more	6	80,744	576	0.7	6	179,613	1,628	0.9

Note: Totals are from local agencies that reported data on firearm transfers or permits. 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. See table 11 for respondent totals.

^bProcessed by local checking agencies only in Washington state.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2019 and 2020.

Felony convictions, indictments, and arrests accounted for about half of all denials in 2019 and 2020

Among agencies that reported reasons for denying firearm transfers and permits, felony convictions were the most common reason for denial, prompting more than a third of denials in both 2019 (36.9%) and 2020 (38.2%) (tables 5 and 6). Felony convictions accounted for half (50.2%) of denials issued by the FBI, 25.2% of denials issued by state agencies, and 13.8% of denials issued by local agencies in 2020.

Across all checking agencies, state law prohibitions were the most common nonfelony reason for denial in 2020 (12.6%), accounting for 15.7% of denials issued by state checking agencies and 37.8% issued by local checking agencies. Drug use or addiction accounted for 8.6% of denials overall in 2020, followed by misdemeanor convictions of domestic violence (6.5%) and mental health commitments or adjudications (5.7%). About 5.1% of denials in 2020 were due to fugitive-from-justice status or warrants for arrest, 3.3% were due to protection or restraining orders, and 2.6% were due to illegal or unlawful entry into the United States.

TABLE 5
Reasons for denial of applications for firearm transfers and permits, by the FBI and state checking agencies, 2019

Reason for denial	FBI and state		FBI ^a		State	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	156,072	100%	103,592	100%	52,480	100%
Felony reasons	75,913	48.6%	54,060	52.2%	21,853	41.6%
Felony conviction	57,534	36.9	46,107	44.5	11,427	21.8
Under indictment/information ^b	8,870	5.7	7,953	7.7	917	1.7
Felony arrest with no disposition ^c	9,509	6.1	~	~	9,509	18.1
Nonfelony reasons	80,159	51.4%	49,532	47.8%	30,627	58.4%
State law prohibition	16,450	10.5	7,671	7.4	8,779	16.7
Drug use/addiction	18,581	11.9	14,208	13.7	4,373	8.3
Misdemeanor conviction of domestic violence	10,620	6.8	7,812	7.5	2,808	5.4
Mental health commitment/adjudication	8,811	5.6	5,977	5.8	2,834	5.4
Fugitive from justice/warrant	11,108	7.1	7,889	7.6	3,219	6.1
Protection/restraining order	5,109	3.3	3,136	3.0	1,973	3.8
Illegal/unlawful entry into U.S.	3,128	2.0	2,758	2.7	370	0.7
Local law prohibition ^d	0	0	~	~	0	0
Other prohibitions ^e	6,352	4.1	81	0.1	6,271	11.9

Note: Reasons for denial were based on 18 U.S.C. § 922 or state law. (See *Background check and permit procedures*.) Totals were based on state agencies that reported reasons for denial and on information from the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System Operations Report. The Firearm Inquiry Statistics program did not collect 2019 data on reasons for denial from local checking agencies. Details may not sum to totals due to rounding. For more information on sample design and agencies that reported data, see *Methodology*.

~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 Bureau of Justice Statistics reports in the *Background Check of Firearm Transfers* series that were published before 2008.

^bAn 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.

^cFelony arrest with no disposition is a prohibition in certain states but is not a federal prohibition.

^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.

^eInclude 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, 2019 and 2020; and Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Instant Criminal Background Check System Transaction Statistics, 2019.

TABLE 6**Reasons for denial of applications for firearm transfers and permits, by type of checking agency, 2020**

Reason for denial	All checking agencies		FBI ^a		State		Local	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	332,200	100%	185,384	100%	118,582	100%	28,234	100%
Felony reasons	167,468	50.4%	109,353	59.0%	52,451	44.2%	5,664	20.1%
Felony conviction	126,799	38.2	92,992	50.2	29,915	25.2	3,892	13.8
Under indictment/information ^b	20,160	6.1	16,361	8.8	2,761	2.3	1,038	3.7
Felony arrest with no disposition ^c	20,510	6.2	~	~	19,775	16.7	735	2.6
Nonfelony reasons	164,732	49.6%	76,031	41.0%	66,131	55.8%	22,570	79.9%
State law prohibition	41,876	12.6	12,588	6.8	18,609	15.7	10,679	37.8
Drug use/addiction	28,683	8.6	19,310	10.4	7,504	6.3	1,869	6.6
Misdemeanor conviction of domestic violence	21,709	6.5	12,620	6.8	6,601	5.6	2,488	8.8
Mental health commitment/adjudication	18,850	5.7	10,331	5.6	7,105	6.0	1,414	5.0
Fugitive from justice/warrant	16,837	5.1	10,245	5.5	5,826	4.9	766	2.7
Protection/restraining order	11,061	3.3	4,350	2.3	5,887	5.0	824	2.9
Illegal/unlawful entry into U.S.	8,643	2.6	6,344	3.4	2,040	1.7	259	0.9
Local law prohibition ^d	1,367	0.4	~	~	0	0	1,367	4.8
Other prohibitions ^e	15,706	4.7	243	0.1	12,559	10.6	2,904	10.3

Note: Reasons for denial were based on 18 U.S.C. § 922 or state law. (See *Background check and permit procedures*.) Totals were based on state and local agencies that reported reasons for denial and on information from the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System Operations Report. 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.

~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 Bureau of Justice Statistics reports in the *Background Check of Firearm Transfers* series that were published before 2008.

^bAn 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.

^cFelony arrest with no disposition is a prohibition in certain states but is not a federal prohibition.

^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.

^eInclude 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, 2019 and 2020; and Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Instant Criminal Background Check System Transaction Statistics, 2020.

The number of applications for firearm transfers and permits nearly tripled from 1999 to 2020

Checking agencies received nearly triple the number of applications (190% increase) for firearm transfers and permits in 2020 (25 million) as in 1999 (8.6 million), the first full year that NICS was in operation (table 7). During that period, the number of persons age 18 or older in the 50 states and the District of Columbia increased 24%.¹

From 1999 to 2020, the rate at which applications were denied for a felony conviction, indictment, or arrest declined from 1.7% to 0.8%. About 50.5% of all denials in 2020 were for a felony reason, down from 72.5% in 1999. The denial rate for a nonfelony reason, such as a misdemeanor conviction of domestic violence, drug use or addiction, or a mental health commitment or adjudication, was 0.6% in 1999 and 0.8% in 2020. During this period, the share of denials that were due to a nonfelony reason increased from 27.5% to 49.5%.

¹See National Center for Health Statistics [NCHS]. (n.d.). Bridged-race population estimates, United States July 1st resident population by state, county, age, sex, bridged-race, and Hispanic origin [Dataset compiled from 1990–1999 bridged-race intercensal population estimates (released by NCHS on July 26, 2004); revised bridged-race 2000–2009 intercensal population estimates (released by NCHS on October 26, 2012); and bridged-race Vintage 2020 (2010–2020) postcensal population estimates (released by NCHS on September 22, 2021).] Retrieved September 6, 2022, from <https://wonder.cdc.gov/bridged-race-v2020.html>.

TABLE 7
Percent change in applications, denials, reasons for denial, and rates of denial, 1999 and 2020

	1999	2020	Percent change, 1999–2020
Number of applications	8,621,000	24,991,000	189.9%
Number of denials^a	204,000	398,000	95.1%
For felony reasons	148,000	201,000	35.8
For nonfelony reasons	56,000	197,000	251.8
Percent of applications denied	2.4%	1.6%	-32.7%
For felony reasons	1.7	0.8	-53.2
For nonfelony reasons	0.6	0.8	21.4
Percent of denials			
For felony reasons ^b	72.5%	50.5%	-30.4%
For nonfelony reasons	27.5	49.5	80.3

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 in this report. Estimates are based on data reported by the 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*. See tables 5 and 6 for felony and nonfelony reasons for denial.

^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 Bureau of Justice Statistics reports in the *Background Check for Firearm Transfers* series that were published before 2008.

^bSome checking agencies did not report 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, 2019, and 2020; and Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Instant Criminal Background Check System Transaction Statistics, 1999, 2019, and 2020.

About 19,000 denials were referred to ATF field divisions for further investigation in 2020

The FBI’s NICS Section refers all firearm applications it denies to ATF’s Denial Enforcement and NICS Intelligence (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 about 10,600 denials (9.8% of all FBI denials referred to ATF) to ATF field divisions in 2019 and 19,000 denials (9.9% of all FBI denials referred to ATF) in 2020 (table 8).

If the FBI finds a record that prohibits a firearm transfer to an applicant within 3 business days of initiating a

NICS check, it issues a standard denial. If 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 the transfer should not have occurred, the FBI issues a delayed denial. In 2019, the DENI Branch referred about 2,200 delayed denials (2.0% of FBI denials referred to ATF) and 8,400 standard denials (7.8% of FBI denials referred to ATF) to ATF field divisions. In 2020, the DENI Branch referred about 4,400 delayed denials (2.3% of FBI denials referred to ATF) and 14,600 standard denials (7.6% of FBI denials referred to ATF).

TABLE 8
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives investigation of denials referred by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2019 and 2020

	2019		2020	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total FBI denials referred to ATF’s DENI Branch	107,809	100%	192,690	100%
DENI Branch referrals to ATF field divisions ^a				
Referred to field ^b	10,567	9.8%	19,074	9.9%
Delayed denials ^c	2,192	2.0	4,437	2.3
Standard denials ^d	8,375	7.8	14,637	7.6
Not referred to field ^b	97,239	90.2	173,571	90.1
Canceled ^e	3	<0.1	45	<0.1
Reasons for referrals to ATF field divisions ^f	10,597	100%	18,496	100%
Convicted felon	3,206	30.2	5,700	30.8
Domestic violence misdemeanor	1,929	18.2	3,486	18.8
Subject to protective order	1,421	13.4	2,153	11.6
Under felony indictment/information ^g	1,031	9.7	2,143	11.6
Unlawful user of controlled substance	982	9.2	1,222	6.6
Adjudicated mentally defective	965	9.1	1,856	10.0
Fugitive from justice	808	7.6	1,409	7.6
Illegal/unlawful alien	123	1.2	358	1.9
State prohibition	108	1.0	129	0.7
Career armed criminal	22	0.2	31	0.2
Dishonorable discharge	2	<0.1	8	<0.1
Renounced U.S. citizenship	0	0	1	<0.1

Note: Details may not sum to totals due to rounding. DENI denotes Denial Enforcement and NICS Intelligence.

^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.

^bIncludes an unspecified number of denials that were later overturned.

^cDenials that the 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).

^dDenials 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.

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

^fCounts may not equal delayed denials plus standard denials because denials can be received and referred in different calendar years. A status of “delayed” or “standard” is assigned on the date ATF receives a denial from the FBI, while a reason for referral is assigned on the date a denial is referred to a field division.

^gAn 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, 2019 and 2020.

A felony conviction was the most common reason for referring a denial to an ATF field division in both 2019 (30.2%) and 2020 (30.8%). This was followed by the denied person having a misdemeanor conviction of domestic violence (18.2% in 2019 and 18.8% in 2020). The denied person being subject to a protective order was the third-most common reason (13.4% in 2019 and 11.6% in 2020).

Background Check Laws and Procedures

Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act

The Brady Act mandates that anyone attempting to transfer (purchase or receive) firearms from an FFL, also known as a federally licensed firearm dealer, must undergo a criminal background check. The Brady Act established the NICS, which the FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services Division administers and which contains data on persons who are prohibited by federal and state laws from purchasing or possessing a firearm.

The Brady Act took effect on February 28, 1994 with 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 Brady Act's permanent provisions went into effect with the launch of NICS.

The Brady Act enforces prohibitions previously established by the Gun Control Act (GCA), 18 U.S.C. § 922, which prohibits 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 1 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 United States under a nonimmigrant 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.

In addition to the prohibitions listed in the GCA, which are the nationwide standards for denying a firearm transfer or permit application, states may have their own prohibitions, specifications, or requirements for the transfer or possession of firearms. An applicant who is denied a firearm transfer or permit may appeal to the FBI or a state point of contact (POC), depending on the state and type of permit or check. Some jurisdictions allow a further appeal to a court. A denied person who submitted a false application or has an outstanding warrant may be subject to arrest and prosecution under federal or state laws.

Background check and permit procedures

Each state government determines the extent of its involvement in the NICS process (table 9). Three basic levels of state involvement currently exist:

- In a **full POC** state, the state directly queries NICS for a background check on all firearm transfers originating in the state. In 2019 and 2020, there were 13 full POC states.
- In a **partial POC** state, the state conducts a NICS check on all handgun transfer applicants, but FFLs in the state are required to contact the FBI for NICS checks for long gun transfers. There were seven partial POC states in 2019 and 2020.

TABLE 9
Number of states, by type of check, point of contact status, and reporter of Firearm Inquiry Statistics data, 2019 and 2020

Type of permit/check	2019	2020
Handgun transfer	26	26
Instant check	13	13
Purchase permit	13	13
Other approval	5	5
Long gun transfer	20	20
Instant check	11	11
Purchase permit	7	7
Other approval	2	2
Exempt carry permit	25	24
FBI NICS background check only	7	7
POC status		
Non-POC (FBI conducts checks for all firearms)	31	31
Full POC (POC conducts checks for all firearms)	13	13
Partial POC (POC checks handguns, FBI checks long guns)	7	7
Reporter of FIST data		
FBI reports NICS handgun and long gun data	31	31
FBI reports NICS long gun data only	7	7
State agency reports transfer/permit data for entire state	34	34
Local agencies report transfer/permit data	13	12

Note: Includes the District of Columbia. States may be included in more than one subcategory. FIST denotes Firearm Inquiry Statistics. NICS denotes National Instant Criminal Background Check System. POC denotes point of contact.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2019 and 2020.

- In a **non-POC** state, the state does not conduct NICS checks. Instead, FFLs are required to contact the FBI directly for NICS checks on all firearm transfers originating in the state. In 2019 and 2020, 30 states and the District of Columbia were non-POC states and five other U.S. jurisdictions or territories did not have POCs.

An FFL initiates a background check of an applicant for a firearm transfer or permit by contacting either the FBI or POC to query NICS. Applicant information is collected on ATF Form 4473, Firearm Transaction Record, and includes the applicant's name, descriptive data (e.g., date of birth, sex, race, state of residence, and country of citizenship), and other information that may immediately identify an applicant as prohibited from receiving or possessing a firearm and negate the need to continue the check. NICS searches for records about the applicant in several databases:²

- The FBI's Interstate Identification Index (III) maintains individual fingerprint-supported criminal history records. As of December 31, 2020, III contained 81,366,218 records that NICS could access during a background check.
- The FBI's National Crime Information Center (NCIC) contains data on persons who, for example, are subject to protection orders or active criminal warrants, violated immigration laws, are known or suspected terrorists, or committed sex offenses. As of December 31, 2020, NCIC contained 7,284,233 records that NICS could access during a background check.
- The NICS Indices is a database created specifically for the NICS program, and it maintains information contributed by federal, state, local, and tribal agencies pertaining to persons prohibited from receiving or possessing a firearm pursuant to federal and state law. Typically, the records maintained in the NICS Indices are not available via the III or NCIC. As of December 31, 2020, the NICS Indices contained 23,377,233 records (table 10).

²See Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2022). *National Instant Background Check System Operational Report 2020–2021*. <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/nics-2020-2021-operations-report.pdf/view>.

TABLE 10**National Instant Criminal Background Check System Indices records of persons prohibited from receiving or possessing a firearm, yearend 2018–2020**

Type of record	December 31, 2018 submissions			December 31, 2019 submissions			Percent change, yearend 2018 to 2019	December 31, 2020 submissions			Percent change, yearend 2019 to 2020
	Total	Federal ^a	State ^b	Total	Federal ^a	State ^b		Total	Federal ^a	State ^b	
Total	19,318,610	9,595,006	9,723,604	20,929,713	10,242,180	10,687,533	8.3%	23,377,233	11,909,241	11,467,992	11.7%
Felony conviction	3,971,721	1,264,993	2,706,728	4,336,950	1,356,720	2,980,230	9.2	4,615,459	1,444,166	3,171,293	6.4
Under indictment/information ^c	130,040	43,629	86,411	159,979	48,849	111,130	23.0	183,386	53,282	130,104	14.6
Fugitive from justice	1,989	1,949	40	2,467	2,411	56	24.0	145	53	92	-94.1
Unlawful user/addicted	45,152	23,606	21,546	67,032	26,249	40,783	48.5	49,746	21,239	28,507	-25.8
Adjudicated mental health	5,669,909	250,015	5,419,894	6,032,035	260,866	5,771,169	6.4	6,396,880	263,263	6,133,617	6.0
Illegal/unlawful entry into U.S.	7,905,804	7,904,839	965	8,423,418	8,422,457	961	6.5	9,994,293	9,993,330	963	18.6
Dishonorable discharge	16,543	16,458	85	18,119	18,025	94	9.5	18,923	18,819	104	4.4
Renounced U.S. citizenship	46,560	46,527	33	51,698	51,659	39	11.0	53,975	53,955	20	4.4
Protection/restraining order	73,288	556	72,732	75,685	558	75,127	3.3	76,910	538	76,372	1.6
Domestic violence misdemeanor	175,376	33,487	141,889	207,774	41,436	166,338	18.5	222,191	46,018	176,173	6.9
State law prohibition	1,282,228	8,947	1,273,281	1,554,556	12,950	1,541,606	21.2	1,765,325	14,578	1,750,747	13.6

Note: The National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) Indices is used exclusively for NICS checks and contains records of persons who are prohibited by federal or state law from receiving or possessing a firearm.

^aIncludes submissions from federal agencies, U.S. district courts, tribal agencies, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories.

^bState totals include U. S. territories.

^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.

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Instant Criminal Background Check System Indices, 2018–2020.

As applicable, a NICS search will also query U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) databases, which contain information on non-U.S. citizens. The NICS Section and POC states sent 206,486 queries to ICE in 2019 and 319,237 in 2020 (not shown in tables).

State and local agencies may also access records in their own state and search records that are not electronically available to the FBI. A checking agency may also request a paper record from a court, mental health facility, or law enforcement agency.

After reviewing relevant records, the FBI or POC informs the FFL that the transaction may proceed, is denied, or is delayed for further review. Some states have an additional waiting period (after a transfer application is filed with a seller or permit application is filed with a checking agency) that must expire before the firearm transfer or permit issuance may be completed. Some states require a person attempting to receive a firearm through a private transfer to obtain a purchase permit or undergo an instant check.

Types of permits and checks

A state may use one or more (for different types of firearms) of four methods to approve a prospective firearm purchaser.

Purchase permits require that a prospective firearm purchaser undergo a background check to obtain a government-issued document (i.e., permit, license, or identification card) that is presented to a seller to receive a firearm. Twelve states and the District of Columbia had purchase permit systems in 2019 and 2020. In eight of these jurisdictions, local agencies issued these permits, and in five states, state agencies issued these permits.

Instant checks (instant approval) require a seller to transmit a purchaser's application to a checking agency by telephone or computer, after which the agency is required to respond as quickly as possible without delay. Thirteen state agencies (and the FBI) maintained instant check systems in 2019 and 2020.

Other approval systems, used by four states in 2019 and 2020, require a seller to transmit a purchaser's application or information to a checking agency. The transfer of the firearm is delayed until a statutory waiting period expires or the agency completes a background check. In 2019 and 2020, checks were conducted by local agencies in one state and by state agencies in three states.

Exempt carry permits are permits issued after a background check that exempt the holder from undergoing a new check at the time of purchase or transfer. These permits are qualified by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) as a valid alternative to the NICS check and are 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. These permits are valid for a maximum of 5 years from their issuance date and are only for firearm transfers in the state where the permit is issued. Twenty-five states in 2019 and 24 in 2020 offered exempt carry permits. Unlike the other three methods, use of an exempt carry permit is not a requirement but an option for the permit holder.

While the Brady Act requires NICS checks of all prospective firearm purchasers who apply for a firearm transfer from an FFL, they can bypass the check if they hold a state permit to receive, possess, or carry a firearm that ATF 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.

Methodology

Data used for this report were collected and prepared by the Regional Justice Information Service Commission (REJIS), through a cooperative agreement with the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) under the Firearm Inquiry Statistics (FIST) program. Conducted annually since 1999, the FIST survey collects data on applications for and denials of firearm transfers from all state checking agencies and a representative sample of local checking agencies.

FIST frame

While BJS normally collects data annually for the previous calendar year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, BJS collected data for 2019 and 2020 simultaneously. The frames for the 2 years of collection were similar. However, beginning in 2019, Alabama no longer had an alternative to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) point of transfer check that was qualified by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). In 2019, Alabama's exempt carry permit was no longer an ATF-qualified alternative check. For the 2019 collection, local checking agencies in Alabama received a survey covering only the portion of the year when the ATF-qualified alternative check was in place. These agencies did not receive a survey covering the 2020 portion of the data collection. BJS collected data from three types of reporting sources to generate the 2019 and 2020 estimates for firearm transfer applications and denials:

- **FBI.** The FBI provided data in 2019 and 2020 for 30 states, the District of Columbia, and the five U.S. territories that rely exclusively on the FBI to conduct NICS checks for handgun and long gun transfers. The FBI also provided data for the seven states that rely on it to conduct background checks on long gun transfers only.
- **State agency reporters.** BJS surveyed the 33 state agencies and the District of Columbia Police Department that conducted background checks required by law or compiled data for their entire jurisdiction (e.g., states where local agencies conduct background checks but report counts to a state-level entity).³ In 15 cases in both 2019 and 2020, BJS used reports published by the state agencies and asked the agencies to verify the published information.

³Two separate agency units in New Jersey reported to FIST. These units were counted as a single reporter so that totals for the entire state could be reported.

- **Local reporting agencies.** BJS surveyed 1,081 local checking agencies in 13 states in 2019 and 1,014 local checking agencies in 12 states in 2020 that issued permits, tracked applications and denials, or conducted background checks for various types of firearm transfer or permit systems and did not report counts to a state-level entity. Local checking agencies in Alabama were not included in the 2020 portion of the data collection.⁴ BJS administered the FIST survey to a sample of local agencies in three states in both 2019 and 2020. BJS administered the survey to all local agencies in 10 states in 2019 and in 9 states in 2020.

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

FIST sample

State laws determine which government agencies conduct background checks for a firearm transfer or permit. For FIST, it is important to distinguish between local agencies that are authorized by statute to conduct background checks and local agencies that actually conduct them. For example, in certain states local agencies may be legally authorized, but not required, to conduct background checks for firearm transfers or permits.

For FIST, BJS determined that eligible reporting agencies should be those authorized and known to conduct background checks or maintain information on critical FIST data elements, which included applications, denials, and reasons for denial when reported.⁵ 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 2018 FIST sampling frame was constructed and those with only part-time employees who each worked less than 35 hours per week.

To construct the 2019–2020 FIST sampling frame, REJIS, under the direction of BJS, used multiple data sources combined with a large known pool of past FIST respondents. First, REJIS included local reporting agencies from the 2016 frame that had responded to the FIST survey at least once in the previous 3 years and had

⁴FIST obtains data from law enforcement agencies and other types of local agencies that conduct these activities, such as probate courts in Georgia and county clerks or other types of administrative offices in New York.

⁵For FIST, collecting application and denial data from agencies that conduct background checks or track applications for transfers or permits is considered the most accurate and sometimes only means of assessing background check activity.

a verified status of conducting background checks or of processing or tracking applications for firearm transfers or permits. To verify the frame, REJIS used the Law Enforcement Agency Roster, the FBI’s 2011 Originating Agency Identifier file of law enforcement agencies, and published lists of law enforcement agencies from professional officer associations.

Most FIST data consisted of counts obtained from the FBI and counts collected from state agency reporters. 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 13 states in 2019 and 12 in 2020. BJS conducted a census of local reporting agencies in 10 states in 2019: Alabama, Idaho, Iowa, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, South Dakota, and West Virginia. In three states (Georgia, Minnesota, and Washington), BJS sampled local reporting agencies due to the large number of potentially eligible local reporting agencies (ranging from 159 in Georgia to more than 300 in Minnesota). REJIS created a stratified sample based on population that equated to—

- Stratum 1: rural—population of 9,999 or fewer residents
- Stratum 2: small cities—population of 10,000 to 99,999
- Stratum 3: small metropolitan areas—population of 100,000 to 199,999
- Stratum 4: large metropolitan areas—population of 200,000 or more.

These population categories were selected to be consistent with definitions of various population levels.

Additionally, the categories allowed the collection to maintain some consistency with portions of the methodology used for previous FIST collections. BJS and REJIS took several steps to determine whether 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 Census of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies 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.

The final designated sample for 2019 included 691 enumerated (self-representing, or SR) local reporting agencies in states where all local reporting agencies were enumerated and 348 sampled (non-self-representing, or NSR) local reporting agencies in three states where strata 1 and 2 were sampled. For 2020, there were 624 SR local reporting agencies and 348 NSR local reporting agencies. After adjusting for local agencies that were ineligible to participate in the survey, the final sample consisted of 1,081 state agency reporters and local reporting agencies in 2019 and 1,014 state agency reporters and local reporting agencies in 2020 (table 11). The overall response rate was 76% for the 2019 portion of the collection and 78% for the 2020 portion. Eighty-two percent of state agency reporters responded for both the 2019 and 2020 portions of the collection. About 76% of local reporting agencies responded to the 2019 portion of the collection, and 78% responded for the 2020 portion.

TABLE 11
Number of reporting agencies that participated in the Firearm Inquiry Statistics survey, 2019 and 2020

Reporting agencies	2019				2020			
	Total	Sample	Responses	Response rate	Total	Sample	Responses	Response rate
Total	1,380	1,081	825	76.3%	1,313	1,014	788	77.7%
State agency reporters	34	34	28	82.4%	34	34	28	82.4%
Local checking agencies	1,346	1,047	797	76.1%	1,279	980	760	77.6%
Population served								
9,999 or fewer	550	348	241	69.3	547	345	241	69.9
10,000–99,999	666	569	455	80.0	614	517	425	82.2
100,000–199,999	70	70	56	80.0	65	65	52	80.0
200,000 or more	60	60	45	75.0	53	53	42	79.2

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

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2019 and 2020.

For the 2019–2020 collection, BJS and REJIS updated the 15 survey forms used in 2018 to reflect the 2019 and 2020 reference year and any changes in state laws, permits, or checking procedures that would alter what information the responding agency could provide. These forms were tailored to be applicable to states or groups of states. State-specific instructions served to minimize respondent burden. BJS and REJIS used multiple survey modes (e.g., online form, paper survey, and fax) and a rigorous strategy for following up with nonresponding agencies to increase survey responses.

Estimation

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

Application and denial data were estimated using proportional adjustments borrowed from each permit category for 2019 and 2020 in Arizona, California, New Hampshire, and the District of Columbia. Application and denial data were estimated in North Dakota for 2019 and in Kentucky for 2020. Denial data were estimated in Connecticut and Illinois for 2019 and 2020 and in Florida for 2019 only.

Weighting for local reporting agencies

The 2019–2020 FIST data collection provides for two basic weighting structures for local reporting agencies: a weight applied to SR agencies and a weight applied to NSR agencies.

SR agencies (enumerated)

Local reporting agencies in strata 3 and 4 (large agencies) were selected with certainty and given a design weight of 1 ($w_1 = 1$). A nonresponse 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 local reporting agencies was similar to that for SR local reporting 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 where the agencies were located. This weight reflects 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.

Nonresponse adjustment

The nonresponse adjustment accounts for agencies that were ineligible (out of scope) and for nonresponding agencies. It consists 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 nonresponse adjustment was applied to each cell (stratum within state) if there was any nonresponse. 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 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 (Fw) applied to each FIST case are the product of a design weight (w1) and a nonresponse adjustment weight (w2) for $Fw = w1 \times w2$. Table 12 shows the final weights for NSR and SR agencies.

Item nonresponse imputation for local reporting agencies

For the 2019–2020 FIST data collection, REJIS identified relatively few instances of missing data on applications for firearm transfers or permits, compared to other missing data (e.g., reasons for denial). For partial responses to count, respondents had to report 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 nonrespondent. When data were missing for only applications or only denials, REJIS used a conditional mean imputation to estimate the number of applications or denials.⁶

In population stratum 1, REJIS replaced missing values with the mean number of applications of other agencies in the same state that were in the same population category. In population stratum 2, REJIS employed a basic multiple-imputation strategy for agencies with complete data, accounting for the number of denials,

⁶Schafer, J. L., & Schenker, N. (2000). Inference with imputed conditional means. *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 95(449), 144–154. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01621459.2000.10473910>.

the actual population size 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

REJIS 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 account 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.

REJIS approximated the FIST design by using an IBM 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 local reporting 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.

TABLE 12
Final weights by state and population category for local reporting agencies, 2019 and 2020

State	2019				2020			
	9,999 or fewer	10,000–99,999	100,000–199,999	200,000 or more	9,999 or fewer	10,000–99,999	100,000–199,999	200,000 or more
Alabama*	1.50	1.63	1.25	2.33	~	~	~	~
Georgia	4.13	1.77	1.56	1.38	4.13	1.77	1.56	1.38
Iowa	1.13	1.14	1.00	2.00	1.13	1.14	1.00	2.00
Idaho	1.36	1.67	1.00	1.00	1.36	1.67	1.00	1.00
Minnesota	4.65	1.56	1.00	1.00	4.55	1.56	1.00	1.00
Montana	1.84	1.13	1.33	~	1.84	1.13	1.33	~
North Carolina	1.33	1.19	1.14	1.09	1.33	1.19	1.14	1.09
Nebraska	1.35	1.04	1.00	1.00	1.35	1.04	1.00	1.00
Nevada	1.60	1.40	~	1.00	1.60	1.40	~	1.00
New York	1.00	1.43	1.57	1.40	1.00	1.43	1.57	1.40
South Dakota	1.42	1.21	1.00	~	1.42	1.21	1.00	~
Washington	6.50	1.84	1.20	1.50	5.91	1.76	1.20	1.50
West Virginia	1.33	1.54	1.00	~	1.33	1.54	1.00	~

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

*No 2020 data were collected from local checking agencies in Alabama.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2019 and 2020.

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, nonresponse, and population eligibility or coverage. In some cases, standard error computations were not possible, as only one local reporting agency reported information from a given type of application in areas where more than one local reporting agency was queried (via sample or census). In these cases, no standard error was calculated.

Variance and standard error estimates were generated using the IBM SPSS Complex Samples software package. This report used the Taylor linearization method for a “stratified without replacement” design to calculate standard errors.

Reasons for denial

BJIS 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 REJIS obtained denial data from an agency’s website or internal report that 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, 23 state agency reporters, and 615 local reporting agencies provided at least some reasons for denial for 2020. FIST did not collect reasons for denial from local reporting agencies for 2019.

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 nonresponse 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 still 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 and REJIS have 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 2020, approximately 76% reported all reasons found during a background check, while about 16% reported only one reason for each denial (either the first reason for denial listed or the most serious reason).

Approximately 4% of the local agency reporters stated they did not know how a reason for a denial was tracked. Five state agency reporters provided all reasons for denial, and about seven provided only one reason for each denial. In 2020, four state agency reporters indicated that they did not know how denials were tracked.

Due to the high item nonresponse and variation in the way reasons for denial were reported, REJIS 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.

Jurisdiction notes

The following notes provide additional information about background checks for firearm transfers and permits in jurisdictions that submitted data directly to the Firearm Inquiry Statistics (FIST) program for the 2019–2020 collection. A jurisdiction’s statutes should be consulted for complete details on its firearm laws. States (Delaware, Indiana, Maine, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Vermont) and U.S. territories excluded from this list rely entirely on the FBI to conduct firearm transfer background checks and do not have separate state or local checks.

Alabama—Local agencies issued exempt carry permits that may have been used for handgun or long gun transfers. Beginning in 2019, Alabama’s exempt carry permit was no longer qualified by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. The 2019 data for Alabama’s exempt carry permit covered only a partial year. Alabama was not a point of contact (POC) state.

Alaska—A state agency conducted background checks on applicants for exempt carry permits that may have been used for handgun or long gun transfers. Alaska was a non-POC state.

Arizona—A state agency conducted background checks on applicants for exempt carry permits that may have been used for handgun or long gun transfers. Arizona was a non-POC state.

Arkansas—A state agency conducted background checks on applicants for exempt carry permits that may have been used for handgun or long gun transfers. Arkansas was a non-POC state.

California—A state agency conducted other approval checks on applicants for handgun and long gun transfers. California was a full POC state.

Colorado—A state agency conducted instant checks on applicants for handgun and long gun transfers. Colorado was a full POC state.

Connecticut—The state authorized two types of purchase permits, and every handgun transferee was required to obtain one of the permits. A purchase permit was also required for a long gun. In addition, a state agency conducted instant checks at the point of transfer on applicants for handgun and long gun transfers. Connecticut was a full POC state.

District of Columbia—The chief of police conducted checks on applicants for a registration certificate (categorized by the FIST program as a purchase permit), which was required to obtain a handgun or long gun. In addition, the FBI conducted National Instant Criminal Background Check System checks requested by dealers who transferred a firearm after receiving a buyer’s registration certificate. The District of Columbia was a non-POC jurisdiction.

Florida—A state agency conducted instant checks on applicants for handgun and long gun transfers. Florida was a full POC state.

Georgia—Local agencies issued exempt carry permits that may have been used for handgun or long gun transfers. Georgia was a non-POC state.

Hawaii—A purchase permit was required to obtain a handgun or long gun. Local agencies conducted checks on purchase permit applicants. Hawaii was a full POC state.

Idaho—Local agencies issued exempt carry permits that may have been used for handgun or long gun transfers. Idaho was a non-POC state.

Illinois—A purchase permit was required to obtain a handgun or long gun. In addition, a state agency conducted instant checks at the point of transfer on applicants for handgun and long gun transfers. Illinois was a full POC state.

Iowa—A purchase permit was required to obtain a handgun. An exempt carry permit may have been substituted for the purchase permit. Both types of permits may have been used to acquire a long gun. Local agencies conducted checks on applicants for purchase and exempt carry permits. Iowa was a partial POC state.

Kansas—A state agency conducted background checks on applicants for exempt carry permits that may have been used for handgun or long gun transfers. Kansas was a non-POC state.

Kentucky—A state agency conducted background checks on applicants for exempt carry permits that may have been used for handgun or long gun transfers. Kentucky was a non-POC state.

Louisiana—A state agency conducted background checks on applicants for exempt carry permits that may have been used for handgun or long gun transfers. Louisiana was a non-POC state.

Maryland—A purchase permit issued by a state agency was required to obtain a handgun. In addition, the state agency conducted other approval checks on applicants for transfers of handguns and assault weapons, which were designated by state law as regulated firearms. Maryland was a partial POC state.

Massachusetts—A purchase permit was required to obtain a handgun or long gun. Two types of purchase permits were included in the FIST survey data. Local agencies conducted checks on permit applicants. Massachusetts was a non-POC state.

Michigan—A purchase permit was required for a handgun transfer between two individuals who were not licensed dealers. An exempt carry permit may have been substituted for the purchase permit and may have also been used to acquire a long gun. Checks were conducted by local agencies on purchase permit applicants and by a state agency on exempt carry permit applicants. Michigan was a non-POC state.

Minnesota—A purchase permit was required to obtain a handgun or an assault weapon. An exempt carry permit may have been substituted for the purchase permit. Local agencies conducted checks on applicants for purchase and exempt carry permits. Minnesota was a non-POC state.

Mississippi—A state agency conducted background checks on applicants for exempt carry permits that may have been used for handgun or long gun transfers. Mississippi was a non-POC state.

Montana—Local agencies issued exempt carry permits that may have been used for handgun or long gun transfers. Montana was a non-POC state.

Nebraska—Local agencies conducted checks on applicants for a purchase permit, which was required to obtain a handgun. An exempt carry permit issued by a state agency may have been substituted for the purchase permit. Both types of permits may have been used to acquire a long gun. Nebraska was a partial POC state.

Nevada—A state agency conducted instant checks on applicants for handgun and long gun transfers. Local agencies issued exempt carry permits that may have been used for handgun or long gun transfers. Nevada was a full POC state.

New Hampshire—A state agency conducted instant checks on applicants for handgun transfers. New Hampshire was a partial POC state.

New Jersey—A purchase permit was required to obtain a handgun or long gun. Local agencies and the state police conducted checks on purchase permit applicants. In addition, the state police conducted instant checks at the point of transfer on applicants for handgun and long gun transfers. New Jersey was a full POC state.

New York—The state's purchase permit was required to obtain a handgun and certain types of long guns. Local agencies conducted checks on purchase permit applicants. New York was a non-POC state.

North Carolina—A purchase permit was required to obtain a handgun. An exempt carry permit may have been substituted for the purchase permit. Both types of permits may have been used to acquire a long gun. Local agencies conducted checks on applicants for purchase and exempt carry permits. North Carolina was a partial POC state.

North Dakota—A state agency conducted background checks on applicants for exempt carry permits that may have been used for handgun or long gun transfers. North Dakota was a non-POC state.

Ohio—Local agencies issued exempt carry permits that may have been used for handgun or long gun transfers. Ohio was a non-POC state.

Oregon—A state agency conducted instant checks on applicants for handgun and long gun transfers. Oregon was a full POC state.

Pennsylvania—A state agency conducted instant checks on applicants for handgun and long gun transfers. Pennsylvania was a full POC state.

Rhode Island—Local agencies conducted other approval checks on applicants for handgun and long gun transfers. Rhode Island was a non-POC state.

South Carolina—A state agency conducted background checks on applicants for exempt carry permits that may have been used for handgun or long gun transfers. South Carolina was a non-POC state.

South Dakota—Local agencies issued exempt carry permits that may have been used for handgun or long gun transfers. South Dakota was a non-POC state.

Tennessee—A state agency conducted instant checks on applicants for handgun and long gun transfers. Tennessee was a full POC state.

Texas—A state agency conducted background checks on applicants for exempt carry permits that may have been used for handgun or long gun transfers. Texas was a non-POC state.

Utah—A state agency conducted instant checks on applicants for handgun and long gun transfers and conducted background checks on applicants for exempt carry permits. Utah was a full POC state.

Virginia—A state agency conducted instant checks on applicants for handgun and long gun transfers. Virginia was a full POC state.

Washington—Local agencies conducted other approval checks on applicants for handgun transfers. Washington was a partial POC state.

West Virginia—Local agencies issued exempt carry permits that may have been used for handgun or long gun transfers. West Virginia was a non-POC state.

Wisconsin—A state agency conducted instant checks on applicants for handgun transfers. Wisconsin was a partial POC state.

Wyoming—A state agency conducted background checks on applicants for exempt carry permits that may have been used for handgun or long gun transfers. Wyoming was a non-POC state.

APPENDIX TABLE 1
Firearm applications and denials by state and local agencies, by jurisdiction and type of permit or check, 2019

Jurisdiction	Applications		Denials		Percent denied	
	Estimate	Standard error	Estimate	Standard error	Estimate	Standard error
Alabama^{a,b}						
Exempt carry permit	229,698	18,194	5,314	977	2.3%	0.31%
Alaska						
Exempt carry permit	2,325	~	6	~	0.3%	~
Arizona						
Exempt carry permit	65,000	~	600	~	0.9%	~
Arkansas						
Exempt carry permit	34,990	~	1,135	~	3.2%	~
California						
Other approval	781,000	~	700	~	0.1%	~
Colorado						
Instant check	342,439	~	7,069	~	2.1%	~
Connecticut	140,713	~	110	~	0.1%	~
Instant check	126,458	~	100	~	0.1	~
Purchase permit	14,255	~	10	~	0.1	~
District of Columbia						
Purchase permit	6,000	~	10	~	0.2%	~
Florida						
Instant check	942,052	~	12,500	~	1.3%	~
Georgia						
Exempt carry permit ^a	208,022	8,846	4,602	374	2.2%	0.17%
Hawaii						
Purchase permit	16,098	~	256	~	1.6%	~
Idaho						
Exempt carry permit ^a	22,194	1,239	127	8	0.6%	0.05%
Illinois	1,036,974	~	23,700	~	2.3%	~
Instant check	553,933	~	3,200	~	0.6	~
Purchase permit	483,041	~	20,500	~	4.2	~
Iowa	46,209	912	689	19	1.5%	0.03%
Purchase permit ^a	5,740	154	207	7	3.6	0.09
Exempt carry permit ^a	40,469	796	482	13	1.2	0.03
Kansas						
Exempt carry permit	21,278	~	52	~	0.2%	~
Kentucky						
Exempt carry permit	14,500	~	378	~	2.6%	~
Louisiana						
Exempt carry permit	11,456	~	856	~	7.5%	~
Maryland	73,809	~	1,014	~	1.4%	~
Other approval	53,726	~	245	~	0.5	~
Purchase permit	20,083	~	769	~	0.1	~
Massachusetts						
Purchase permit	105,506	~	1,573	~	1.5%	~
Michigan	172,018	~	2,842	~	1.7%	~
Purchase permit	30,625	~	906	~	3.0	~
Exempt carry permit	141,393	~	1,936	~	1.4	~
Minnesota^c	98,340	~	1,758	~	1.8%	0.06%
Purchase permit ^a	45,030	2,620	1,102	59	2.4	0.16
Exempt carry permit ^d	53,310	~	656	~	1.2	~
Mississippi						
Exempt carry permit	19,455	~	1	~	<0.1%	~
Montana						
Exempt carry permit ^a	13,365	786	113	16	0.8%	0.13%

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APPENDIX TABLE 1. (continued)

Firearm applications and denials by state and local agencies, by jurisdiction and type of permit or check, 2019

Jurisdiction	Applications		Denials		Percent denied	
	Estimate	Standard error	Estimate	Standard error	Estimate	Standard error
Nebraska^c	43,241	~	912	~	2.1%	0.05%
Purchase permit ^a	29,916	1,074	734	39	2.5	0.06
Exempt carry permit	13,325	~	178	~	1.3	~
Nevada^c	128,505	~	1,861	~	1.4%	0.01%
Instant check	101,783	~	1,637	~	1.6	~
Exempt carry permit ^a	26,722	677	224	4	0.8	0.03
New Hampshire						
Instant check	52,000	~	500	~	1.0%	~
New Jersey	144,190	~	3,276	~	2.3%	~
Instant check	89,776	~	398	~	0.4	~
Purchase permit	54,414	~	2,878	~	5.3	~
New York						
Purchase permit ^a	53,188	8,109	1,918	262	3.6%	0.55%
North Carolina	282,282	7,930	16,438	1,136	5.8%	0.33%
Purchase permit ^a	144,606	5,579	15,304	1,116	10.6	0.62
Exempt carry permit ^a	137,676	3,715	1,133	34	0.8	0.03
North Dakota						
Exempt carry permit	4,300	~	150	~	3.5%	~
Ohio						
Exempt carry permit	133,912	~	1,310	~	1.0%	~
Oregon						
Instant check	276,912	~	2,258	~	0.8%	~
Pennsylvania						
Instant check	982,036	~	12,436	~	1.3%	~
Rhode Island						
Other approval	13,650	~	183	~	1.3%	~
South Carolina						
Exempt carry permit	85,803	~	1,706	~	2.0%	~
South Dakota						
Exempt carry permit	1,776	195	32	8	1.8%	0.44%
Tennessee						
Instant check	484,778	~	20,212	~	4.2%	~
Texas						
Exempt carry permit	353,580	~	1,755	~	0.5%	~
Utah	236,567	~	2,568	~	1.1%	~
Instant check	95,722	~	1,330	~	1.4	~
Exempt carry permit	140,845	~	1,238	~	0.9	~
Virginia						
Instant check	484,550	~	3,781	~	0.8%	~
Washington						
Other approval ^a	196,166	12,346	1,365	116	0.7%	0.06%
West Virginia						
Exempt carry permit ^a	26,335	1,483	102	10	0.4%	0.03%
Wisconsin						
Instant check	139,119	~	1,485	~	1.1%	~
Wyoming						
Exempt carry permit	2,416	~	33	~	1.4%	~

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*.

^bData are for January 1, 2019 to July 21, 2019, after which the state's carry permit was no longer exempt.

^cStandard errors are not applicable because a portion of the estimate came from a state agency that reported complete counts.

^dThe state's concealed carry permits are exempt only under state law.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2019 and 2020.

APPENDIX TABLE 2

Firearm applications and denials by state and local agencies, by jurisdiction and type of permit or check, 2020

Jurisdiction	Applications		Denials		Percent denied	
	Estimate	Standard error	Estimate	Standard error	Estimate	Standard error
Alaska						
Exempt carry permit	2,617	~	0	~	0%	~
Arizona						
Exempt carry permit	83,000	~	800	~	1.0%	~
Arkansas						
Exempt carry permit	51,442	~	2,328	~	4.5%	~
California						
Other approval	1,221,000	~	1,100	~	0.1%	~
Colorado						
Instant check	501,324	~	14,227	~	2.8%	~
Connecticut	186,209	~	220	~	0.1%	~
Instant check	169,113	~	200	~	0.1	~
Purchase permit	17,096	~	20	~	0.1	~
District of Columbia						
Purchase permit	13,000	~	10	~	0.1%	~
Florida						
Instant check	1,526,556	~	20,323	~	1.3%	~
Georgia						
Exempt carry permit ^a	304,842	13,707	6,677	492	2.2%	0.16%
Hawaii						
Purchase permit	26,122	~	741	~	2.8%	~
Idaho						
Exempt carry permit ^a	21,415	1,282	163	8	0.8%	0.06%
Illinois	694,946	~	15,300	~	2.2%	~
Instant check	385,770	~	2,200	~	0.6	~
Purchase permit	309,176	~	13,100	~	4.2	~
Iowa	96,007	1,961	1,187	39	1.2%	0.03%
Purchase permit ^a	13,750	410	386	14	2.8	0.08
Exempt carry permit ^a	82,256	1,604	801	28	1.0	0.03
Kansas						
Exempt carry permit	17,048	~	43	~	0.3%	~
Kentucky						
Exempt carry permit	15,824	~	441	~	2.8%	~
Louisiana						
Exempt carry permit	13,764	~	925	~	6.7%	~
Maryland	172,192	~	2,712	~	1.6%	~
Other approval	104,440	~	594	~	0.6	~
Purchase permit	67,752	~	2,118	~	3.1	~
Massachusetts						
Purchase permit	108,962	~	2,100	~	1.9%	~
Michigan	215,876	~	3,432	~	1.6%	~
Purchase permit	33,155	~	1,065	~	3.2	~
Exempt carry permit	182,721	~	2,367	~	1.3	~
Minnesota^c	196,342	~	3,634	~	1.9%	0.06%
Purchase permit ^a	94,445	5,359	2,162	140	2.3	0.14
Exempt carry permit ^d	101,897	~	1,472	~	1.4	~
Mississippi						
Exempt carry permit	23,465	~	8	~	<0.1%	~
Montana						
Exempt carry permit ^a	20,360	1,270	208	27	1.0%	0.13%

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APPENDIX TABLE 2 (continued)**Firearm applications and denials by state and local agencies, by jurisdiction and type of permit or check, 2020**

Jurisdiction	Applications		Denials		Percent denied	
	Estimate	Standard error	Estimate	Standard error	Estimate	Standard error
Nebraska^c	70,540	~	1,605	~	2.3%	0.03%
Purchase permit ^a	48,328	1,890	1,306	56	2.7	0.03
Exempt carry permit	22,212	~	299	~	1.3	~
Nevada^c	234,105	~	3,511	~	1.5%	<0.01%
Instant check	184,822	~	3,151	~	1.7	~
Exempt carry permit ^a	49,283	703	360	5	0.7	0.01
New Hampshire						
Instant check	93,000	~	900	~	1.0%	~
New Jersey	397,133	~	3,002	~	0.8%	~
Instant check	178,396	~	350	~	0.2	~
Purchase permit	218,737	~	2,652	~	1.2	~
New York						
Purchase permit ^a	89,266	17,352	1,501	147	1.7%	0.23%
North Carolina	559,512	21,060	32,780	2,482	5.9%	0.39%
Purchase permit ^a	359,908	17,055	31,120	2,459	8.6	0.60
Exempt carry permit ^{a,b}	199,604	5,758	1,660	44	0.8	0.02
North Dakota						
Exempt carry permit	6,000	~	200	~	3.3%	~
Ohio						
Exempt carry permit	171,182	~	1,777	~	1.0%	~
Oregon						
Instant check	418,061	~	3,363	~	0.8%	~
Pennsylvania						
Instant check	1,445,910	~	23,220	~	1.6%	~
Rhode Island						
Other approval	29,708	~	552	~	1.9%	~
South Carolina						
Exempt carry permit	104,468	~	2,733	~	2.6%	~
South Dakota						
Exempt carry permit	2,234	166	54	11	2.4%	0.45%
Tennessee						
Instant check	740,694	~	37,512	~	5.1%	~
Texas						
Exempt carry permit	567,981	~	2,422	~	0.4%	~
Utah	333,543	~	4,002	~	1.2%	~
Instant check	180,252	~	2,136	~	1.2	~
Exempt carry permit	153,291	~	1,866	~	1.2	~
Virginia						
Instant check	781,910	~	9,767	~	1.2%	~
Washington						
Other approval ^a	397,983	31,312	3,660	347	0.9%	0.03%
West Virginia						
Exempt carry permit ^a	30,789	1,737	128	11	0.4%	0.03%
Wisconsin						
Instant check	242,330	~	3,194	~	1.3%	~
Wyoming						
Exempt carry permit	3,631	~	30	~	0.8%	~

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*.

^bData are for January 1, 2019 to July 21, 2019, after which the state's carry permit was no longer exempt.

^cStandard errors are not applicable because a portion of the estimate came from a state agency that reported complete counts.

^dThe state's concealed carry permits are exempt only under state law.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2019 and 2020.

APPENDIX TABLE 3**Standard errors for table 2: Firearm applications and denials, by type of checking agency and type of permit or check, 2019 and 2020**

Type of checking agency and permit/check	2019			2020		
	Applications	Denials	Percent denied	Applications	Denials	Percent denied
Local agencies	26,534	1,572	0.11%	44,226	2,563	0.14%
Exempt carry permit	20,702	1,047	0.12	15,180	496	0.07
Purchase permit	10,243	1,148	0.39	24,989	2,468	0.39
Other approval	12,346	116	0.06	31,312	347	0.03

Note: No sampling error was present for the FBI and state agency reporters because they reported complete counts.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2019 and 2020.

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, 2019 and 2020**

Type of permit/check and population served	2019			2020		
	Applications	Denials	Percent denied	Applications	Denials	Percent denied
All permit/check types and population sizes	26,534	1,572	0.11%	44,226	2,563	0.14%
Purchase permit	10,243	1,148	0.39%	24,989	2,468	0.39%
9,999 or fewer	2,041	41	0.20	4,057	61	0.18
10,000–99,999	3,642	259	0.27	5,826	541	0.25
100,000–199,999	1,350	369	0.92	2,989	1,128	1.21
200,000 or more	9,256	1,055	0.91	23,772	2,126	0.72
Exempt carry permit	20,702	1,047	0.12%	15,180	496	0.07%
9,999 or fewer	729	40	0.21	985	34	0.12
10,000–99,999	15,342	950	0.25	10,108	211	0.06
100,000–199,999	4,938	68	0.06	6,548	133	0.08
200,000 or more	12,973	432	0.14	9,187	427	0.19
Other approval	12,346	116	0.06%	31,312	347	0.03%
9,999 or fewer	2,305	13	0.15	2,434	22	0.12
10,000–99,999	7,268	61	0.05	14,267	127	0.05
100,000–199,999	2,386	13	0.05	2,999	39	0.10
200,000 or more	9,413	97	0.12	27,604	320	0.06

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2019 and 2020.

APPENDIX TABLE 5**Standard errors for table 6: Reasons for denial of applications for firearm transfers and permits, by type of checking agency, 2020**

Reason for denial	Local	
	Number	Percent
Total	1,386	~
Felony reasons	182	0.65%
Felony conviction	98	0.35
Under indictment/information	77	0.27
Felony arrest with no disposition	86	0.31
Nonfelony reasons	1,297	4.60%
State law prohibition	1,411	5.00
Drug use/addiction	362	1.28
Misdemeanor conviction of domestic violence	248	0.88
Mental health commitment/adjudication	48	0.17
Fugitive from justice/warrant	42	0.15
Protection/restraining order	45	0.16
Illegal/unlawful entry into U.S.	30	0.11
Local law prohibition	174	0.62
Other prohibitions	245	0.87

Note: No sampling error was present for the FBI and state agency reporters because they reported complete counts.

~Not applicable.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2019 and 2020; and Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Instant Criminal Background Check System Transaction Statistics, 2020.

APPENDIX TABLE 6**Agencies that conducted background checks for firearm transfers or permits, by type of application and jurisdiction, December 31, 2020**

Jurisdiction	Application for firearm transfer/purchase permit	Application for exempt carry permit ^a
United States	FBI	—
Alabama	—	—
Alaska	—	Department of Public Safety
Arizona	—	Department of Public Safety
Arkansas	—	State police
California	Department of Justice Firearms Division	—
Colorado	Bureau of Investigation Insta-Check Unit	—
Connecticut	State Police Special Licensing & Firearms	—
Delaware	—	—
District of Columbia	Metropolitan Police Department	—
Florida	Department of Law Enforcement	—
Georgia	—	County probate courts
Hawaii	Police departments	—
Idaho	—	County sheriffs
Illinois	State Police Firearm Owners Identification and Firearm Transfer Inquiry Program units	—
Indiana	—	—
Iowa	County sheriffs	Department of Public Safety/county sheriffs
Kansas	—	Attorney general
Kentucky	—	State police
Louisiana	—	State police
Maine	—	—
Maryland	State Police Licensing Division	—
Massachusetts	Police departments	—
Michigan	Sheriffs and police departments	State police
Minnesota	Sheriffs and police departments	County sheriffs
Mississippi	—	Department of Public Safety
Missouri	—	—
Montana	—	County sheriffs
Nebraska	Sheriffs and police departments	State patrol
Nevada	Department of Public Safety	County sheriffs
New Hampshire	Department of Safety	—
New Jersey	State and local police departments	—
New Mexico	—	—
New York ^b	Sheriffs and police departments	—
North Carolina	County sheriffs	County sheriffs
North Dakota	—	Bureau of Criminal Investigation
Ohio	—	County sheriffs
Oklahoma	—	—
Oregon	State Police Firearms Unit	—
Pennsylvania	State Police Firearms Division	—
Rhode Island	Police departments	—
South Carolina	—	Law Enforcement Division
South Dakota	—	County sheriffs
Tennessee	Bureau of Investigation Tennessee Instant Check System Unit	—
Texas	—	Department of Public Safety
Utah	Bureau of Criminal Identification	Bureau of Criminal Identification
Vermont	—	—
Virginia	State Police Firearms Transaction Program	—
Washington	Sheriffs and police departments	—
West Virginia	—	County sheriffs
Wisconsin	Department of Justice Firearms Unit	—
Wyoming	—	Attorney general

—The FBI conducted background checks for firearm purchases, or the jurisdiction did not issue exempt carry permits.

^aAgencies issued carry permits that could be used to waive a background check for a firearm purchase.

^bFirearm purchase licenses could also permit carry.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2019 and 2020.

APPENDIX TABLE 7

Types of background checks and permits for firearm transfers conducted by jurisdictions as of December 31, 2020

Jurisdiction	Handgun transfers			Long gun transfers			Exempt carry permit
	Instant check	Purchase permit	Other approval	Instant check	Purchase permit	Other approval	
Federal	■			■			
State	13	13	5	11	7	2	24
Alabama							■
Alaska							■
Arizona							■
Arkansas							■
California			■			■	
Colorado	■			■			
Connecticut	■	■		■	■		
Delaware							
District of Columbia		■			■		
Florida	■			■			
Georgia							■
Hawaii		■			■		
Idaho							■
Illinois	■	■		■	■		
Indiana							
Iowa		■					■
Kansas							■
Kentucky							■
Louisiana							■
Maine							
Maryland ^a		■	■				
Massachusetts		■			■		
Michigan		■					■
Minnesota ^b		■	■				■
Mississippi							■
Missouri							
Montana							■
Nebraska		■					■
Nevada	■			■			■
New Hampshire	■						
New Jersey	■	■		■	■		
New Mexico							
New York ^c		■			■		
North Carolina		■					■
North Dakota							■
Ohio							■
Oklahoma							
Oregon	■			■			
Pennsylvania	■			■			
Rhode Island			■			■	
South Carolina							■
South Dakota							■
Tennessee	■			■			
Texas							■
Utah	■			■			■
Vermont							
Virginia	■			■			
Washington			■				
West Virginia							■
Wisconsin	■						
Wyoming							■

■ Indicates type of check conducted or type of permit issued by agencies within the jurisdiction.

^aHandgun requirements also apply to transfers of certain assault weapons.

^bHandgun and assault weapon buyers may obtain a purchase permit or use the other approval process.

^cPurchase permit applies to handguns and certain types of long guns.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2019 and 2020.

APPENDIX TABLE 8

State involvement in the National Instant Criminal Background Check System process, by point of contact status, December 31, 2020

State	Non-POC ^a	Full POC ^b	Partial POC ^c	State	Non-POC ^a	Full POC ^b	Partial POC ^c
Total	31	13	7	Missouri	■		
Alabama	■			Montana	■		
Alaska	■			Nebraska			■
Arizona	■			Nevada		■	
Arkansas	■			New Hampshire			■
California		■		New Jersey		■	
Colorado		■		New Mexico	■		
Connecticut		■		New York	■		
Delaware	■			North Carolina			■
District of Columbia	■			North Dakota	■		
Florida		■		Ohio	■		
Georgia	■			Oklahoma	■		
Hawaii		■		Oregon		■	
Idaho	■			Pennsylvania		■	
Illinois		■		Rhode Island	■		
Indiana	■			South Carolina	■		
Iowa			■	South Dakota	■		
Kansas	■			Tennessee		■	
Kentucky	■			Texas	■		
Louisiana	■			Utah		■	
Maine	■			Vermont	■		
Maryland			■	Virginia		■	
Massachusetts	■			Washington			■
Michigan	■			West Virginia	■		
Minnesota	■			Wisconsin			■
Mississippi	■			Wyoming	■		

Note: The FBI also conducts all National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) transfer checks for American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, which are all non-POC. POC denotes point of contact.

^aThe FBI conducts NICS checks on all firearm transfer applicants.

^bA state or local agency conducts NICS checks on all firearm transfer or purchase permit applicants.

^cA state or local agency conducts NICS checks on handgun applicants, while the FBI conducts NICS checks on long gun applicants.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2019 and 2020.

APPENDIX TABLE 9
Reporting of data to the Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, by jurisdiction, 2019 and 2020

Jurisdiction	FBI reported NICS handgun and long gun data ^a	FBI reported only NICS long gun data	State agency reported transfer/permit data for entire state ^b	Local agencies reported transfer/permit data ^c
Total	31	7	34	13
Alabama	▪			▪
Alaska	▪		▪	
Arizona	▪		▪	
Arkansas	▪		▪	
California			▪	
Colorado			▪	
Connecticut			▪	
Delaware	▪			
District of Columbia	▪		▪	
Florida			▪	
Georgia	▪			▪
Hawaii			▪	
Idaho	▪			▪
Illinois			▪	
Indiana	▪			
Iowa		▪		▪
Kansas	▪		▪	
Kentucky	▪		▪	
Louisiana	▪		▪	
Maine	▪			
Maryland		▪	▪	
Massachusetts	▪		▪	
Michigan	▪		▪	
Minnesota	▪		▪	▪
Mississippi	▪		▪	
Missouri	▪			
Montana	▪			▪
Nebraska		▪	▪	▪
Nevada			▪	▪
New Hampshire		▪	▪	
New Jersey			▪	
New Mexico	▪			
New York	▪			▪
North Carolina		▪		▪
North Dakota	▪		▪	
Ohio	▪		▪	
Oklahoma	▪			
Oregon			▪	
Pennsylvania			▪	
Rhode Island	▪		▪	
South Carolina	▪		▪	
South Dakota	▪			▪
Tennessee			▪	
Texas	▪		▪	
Utah			▪	
Vermont	▪			
Virginia			▪	
Washington		▪		▪
West Virginia	▪			▪
Wisconsin		▪	▪	
Wyoming	▪		▪	

Note: States with multiple reporters to the Firearm Inquiry Statistics (FIST) program either had multiple agencies conducting National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) checks or had more than one type of check or permit.

^aThe FBI also reports all NICS transfer checks for American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. FIST does not collect any other data from these jurisdictions.

^bState and local agencies may conduct NICS checks (as a full or partial point of contact) or conduct transfer or permit checks required by state law.

^cAlabama local agencies reported data only for January 1 to July 21, 2019. See *Jurisdiction notes* for details.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Firearm Inquiry Statistics program, 2019 and 2020.



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. Kevin M. Scott, PhD, is the acting director.

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