

OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
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2019 Firearms

Used in the Commission of Crimes

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Division of Law Enforcement
Bureau of Forensic Services

Executive Summary

Reporting Requirement

California Penal Code section 34200¹ requires the Department of Justice (Department) to provide the Legislature on or before April 15 of each year a written report on the specific types of firearms used in the commission of crimes based upon information obtained from state and local crime laboratories. Although the Department is required to produce this annual report based on data obtained from state and local crime laboratories, there is no corresponding mandate for local crime laboratories to track or provide this data.

The report must include all of the following information regarding crimes in which firearms were used:

- (a) A description of the relative occurrence of firearms most frequently used in the commission of violent² crimes, distinguishing whether the firearms used were handguns, rifles, shotguns, assault weapons, or other related types of weapons.
- (b) A description of specific types of firearms that are used in homicides or street gang and drug trafficking crimes.
- (c) The frequency with which stolen firearms were used in the commission of the crimes.
- (d) The frequency with which fully automatic firearms were used in the commission of the crimes.
- (e) Any trends of importance such as those involving specialized ammunition or firearms modifications, such as conversion to a fully automatic weapon, removal of serial number, shortening of barrel, or use of a suppressor.

Scope

The 2019 Firearms Used in the Commission of Crimes report is limited in scope because it only includes data from the Department's ten regional crime laboratories, which principally serve the rural areas of California. It does not include data from the crime laboratories that serve California's major cities and urban areas, as these laboratories are not statutorily mandated to provide data to the Department for this report. The absence of data from the local laboratories that serve population-dense regions means this report may not represent gun use trends in urban areas or across California as a whole.

¹ Previously California Penal Code section 12039

² Violent felonies are defined in Penal Code section 667.5

Report

The ten regional crime laboratories operated by the Department’s Bureau of Forensic Services (BFS) completed examinations of 506 firearms during the 2019 calendar year, 93 of which qualified for inclusion in this report. A firearm is considered to be qualified for this report if forensic testing has positively tied it to at least one of the violent crimes defined by Penal Code section 667.5. Small inconsistencies in data totals are attributable to the fact that the categories in this report, other than firearm types and calibers, are not mutually exclusive; as a result, individual firearms may fit and be counted within multiple categories. For example, if a laboratory examined a stolen shotgun with a shortened barrel that was used in a street gang-related homicide, that weapon would be counted in each of those categories.

Types of Firearms and Calibers of Ammunition Used in Crimes (Figures 1 and 2)

The 93 qualifying firearms examined by DOJ during this reporting period included 82 handguns (88.2 percent), seven rifles (7.5 percent), three shotguns (3.2 percent), and one machine gun (1.1 percent, see Figure 1). Three firearms were assault weapons³ and two firearms were classified as short-barreled shotguns or rifles.

The most commonly encountered calibers were 9 mm Luger and 40 Smith & Wesson (S&W), followed by 45 Auto (see Figure 2).

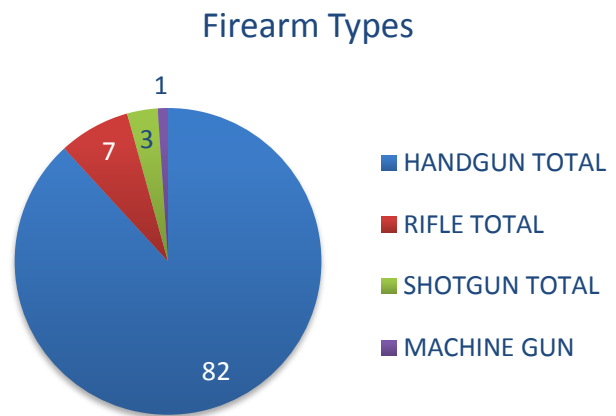
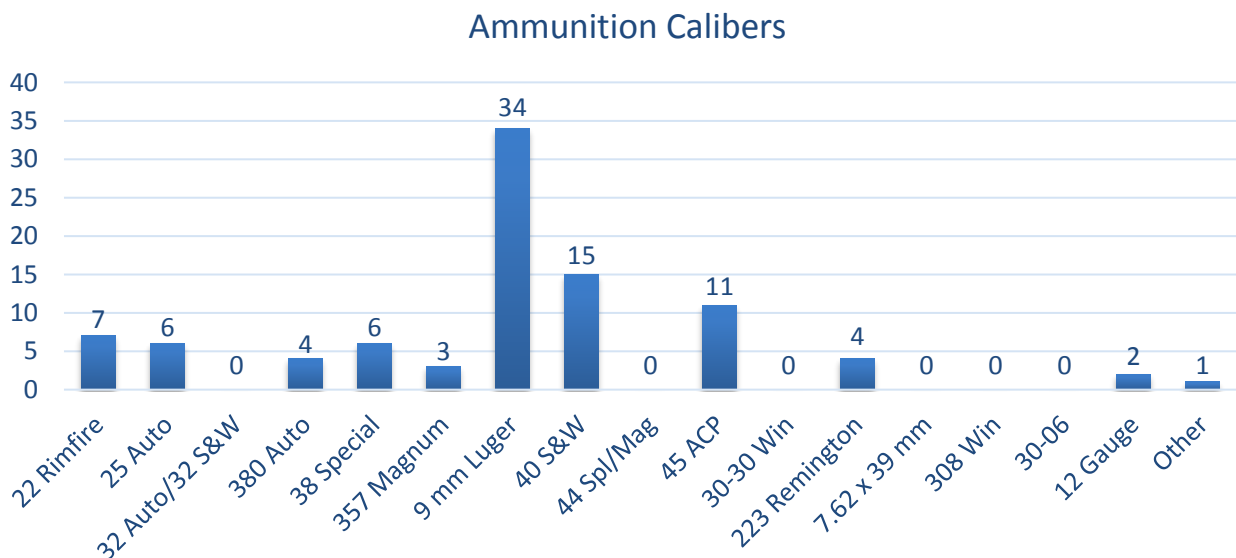


Figure 1. Types of firearms used in crimes.



³ As defined in Penal Code sections 30510 and 30515

Figure 2. Calibers of ammunition used in crimes.

Firearms Used in Crimes of Violence Other Than Homicide (Figure 3)

Forty-four of the firearms examined by BFS laboratories were submitted in cases involving crimes of violence other than homicide. These 44 firearms included 38 handguns (86.4 percent), four rifles (9.1 percent), one shotgun (2.3 percent), and one machine gun (2.3 percent, see Figure 3).

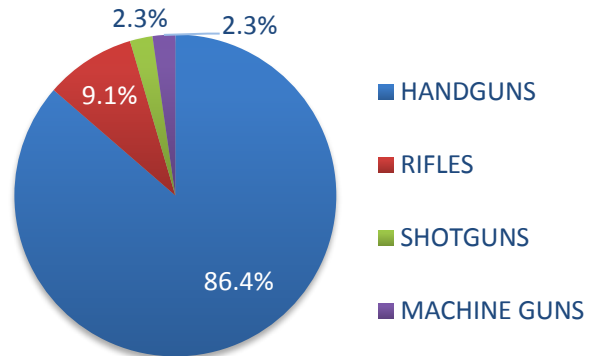
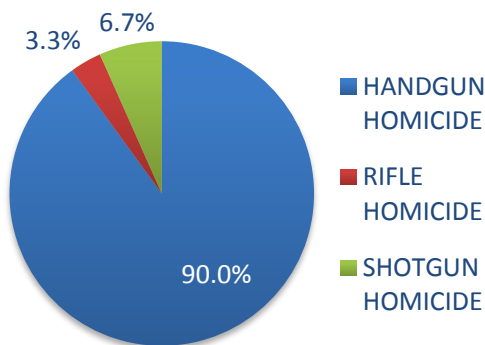


Figure 3. Firearms used in crimes of violence other than homicide.



Firearms Used in Homicides (Figure 4)

The 30 firearms that were submitted to DOJ laboratories in homicide cases included twenty-seven handguns (90 percent), one rifle (3.3 percent), and two shotguns (6.7 percent, see Figure 4). There were no fully automatic firearms linked to homicides. These figures are graphically depicted in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Firearms used in homicides.

Street Gang Crimes

Two handguns and one shotgun were identified as being related to street gang crimes.

Drug Trafficking Crimes

Five handguns were identified as being used in drug trafficking crimes.

Weapons Examined by Year (Figure 5)

The number of California assault weapons examined by BFS laboratories decreased by 50% in 2019 when compared to 2018. However, there has been very little change in the number of assault weapons examined over the last 18 years; as a category, their numbers have been nominal relative to the total number of firearms examined.

The reported number of California Assault Weapons is based on a defined list for each year. That list has been legislatively expanded a number of times since 1998; as a result, the years following each increase may include firearms that would not have been counted previously.

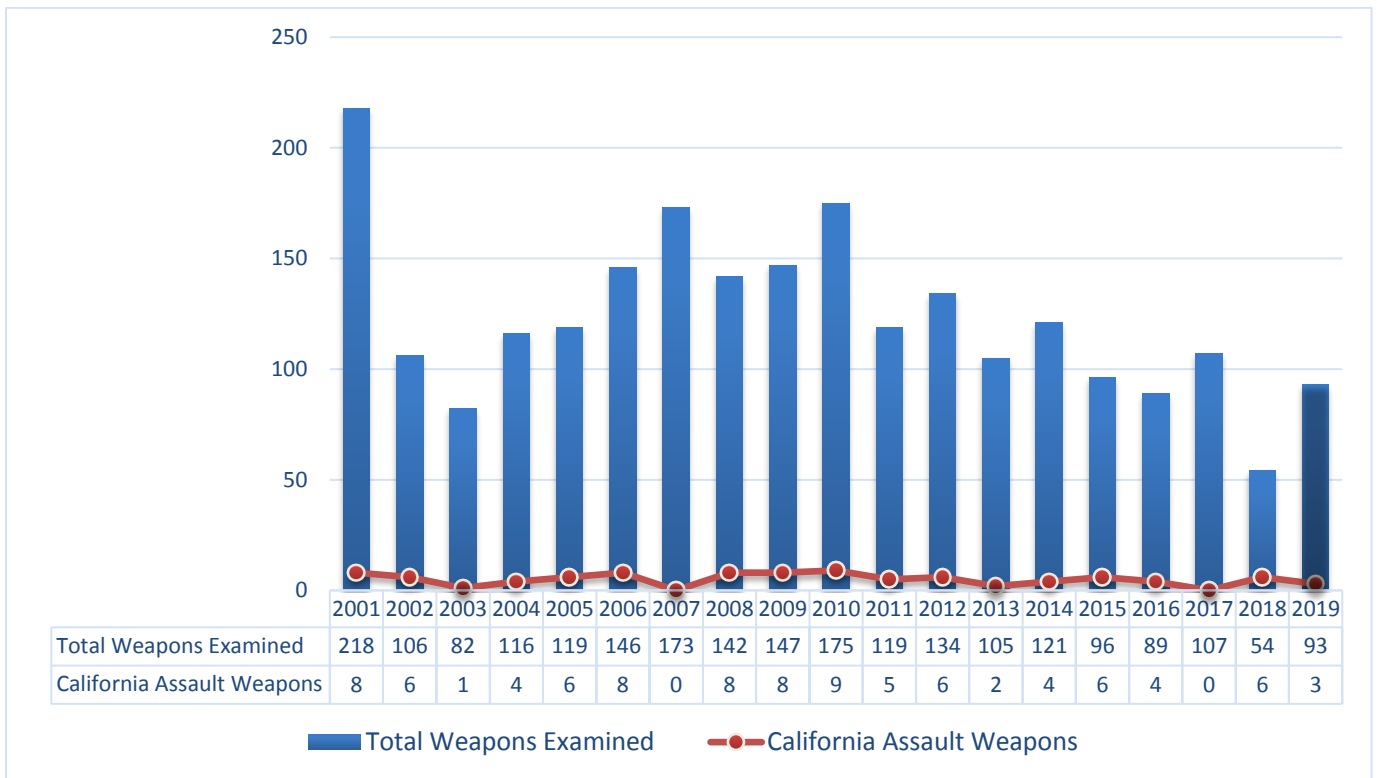


Figure 5. Weapons examined by year.

Trends and Special Cases

California Assault Weapons

Three of the 93 firearms examined in 2019 were identified as California Assault Weapons (as defined in Pen. Code §§ 30510 and 30515) (see Figure 5).

Stolen Firearms

None of the firearms examined were confirmed to have been reported stolen. However, information related to a firearm's ownership status is often not provided to the laboratory conducting the forensic examination.

Serial Numbers Removed

Four of the 93 firearms were submitted with the serial number removed.

Full-Auto Firearms (Machine Guns, Submachine Guns or Full-Auto Conversions)

One qualifying firearm exhibiting full-auto fire was examined this year.

Short Barreled Shotguns or Rifles

Two of the examined firearms were classified as a short-barreled or short overall-length shotgun or rifle.

Officer-Involved Shooting Incidents

The thirteen firearms identified as being related to officer-involved shooting incidents were ten handguns, two rifles, and one shotgun.

Suppressors

No firearms equipped with a suppressor (silencer) were examined this year.

Unusual Ammunition

There were no reported examinations of armor piercing, exploding, frangible, Glazer-type, incendiary or tracer ammunition.