

## **Small Arms Survey reveals: More than one billion firearms in the world**

GENEVA—There are more than one billion firearms in the world, the vast majority of which are in civilian hands, according to new research.

The Small Arms Survey estimates that of the one billion firearms in global circulation as of 2017, 857 million (85 per cent) are in civilian hands, 133 million (13 per cent) are in military arsenals, and 23 million (2 per cent) are owned by law enforcement agencies. The new studies suggest that the global stockpile has increased over the past decade, largely due to civilian holdings, which grew from 650 million in 2006 to 857 million in 2017.

### **Four out of ten firearms are held by US civilians**

Of the 857 million civilian-held firearms estimated in 2017, 393 million are in the United States—more than those held by civilians in the other top 25 countries combined. Even after adjusting for population, it is clear that the United States far outnumbers other countries. The United States has 4% of the world's population, but its civilians hold almost 40% of the world's firearms.

'With acquisition averaging around 14 million guns annually during the last five years, growth of civilian holdings in the United States contributes disproportionately to the increase of the global firearms stockpile,' said author and Small Arms Survey senior consultant Aaron Karp, who is also a senior lecturer at Old Dominion University.

### **A diverse civilian stockpile**

Civilian firearm ownership rates vary greatly across the world, with about 121 firearms for every 100 residents in the United States, 53 in Yemen, 39 in Montenegro and Serbia alike, and 35 in Canada and Uruguay, respectively. At the other end of the spectrum, residents in countries such as Indonesia and Japan hold less than one firearm per 100 people.

The types of firearms held by civilians differ considerably across settings. They can include improvised craft weapons, factory-made handguns, rifles, shotguns, and in some countries even machine guns. Civilian holdings comprise not only weapons held by individuals but also those possessed by private security firms, non-state armed groups, and gangs. While these groups hold a small fraction of the civilian total, their weapons can be disproportionately used in armed violence.

### **The opacity of state holdings**

Compared to 2007, more detailed information is available on civilian holdings. The Small Arms Survey does not, however, see the same level of transparency for armed forces and law enforcement agencies. While civilian firearms registration data is available for 133 countries and territories, only 28 countries have released information on their military stockpiles and 28 did so regarding their law enforcement firearms holdings, with the rest based on estimates.

'We have fine-tuned our methodology and are more conservative with our estimates on the military and law enforcement holdings than in 2007. Nevertheless, governments' lack of transparency regarding their procurement, stockpiles, and transfers of small arms makes this exercise a most challenging undertaking. Illicit firearms holdings outside of government control largely remain poorly documented. More work is also needed to better understand illicit proliferation, incidences of armed violence, and people's perceptions of their security,' noted Eric Berman, Director, Small Arms Survey.

**The data is under embargo until 18 June, 12pm New York time (6pm, Geneva time).**

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**Note for editors:**

The Small Arms Survey provides expertise on all aspects of small arms and armed violence. A global centre of excellence and a project of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, the Small Arms Survey generates evidence-based, impartial, and policy-relevant knowledge and analysis on small arms and armed violence issues for governments, policy-makers, researchers, and civil society.

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