



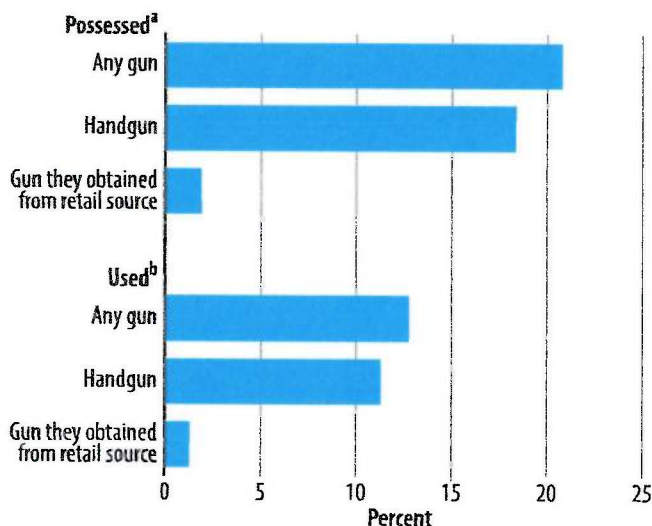
# Source and Use of Firearms Involved in Crimes: Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016

Marriel Alper, Ph.D., and Lauren Glaze, *BJS* Statisticians

Based on the 2016 Survey of Prison Inmates (SPI), about 1 in 5 (21%) of all state and federal prisoners reported that they had possessed or carried a firearm when they committed the offense for which they were serving time in prison (figure 1). More than 1 in 8 (13%) of all prisoners had used a firearm by showing, pointing, or discharging it during the offense for which they were imprisoned. Fewer than 1 in 50 (less than 2%) of all prisoners had obtained a firearm from a retail source and possessed, carried, or used it during the offense for which they were imprisoned.

An estimated 287,400 prisoners had possessed a firearm during their offense. Among these, more than half (56%) had either stolen it (6%), found it at the scene of the crime (7%), or obtained it off the street or from the underground market (43%). Most of the remainder (25%) had obtained it from a family member or friend, or as a gift. Seven percent had purchased it under their own name from a licensed firearm dealer.

**FIGURE 1**  
Percent of all state and federal prisoners who had possessed or used a firearm during their offense, 2016



Note: See appendix table 1 for standard errors.

<sup>a</sup>Includes prisoners who carried or possessed a firearm during the offense.

<sup>b</sup>Includes prisoners who showed, pointed, or discharged a firearm during the offense.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- About 21% of state and 20% of federal prisoners said they possessed a gun during their offense, while 79% of state and 80% of federal prisoners did not.
- About 29% of state and 36% of federal prisoners serving time for a violent offense possessed a gun during the offense.
- About 1.3% of prisoners obtained a gun from a retail source and used it during their offense.
- Handguns were the most common type of firearm possessed by state and federal prisoners (18% each); 11% of all prisoners used a handgun.
- Among prisoners who possessed a gun during their offense, 90% did not obtain it from a retail source.
- Among prisoners who possessed a firearm during their offense, 0.8% obtained it at a gun show.
- About 1 in 5 state and federal prisoners who possessed a firearm during their offense obtained it with the intent to use it during the crime.
- Among state prisoners who possessed a gun during their offense, 27% killed someone with it, another 12% injured someone, 7% fired the gun but did not injure anyone, and 54% did not fire it.
- State prisoners with no military service were more likely to possess a gun during their offense (21%) than prisoners who had served in the military (16%).

Statistics in this report are based on self-reported data collected through face-to-face interviews with a national sample of state and federal prisoners in the 2016 SPI. (See *Methodology*.)

The 2016 SPI data collection was conducted from January through October 2016. The SPI was formerly known as the Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities (SISFCF). The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) has periodically conducted the

survey since the 1970s, with the most recent iteration fielded in 2004. The survey collects information from prisoners on a variety of topics, including firearm possession during the crime for which a prisoner was serving time and how the firearm was used during the crime. It also collects information on the method, source, and process that prisoners used to obtain the firearm. (See appendix 1, *Questions related to firearms in the Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016*.)

## Terms and definitions

- **Firearm** – a weapon that uses gunpowder to shoot a bullet. Primary types are handguns, rifles, and shotguns:<sup>1</sup>
  - **Handgun** – a firearm which has a short stock and is designed to be held and fired by the use of a single hand.
  - **Rifle** – a firearm intended to be fired from the shoulder and designed to use the energy of an explosive to fire only a single projectile through a rifled bore for each single pull of the trigger.
  - **Shotgun** – a firearm intended to be fired from the shoulder and designed to use the energy of an explosive to fire through a smooth bore either a number of ball shot or a single projectile for each pull of the trigger.
- **Firearm possession** – carrying or possessing at least one firearm when the offense for which prisoners were serving a sentence was committed.
- **Firearm use** – showing a firearm to or pointing a firearm at anyone or discharging a firearm during the offense for which a prisoner was serving time.
- **Source of the firearm** – from where and how prisoners reported obtaining the firearm they possessed during the crime for which they were imprisoned—
  - **Purchased or traded from a retail source** – includes a gun shop or store, pawn shop, flea market, or gun show.
    - **Gun shop or store** – a business establishment that sells firearms in an open shopping format.
    - **Pawn shop** – a business that offers secured loans to customers, with personal property used as collateral. This personal property is sold to the public if the loan is not repaid.
    - **Flea market** – a market that rents space to individuals to sell or barter merchandise.
    - **Gun show** – a temporary market where licensed dealers and unlicensed sellers can rent tables or booths to sell firearms.
  - **Obtained from an individual** – includes purchasing, trading, renting, or borrowing from a family or friend. Also includes when the firearm was gifted to or purchased for the person.
  - **Off the street or underground market** – illegal sources of firearms that include markets for stolen goods, middlemen for stolen goods, criminals or criminal enterprises, or individuals or groups involved in sales of illegal drugs.
  - **Theft** – includes stealing the firearm during a burglary or from a retail source, family member, friend, or another source.
  - **Other sources** – includes a firearm that a prisoner obtained or found at the location of the crime, including one that belonged to a victim or that someone else brought to the location of the crime. This category also includes sources for which there were few responses, such as for guns bought online, and other sources that did not fit into one of the existing categories. This also includes instances where there was not enough information to categorize the source, such as when a firearm was purchased from an unknown source or obtained from another person by an unknown method.

<sup>1</sup>The definitions of types of firearms in this section were taken from 18 U.S.C. § 921 (2009). They have been edited for length.

## Controlling-offense characteristics

About 29% of state and 36% of federal prisoners serving a sentence for a violent offense in 2016 possessed a firearm during the crime (table 1). About a quarter of state (23%) and federal (25%) prisoners serving time for a violent offense used a firearm during the crime. “Firearm use” is defined in this report as showing, pointing, or discharging a firearm during the offense for which a prisoner was serving a sentence.

Among prisoners serving time for homicide, more than 2 in 5 (44%) state prisoners and more than 1 in 3 (36%) federal prisoners had possessed a firearm during

the crime. About 37% of state and 28% of federal prisoners serving time for homicide used a firearm during the homicide.

Among those serving time for robbery, more than 2 in 5 state prisoners (43%) and federal prisoners (46%) possessed a firearm during the offense, and nearly a third of state (31%) and federal (32%) prisoners used a firearm during the robbery. Firearm possession was less common among state prisoners serving a sentence for rape or sexual assault (2%). Less than 1% of state prisoners serving time for rape or sexual assault used a firearm in the commission of their crime.

**TABLE 1**

**Firearm possession and use among state and federal prisoners during the offense for which they were serving time, by type of controlling offense, 2016**

Controlling offense <sup>a</sup>	Estimated number of state prisoners <sup>b</sup>	Percent of state prisoners who—		Estimated number of federal prisoners <sup>b</sup>	Percent of federal prisoners who—	
		Possessed a firearm <sup>b</sup>	Used a firearm <sup>c</sup>		Possessed a firearm <sup>b</sup>	Used a firearm <sup>c</sup>
Total	1,211,200	20.9%	13.9%	170,400	20.0%	5.0%
<b>Violent*</b>	667,300	29.1%	23.0%	20,900	36.2%	25.3%
Homicide <sup>d</sup>	191,400	43.6	37.2	3,800	35.9	28.4
Rape/sexual assault	144,800	2.0	0.8	2,400	:	:
Robbery	149,600	43.3	31.5	10,700	46.3	32.1
Assault	149,400	25.0	20.6	2,900	29.0	18.1
Other violent <sup>e</sup>	32,200	17.0	12.6	1,200	34.1	:
<b>Property</b>	186,100	4.9% †	2.0% †	12,000	2.6% †	:
Burglary	88,100	6.7	3.2	300	:	:
Other property <sup>f</sup>	98,000	3.3	1.0	11,800	2.4	:
<b>Drug</b>	180,800	8.4% †	0.8% †	80,500	12.3% †	0.6% †
Trafficking <sup>g</sup>	130,500	9.4	0.9	72,300	12.9	0.7
Possession	45,900	6.1	:	3,500	:	:
Other/unspecified drug	4,300	:	:	4,700	:	:
<b>Public order</b>	158,300	21.5% †	5.6% †	52,900	30.2%	5.3% †
Weapons <sup>h</sup>	43,800	67.2	15.7	22,200	66.9	11.3
Other public order <sup>i</sup>	114,400	4.0	1.7	30,700	3.6	:
<b>Other</b>	3,900	:	:	1,800	:	:
<b>Unknown</b>	14,900	4.3% †	:	2,200	:	:

Note: See appendix table 2 for standard errors.

\*Comparison group.

†Difference with comparison group is significant at the 95% confidence level across main categories, and no testing was done on subcategories (e.g., homicide).

: Not calculated. Too few cases to provide a reliable estimate, or coefficient of variation is greater than 50%.

<sup>a</sup>See *Methodology* for information on how controlling offense was measured.

<sup>b</sup>Excludes 3.0% of state prisoners and 1.7% of federal prisoners who were missing responses on firearm possession. Includes prisoners who were missing responses on firearm use.

<sup>c</sup>Excludes 3.0% of state prisoners and 1.7% of federal prisoners who were missing responses on firearm possession, and an additional 0.6% of state prisoners and 0.7% of federal prisoners who were missing responses on firearm use.

<sup>d</sup>Includes murder and both negligent and non-negligent manslaughter.

<sup>e</sup>Includes kidnapping, blackmail, extortion, hit-and-run driving with bodily injury, child abuse, and criminal endangerment.

<sup>f</sup>Includes larceny, theft, motor vehicle theft, arson, fraud, stolen property, destruction of property, vandalism, hit-and-run driving with no bodily injury, criminal tampering, trespassing, entering without breaking, and possession of burglary tools.

<sup>g</sup>Includes possession with intent to distribute.

<sup>h</sup>Includes being armed while committing a crime; possession of ammunition, concealed weapons, firearms and explosive devices; selling or trafficking weapons; and other weapons offenses. Among federal prisoners, weapons offense include violations of federal firearms and explosives.

<sup>i</sup>Includes commercialized vice, immigration crimes, DUI, violations of probation/parole, and other public-order offenses.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016.

State and federal prisoners serving time for a violent offense were much more likely to have possessed a firearm during the offense (29% state, 36% federal) than prisoners serving time for a property (5% state, 3% federal) or drug (8% state, 12% federal) offense. Among prisoners serving time for a public-order offense, about 1 in 5 (21%) state prisoners and nearly 1 in 3 (30%) federal prisoners reported that they possessed a firearm during the crime, and about 1 in 20 reported they had used it. About two-thirds of state and federal prisoners sentenced for a weapons offense said they possessed a firearm during the crime.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>In addition to prisoners serving a sentence in state or federal prison in 2016 who possessed a firearm during the offense, weapons offenses include prisoners who were convicted of trafficking firearms but did not possess them at the time of the offense and prisoners who were convicted of a weapons offense that did not involve a firearm.

## Extent of firearm use among prisoners during the crime

State and federal prisoners in 2016 who had possessed a firearm during their offense were about equally likely to report that they had obtained the firearm with the intent to use it during the offense (19% state, 20% federal) (table 2). However, state prisoners (68%) who possessed a firearm were more than 2.5 times as likely as federal prisoners (26%) who possessed a firearm to have used it during the crime.

Nearly half of state prisoners (46%) serving a sentence for a crime during which they possessed a firearm discharged the firearm when they committed the crime, compared to 12% of federal prisoners. Among state prisoners who possessed a firearm during their offense, 27% killed a victim with the firearm and another 12% injured or shot a victim but did not kill him or her. Federal prisoners who possessed a firearm when they committed their offense were much less likely to have killed (4%) or injured (2%) a victim with the firearm than state prisoners.

**TABLE 2**

**Among state and federal prisoners who possessed a firearm during the offense for which they were serving time, extent of firearm use, 2016**

Firearm use	State prisoners*	Federal prisoners	State prisoners		Federal prisoners	
			Violent offense*	Non-violent offense <sup>a</sup>	Violent offense*	Non-violent offense <sup>a</sup>
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
<b>Obtained firearm because planned to use in controlling offense<sup>b</sup></b>						
Yes	19.3%	19.7%	17.7%	24.6% †	26.4%	18.0%
No	80.7	80.3	82.3	75.4 †	73.6	82.1
<b>Used firearm<sup>c</sup></b>						
Discharged	68.0%	25.9% †	81.0%	24.8% †	72.5%	12.9% †
Killed victim	46.5%	11.9% †	55.9%	15.4% †	27.3%	7.5% †
Injured/shot victim but did not kill victim	27.1	4.1 †	35.0	:	16.5	:
Discharged firearm but did not shoot anyone	12.4	2.2 †	14.5	5.3 †	:	:
Did not discharge <sup>d</sup>	7.0	5.6	6.4	9.0	5.7	5.4
Did not use firearm	21.5%	14.0% †	25.2%	9.4% †	45.3%	5.4% †
Estimated number of prisoners who possessed a firearm (with valid data) <sup>e</sup>	32.0%	74.1% †	19.0%	75.2% †	27.5%	87.1% †
	245,400	32,900	187,800	57,000	7,200	25,600

Note: Percentages are based on data reported on firearm possession, use, and controlling offense. Excludes 3.1% of state prisoners and 3.5% of federal prisoners who possessed a firearm during the offense and were missing responses on firearm use and 0.3% of state prisoners and 0.7% of federal prisoners who possessed a firearm and were missing a controlling offense. The sum of violent offense and non-violent offense does not equal the total number of state and federal prisoners who possessed a firearm in this table due to an estimated 600 state and 100 federal prisoners whose offense type was unknown. See appendix table 3 for standard errors.

\*Comparison group.

†Difference with comparison group is significant at the 95% confidence level.

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<sup>a</sup>Includes property, drug, public order, and other non-violent offenses.

<sup>b</sup>Percentages are based on the 246,200 state and 32,600 federal prisoners who reported they carried or possessed a firearm and whether they obtained a firearm to use during the offense.

<sup>c</sup>Includes prisoners who showed a firearm to anyone, pointed a firearm at anyone, or discharged the firearm during the offense.

<sup>d</sup>Includes prisoners who showed or pointed a firearm at anyone during the offense but did not discharge it.

<sup>e</sup>Includes prisoners who reported they carried or possessed a firearm. Excludes prisoners who were missing responses on firearm possession or use. For violent offense and non-violent offense, also excludes prisoners who were missing a controlling offense.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016.

Among prisoners who possessed a firearm during a violent offense, a large majority of both state (81%) and federal (73%) prisoners used the firearm during the offense, far more than the percentages for non-violent offenders (25% state, 13% federal). More than half (56%) of state prisoners serving time for a violent offense who possessed a firearm during the crime discharged it, compared to fewer than a sixth (15%) of non-violent offenders in state prison who possessed a firearm. Violent offenders (27%) in federal prison who possessed a firearm during the crime were about 3.5 times as likely to discharge it as non-violent offenders (8%). Among state prisoners who had possessed a firearm during their offense, however, non-violent offenders (25%) were more likely than violent offenders (18%) to have planned to use the firearm during the offense.

### Type of firearm possessed by prisoners during offense

Handguns were by far the most common type of firearm possessed or used by prisoners during the crime for which they were sentenced. About 18% of all state and federal prisoners in 2016 reported that they had possessed a handgun during the crime for which they were serving a sentence (table 3). Two percent or fewer possessed a rifle or a shotgun. Twelve percent of state and 5% of federal prisoners used a handgun during their offense. Most state (79%) and federal (80%) prisoners did not possess any type of firearm during the crime for which they were imprisoned.

**TABLE 3**

**Firearm possession and use among state and federal prisoners during the offense for which they were serving time, by type of firearm, 2016**

Type of firearm	Percent of prisoners who possessed a firearm			Percent of prisoners who used a firearm <sup>a</sup>		
	All prisoners	State*	Federal	All prisoners	State*	Federal
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Firearm <sup>b</sup>	20.8%	20.9%	20.0%	12.8%	13.9%	5.0% †
Handgun	18.4	18.4	18.3	11.2	12.2	4.6
Rifle	1.5	1.4	2.0 †	0.8	0.8	0.4 †
Shotgun	1.6	1.6	1.7	1.1	1.2	0.4 †
No firearm	79.2%	79.1%	80.0%	87.2%	86.1%	95.0%
Estimated number of prisoners (with valid data) <sup>c</sup>	1,378,200	1,208,100	170,100	1,378,200	1,208,100	170,100

Note: Details on type of firearm may not sum to totals because prisoners could report more than one type of firearm. Percentages exclude missing data. Excludes 3.0% of state prisoners and 1.7% of federal prisoners who were missing responses on firearm possession during the offense and an additional 0.3% of state prisoners and 0.2% of federal prisoners who were missing responses on type of firearm. See appendix table 4 for standard errors.

\*Comparison group.

†Difference with comparison group is significant at the 95% confidence level.

<sup>a</sup>Percentages exclude 0.6% of state prisoners and 0.7% of federal prisoners who were missing responses on firearm use.

<sup>b</sup>Includes prisoners who reported a type of firearm that did not fit into one of the existing categories and those who did not provide enough information to categorize the type of firearm. About 0.1% of state prisoners and 0.2% of federal prisoners reported another type of firearm or did not report enough information to specify the type of firearm.

<sup>c</sup>Excludes prisoners who were missing responses on firearm possession or type of firearm. Counts are weighted to totals from the 2015 National Prisoner Statistics Program; see *Methodology: Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016* (NCJ 252210, BJS web, July 2019).

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016.

## Demographic characteristics

Male prisoners were more likely than female prisoners to have possessed a firearm during their crime. About a fifth of male state and federal prisoners serving a sentence in 2016 possessed a firearm during the crime (table 4). Males in state prisons in 2016 were about 2.5 times as likely (22%) as females in state prisons (9%) to have possessed a firearm during the crime for which they were imprisoned. In federal prisons, males (21%) were about three times as likely as females (7%) to have possessed a firearm during their crime. Almost

3 in 10 (29%) black prisoners serving a sentence in state prison in 2016 possessed a firearm during their crime. White (12%) and Hispanic (21%) state prisoners were less likely to have possessed a firearm during their crime. Similarly, white (17%) and Hispanic (13%) federal prisoners serving a sentence in 2016 were less likely to have possessed a firearm during the crime than black (29%) federal prisoners. State prisoners who served in the military were less likely to have possessed a firearm during their crime (16%) than state prisoners who had not served in the military (21%).

**TABLE 4**

**Firearm possession among state and federal prisoners during the offense for which they were serving time, by demographic characteristics, 2016**

Demographic characteristic	State		Federal	
	Number of prisoners	Percent of prisoners who possessed a firearm during the offense	Number of prisoners	Percent of prisoners who possessed a firearm during the offense
<b>Sex</b>				
Male*	1,124,200	21.8%	159,800	20.9%
Female	87,000	9.5 †	10,600	6.6 †
<b>Race/Hispanic origin<sup>a</sup></b>				
White	383,300	12.4% †	35,400	16.6% †
Black*	401,500	29.4	53,800	29.2
Hispanic	247,200	21.5 †	62,600	12.6 †
American Indian/Alaska Native	17,200	14.8 †	2,800	23.8
Asian/Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	10,700	22.8	2,600	:
Two or more races	133,100	19.1 †	10,900	29.3
<b>Age at time of survey</b>				
18–24*	123,800	31.7%	8,200	30.1%
25–34	389,100	24.4 †	47,700	27.4
35–44	318,800	19.3 †	58,800	19.0 †
45–54	224,800	14.6 †	36,700	14.1 †
55 or older	154,800	16.0 †	19,000	12.2 †
<b>Marital status</b>				
Married*	168,500	16.7%	36,800	14.4%
Widowed/widowed	34,300	18.3	3,100	21.7
Separated	58,300	12.7 †	9,600	12.8
Divorced	233,300	14.5	30,900	15.2
Never married	715,900	24.8 †	90,000	24.6 †
<b>Education<sup>b</sup></b>				
Less than high school*	750,500	23.1%	94,900	22.7%
High school graduate	273,700	19.6 †	36,500	19.4
Some college	133,900	14.7 †	23,100	18.8
College degree or more	43,600	11.0 †	12,700	6.3 †
<b>Citizenship</b>				
U.S. citizen*	1,156,800	21.0%	127,500	24.2%
Non-U.S. citizen	53,100	18.5	42,400	7.2 †
<b>Military service</b>				
Yes*	95,200	15.6%	9,200	15.9%
No	1,115,900	21.4 †	161,200	20.3

Note: Percentages and counts exclude missing data. Excludes 3.0% of state prisoners and 1.7% of federal prisoners who were missing responses on firearm possession during the offense. Details for counts may not sum to totals due to missing data. See appendix table 5 for standard errors.

\*Comparison group.

†Difference with comparison group is significant at the 95% confidence level.

: Not calculated. Too few cases to provide a reliable estimate, or coefficient of variation is greater than 50%.

<sup>a</sup>Excludes persons of Hispanic/Latino origin, unless specified.

<sup>b</sup>Based on highest year of education completed.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016.

In general, the likelihood of state and federal prisoners having possessed a firearm during their crime decreased with age. Firearm possession among state prisoners ages 18 to 24 (32%) in 2016 was more common than among older prisoners. Federal prisoners ages 18 to 24 (30%) were more likely to possess a firearm than those age 35 or older (16%, not shown in table).

The difference in firearm possession between U.S. citizens (21%) and non-citizens (18%) in state prisons in 2016 was not statistically significant. Among federal prisoners serving a sentence in 2016, firearm possession was more than three times as high among U.S. citizens (24%) as non-citizens (7%).

## Method, source, and process used to obtain the firearm

Among prisoners who possessed a firearm when they committed the offense for which they were imprisoned and who reported the source from which they obtained it, the most common source (43%) was off-the-street or the underground market (table 5). Another 7% of state and 5% of federal prisoners stole the firearm, and 7% of state and 8% of federal prisoners reported that they obtained the firearm at the location of the crime.

**TABLE 5**

**Among state and federal prisoners who had possessed a firearm during the offense for which they were serving time, sources and methods used to obtain a firearm, 2016**

Source and method to obtain firearm	All prisoners	State	Federal
<b>Purchased/traded at retail source</b>	10.1%	9.7%	13.7%
Gun shop/store	7.5	7.2	9.6
Pawn shop	1.6	1.5	2.2
Flea market	0.4	:	:
Gun show	0.8	0.8	1.4
<b>Obtained from individual</b>	25.3%	26.0%	20.5%
Purchased/traded from family/friend	8.0	7.9	9.1
Rented/borrowed from family/friend	6.5	7.0	3.0
Gift/purchased for prisoner	10.8	11.2	8.4
<b>Off the street/underground market<sup>a</sup></b>	43.2%	43.2%	42.9%
<b>Theft<sup>b</sup> 6.4% Total</b>	6.4%	6.6%	4.7%
From burglary	1.5	1.5	:
From retail source	0.2	:	:
From family/friend	1.6	1.8	:
Unspecified theft <sup>c</sup>	3.1	3.3	1.8
<b>Other source</b>	17.4%	17.1%	20.1%
Found at location of crime/victim	6.9	6.7	7.9
Brought by someone else	4.6	4.7	3.6
Other <sup>d</sup>	5.9	5.6	8.5
<b>Multiple sources<sup>e</sup></b>	2.5%	2.6%	2.0%
<b>Estimated number of prisoners who possessed a firearm, excluding prisoners who did not report source<sup>f</sup></b>	256,400	227,100	29,300

Note: Prisoners were asked to report all sources and methods of obtaining any firearm they possessed during the offense, so details may not sum to totals. Each source is included in this table when multiple sources were reported. See *Methodology*. Percentages exclude missing data. Excludes 10.3% of state prisoners and 14.1% of federal prisoners who possessed a firearm during the offense and were missing responses on either source or method of obtaining the firearm. These prisoners were excluded either because they did not provide a valid response or they did not receive the questions due to providing an open-ended response to the previous question about type of weapon. See appendix table 6 for standard errors.

: Not calculated. Too few cases to provide a reliable estimate, or coefficient of variation is greater than 50%.

<sup>a</sup>Illegal sources of firearms that include markets for stolen goods, middlemen for stolen goods, criminals or criminal enterprises, or individuals or groups involved in sales of illegal drugs.

<sup>b</sup>Excludes theft from victim.

<sup>c</sup>Includes theft where the source could not be identified and theft other than from a burglary, retail location, family, or friend.

<sup>d</sup>Included if no source specified in the table was reported. Includes sources that did not fit into one of the existing categories, sources for which there were few responses such as bought online, or if there was not enough information to categorize the source. Examples of other sources include bought from an unknown source or obtained from a friend by an unknown method.

<sup>e</sup>Includes prisoners who reported multiple sources or methods that fit into more than one of the categories. Each reported source is included in the categories above.

<sup>f</sup>Includes prisoners who reported they carried or possessed a firearm and prisoners who reported a source or method.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016.

Among prisoners who possessed a firearm during the offense for which they were imprisoned, 7% of state and 10% of federal prisoners serving a sentence in 2016 bought or traded for the firearm from a gun shop or gun store. About 1% bought or traded for the firearm at a gun show. About a quarter (26%) of state prisoners and about a fifth (21%) of federal prisoners obtained a firearm that they possessed during their offense from an individual in a non-retail setting, such as a friend or family member.

Prisoners who reported that they had purchased or traded a firearm at a retail source were asked if they had obtained the firearm from a licensed dealer or private seller. Among prisoners who had possessed a firearm during the offense for which they were serving time, 8% of state and 11% of federal prisoners had purchased it from or traded with a licensed firearm dealer at a retail source (table 6).

Prisoners who reported that they had purchased a firearm from a licensed firearm dealer at a retail source were further asked whether they bought the firearm under their own name and whether they knew a background check was conducted. Among those who had possessed a firearm during the offense for which they were imprisoned, 7% of state and 8% of federal prisoners had purchased it under their own name from a licensed firearm dealer at a retail source, while approximately 1% of state and 2% of federal prisoners had purchased a firearm from a licensed dealer at a retail source but did not purchase it under their own name (not shown in table).

Among all prisoners who purchased or traded a firearm from a licensed firearm dealer at a retail source (8.2%), the majority reported that a background check was conducted (6.7%).

**TABLE 6**

**Among state and federal prisoners who had possessed a firearm during the offense for which they were serving time, processes used to obtain a firearm, 2016**

Process to obtain firearm	All prisoners	State	Federal
Total	100%	100%	100%
Not purchased or traded at retail source	89.9%	90.3%	86.3%
Purchased or traded at retail source <sup>a</sup>	10.1%	9.7%	13.7%
Licensed firearm dealer at retail source	8.2	7.9	10.9
Purchased under own name <sup>b</sup>	6.9	6.8	8.4
Background check was reportedly conducted <sup>c</sup>	6.7	6.3	9.4
Private seller at retail source <sup>d</sup>	1.2	1.1	2.3
Unknown <sup>e</sup>	0.7	0.8	:
Estimated number of prisoners who possessed a firearm (with valid data) <sup>f</sup>	256,400	227,100	29,300

Note: Percentages exclude missing data. Excludes 10.3% of state prisoners and 14.1% of federal prisoners who possessed a firearm during the offense and were missing responses on source or method of obtaining the firearm. See appendix table 7 for standard errors.

: Not calculated. Too few cases to provide a reliable estimate, or coefficient of variation is greater than 50%.

<sup>a</sup>Includes prisoners who purchased or traded from a retail source, including a retail store, pawn shop, flea market, or gun show.

<sup>b</sup>Includes prisoners who purchased from a retail source, including a retail store, pawn shop, flea market, or gun show. Excludes prisoners who traded for a firearm from a retail source.

<sup>c</sup>Includes prisoners who purchased from a retail source, including a retail store, pawn shop, flea market, or gun show. Excludes prisoners who traded for a firearm from a retail source and prisoners who reported that a background check was not conducted or who were unaware as to whether one was conducted.

<sup>d</sup>Excludes private sellers other than at a retail source.

<sup>e</sup>Includes prisoners who purchased or traded a firearm from a retail source and were missing responses on whether a firearm was purchased or traded from a licensed firearm dealer or a private seller at a retail source.

<sup>f</sup>Includes prisoners who reported they carried or possessed a firearm and prisoners who reported a source or method.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016.

## Use and source of firearms among all state and federal prisoners

About 1% of all state and federal prisoners used a firearm during the offense that they obtained from a retail source (table 7). About 2% of prisoners possessed a firearm that they obtained from a retail source, including a retail store, pawn shop, flea market, or gun show.

Thirteen percent of all state and federal prisoners used a firearm during the offense for which they were serving time in 2016.

**TABLE 7**

**Firearm possession and use among all state and federal prisoners during the offense for which they were serving time, by type of controlling offense and source, 2016**

Controlling offense <sup>a</sup>	Percent of state and federal prisoners who—		Percent of state and federal prisoners who—	
	Possessed a firearm <sup>b</sup>	Possessed a firearm that they obtained from a retail source <sup>c</sup>	Used a firearm <sup>d</sup>	Used a firearm that they obtained from a retail source <sup>e</sup>
Total	20.8%	1.9%	12.8%	1.3%
Violent*	29.3%	2.8%	23.1%	2.3%
Homicide <sup>f</sup>	43.5	5.9	37.0	5.2
Robbery	43.5	1.8	31.5	1.3
Property	4.8% †	0.5% †	1.9% †	:
Drug	9.6% †	1.0% †	0.8% †	0.1% †
Public order	23.6% †	1.7% †	5.5% †	0.6% †

Note: Percentages exclude missing data. Excludes 2.8% of prisoners who were missing responses on firearm possession during the offense and 1.2% of prisoners who had a valid response to firearm possession but were missing a controlling offense. Retail source includes purchasing or trading the firearm from a retail store, pawn shop, flea market, or gun show. Use includes prisoners who showed a firearm to anyone, pointed a firearm at anyone, or discharged a firearm during the controlling offense. See appendix table 8 for standard errors.

\*Comparison group.

† Difference with comparison group is significant at the 95% confidence level across main categories, and no testing was done on subcategories (e.g., homicide).

: Not calculated. Too few cases to provide a reliable estimate, or coefficient of variation is greater than 50%.

<sup>a</sup>See *Methodology* for more information on how controlling offense was measured.

<sup>b</sup>Includes state and federal prisoners who reported a valid response to firearm possession.

<sup>c</sup>Includes state and federal prisoners who reported a valid response to firearm possession and source.

<sup>d</sup>Includes state and federal prisoners who reported a valid response to firearm possession and use.

<sup>e</sup>Includes state and federal prisoners who reported a valid response to firearm possession, source, and use.

<sup>f</sup>Includes murder and both non-negligent and negligent manslaughter.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016.