

GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP ON SMALL ARMS

Blog post



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Measuring illicit arms flows in Honduras

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The Honduran customs authorities recently reported a spectacular increase in the number of firearms seized at the country's borders. On average, customs officials seized 35–40 weapons per month in 2016, compared to just 2.5 firearms per month five years earlier. Beyond the numbers, what does this rise in seized firearms tell us about the evolution of illicit arms flows in Honduras?

UN member states are committed to reducing illicit arms flows under Target 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Although [proposals to monitor this commitment focus on arms seizures](#), variations in the quantities of arms seized in any location do not necessarily reflect actual changes in illicit arms flows. As a recent Small Arms Survey [Research Note](#) on monitoring illicit arms flows in Honduras explains, these variations can instead be the result of, among other things, changes in the number of law enforcement personnel, the availability of the resources at their disposal, or enforcement policy.

Moreover, in addition to cross-border trafficking, illicit arms flows take many different forms in Honduras. These include firearms that are purchased from local illicit markets, that are diverted from the legal holdings of security agencies, and that are lost by or stolen from private individuals. In fact, [interviewed Honduran police officials](#) estimate that among the firearms they seize in the context of administrative violations, minor offences, and crime scenes, up to 40 per cent were legally registered in the country at some point.

In short, seizures of firearms at the country's borders are only one part of the picture—and one that is difficult to interpret. Their reported increase may result from a rise in cross-border arms flows, or from more dedicated efforts by customs and border control authorities, or a combination of both. A focus on border seizures also risks missing the important role played by domestically sourced firearms in trafficking and crime.

So what additional information would be required to better keep track of and measure illicit arms flows in Honduras? If data is to help determine new trends and identify patterns in illicit arms flows in the country, the information needs to reflect the seizures made by all the relevant agencies, not just those that focus on cross-border trafficking. It should also be disaggregated by weapon type, model, and the precise circumstances of each seizure. Furthermore, it is essential to be able to keep track of the proportions of the various types of weapons seized over time, because the appearance of unusual firearms models in the data will often point to changing trafficking patterns.

Finally, seizure data can be meaningfully triangulated through the monitoring of a series of complementary [indicators](#). In the case of Honduras, the Survey has concluded that time-series data on prices for illicit firearms and ammunition in the country has the potential to reveal important trends in their accessibility. Moreover, the significant decrease in violent deaths observed in Honduras [since 2011](#) hints at the possible effectiveness of the authorities' efforts to reduce illicit arms flows and armed violence, so firearms homicide statistics could be a further indicator of the accessibility of firearms. Putting in place systematic data collection mechanisms that include a combination of such indicators promises a more nuanced and policy-relevant monitoring of illicit arms flows in Honduras.

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The Global Partnership on Small Arms was a platform where stakeholders engaged in reducing or preventing illicit arms trafficking were able to interact; exchange information, experience, and knowledge; and give feedback to further their shared goals.

The Global Partnership was intended to build on the mutually reinforcing implementation of existing international instruments dealing with countering illicit arms trafficking (for example, the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons), promoting the regulation of the legal trade through the Arms Trade Treaty, and advancing gender equality through the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.