



## U.S. Department of Justice

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco,  
Firearms and Explosives

### *Public and Governmental Affairs*

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Washington, DC 20226

[www.atf.gov](http://www.atf.gov)

January 5, 2024

Senator Charles E. Grassley  
United States Senate Judiciary Committee  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Grassley:

This responds to your letters to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) Director Steven Dettelbach, dated October 10, 2023, October 30, 2023, and December 14, 2023, regarding ATF's efforts to combat firearms trafficking networks used to smuggle weapons across the United States border, including to cartels based in Mexico.

Keeping our communities safe is a top priority of ATF. An essential part of accomplishing this goal is combatting the serious problem of firearms trafficking, including but not limited to Mexican cartels, with evidence-based enforcement solutions. ATF, together with the Department of Justice (Department), have long recognized that the most effective way to reduce violent crime is to collaborate with our federal, state, local, Tribal, and territorial counterparts who are on the front line, especially given that the drivers of violence vary from location to location and change over time.<sup>1</sup> To that end, as the Attorney General has noted that the Department "is doubling down on the fight to protect our communities from violent crime, and from the gun violence that often drives it" by developing "anti-violent crime strategies [that] are tailored to the needs of, and are developed by and in partnership with, individual communities."<sup>2</sup>

In implementing this violent crime reduction strategy, ATF and the Department are building on what works—implementing initiatives focused on identifying, disrupting, and dismantling domestic and international firearms trafficking networks that transport firearms illegally from the United States to Mexico. Cross-border firearms trafficking does not only occur at the border, or only include dozens of firearms being illegally transported at once. Rather, the problem is diffuse, with firearms trafficking often involving the smuggling of only a few weapons at a time, from sources that extend well beyond the border. Accordingly, the Department and ATF use every tool available to address international and domestic firearms trafficking, including:<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Department, *Violent Crime Reduction Efforts Fact Sheet* (May 2021), available at [www.justice.gov/file/1468221/download](http://www.justice.gov/file/1468221/download).

<sup>2</sup> See Attorney General, *Remarks at Meeting with President Biden and Members of New York Gun Violence Strategic Partnership* (Feb. 3, 2022), available at [www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-merrick-b-garland-delivers-remarks-meeting-president-biden-and-members](http://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-merrick-b-garland-delivers-remarks-meeting-president-biden-and-members).

<sup>3</sup> With respect to your inquiry regarding funding, including with respect to Project Thor, ATF does not maintain a separate funding designation for Mexico-related initiatives, nor has ATF received specific appropriated funding for participation in these efforts. Rather, ATF uses existing resources and appropriations—the same pot of money that is used to combat illegal firearms trafficking to criminals in cities, towns, and states all over the United States—to combat firearm trafficking to Mexico.

**Operation Southbound.** The Department’s signature international firearms trafficking initiative is Operation Southbound, which is focused on operations leading to arrests and seizures. This operational initiative, which builds on its intelligence-based predecessor program, Project Thor, utilizes a whole-of-government effort to identify the networks and methodologies used to transport firearms from the United States to Mexico and to take law enforcement action. Since its inception in 2020, Operation Southbound has resulted in a 40% increase in actual firearms trafficking investigations in Mexico and an 11% increase in related firearms seizures.<sup>4</sup> Operation Southbound consists of nine interagency Firearms Trafficking Task Forces deployed in eight cities along the Southwest Border with the sole focus on making cases to stem the trafficking of firearms from the United States to Mexico.<sup>5</sup> In addition to ATF, these teams include participants from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and state and local law enforcement, as well as prosecutors, United States Attorneys, and the Department’s Criminal Division. As a result of Operation Southbound, nearly 2,000 firearms were seized in the first half of FY 2023—representing a 65.8% increase over the same period from FY 2022—while over 80,000 rounds of ammunition were seized in the first half of FY 2023—also a substantial increase over the same period in FY 2022.<sup>6</sup> This activity, supported by ATF and our partners, is some of the most dangerous in all of federal law enforcement, and the agents who work on these matters every day are tasked with a difficult job. They must also always be conscious, in the course of disrupting these activities, of protecting the safety of both law enforcement and the public.

**Anti-Cartel Weapons Trafficking Group.** In 2022, the Department also established a new anti-cartel weapons trafficking group along the Southwest Border, which is led by the United States Attorneys. In coordination with this group, ATF-led investigations have proven effective at taking concerted action against those seeking to traffic firearms to Mexico. For example, in September 2022, after an ATF-led investigation, the United States Attorney’s Office in the District of Arizona secured a 27-month sentence for an individual engaged in straw purchasing 82 firearms bound for Mexico, including one firearm recovered in Mexico that was used to murder a Mexican citizen.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in June 2023, an ATF-led investigation resulted in the United States Attorney’s Office in the Southern District of Texas securing the guilty plea of an individual who produced and illegally exported fully

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<sup>4</sup> See Office of the Spokesperson, *Third Meeting of the U.S. – Mexico High Level Security Dialogue* (Oct. 13, 2023), available at <https://www.state.gov/third-meeting-of-the-u-s-mexico-high-level-security-dialogue/>.

<sup>5</sup> See Deputy Attorney General, *Remarks at the Southbound Firearms Trafficking Coordination Meeting* (Jun. 14, 2023), available at [www.justice.gov/opa/speech/deputy-attorney-general-lisa-o-monaco-delivers-remarks-southbound-firearms-trafficking](http://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/deputy-attorney-general-lisa-o-monaco-delivers-remarks-southbound-firearms-trafficking).

<sup>6</sup> See Office of Public Affairs, *Remarks at the Southbound Firearms Trafficking Coordination Meeting* (Jun. 14, 2023) (Operation Southbound coordination meeting attended by Deputy Attorney General Monaco, ATF Director Dettelbach, DHS Deputy Secretary John Tien, Ambassador Ken Salazar, and U.S. Attorneys Diggs, Esparza, Hamdani, Restaino, Simonton, and Uballez), available at [www.justice.gov/opa/speech/deputy-attorney-general-lisa-o-monaco-delivers-remarks-southbound-firearms-trafficking](http://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/deputy-attorney-general-lisa-o-monaco-delivers-remarks-southbound-firearms-trafficking); see also White House Press Release, *Biden-Harris Administration’s Ongoing Efforts to Stem Firearms Trafficking to Mexico* (Jun. 14, 2023) (“Mexico Firearms Trafficking Fact Sheet”), available at [www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/06/14/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administrations-ongoing-efforts-to-stem-firearms-trafficking-to-mexico/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/06/14/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administrations-ongoing-efforts-to-stem-firearms-trafficking-to-mexico/).

<sup>7</sup> See United States Attorney’s Office for the District of Arizona Press Release, *Arizona City Man Sentenced to 27 Months for Straw Purchasing 82 Firearms Bound for Mexico* (Sept. 22, 2022), available at [www.justice.gov/usao-az/pr/arizona-city-man-sentenced-27-months-straw-purchasing-82-firearms-bound-mexico](http://www.justice.gov/usao-az/pr/arizona-city-man-sentenced-27-months-straw-purchasing-82-firearms-bound-mexico).

automatic weapons—3D printed polymer AR-Type drop-in auto sears—to Mexico for use by the cartels.<sup>8</sup>

**Bipartisan Safer Communities Act.** By way of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA), in June 2022, Congress provided the Department and ATF with expanded authorities to combat firearms trafficking, including to Mexican cartels. The BSCA, for the first time, directly criminalized straw purchasing and firearms trafficking. ATF immediately began using these new authorities to target and disrupt illicit firearms trafficking networks. To date, despite receiving no new additional appropriations from Congress to specifically implement the BSCA, ATF-led investigations have resulted in charges being brought against nearly 300 defendants involved in violations of these new straw purchasing and firearms trafficking statutes. For example, in March 2023, an ATF-led investigation resulted in the United States Attorney’s Office for the Middle District of Florida charging two individuals with conspiracy to traffic firearms in violation of the BSCA, as well as possession of firearms in furtherance of drug trafficking, for agreeing to send over 90 firearms to drug cartel members in Mexico.<sup>9</sup>

**ATF’s Anti-Firearms Trafficking Campaign.** In 2021, ATF launched its Anti-Firearms Trafficking Public Safety Campaign, which has two specific goals: reduce gun trafficking and stop illegal gun purchases for prohibited individuals at the border.<sup>10</sup> The campaign serves to educate the public about the various individuals and organized criminal enterprises, such as cartels, that traffic firearms. In coordination with our partners at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), CBP, ICE, and HIS, this campaign uses strategically placed billboards, radio commercials, and social media advertisements to inform the public about the prevalence and consequences associated with straw purchasing. In addition, the campaign asks individuals to report information about firearms trafficking to help keep their communities safe by submitting an online tip via [www.atf.gov/firearms/anti-firearms-trafficking-campaign](http://www.atf.gov/firearms/anti-firearms-trafficking-campaign), calling 1-(888)-ATF-TIPS (1-888-283-8477), or texting 63975.

**Educating Federal Firearms Licensees to Address Straw Purchases.** For decades, ATF has educated federal firearms licensees (FFLs) on detecting and preventing the straw purchase of firearms. FFLs often serve a vital role in fighting violent crime by providing information that assists law enforcement in identifying straw purchasing and gun trafficking schemes.<sup>11</sup> To assist FFLs in those efforts, ATF routinely hosts firearms seminars to discuss the obligations of FFLs under the law and to respond to FFL questions and concerns. ATF also partners with the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) on the “Don’t Lie for the Other Guy” program, which is a multimedia campaign

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<sup>8</sup> See United States Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of Texas Press Release, *Felon admits to manufacturing and selling automatic weapons to the Mexican cartel* (Jun. 6, 2022), available at [www.justice.gov/usao-sdtx/pr/felon-admits-manufacturing-and-selling-automatic-weapons-mexican-cartel](http://www.justice.gov/usao-sdtx/pr/felon-admits-manufacturing-and-selling-automatic-weapons-mexican-cartel).

<sup>9</sup> See United States Attorney’s Office for the Middle District of Florida Press Release, *Two Arrested for Trying to Send Over 90 Firearms to Drug Cartel Members in Mexico* (Mar. 14, 2023), available at [www.justice.gov/usao-mdfl/pr/two-arrested-trying-send-over-90-firearms-drug-cartel-members-mexico](http://www.justice.gov/usao-mdfl/pr/two-arrested-trying-send-over-90-firearms-drug-cartel-members-mexico).

<sup>10</sup> See ATF, *Anti-Firearms Trafficking Campaign* (Mar. 4, 2022), available at [www.atf.gov/firearms/anti-firearms-trafficking-campaign](http://www.atf.gov/firearms/anti-firearms-trafficking-campaign).

<sup>11</sup> As you are aware from ATF’s prior response, dated September 22, 2023, the enhanced regulatory enforcement policy does not alter the statutory or regulatory provisions applicable to the revocation process. Rather, that policy is limited to the initial step in the revocation process. Moreover, whether issued pursuant to the enhanced regulatory enforcement policy or for other violations, a revocation notice initiates additional procedural rights for FFLs, including the right to an administrative hearing, and if applicable, the right to judicial review. License revocations do not become final until the FFL receives notice and an opportunity to respond or waives those protections.

to help ATF to better educate America's firearms retailers on how to detect would-be straw purchasers.<sup>12</sup> The program, in which Director Dettelbach has personally participated with NSSF, also raises public awareness that it is a serious crime to buy a firearm for a prohibited person or for someone who does not otherwise want his or her name associated with the transaction. Recently, together with NSSF, the "Don't Lie for the Other Guy" campaign is currently operating in three cities: Fort Worth, Texas, Las Vegas, Nevada, and Atlanta, Georgia.

**Expanding International Partnerships.** The eTrace application, provided by the ATF National Tracing Center (NTC) and available in both English and Spanish, is a key component for generating investigative leads to help solve firearm-related crimes utilizing United States-sourced crime guns both domestically and internationally. Between 2017 and 2021, 27% (44,669) of international crime gun trace requests were traced to purchasers in the United States.<sup>13</sup> These guns were purchased in the United States, and at some point, following the retail purchase from an FFL, were trafficked out of the United States and subsequently recovered in a crime by foreign law enforcement agencies, most frequently in Mexico, followed by Canada, the Caribbean, Central America, and locations outside of North America. Nearly all (44,660) of these traces recorded purchaser and/or possessor information. In 23.6% of these 44,660 traces, the purchaser and possessor were different, while in 75.1% of these traces, the purchaser was known but the possessor was unknown. Of the 44,669 traces, pistols accounted for 61% of the most frequently traced crime guns recovered by law enforcement agencies in other countries, followed by rifles (26%), revolvers (10%), and shotguns (3%). Seven states—Texas, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Ohio, and New Mexico—accounted for approximately 76% of international crime guns traced to a purchaser. It is noteworthy that three of these top seven states are not located on the Southwest Border.

The eTrace application is an electronic trace request submission and interactive trace data analysis tool that provides for the exchange of crime gun incident-based data in a secure web environment. Through eTrace, domestic and international law enforcement agencies can electronically submit firearms trace requests, monitor the progress of traces, retrieve completed trace results, and query trace-related data. The statistical reports generated through the application assist law enforcement agencies in developing strategies to reduce violent crime. In addition, participating law enforcement agencies can opt to share their firearms trace data with other eTrace users who have also opted into collective data sharing, thus allowing users to detect patterns of violent crime across jurisdictions. In fiscal year 2022, more than 9,300 law enforcement agencies use eTrace in their investigations, including agencies from 50 foreign countries.

**Deepening Collaboration with Mexico.** In addition to expanding its international footprint generally, the Department and the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) have taken concrete steps to strengthen their partnership with the Government of Mexico.<sup>14</sup> For example, as of January 2023, ATF had established 287 eTrace accounts in Mexico, including 163 Federal and 124 State accounts, which help enable Mexican law enforcement to track

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<sup>12</sup> ATF, *Don't Lie for the Other Guy* (Apr. 26, 2018), available at [www.atf.gov/firearms/dont-lie-other-guy](http://www.atf.gov/firearms/dont-lie-other-guy).

<sup>13</sup> See ATF's National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment, *Volume II: Part IV – Crime Guns Recovered Outside the United States and Traced by Law Enforcement* (Jan. 11, 2023), available at [www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-ii-part-iv-crime-guns-recovered-outside-us-and-traced-le/download](http://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-ii-part-iv-crime-guns-recovered-outside-us-and-traced-le/download).

<sup>14</sup> See Mexico Firearms Trafficking Fact Sheet available at [www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/06/14/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administrations-ongoing-efforts-to-stem-firearms-trafficking-to-mexico/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/06/14/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administrations-ongoing-efforts-to-stem-firearms-trafficking-to-mexico/).

down the origin and purchase of crime guns recovered in Mexico.<sup>15</sup> ATF and INL have also collectively trained over 750 forensic experts and investigators from Mexican law enforcement agencies on firearms and explosives identification, and more than 118 forensics experts and investigators from Mexican law enforcement agencies on ATF's eTrace system.<sup>16</sup> As a result of these efforts, Mexican law enforcement agencies have increased eTrace usage from 21,803 to 24,642 crime guns submitted to ATF for tracing from 2021 to 2022—representing a 13% increase in just one year.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, in the first half of 2023 alone, Mexican law enforcement submitted nearly 12,000 crime gun trace requests, and ATF successfully traced about one third of those requests to a purchaser.<sup>18</sup>

ATF's efforts, in the above initiatives and beyond, have resulted in numerous successful prosecutions brought against individuals and groups allegedly involved in trafficking firearms to transnational organized crime organizations in Mexico, including, for example:

- ***United States v. Bradford***: In December 2023, in the Western District of Texas, a New Braunfels man was indicted for a multimillion-dollar scheme to illegally provide approximately 4,800 semiautomatic rifles to an individual in Mexico.<sup>19</sup>
- ***United States v. Ramirez***: In November 2023, in the Western District of Texas, a Dallas man was indicted after CPB found 187 firearms hidden in a trailer's wall as he attempted to smuggle the firearms into Mexico.<sup>20</sup>
- ***United States v. Goodman***: In November 2023, in the Northern District of Georgia, five individuals were charged for purchasing over 120 firearms from the Southeastern United States for the purpose of reselling them to others, including in Mexico and Canada.<sup>21</sup>
- ***United States v. Cervantes Rosales***: In October 2023, in the Southern District of California, two brothers plead guilty to conspiring to traffic over 30 firearms—including

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<sup>15</sup> See ATF's National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment, *Volume II: Part IV – Crime Guns Recovered Outside the United States and Traced by Law Enforcement* (Jan. 11, 2023), available at [www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-ii-part-iv-crime-guns-recovered-outside-us-and-traced-le/download](http://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/nfcta-volume-ii-part-iv-crime-guns-recovered-outside-us-and-traced-le/download).

<sup>16</sup> See Mexico Firearms Trafficking Fact Sheet, available at [www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/06/14/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administrations-ongoing-efforts-to-stem-firearms-trafficking-to-mexico/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/06/14/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administrations-ongoing-efforts-to-stem-firearms-trafficking-to-mexico/).

<sup>17</sup> See Firearms Trace Data: Mexico – 2017-2022, available at [www.atf.gov/resource-center/firearms-trace-data-mexico-2017-2022](http://www.atf.gov/resource-center/firearms-trace-data-mexico-2017-2022).

<sup>18</sup> See Mexico Firearms Trafficking Fact Sheet, available at [www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/06/14/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administrations-ongoing-efforts-to-stem-firearms-trafficking-to-mexico/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/06/14/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administrations-ongoing-efforts-to-stem-firearms-trafficking-to-mexico/).

<sup>19</sup> See United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of Texas, *New Braunfels Man Indicted for Alleged Role in Multimillion-Dollar Firearm Trafficking Scheme* (Dec. 8, 2023), available at [www.justice.gov/usao-wdtx/pr/new-braunfels-man-indicted-alleged-role-multimillion-dollar-firearm-trafficking-scheme](http://www.justice.gov/usao-wdtx/pr/new-braunfels-man-indicted-alleged-role-multimillion-dollar-firearm-trafficking-scheme).

<sup>20</sup> See United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of Texas, *Dallas Man Indicted for Alleged Smuggling Attempt of 187 Firearms into Mexico* (Nov. 30, 2023), available at [www.justice.gov/usao-wdtx/pr/dallas-man-indicted-alleged-smuggling-attempt-187-firearms-mexico](http://www.justice.gov/usao-wdtx/pr/dallas-man-indicted-alleged-smuggling-attempt-187-firearms-mexico).

<sup>21</sup> See United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia, *Defendants arraigned in international firearms trafficking case* (Nov. 17, 2023), available at [www.justice.gov/usao-ndga/pr/defendants-arraigned-international-firearms-trafficking-case-0](http://www.justice.gov/usao-ndga/pr/defendants-arraigned-international-firearms-trafficking-case-0).



privately made firearms, short-barrel rifles, silencers, and machine guns—to Mexico for use by individuals they believed were international drug traffickers.<sup>22</sup>

- ***United States v. Gonzalez-Carrillo***: In October 2023, in the District of Montana, a Montana man plead guilty for his role in trafficking over 30 firearms—including semiautomatic handguns and AR-styled rifles—from Montana to individuals in Mexico.<sup>23</sup>
- ***United States v. Navarro-Sanchez***: In September 2023, in the Western District of Texas, two alleged members of a drug trafficking organization were charged with trafficking fentanyl and methamphetamine to the United States from Mexico, and straw purchasing and trafficking firearms—including 20 AK-47-type rifles and two Barret .50 BMG caliber rifles—from the United States to Mexico.<sup>24</sup>
- ***United States v. Lara***: In September 2023, in the Northern District of Texas, seven individuals were charged for their roles in purchasing more than 100 firearms later trafficked to Mexico—which, after being straw purchased, were disassembled, concealed inside plastic and towels, and then smuggled across the border.<sup>25</sup>
- ***United States v. Almeida***: In August 2023, in the Southern District of Texas, a former police academy recruit was sentenced to 50 month in prison for his role in trafficking hundreds of rounds of .50 caliber ammunition to Mexico. At the sentencing, the court noted that the defendant knew the dangerousness of this quantity and this type of ammunition in the hands of the cartel.<sup>26</sup>
- ***United States v. Highsmith***: In August 2023, in the Eastern District of North Carolina, five defendants were charged in an alleged firearms trafficking conspiracy to smuggle multiple firearms from Eastern North Carolina to Mexico. These individuals were charged under the BSCA.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See United States Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of California, *Brothers Admit to Conspiracy to Traffic Firearms They Believed Were Bound for Mexico* (Oct. 19, 2023), available at [www.justice.gov/usao-sdca/pr/brothers-admit-conspiracy-traffic-firearms-they-believed-were-bound-mexico](https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdca/pr/brothers-admit-conspiracy-traffic-firearms-they-believed-were-bound-mexico).

<sup>23</sup> See United States Attorney’s Office for the District of Montana, *Montana Man Pleads Guilty to Buying Firearms in Montana, Illegally Exporting Them to Mexico* (Oct. 11, 2023), available at [www.justice.gov/opa/pr/montana-man-pleads-guilty-buying-firearms-montana-illegally-exporting-them-mexico](https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/montana-man-pleads-guilty-buying-firearms-montana-illegally-exporting-them-mexico).

<sup>24</sup> See United States Attorney’s Office for the Western District of Texas, *Alleged Drug and Firearm Smugglers Federally Indicted in El Paso* (Sept. 15, 2023), available at [www.justice.gov/usao-wdtx/pr/alleged-drug-and-firearm-smugglers-federally-indicted-el-paso](https://www.justice.gov/usao-wdtx/pr/alleged-drug-and-firearm-smugglers-federally-indicted-el-paso).

<sup>25</sup> See United States Attorney’s Office for the Northern District of Texas, *Straw Purchasers Charged With Buying 100+ Guns Trafficked to Mexico* (Sept. 6, 2023), available at [www.justice.gov/usao-ndtx/pr/straw-purchasers-charged-buying-100-guns-trafficked-mexico](https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndtx/pr/straw-purchasers-charged-buying-100-guns-trafficked-mexico).

<sup>26</sup> See United States Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of Texas, *Former police academy recruit headed to prison for exporting .50 caliber ammunition* (Aug. 31, 2023), available at [www.justice.gov/usao-sdtx/pr/former-police-academy-recruit-headed-prison-exporting-50-caliber-ammunition](https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdtx/pr/former-police-academy-recruit-headed-prison-exporting-50-caliber-ammunition).

<sup>27</sup> See United States Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of North Carolina, *Five Charged in Alleged Firearms Trafficking and Money Laundering Conspiracy to Smuggle Guns Illegally to Mexico* (Aug. 30, 2023), available at [www.justice.gov/usao-ednc/pr/five-charged-alleged-firearms-trafficking-and-money-laundering-conspiracy-smuggle-guns](https://www.justice.gov/usao-ednc/pr/five-charged-alleged-firearms-trafficking-and-money-laundering-conspiracy-smuggle-guns) (“The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act allows us to investigate and prosecute gun trafficking and straw purchasing rings that drive the flow of guns from the United States to

- ***United States v. Olivares***: In July 2023, in the Southern District of Texas, a defendant was sentenced to 75 months in prison for attempting to export 5,680 rounds of ammunition to Mexico. When imposing the sentence, the court noted there was likely only one purpose for this ammunition: to be delivered into the hands of cartel members in Mexico for their use, including killing people.<sup>28</sup>
- ***United States v. Gonzalez-Diaz***: In June 2023, in the Southern District of Texas, a defendant was sentenced to more than 14 years in prison for his role in drug trafficking and unlawfully possessing a rocket launcher, rocket-propelled grenades, guns, and ammunition that were destined for imminent distribution to the Jalisco New Generation Cartel in Mexico.<sup>29</sup>
- ***United States v. Esquivel***: In June 2023, in the Southern District of Texas, a defendant plead guilty to possession of a machine gun, possession of a firearm by a convicted felon, and conspiracy to distribute cocaine for his role in producing and illegally exporting fully automatic firearms to Mexico for the use of drug cartels.<sup>30</sup>
- ***United States v. Barron***: In May 2023, in the District of New Mexico, a defendant was sentenced to 115 months in prison for his role in smuggling firearms from the United States to the Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generacion in Zacatecas, Mexico.<sup>31</sup>
- ***United States v. Loyola***: In March 2023, in the Northern District of Texas, a defendant was sentenced to 10 years in prison for his role in attempting to traffic a military-grade machine gun, an M-60, to a Mexican drug cartel.<sup>32</sup>

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Mexico, often fueling cartel violence in that country while enabling the fentanyl crisis here at home,’ said U.S. Attorney Michael Easley. ‘Those who engage in international gunrunning conspiracies based in North Carolina will meet justice in our courts.’”).

<sup>28</sup> See United States Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of Texas, *American headed back to prison after trying to export 5,680 rounds of ammunition* (Jul. 6, 2023), available at [www.justice.gov/usao-sdtx/pr/american-headed-back-prison-after-trying-export-5680-rounds-ammunition](https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdtx/pr/american-headed-back-prison-after-trying-export-5680-rounds-ammunition). (“‘This sentence sends a clear message: the Justice Department will be relentless in bringing to justice those responsible for smuggling illegal firearms and ammunition across our southern border,’ said Deputy Attorney General Lisa O. Monaco. ‘We will continue to take aggressive action to combat the gun violence that endangers law enforcement and devastates communities in both Mexico and the United States.’”)

<sup>29</sup> See United States Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of Texas, *Drug trafficker sent to prison for possession of multiple variations of weapons earmarked for cartel in Mexico* (Jun. 29, 2023), available at [www.justice.gov/usao-sdtx/pr/drug-trafficker-sent-prison-possession-multiple-variations-weapons-earmarked-cartel](https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdtx/pr/drug-trafficker-sent-prison-possession-multiple-variations-weapons-earmarked-cartel).

<sup>30</sup> See United States Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of Texas, *Felon admits to manufacturing and selling automatic weapons to the Mexican cartel* (Jun. 6, 2023), available at [www.justice.gov/usao-sdtx/pr/felon-admits-manufacturing-and-selling-automatic-weapons-mexican-cartel](https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdtx/pr/felon-admits-manufacturing-and-selling-automatic-weapons-mexican-cartel).

<sup>31</sup> See United States Attorney’s Office for the District of New Mexico, *Mexican National Sentenced to 9 years for Smuggling Firearms into Mexico from the United States* (May 25, 2023), available at [www.justice.gov/usao-nm/pr/mexican-national-sentenced-9-years-smuggling-firearms-mexico-united-states](https://www.justice.gov/usao-nm/pr/mexican-national-sentenced-9-years-smuggling-firearms-mexico-united-states).

<sup>32</sup> See United States Attorney’s Office for the Northern District of Texas, *Firearms Trafficker Linked to Cartel Sentenced to 10 Years in Prison* (Mar. 24, 2023), available at [www.justice.gov/usao-ndtx/pr/firearms-trafficker-linked-cartel-sentenced-10-years-prison](https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndtx/pr/firearms-trafficker-linked-cartel-sentenced-10-years-prison).

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In conclusion, ATF is steadfast in its commitment to identify, disrupt, and dismantle firearms trafficking networks—including but not limited to those who wish to supply illegal firearms to Mexican cartels and other transnational criminal and terrorist organizations. While DHS and its components, given their statutory mandates, are best suited to answer your questions related to illegal immigration and seizures of various contraband and weapons, including weaponized drones, at the Southwest Border, we stand ready to work with you to continue to keep our communities safe from violent crime.

ATF's Legislative Affairs Division will follow up with your staff directly to ensure this letter is responsive to your questions; however, should you have any other concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us at (202) 648-8510 or via email at [atflegislativeaffairs@atf.gov](mailto:atflegislativeaffairs@atf.gov).

Sincerely,

Ann M. Vallandingham  
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