

## The Effects of the U.S. Arms Trade with Latin America

The presence of arms in Latin America and the Caribbean is not a new phenomenon. However, the negative consequences of U.S. arms in these regions are increasing. Various wars and conflicts established the arms trade between Latin America and the United States, but for-profit trade has become more prominent in recent decades. Currently, the Trump administration is also moving the regulation of international non-military firearms sales from the State Department, which deals with international threats and stability, to the Commerce Department, which regulates international trade. Some argue that the Commerce department is primarily concerned with profit and may not consider the human rights and safety effects of these arms sales. The U.S. is the largest exporter of arms to the region and the leniency of the U.S. government has made it easier for guns to reach Latin America legally.

On the other hand, Americans sell guns they have obtained legally to various crime syndicates from Latin America and the Caribbean, who purposefully cross the border to buy guns. The North American Congress on Latin America reports that the “vast coastline, densely forested mountains, porous borders, clandestine airstrips, widespread government corruption and a lack governmental resources” have all led to a robust illegal arms trade in Latin American and Caribbean countries. Additionally, arms are also obtained from corrupted law enforcement agencies such as the police and military.

Latin America has 16% of the world’s population but has 33% of the world’s homicides. For example, even though Central America has the strictest rules on guns, the area is riddled with much gun violence. This violence, coupled with extreme poverty, leads to the mass migration of people into the U.S. Another effect of the arms trade is the very lucrative drug-trafficking into the U.S. The acquisition of guns by criminal groups makes them more powerful in developing a successful drug-trafficking business. Furthermore Columbia, Peru, Bolivia and Guatemala have extensive fertile lands, which makes it easier for the cultivation of these drugs.

Drug-trafficking and immigration are just two consequences of the arms sales. As more guns enter Latin America, more criminal groups grow more brazen. So, while the U.S. is accruing the profits from arms trading, it is spreading gun culture to Latin America, which causes effects such as mass flights of refugees and drug-trafficking.

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Information gathered from Clare Ribando Seelke, Liana Sun Wyle, June S. Beittel, Mark P. Sullivan’s “Latin America and the Caribbean: Illicit Drug Trafficking and U.S. Counterdrug Programs” in the *Congressional Research Service*, April 2011; Rachel Stohl and Doug Tuttle’s “The Small Arms Trade in Latin America” in *The North American Congress on Latin America*, March 6, 2008; David Luhnnow’s “Latin America Is the Murder Capital of the World” in the *Wall Street Journal*, September 20, 2018; Alex Yablon’s “U.S. Gun Makers Send Weapons South As Migrants Flee North” in *The Trace*, March 8, 2019; Marianne Fay’s *The Urban Poor in Latin America. Directions in Development* (World Bank. 2005); Lindsay Huth’s “Immigration in America by the Numbers” in *U.S News and World Report*, May 1, 2018; Guns from the United States are flooding Latin America in *The Economist*, May 23, 2019 and A. Trevor Thrall and Caroline Dorminey’s “Risky Business: The Role of Arms Sales in U.S. Foreign Policy” in *The Cato Institute*, March 13, 2018.