

Civil Firearms Market in Mexico, 2021-2023**Mercado civil de armas de fuego en México, 2021-2023**

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ABSTRACT

The objective is to analyze the civilian firearms market in Mexico during the 2021-2023 period. To this end, the import dynamics, regulatory differences with the United States regulations, and the role of the Ministry of National Defense in the oversight of this market are examined. A mixed methodology is employed, combining a qualitative analysis of Mexican and U.S. legislation with quantitative data on import trends. The results show an increase in the importation of pistols and shotguns for defense and recreation in Mexico with an economic impact derived from the increase in permits and tariffs. Although administrative processes have been strengthened, there are still structural limitations stemming from regulatory asymmetries. The conclusions propose stricter control in the registration and commercialization of weapons as well as the strengthening of cooperation with the United States as key strategies for security in Mexico.

Keywords: 1. arms control, 2. SEDENA, 3. firearms imports, 4. hunting, 5. international cooperation.

RESUMEN

El objetivo consiste en analizar el mercado de armas de fuego de uso civil en México durante el período 2021-2023. Para ello, se examinan dinámicas de importación, diferencias regulatorias con Estados Unidos y el rol de la Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional en la supervisión de este mercado. Se emplea una metodología mixta que combina el análisis cualitativo de las legislaciones mexicana y estadounidense con datos cuantitativos en tendencias de importación. Los resultados evidencian un alza en la importación de pistolas y escopetas para defensa y recreación en México, con un impacto económico derivado del incremento en permisos y aranceles. Si bien se han fortalecido los procesos administrativos, persisten limitaciones estructurales derivadas de estas discrepancias normativas. Las conclusiones proponen un control más estricto en el registro y comercialización de armas, así como el fortalecimiento de la cooperación con Estados Unidos, como estrategias clave para la seguridad en México.

Palabras clave: 1. control de armas, 2. Sedena, 3. importación de armas, 4. cinegética, 5. cooperación internacional.

Received: February 2, 2025

Accepted: March 10, 2025

Available online: May 15, 2026

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INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the international legal trade in firearms encompasses the regulated purchase and sale of rifles, ammunition, and explosives, conducted in accordance with both national and international laws. Mexico's geographic proximity to the United States—the world's largest producer and exporter of firearms—poses significant challenges to effective regulation and oversight. These challenges are further compounded by Mexico's high rates of firearm-related homicides, underscoring the urgent need to examine the scope and impact of the legal arms trade within the country (UNODC, 2020; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute [SIPRI], 2023).

One of the most pressing issues surrounding the arms market in Mexico, and one that has been widely documented, is illicit trafficking. The United States Government Accountability Office (USGAO, 2021) estimates that at least 200 000 firearms are illegally smuggled into Mexico from the United States each year. In contrast, there remains a significant gap in public and academic understanding of the legal firearms trade in Mexico, particularly regarding its regulatory framework, import volumes, and the oversight role of the Secretariat of National Defense⁴ (SEDENA, for its acronym in Spanish). As a result, the legal arms trade landscape in Mexico remains largely undefined and understudied. To address these questions, this study examines the legal purchase and sale of firearms for civilian⁵ use in Mexico between 2021 and 2023. This analysis is particularly relevant given the limited availability of systematic data on the topic and its implications for public security and the economy.

The guiding research question is: What is the current state of the legal civilian firearms trade in Mexico? Accordingly, the primary objective is to analyze the characteristics of the country's legal arms market, focusing on its regulatory framework, import patterns, and the broader implications of its commercialization. The period from 2021 to 2023 was selected to ensure an analysis based on recent data, which were sourced from SEDENA's open data portal and the National Transparency Platform.⁶

The article is organized into six sections. Following this introduction, the second section reviews the legal and regulatory framework governing firearm possession and commercialization in Mexico; the third outlines the main gun control measures in Mexico, emphasizing state regulation and oversight; the fourth describes the methodological strategy for collecting and analyzing official data. Subsequently, the results section presents a comparative analysis of Mexico's and the United States' regulatory frameworks, followed by an overview of firearms import trends in Mexico, detailing brands, models, import volumes from 2021 to 2023, as well as

⁴ Unofficial English translation of Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional.

⁵ Firearms are classified into long guns and handguns. Long guns, along with certain handgun calibers, are exclusively reserved for military use. Civilian-use handguns include specific revolvers and pistols of smaller calibers, up to .38 mm—excluding .38 Super, .38 Commando, and .357 Magnum calibers. Accordingly, this study focuses specifically on handguns authorized for civilian use.

⁶ Unofficial English translation of Plataforma Nacional de Transparencia.

revenue generated from permits and import fees. Finally, the conclusion synthesizes the study's findings, highlights factors driving the growth of Mexico's legal firearms market, and offers policy recommendations to enhance its regulation and control.

LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK ON THE POSSESSION AND COMMERCIALIZATION OF FIREARMS IN MEXICO

In Mexico, the right to legally possess firearms for civilian use is recognized in Article 10 of the Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos (CPEUM, 1917). This article grants citizens the right to possess firearms within their homes for the purpose of ensuring their security and legitimate defense. However, the Federal Law on Firearms and Explosives⁷ (LFAFE, for its acronym in Spanish) outlines the specific cases, conditions, requirements, and locations under which firearm possession and use may be authorized. This constitutional framework serves as the foundation for the regulation of firearm possession and trade in the country.

Indeed, the LFAFE establishes the criteria for the purchase and use of firearms in Mexico, restricting their acquisition to specific circumstances and defining the legal requirements that must be met. Articles 9 and 10 specify that firearms may be legally acquired for purposes such as protecting private residences, overseeing plots or communal lands (*ejidos*), sport shooting, and hunting (LFAFE, 1972).

The regulation and oversight of Mexico's legal firearms market are the responsibility of SEDENA, specifically through the General Directorate of the Federal Registry of Firearms and Explosives Control⁸ and the Directorate of Armament and Ammunition Commercialization⁹ (DCAM, for its acronym in Spanish), both subordinate to the General Directorate of Military Industry.¹⁰ These bodies oversee the registration of firearms for civilian and military use, manage permits related to the production, acquisition, importation, exportation, and commercialization of firearms and explosives, and ensure compliance with the LFAFE.

The DCAM remains the sole entity legally authorized to commercialize firearms nationwide. In contrast, the OTCA¹¹ agencies do not perform this function; rather, they operate exclusively as regional offices to facilitate the acquisition process in states such as Nuevo León, San Luis Potosí, and Tamaulipas (SEDENA, 2024c, 2024d, 2024e y 2024f).

⁷ Unofficial English translation of Ley Federal de Armas de Fuego y Explosivos.

⁸ Unofficial English translation of Dirección General del Registro Federal de Armas de Fuego y Control de Explosivos.

⁹ Unofficial English translation of Dirección de Comercialización de Armamento y Municiones.

¹⁰ Unofficial English translation of Dirección General de Industria Militar.

¹¹ The acronym stands for the official name in Spanish: Oficina para Trámites de Comercialización de Artículos Regulados (the office responsible for procedures related to the commercialization of items regulated by the LFAFE).

The importation of firearms into Mexico is strictly regulated and overseen by SEDENA and the National Customs Agency of Mexico¹² (ANAM, for its acronym in Spanish). According to Chapter 93 of the General Import and Export Tax Law¹³ (LIGIE, for its acronym in Spanish), firearms may be imported provided that the requirements established by the LFAFE are met (Decree of 2022). Firearms intended for civilian use are classified under tariff codes 93.02 and 93.03 of the LIGIE, and their importation is subject to a 15% tariff based on the unit value, in addition to a 16% value-added tax (IVA).¹⁴

The customs system plays a crucial role in regulating the trade of dual-use goods, which include firearms and other items with both civilian and military applications. In this context, Ávila Domínguez (2009) emphasizes the significance of customs oversight in a globalized world, particularly in light of the security challenges of the twenty-first century. Beyond facilitating legitimate trade, customs authorities are responsible for implementing measures to prevent the illicit trafficking of firearms and to enhance both national and international security. This highlights the complexity of the challenges involved in regulating the arms trade in Mexico.

MEASURES FOR THE CONTROL OF FIREARMS IN MEXICO

Understanding the challenges of arms trade and control in Mexico requires a careful examination of the relevant concepts, their scope, and their implications. According to Parnell (2009), arms control refers to the set of policies and laws aimed at regulating the manufacture, sale, possession, and use of firearms by civilians. These measures typically include mandatory registration, background checks, and restrictions on specific types of firearms, with the primary goal of preventing illegal access and misuse. Such initiatives function as political instruments that reveal the difficulties the State faces in curbing the illicit arms trade—primarily involving firearms originating in the United States—while managing a growing legal civilian firearms market (Manetto, 2021).

The Arms Trade Treaty decree, signed *ad referendum* by President Enrique Peña Nieto in April 2013, is an international instrument that affirms the commitment and authority of State Parties to implement administrative measures to combat the illicit trafficking of firearms (Decree of 2013). These measures apply to both individuals and legal entities, in accordance with national legislation.¹⁵ Their enforcement is supported by Article 3 of the Reglamento de la Ley Federal de Armas de Fuego y Explosivos (LFAFE, 1972) and Articles 71 and 72 of the Reglamento Interior de la SEDENA (2023).

¹² Unofficial English translation of Agencia Nacional de Aduanas de México.

¹³ Unofficial English translation of Ley de los Impuestos Generales de Importación y Exportación.

¹⁴ The acronym stands for the official name in Spanish: Impuesto al Valor Agregado.

¹⁵ In the case of Mexico, the Ley Federal de Armas de Fuego y Explosivos (LFAFE).

As part of efforts to strengthen arms control, the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs¹⁶ is responsible for ensuring compliance with international treaties aimed at reducing the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons. Meanwhile, the SEDENA requires that, for the registration of newly manufactured firearms and new brands and models, documentation proving their legal importation and origin must be submitted.

At the domestic level, Aguirre Quezada (2020) analyzes firearms buyback programs in Mexico, implemented by the SEDENA in coordination with local governments, with the goal of reducing the number of firearms in circulation and lowering violence. His study highlights that these programs, together with the Dirección General del Registro Federal de Armas de Fuego y Control de Explosivos, are components of a broader strategy that includes legislative reforms to strengthen arms control nationwide. Nevertheless, achieving pacification and fostering a culture of peace require sustained, systematic efforts that promote values and behaviors focused on violence prevention.

From a security and governance perspective, the RAND Corporation (2024) emphasizes that building a culture of peace requires educational programs that promote civic values, mutual respect, and social cohesion. It also underscores the importance of policies that encourage dialogue and mediation as effective mechanisms for conflict resolution. In Mexico, this approach is exemplified by initiatives such as the Sí al Desarme, Sí a la Paz program,¹⁷ through which thousands of firearms have been collected in exchange for incentives (Santiago, 2021).

Pagaza Martínez (2015) emphasizes the need to balance the constitutional right to possess firearms with effective regulation to prevent and penalize their misuse. The author argues that current policies and regulations in Mexico are insufficient to adequately control illicit arms trafficking. Between 2019 and 2022, Mexico imported firearms worth a total of 4.53 billion dollars¹⁸ (SIPRI, 2023), not including the circulation of counterfeit, homemade, or “ghost” guns, which are estimated to number over one million (Hernández Hernández et al., 2023).

The control of firearm possession in Mexico is shaped by a complex tension between citizens’ constitutional rights and the criminal violence fueled by firearm access. As Pagaza Martínez (2015) highlights, this dilemma presents an ongoing challenge for the development of public policies that effectively regulate the legal arms market while safeguarding national security.

METHODOLOGY

This research examines the legal trade of firearms in Mexico from 2021 to 2023. It employs an exploratory, mixed-methods approach that integrates both qualitative and quantitative techniques. While numerous official reports address illicit firearms trafficking, systematic data on the legal commercialization of firearms remain limited. This gap underscores the need for systematic

¹⁶ Unofficial English translation of Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores.

¹⁷ Yes to Disarmament, Yes to Peace (unofficial English translation).

¹⁸ Mainly from the United States, Israel, and Sweden.

empirical examination to better understand the market's dynamics and implications within the Mexican context.

Regarding the qualitative approach, this research relies on documentary analysis, with particular focus on Mexican and U.S. legislation related to the import and export of firearms. Additionally, specialized jurisprudence from both countries is examined to identify the regulatory criteria governing the legal commercialization and possession of firearms. On the quantitative side, the analysis centers on import trends of civilian-use firearms in Mexico from 2021 to 2023. Data were collected on import volumes, the most commonly acquired brands and models, and the revenue generated from import duties and registration permits. This quantitative approach enables an assessment of the legal firearms market's evolution in Mexico, as well as the key factors driving its growth.

Data Sources and Procedure

This research relies on secondary data sources, including government reports, specialized publications, international trade databases, and information obtained through access requests. Specifically, official records from the SEDENA open data portal and the National Transparency Platform are utilized, providing detailed information on the importation and commercialization of firearms in Mexico. From these sources, the study analyzes the legal purchase and sale of firearms through the DCAM, identifying official prices, acquisition procedures, and civilian permits within the context of recreational activities—such as hunting and sport shooting—as well as for protection in homes or businesses. Additionally, data collection through transparency requests submitted to SEDENA has been a central component of this study. Throughout the research process, the inquiries were progressively refined and adjusted to obtain more precise and detailed information, particularly when initial data proved limited or incomplete.

Data Analysis

The data analysis employed an inductive approach, enabling the derivation of general conclusions about the dynamics of Mexico's legal firearms market. This approach facilitated the identification of patterns in import and commercialization trends, as well as in the characteristics and behaviors of end users. Quantitative data were analyzed to evaluate trends in import volumes and consumer preferences for firearm types and models. Simultaneously, the qualitative analysis provided insight into how regulatory differences between Mexico and the United States affect the arms trade and the related public security challenges stemming from these regulatory asymmetries. The following section presents the results derived from these analyses.

RESULTS

Comparative Analysis of the Regulatory Framework for the Possession and Commercialization of Firearms

The regulation and legal trade of firearms for civilian use reveal significant structural differences between Mexico and the United States, rooted in their distinct legal frameworks. In Mexico, firearm possession and carrying are governed exclusively by the LFAFE, which imposes specific restrictions on citizens and centralizes regulatory authority within SEDENA. In contrast, the United States operates under a dual system of federal and state regulations: the Gun Control Act of 1968 and related federal laws establish a broad framework, while individual states enact varying laws that range from stringent controls to more permissive policies (GCA, 1968).

A key distinction lies in the right to possess and carry firearms. In Mexico, this right is recognized in Article 10 of the Constitution but requires explicit authorization from SEDENA to be exercised. Additionally, secondary legislation—especially the LFAFE—limits access to a specific number of firearms with restricted calibers, and carrying firearms is permitted only in exceptional cases (CPEUM, 1917; LFAFE, 1972). Consequently, legal access to firearms in Mexico is significantly constrained.

In contrast, the Second Amendment to the United States Constitution safeguards citizens' right to possess and carry firearms, framing it as a fundamental aspect of individual liberty and self-defense (Kopel, 2014; Constitution of the United States of America, 1789). Nonetheless, regulations vary significantly across states—some require permits and registration for possession and carrying, while others allow purchase and carry with minimal restrictions. The National Rifle Association (NRA) has played a central role in advocating for gun rights and has exerted substantial influence over firearms policy and legislation in the United States (Hernández-Pinzón García, 2010).

Differences in regulation are also evident in the jurisprudence of the United States Supreme Court, particularly in landmark cases such as *District of Columbia v. Heller* (2008) and *McDonald v. Chicago* (2010). In *Heller*, the Court reaffirmed the individual right to possess and carry firearms for personal self-defense, especially within the home. Subsequently, *McDonald* extended this interpretation to the state level, establishing that the right to bear arms is a fundamental aspect of the right to self-defense, protected under the Fourteenth Amendment (Kopel, 2014).

Another key distinction concerns firearm commercialization. In Mexico, the sale is monopolized by the State and can only be conducted through SEDENA's DCAM. Conversely, in the United States, the firearms market is highly decentralized. While federally licensed firearms dealers (FFL) are subject to federal regulations, private sales and gun shows operate under varying state laws, which in some cases permit sales without mandatory background checks. Regarding the right to self-defense, Mexican legislation does not explicitly recognize it as a legal justification for carrying

firearms. In contrast, several U.S. states have enacted laws such as the Stand Your Ground statutes,¹⁹ which permit the use of lethal force in self-defense without a duty to retreat from a confrontation.

Ammunition control and the types of permitted firearms also reveal significant differences. In Mexico, ammunition purchases are strictly regulated, with citizens allowed to acquire only specific calibers. Additionally, possession of high-powered firearms—such as assault rifles and automatic firearms—is prohibited for civilians and reserved exclusively for the armed forces. In contrast, while federal law imposes some restrictions on automatic firearms in the United States, many states allow citizens relatively easy access to high-powered semi-automatic rifles.

Table 1 summarizes the key differences between Mexico and the United States, illustrating how their regulatory frameworks reflect distinct historical, political, and cultural contexts. Mexico emphasizes centralized state control aimed at limiting the proliferation of firearms, whereas the United States adopts a decentralized approach that provides greater flexibility in firearm access and commercialization.

Table 1. Comparison of the Legal and Regulatory Frameworks for Firearms in Mexico and the United States

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Mexico (LFAFE)</i>	<i>United States (Federal law + State laws)</i>
Legal framework	Single law: Ley Federal de Armas de Fuego y Explosivo (LFAFE).	Federal law Gun Control Act of 1968 and others. Each state has its own regulations.
Regulatory authority	Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional (SEDENA).	Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and state governments.
Possession permit	Issued by SEDENA and limited to certain firearms allowed for civilians.	Not required at the federal level, but some states require licenses.
Carry permit	Only for exceptional cases, with strict requirements.	Varies by state: some allow concealed or open carry with permits.
Firearms registration	Mandatory for all permitted firearms.	Not mandatory at the federal level; some states require registration.
Sale and purchase	Only through the Dirección de Comercialización de Armamento y Municiones (DCAM) of SEDENA.	Private sales allowed in many states; federal control applies to licensed dealers (FFL).
Purchase restrictions	Civilians may buy permitted firearms after prior screening: mental health checks; drug tests; no criminal record; honest means of living; medical certificate, among others.	Federal restrictions based on criminal history, age, and mental health.

(continues)

¹⁹ The Stand Your Ground doctrine refers to the right of citizens to use lethal force in defense against an imminent threat, both inside and outside their homes. It is important to note that this doctrine has a dual aspect, as it is sometimes invoked by perpetrators of homicide as a legal justification when claiming an imminent threat.

(continuation)

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Mexico (LFAFE)</i>	<i>United States (Federal law + State laws)</i>
Firearms limit	For home protection: one pistol or revolver per person residing in the household. For activities such as hunting and sport shooting: up to 10 long and/or short firearms.	No federal limit; some states impose restrictions.
Self-defense	Not an explicit right; self-defense must be proven legally.	The Second Amendment protects the right to bear arms; doctrines such as the Stand Your Ground Law in some states expand self-defense rights.
Prohibited firearms	Firearms exclusively for military use: high-caliber firearms, automatic firearms, and certain platforms.	Some restrictions on automatic firearms, but semiautomatic firearms are widely accessible in several states.
Ammunition control	Strict and limited regulation, both in quantity and for certain calibers.	Restrictions in some states; in others, no specific control.

Source: Own elaboration based on the regulatory frameworks of Mexico and the United States (Constitution of the United States of America, 1789; GCA, 1968; LFAFE, 1972).

The geographic proximity between Mexico and the United States, coupled with regulatory asymmetries in the importation, sale, and possession of firearms, has contributed to a sustained flow of both legal and illegal firearms into Mexico. This dynamic not only exacerbates insecurity but also enhances the operational capabilities of organized crime (Weigend Vargas & Villarreal González, 2015). Notably, these regulatory discrepancies have enabled the growth of grey markets²⁰ that supply criminal groups involved in high-impact crimes, including intentional homicides (Hernández & Orozco Reynoso, 2021).

It is important to underscore the historical and contextual differences that have shaped gun laws in Mexico and the United States. Kopel (2014) notes that both countries underwent significant shifts in their gun control policies following the civil unrest of the 1960s and 1970s, resulting in stricter restrictions in Mexico. These developments have fueled ongoing debates about finding the right balance between public safety and individual rights.

Kopel (2014) also examines reform proposals in the United States aimed at adopting certain elements of Mexico's more restrictive gun legislation. This viewpoint has garnered support from gun control advocates within the U.S. as well as political leaders in Mexico. Notably, former Presidents Barack Obama and Felipe Calderón have both endorsed efforts to align U.S. firearm laws more closely with Mexico's regulations, while respecting the constitutional protections of the Second Amendment (Kopel, 2014).

²⁰ Grey markets are a "phenomena that cannot be clearly assigned to one specific category on the dimensions legal/illegal and legitimate/illegitimate. This can be due to a number of reasons. For one thing, as already underlined, there are gaps in legal regulation, where actions can be judged only by the legitimacy accorded to them, or more generally by their appropriateness. In regulated areas, legal norms are often subject to interpretation" (Beckert & Dewey, 2017, p. 45).

The interaction between U.S. public policies and security in Mexico is a central focus in the study of arms trafficking. Hernández Hernández et al. (2023) emphasize how regulatory weaknesses or the absence of stricter controls in the United States directly impact patterns of violence in Mexico. They highlight that lax U.S. firearm regulations facilitate the flow and distribution of unmonitored firearms, thereby complicating the enforcement of security measures along Mexico's northern border. Their analysis reveals a strong correlation between U.S. gun control policies and violence levels in Mexico, underscoring the urgent need to enhance binational cooperation on this issue.

In the context of international trade in civilian firearms, it is crucial to consider the bilateral security cooperation frameworks between Mexico and the United States (Velázquez & Schiavon, 2009). Given the high volume of firearms trafficked from the United States into Mexico, gun control policy should be based on two main pillars. The first is a comprehensive, long-term national strategy for gun control. The second involves enhanced cooperation with the United States, focusing on responsible trade practices, prevention of illegal sales, and the mandatory implementation of traceability systems from the point of assembly.

Historically, bilateral cooperation initiatives have included efforts such as the *Iniciativa Mérida* and the *Entendimiento Bicentenario*. The *Iniciativa Mérida*, approved in 2008, marked a joint commitment to combating drug trafficking and organized crime—issues closely linked to the illicit arms trade. This agreement provided Mexico with technical assistance, intelligence sharing, and funding aimed at reforming the Criminal Justice System (*Embajada y Consulados de Estados Unidos en México*, 2021). Although primarily focused on counter-narcotics efforts, it also incorporated measures to strengthen the interdiction of firearms and ammunition illegally entering Mexico (Velázquez & Schiavon, 2009).

In 2021, the *Entendimiento Bicentenario* replaced the *Iniciativa Mérida*, introducing a broader strategy that extends beyond security to include public health and the development of safe and resilient communities. This renewed approach seeks to address the structural drivers of violence and crime through initiatives focused on addiction prevention, institutional strengthening in the areas of security and justice, and the fight against the illegal trafficking of firearms (*Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores*, 2021). Launched during the commemoration of 200 years of diplomatic relations between Mexico and the United States, this bilateral agreement reflects a joint commitment to fostering a more balanced partnership based on mutual respect and national sovereignty.

Legislative discrepancies between Mexico and the United States have significantly influenced firearm accessibility and, consequently, the prevalence of lethal violence in Mexico (Weigend Vargas & Villarreal González, 2015). In particular, the trafficking of firearms from the United States presents a major challenge to public safety and governance. As Pérez Canchola (2008) observes, Mexican authorities continue to contend with a steady influx of illegal firearms—many of them high-caliber firearms frequently used in violent crimes. This scenario underscores the complexity of arms trafficking and its direct link to gun violence and the operations of organized crime in Mexico.

According to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF, 2022), firearm exports to Mexico increased by 20% between 2020 and 2022. Over this period, Mexico imported a

total of 3 332 000 firearms for both military and civilian purposes—an average of approximately 1 111 000 firearms per year. This volume highlights not only the magnitude of the legal arms trade between the two countries but also the pressing need to strengthen oversight mechanisms that can prevent the diversion of firearms into illicit markets.

Civilian Firearm Sales in Mexico

As shown in Table 2, sales of civilian-use firearms through the DCAM exhibited an upward trend from 2021 to 2023. Notably, sales of .380 caliber pistols increased by approximately 47% during this period, making them one of the most popular choices for home defense. Similarly, sales of 12-gauge shotguns saw a significant rise, growing from 1 711 units in 2022 to 2 224 units in 2023. This increased demand likely reflects the versatility of these firearms, which are commonly used for both personal protection and recreational activities such as sport shooting and hunting.

Table 2. Civilian Firearm Sales Through DCAM-Mexico City, 2021-2023

<i>Firearms and Caliber</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>	<i>2023</i>
.380 pistol	3 128	2 782	4 589
.22 LR pistol	712	415	952
.22 LR revolver	32	39	85
.38 SPL revolver	93	158	70
.22 LR rifle	1 235	999	1 220
.223 rifle	150	351	390
.22-250 REM rifle	5	18	1
.243 WIN rifle	32	10	59
.270 WIN rifle	28	20	72
.30-06 rifle	64	22	57
.300 WIN rifle	24	20	18
.308 WIN rifle	138	177	230
6.5 rifle	2	5	7
7 mm REM rifle	5	11	5
.12 gauge shotgun	1 751	1 711	2 224
.20 gauge shotgun	190	115	197
.410 bore shotgun	1	5	1
.28 gauge shotgun	0	1	0
.16 gauge shotgun	0	0	13
<i>Total</i>	<i>7 590</i>	<i>6 859</i>	<i>10 190</i>

Source: Own elaboration based on data from SEDENA (2024a) obtained through information access requests.

An upward trend was also observed in the number of firearm acquisition requests during the study period (see Table 2). Notably, 2023 experienced a significant increase in approved license applications, accompanied by a decrease in denied requests. Specifically, denied applications fell from 2 818 in 2021 to 980 in 2023, while the approval rate rose to 70% compared to 2021. However, these figures should be interpreted with caution, as SEDENA’s data indicate that acquisition requests may pertain to firearms, ammunition, or both (see Table 3).

Table 3. Requests for Firearm Acquisition Permits at DCAM, 2021-2023

<i>Requests</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>	<i>2023</i>
Received	7 499	7 240	12 706
Authorized	4 681	6 655	14 330
Not Authorized	2 818	585	980

Source: Own elaboration based on data from SEDENA (2024a) obtained through information access requests.

Another relevant data point provided by official sources is the total expenditure on arms imports, reported in both dollars (USD) and euros (EUR). As shown in Table 4, there was a significant increase between 2021 and 2023, with investment allocated by DCAM for arms imports nearly tripling in 2023 compared to 2021. This reflects a clear upward trend in the acquisition of firearms and ammunition. However, it is important to note that official sources do not disaggregate these amounts by firearm caliber, which limits a more detailed analysis of the import composition. Consequently, these data should be interpreted with caution, acknowledging the existing gaps in information.

Table 4. Total Amount in Dollars and Euros for the Importation of Firearms for Civilian use at DCAM, 2021-2023

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Amount (USD)</i>	<i>Total Amount (EUR)</i>
2021	4 709 864.06	1 893 013.92
2022	5 294 721.12	4 597 941
2023	4 732 984.40	11 705 024.28

Source: Own elaboration based on data from SEDENA (2023a) obtained through information access requests.

Among the datasets provided by official sources, Table 5 displays the total value of import contracts for firearms between 2019 and 2023, categorized by firearm brand. This information is valuable for understanding the evolution of arms imports in Mexico. During this period, import contracts were denominated in three main currencies: U.S. dollars, euros, and Mexican pesos (MXN). Notably, 2019—the year preceding the COVID-19 pandemic—recorded the highest volume of available data in this category.

Table 5. Firearms Import Contracts by Brand, 2019-2023

Brand	Origin	Currency	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Anschutz	Germany	EUR	79 040	N/A	N/A	N/A	729 660
Blaser	Germany	USD	44 501.63	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Bersa	Argentina	USD	3 047 500	N/A	N/A	422 000	N/A
Grand Power	Slovakia	EUR	63 083	117 887.50	225 750	89 580	225 750
Browning	United States	USD/EUR	5 873 502	N/A	1 374 060	1 466 175	7 470 275
Diamondback	United States	USD	1 917 000	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Winchester	United States	USD	1 143 900	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mossberg	United States	USD	704 350	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tippmann Arms	United States	USD	247125	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Colt	United States	USD	98 850	34 500	N/A	N/A	N/A
Kriss	United States	USD	118 810	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Savage Arms	United States	USD	14 916.65	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Pietro Beretta	Italy	EUR	6 332 357.04	741 720	351 865	995 685	2 563 003.28
Tanfoglio	Italy	USD	7 361 800	N/A	N/A	318 500	N/A
Charles Daly	Turkey	USD	275 284	N/A	N/A	196 395	N/A
Fabarm	Italy	USD	2 155 295	N/A	N/A	N/A	300 350
Chiappa	Italy	EUR	945 192.20	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Perazzi	Italy	USD	36 402.69	N/A	6 645.60	N/A	N/A
Breda	Italy	EUR	40 265.88	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mendoza	Mexico	MXN	5 646 815.04	2 655 561.90	707 600	575 174.40	17 520 693.20
Trejo	Mexico	MXN	1 505 123.20	91 992.06	604 313.60	575 174.40	660 469.20
Glock	Panama	USD	870 000	N/A	652 500	N/A	N/A
Cezka Zbrojovka	Czech Republic	USD	1 462 730	229 000	281 150	1 319 475	3 812 188
Armsan Silah	Turkey	USD	732 200	91 760	342 030	203 555	114 670
Hatsan	Turkey	USD	480 230	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Armed	Turkey	USD	81 670	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: Own elaboration based on data from SEDENA (2024d) obtained through information access requests.

As shown in Table 5, Mexico's largest suppliers of civilian-use firearms are the United States and Italy. Several firearm brands available in the country have been identified, including Grand Power (U.S.), Pietro Beretta (Italy), Mendoza (Mexico), Trejo (Mexico), Česká Zbrojovka (Czech Republic), and Armsan Silah (Turkey). Except for Pietro Beretta, all these brands experienced a significant increase in import values between 2019 and 2023. Table 5 below provides detailed figures by manufacturer and import period.

Regarding the revenue generated from temporary permits for the importation of firearms intended for hunting and competitive activities, Table 6 shows that between 2019 and 2023, a total of 40 408 997 MXN was collected from permits related to sport hunting. During the same period, revenue from permits for shooting competitions amounted to 14 820 691 MXN. These

figures highlight the significance of these activities within Mexico’s legal firearms market and their contribution to state revenue.

Table 6. Total Value of Firearms Import Permits for Hunting and Sporting Purposes (MXN), 2019-2023

<i>Year</i>	<i>Hunting purposes</i>		<i>Competition purposes</i>	
	<i>Permits</i>	<i>Revenue</i>	<i>Permits</i>	<i>Revenue</i>
2019	2 732	2 772 980	1 622	1 656 330
2020	1 365	1 426 425	1 321	1 380 445
2021	3 601	3 889 080	1 053	1 137 240
2022	4 731	15 328 440	1 720	5 572 800
2023	4 866	16 992 072	1 453	5 073 876
<i>Total</i>	<i>17 295</i>	<i>40 408 997</i>	<i>7 169</i>	<i>14 820 691</i>

Source: Own elaboration based on data from SEDENA (2024b) obtained through information access requests.

With regard to arms control, information was requested on the existence and outcomes of firearms exchange programs in Mexico. However, due to limited data availability, only figures for the year 2022 were provided. Despite this limitation the data offer valuable insight into the scale of such initiatives. In 2022, the exchange program collected a total of 6 168 firearms—mostly handguns. While this figure may appear significant at first glance, it represents only a small fraction of the total number of firearms in circulation. Given that an estimated 200 000 firearms enter Mexico illegally each year, alongside those acquired through legal channels, the overall impact of these exchange programs remains limited in curbing the volume of firearms in the country.

According to data from SEDENA, the states with the highest levels of citizen participation in the firearms exchange program were the State of Mexico and Mexico City (see Table 7). In contrast, most other states recorded minimal participation, with the number of firearms collected generally not exceeding one hundred. In states such as Aguascalientes, Colima, and Quintana Roo, fewer than ten firearms were surrendered over the entire year. These figures suggest that, while firearms exchange programs serve as a voluntary disarmament strategy, their overall impact on reducing the number of firearms in circulation, both legal and illegal, remains limited. Table 7 presents the distribution of firearms exchanged by state.

Table 7. Firearms Exchanged in 2022

<i>State</i>	<i>Firearms</i>		
	<i>Handguns</i>	<i>Long guns</i>	<i>Total</i>
Aguascalientes	0	1	1
Baja California	12	13	25
Baja California Sur	2	0	2
Ciudad de México	764	256	1 020
Coahuila	118	83	201
Colima	1	2	3
Chiapas	78	106	184
Chihuahua	144	59	203
Durango	50	16	66
Guanajuato	87	44	131
Guerrero	31	24	55
Hidalgo	5	0	5
Jalisco	116	58	174
Estado de México	2 325	197	2 522
Michoacán	20	19	39
Morelos	70	37	107
Nuevo León	121	53	174
Oaxaca	13	2	15
Puebla	16	4	20
Querétaro	15	11	26
Quintana Roo	2	3	5
San Luis Potosí	80	29	109
Sinaloa	325	129	454
Sonora	21	9	30
Tabasco	9	6	15
Tamaulipas	113	31	144
Tlaxcala	96	55	151
Veracruz	146	48	194
Zacatecas	61	32	93
<i>National</i>	<i>4 841</i>	<i>1 327</i>	<i>6 168</i>

Source: Own elaboration based on data obtained from SEDENA (2023b, 2024g) through information access requests.

CONCLUSIONS

Mexico is currently facing a crisis of armed violence, which has likely led many citizens to seek authorized means of personal protection. As arms importation and sales continue to rise, there is a growing need to strengthen market control and regulatory oversight. Although Mexico's firearms legislation, as established in the LFAFE, is restrictive, the country's geographic proximity to the United States, where gun laws are generally more permissive, has facilitated both legal trade and illicit trafficking of firearms.

In line with the research question posed at the beginning of this article, the legal firearms trade in Mexico was analyzed in terms of its current landscape and defining characteristics. The findings confirm the existence of a significant civilian market for firearms, used both for recreational purposes and self-defense. Notably, there has been a substantial increase in firearm commercialization and demand in recent years. While sales figures were already high in 2019, they have since tripled and diversified following the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching new peaks by 2023. This growth is reflected in the increased importation of .380 caliber pistols and 12-gauge shotguns, as well as the higher approval rate of acquisition requests by SEDENA. The results indicate that Mexico's legal firearms market is dynamic, diverse, and substantial in volume. Its commercial structure is divided into two main sectors: 1) national, featuring manufacturers such as Mendoza and Trejo, and 2) international, with imports primarily from the United States, Italy, Germany, and the Czech Republic.

Economically, firearm import volumes reach multimillion-dollar levels, while gun buyback programs have had a very limited impact. Consequently, Mexico appears to lack a comprehensive and articulated state policy on arms control, which is reflected in the persistently high rates of intentional homicides involving firearms. Additionally, regulatory discrepancies with the United States further complicate the issue. Whereas the U.S. Second Amendment guarantees the right to possess and carry firearms, with regulations varying by state, Mexico enforces much stricter controls, restricting citizens to low-caliber firearms while reserving high-powered firearms exclusively for security forces.

A key factor in this dynamic is access to information on firearm transactions. In the United States, security and justice authorities maintain detailed and accessible databases, which facilitate effective investigations. In contrast, Mexico's lack of transparency in managing firearms data hampers efforts to regulate the market. This regulatory asymmetry has enabled the growth of both legal and illicit firearms markets in Mexico, largely fueled by imports from the United States. Numerous studies have shown that this dynamic has contributed to the expansion of gray markets, which undermine public security and complicate efforts to control illegal trafficking (Aguirre Quezada, 2020). As a result, are frequently identified in trafficking investigations, where they end up in the hands of criminal organizations. This flow of firearms is therefore a significant driver of armed violence in the country.

SEDENA plays a central role in regulating Mexico's arms market. Through the DCAM, the agency oversees the importation and sale of firearms and processes acquisition requests for civilian

use. However, the findings reveal that despite an increase in approved requests, arms exchange programs remain insufficient, underscoring structural weaknesses in arms control policy. The lack of a comprehensive and effective state policy in this area represents a critical gap that, if left unaddressed, will make it difficult to improve the current security crisis. The following section offers policy recommendations to strengthen arms control in Mexico.

1) Strengthening Regulatory Control

It is essential to establish a coordinated interinstitutional system led by SEDENA, alongside other relevant authorities, to enforce stricter oversight of the importation, distribution, and possession of firearms in Mexico. This system should guarantee rigorous regulation of the legal arms trade and the creation of a comprehensive national database of legally acquired firearms. Such a database must be accessible to security and justice agencies to support criminal investigations, enhance firearm traceability, and identify potential diversions to the illicit market.

2) Strengthening International Cooperation

To combat the illicit trafficking of firearms, it is crucial to reinforce bilateral cooperation with the United States by implementing targeted agreements that enhance controls at border crossings and establish efficient mechanisms for exchanging information on firearm transactions. The creation of a dedicated binational committee focused exclusively on monitoring firearm flows and investigating trafficking networks is recommended to ensure closer coordination between the security agencies of both countries. Additionally, strengthening the capacity to track and control firearms through the development of a comprehensive traceability system, from assembly to the end user, is essential.

3) Strengthening Voluntary Disarmament Programs

Disarmament programs should be redesigned to increase their effectiveness by offering attractive incentives that encourage the voluntary surrender of firearms. Such incentives could include financial compensation, educational opportunities, access to health services, and social reintegration initiatives. Additionally, these programs must expand their outreach efforts to ensure that the public views them as safe and viable options. Implementing awareness campaigns is essential to foster social legitimacy for disarmament, alleviating fears of retaliation or risks linked to surrendering firearms.

4) Public Awareness on Responsible Firearm Handling

It is crucial to develop awareness campaigns focused on the responsible handling of firearms, emphasizing the risks associated with both legal and illegal possession. These campaigns should actively engage communities, local leaders, educational institutions, and religious organizations to foster a culture of peace and encourage adherence to public safety regulations. Through workshops, forums, and informational materials, such efforts can help reduce accidental homicides

and improve public understanding of the harmful consequences of widespread firearm proliferation among civilians.

*5) Strengthening Academic Engagement
in Arms Policy Design*

Academic research should play a more prominent role in the design and oversight of arms control policies. It is recommended that universities and research centers be actively engaged in conducting studies on the importation, sale, and possession of firearms in Mexico. Developing reliable databases and producing specialized analyses would provide authorities with evidence-based information to improve regulation of the arms market. Furthermore, academia can offer strategic guidance on security issues, supporting a balanced approach that integrates public policy implementation with human rights protections and violence reduction efforts.

Implementing these recommendations would enhance the regulation of Mexico's arms market, reduce the illegal circulation of firearms, and strengthen the State's capacity to address public security challenges. Achieving a safer environment requires a comprehensive strategy that incorporates effective regulation, international cooperation, disarmament programs, and social awareness, ensuring that arms control policies are both functional and sustainable over the long term.

Translation: Erika Morales.

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