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Firearms Trafficking to Chicago: Connections and Implications

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FIREARMS TRAFFICKING TO CHICAGO: CONNECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

by

Elizabeth Jamell Benner

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College and the Center for Intelligence and Security Studies.

Oxford, Mississippi

May 2018

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ABSTRACT

The initial purpose of this study was to determine which counties contributed the most to the firearms trafficking route between Mississippi and Chicago, Illinois, and to understand which sociodemographic features may differentiate those counties from their lesser-trafficking counterparts. In order to address any firearms trafficking route, law enforcement agencies must understand the underlying causes and enabling factors. Initial studies of Mississippi counties showed trends of median household income, poverty, and racial disparities. These trends were compared with high-trafficking counties in Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin in order to see if sociodemographic factors associated with firearms trafficking are state-specific or may be reflected across the country. While population size did not appear to be connected to firearms trafficking in Mississippi, the three northern states’ counties of interest appeared to be located around cities, so population was considered for each of the four states.

The results of this study identify high-trafficking counties of interest in Mississippi, Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin and indicate that (a) high poverty rates appear to be associated with firearms trafficking in each of the four states (b) Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin counties of interest are centrally located around urban areas, (c) there appears to be a trend of high racial disparity with high firearms trafficking only in Mississippi; and (d) high median household income appears to be connected in Wisconsin, with low median household income likely connected in Mississippi, and no obvious trends in Illinois and Indiana.
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- Dr. Linda Keena, Interim Chair and Associate Professor of Criminal Justice
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

In 2015 the Chicago Police Department traced the original point of retail sale of 50,000 firearms recovered in connection to crime (crime guns) in Chicago, Illinois from 2001-2012 and found that about half came from outside the state. Of those originally purchased in other states, 7,747 came from Indiana, 4,296 from Mississippi, and 1,647 from Wisconsin (Quealy & Wallace, 2013). Geographically, Indiana and Wisconsin make sense as logical sources for high numbers of Chicago crime guns. However, Chicago Police Department’s assessment revealed an illicit trade route on which firearms are trafficked north from the Mississippi Delta where the state gun laws are relatively lax to Chicago, Illinois where gun sales are illegal (Municipal Code of Chicago, Ill. §4-144-710(a)(1)) and state firearms regulations are strict relative to the other states in this study (Mayors Against Illegal Guns, 2010; supplemented by updates Ill. Code. Ann. §430 ILCS 66/15 (a) and Ill. Code. Ann. §720 ILCS 5/24-4 (a)).

As noted above, approximately 48% of these crime guns recovered in Chicago during the 2001-2012 timeframe were traced to initial retail purchase outside of Illinois, while Chicago’s 2017 Gun Trace Report, based on data from 2013-2016, showed that nearly 60% came from outside the state (City of Chicago, 2017; Quealy & Wallace, 2013). This increase in the proportion of out-of-state firearms used in Chicago suggests a rise in interstate firearms trafficking to the city. Further, the Gun Trace Report revealed that approximately 30% of recovered firearms had time to crime, the time between initial retail purchase and use in a crime, of less than three years, a strong indicator of having
been trafficked, or diverted from legal commerce to the illegal market (City of Chicago, 2017).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Before change can be affected to stem the flow of illegal guns in America, the root causes and enabling factors must be uncovered and understood. According to 2012 data, Mississippi ranked third in states with the top net export of illegal firearms, while Illinois ranked second in top net import states (Kahane, 2012). Mississippi supplies roughly one-fifth of out-of-state crime guns to Chicago, which consistently maintains one of the highest homicide rates in the US (Grawert & Cullen, 2017; Mirabile, 2017). Thus, it is of immense importance to understand and work to eradicate this firearms trafficking route from Mississippi to Chicago, Illinois.

Further, the Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin counties surrounding Chicago’s Cook County must be analyzed to determine if those counties experience similar trends in sociodemographic factors as Mississippi in relation to firearms trafficking to Chicago. If they are, then expansion of mitigating tactics against firearms trafficking which work in one region may help in others. However, if the sociodemographic factors trends relevant to firearms trafficking are different in Mississippi than in Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin, it is important to understand (a) which factors are different, and (b) why they might be different in order reduce firearms trafficking to Chicago, Illinois.
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Initial research into this trafficking route sought to examine the gun trade from Mississippi, on a county level, to illustrate and analyze the trends affecting proclivity for firearms trafficking by addressing the following questions:

1. Did certain areas of Mississippi contribute more recovered crime guns to Chicago, Illinois than others during the 2001-2012-time frame?

2. What differentiates the counties with high counts of recovered guns from those with much smaller numbers?

3. What is the current Mississippi legislation on firearms? Does this legislation enable or restrict firearms trafficking from Mississippi to Chicago, Illinois?

Based on the study’s initial findings showing that race, poverty, and median household income appear to be linked with firearms trafficking out of Mississippi to Chicago, Illinois, this study was expanded to evaluate whether these trends are reflected in the other three largest source states of Chicago crime guns, Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin. While population density did not seem to be connected to gun trafficking from Mississippi, the counties of interest in the other three states appeared to be congregated around high-population areas; therefore, population was analyzed for all four states.

Further, based on the preliminary research on firearms regulation legislation in Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin as compared with Mississippi, differences among state legislation did not appear to be connected and were omitted from this study.
Mississippi and Illinois represent two nearly distant ends of the firearms regulation spectrum, with Indiana and Wisconsin falling somewhere in between. Due to the vast differences in firearms possession, purchase, registration, and other regulations among the states, it was determined that this likely had little to do with firearms trafficking from the four states of interest to Chicago, Illinois.

The following research questions guided the second portion of this study and will also be evaluated in this paper:

1. Are findings of sociodemographic trends from Mississippi consistent with the other three top source states of illegal firearms to Chicago – Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin?

2. What are the implications if the same factors are or are not seen to be linked with high rates of firearms trafficking to Chicago in the other states?

The initial research for this study applied a dataset with counts of crime guns recovered in Chicago, Illinois for each county in America to census data reflecting Mississippi demographics from the 2000 and 2010 U.S. Census (Chicago Trafficking Database provided by K. Quealy, September 1, 2017). This research was conducted under the assumption that trace data on recovered crime guns produces a picture closely resembling that of illegal gun movement generally. The secondary portion of this research applied the Chicago crime gun recovery dataset to the same demographics data points used in Mississippi for Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin from the 2000 and 2010 Census.
Demographics, crime, and poverty rates in the Mississippi Delta, as well as firearms tracing and trafficking trends will be assessed in the literature review. Firearms trafficking research discussed will include information on how trafficking is facilitated and the steps in which it occurs, legislation enabling and preventing trafficking, current Mississippi firearms laws, and the gun tracing process.

LIMITATIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Several limitations to this study exist. First, only four states – Mississippi, Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin – are included in this research as an analysis of all 50 states was not feasible within the time allotted, or relevant given the scope of the particular gun trafficking route. Additionally, the lack of a yearly county-level recovery count or a more recent aggregate count is highly limiting to understanding the yearly patterns and recent trends.

A lack of state and local coordination and/or funding of law enforcement restricted the supplemental data available in terms of county-level data on gang activity and membership in all four researched states. After reaching out to the FBI, ATF, and the National Gang Center, among other state-level resources, gang-related directions of this study were abandoned. Future research might focus on this aspect of firearms trafficking as gang activity is important to understanding underlying causes or catalysts for certain trafficking routes.

The Tiahrt Amendments are the largest limiting factor encountered during this study as they ban the distribution of firearms trace data for use by researchers, cities, litigants, and members of the public, and limit the access and use by state and local law
enforcement. The amendments additionally prohibit the required submission of gun dealer inventories and multiple sales reports to law enforcement. Under the Tiahrt Amendments, the aggregate data released yearly by the ATF is a state-wide count of crime gun recoveries traced to each other state, omitting the county or municipality from which the crime gun was recovered or traced (Giffords Law Center, n.d.; USDOJ ATF, 2007). Consequently, the significance of these amendments lies in the effective impossibility of independent analysis of firearms trafficking trends at any level smaller than state-to-state.

The study rests on the assumption that the aggregate county-level recovery counts obtained from The New York Times are accurate and reflective of the actual Chicago-bound firearms trafficking trends during the 2001-2012 timeframe. This cannot be fully corroborated as the Chicago Police Department denies ever possessing or releasing the dataset in question, likely due to the requirements of the Tiahrt Amendment regarding the release of that data (L. Karr, personal communications, August 31, 2017). However, general trends in the data are reflected in state-level recovery data published annually by the ATF.

**DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS**

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF): a federal law enforcement agency under the Department of Justice that protects the public from crimes involving firearms, explosives, arson, and diversion of alcohol and tobacco products; regulates lawful commerce in firearms and explosives; provides worldwide support to law enforcement and industry partners (USDOJ ATF, n.d.).
Crime Gun: any firearm used in a crime or suspected to have been used in a crime (USDOJ ATF, 2012).

Federal Firearms Licensee (FFL): an individual or company licensed by the ATF to engage in the manufacture, import, transport, or sale of firearms and ammunition in the United States; a federally license firearm dealer under 18 U.S.C. 923.

Firearms Trace: the systematic tracking, using records required to be kept by FFLs, of the movement of a firearm recovered by law enforcement officials, beginning with its importation into or manufacture in the U.S. through the distribution chain of FFLs to the point of first retail sale (USDOJ ATF, 2012).

Firearms Trafficking: the diversion of guns from lawful commerce to the illegal market (Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence [Prevent Gun Violence], 2016).


Straw Purchase: a transaction in which an individual (the straw purchaser) either buys a firearm on behalf of a specific person (the actual buyer), or with the intent to resell the firearm at a later time for a profit; straw purchases circumvent the paperwork necessary to purchase a firearm from a federally licensed firearm dealer (Prevent Gun Violence, 2016).
Time to Crime (TTC): the time elapsed between the initial retail purchase of the gun and its recovery at a crime scene; nationally, 22.6% of crime guns have a short TTC (less than 2 years) and the national average TTC is 10.8 years (Knight, 2011; Mayors Against Illegal Guns, 2010).

Trace Data: for the purpose of this paper, the results from the firearms tracing process to include source and destination states, point of first retail purchase, and time to crime for a particular firearm; also refers to the aggregate results of comprehensive tracing (USDOJ ATF, 2012).

Wisconsin High Trafficking Counties/Counties of Interest: Dane, Kenosha, Milwaukee, and Racine.

SUMMARY

The current study initially focused on Mississippi as a major source for trafficked firearms to Chicago, Illinois. Based on preliminary findings, the scope was expanded to Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin as those are the three other largest sources of illicit Chicago crime guns. Demographic variables for all Mississippi, Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin counties were evaluated and compared to crime gun trace recoveries to each in an effort to understand factors and trends influencing firearms trafficking to Chicago, Illinois. While the ATF aims for comprehensive crime gun tracing, a lack of resources and manpower stands in the way of fully analyzing and creating actionable intelligence based on firearms trace data as it relates to trafficking.

Chapter two consists of a review of literature relevant to firearms tracing, trafficking, and relevant legislation. Chapter three explains the design of the study,
methods of data collection and analysis, and presents the research questions guiding the study. Chapter four covers the organization of data analysis and the analysis itself. Chapter five explores the conclusions of the study, their implications, and further research recommendations.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

Studying firearms trafficking in the United States at a local level is complicated due to federal regulations on what kinds of data may be released to the public surrounding traces and trends (Giffords Law Center, n.d.; USDOJ ATF, 2007). Most of the literature including quantitative data on firearms trafficking referenced in this study comes from government sources. Referenced literature on legislative impacts on firearms trafficking and other theoretical applications was primarily retrieved from private organizations.

This study was guided by literature on firearms trafficking and how it occurs, firearms tracing and the implications of such, legislation relevant to firearms trafficking at the federal and Mississippi state levels and impacts of sociodemographics and education on criminality.

FIREARMS TRAFFICKING

Firearms trafficking is the illicit diversion of firearms from an otherwise legal market to an illegal market, often via straw purchases, non-compliance with federal law by federal firearms licensees (FFLs), or theft. According to Kahane (2012), states with the top net export of illegal firearms within the United States in 2009 were Virginia (1,573), Indiana (1,351), and Mississippi (1,199). The states with the top net import of illegal firearms were New York (3,090), Illinois (2,799), and California (2,690).
How Trafficking Occurs

Firearms trafficking begins when firearms in legal commerce are transferred to an illegal market via theft, illegal transactions, or loopholes in legislation (Kahane, 2012). Illegal transactions may be the result of straw purchases or corrupt federal firearms licensees (FFLs) who refuse to comply with federal, state, and local laws and regulations regarding firearms sales. FFL non-compliance may include “failure to keep required records, transfers to prohibited persons, offenses involving National Firearms Act weapons, making false entries in record books, and conducting illegal out-of-state transfers,” among other violations (USDOT ATF, 2000, p. x). The most commonly referenced legislation loophole allowing legal firearms to become illegal are internet and gun show sales, which are not federally required to conduct the background checks mandated for in-store sales or to enforce any kind of waiting period between purchase and taking possession of the firearm (City of Chicago, 2014). In some cases, this policy gap may allow otherwise ineligible purchasers such as minors, convicted felons, domestic abusers, or drug abusers to buy firearms (USDOT ATF, 2000). Some states, including Illinois, have attempted to overcome these kinds of legislative gaps by requiring that standard background checks be completed at the time of purchase at gun shows and that all firearms transfers must include the presentation of the buyer’s Firearm Owner Identification (FOID) card (Prevent Gun Violence, 2016).

According to the gravity model of trade patterns, the amount of trade, licit or illicit, between entities is proportionate to the economic sizes of each entity and inversely proportionate to the distance between the two (Kahane, 2012). Therefore, states with large economic capacities naturally have greater market participation, facilitating more
options for prospective buyers and sellers of illegal guns. Based on the principles of supply and demand, production and transactions costs should also be lower in larger economies. Kahane’s (2012) study caveats this because states with larger per capita gross domestic product (GDP), a signal of a more affluent population, are less likely than states with low per capita GDP to engage in the illegal interstate exportation of guns. Conversely, Kahane (2012) explains that large per capita GDP states tend to import more illegal firearms than states with low per capita GDPs. Additionally, the influence of distance on firearms trafficking is two-fold as fewer state lines between the place of origin and destination equate to a lower risk of being caught and potentially lessened legal ramifications, while sellers in closer proximity to their buyers also have less market competition (Kahane, 2012).

Alternative to the gravity model approach referenced by Kahane (2012), Cook, Harris, Ludwig, and Pollack (2015) found that obtaining firearms in Chicago’s underground market is difficult and transaction costs are actually quite high. These high transaction costs are attributed to brokers who charge a finding fee with a 30-40% chance of a failed search for available guns, high legal risks associated with illegal gun activity in the city, high price markups relative to legal retail price, and a long waiting time, among other factors (Cook, Ludwig, Venkatesh, and Braga, 2005; Cook, et. al, 2015). In a previous study Cook, et. al, (2005) found that this high transaction cost is generally applicable to non-gang affiliates, while gang affiliates may have a much lower transaction cost. Gang leaders control access to firearms both in and outside of the gang with information on member reliability and credible threats of punishments for misbehavior (Cook, et. al, 2005, p. 14).
Gangs and gang networks are also involved in sales, loans, and movement of illegal firearms along pre-established routes across state lines (Cook, et. al, 2015). Cook, et. al, (2015) estimate that guns confiscated from gang members in Chicago have a median age of ten years since initial retail sale and that most of them come from out of state, often Indiana. It is also estimated that “new” guns, those less than two years old, make up about 10% of those confiscated in association with gangs and that 15% of those were obtained by straw purchase, likely by a girlfriend or wife (Cook, et. al, 2015, p. 723-724). Status and the ability to defend turf are requisites for gang relevancy and stability, raising the demand for guns where gangs are present to build a long-term reputation for violence (Cook, et. al, 2005). In the case of the Mississippi Delta and Chicago, Illinois trafficking route discussed at the beginning of this paper, gang activity is known to be an enabling factor of illicit firearm and drug trade between the two seemingly unconnected regions (Crews, n.d.; statement from ATF Special Agent in Charge, Oxford, MS, October 25, 2017).

Law enforcement efforts to reduce firearms trafficking generally focus on detecting illegal movement of guns and deterring others from participation (Kahane, 2012). These efforts, in addition to the strength and extent of the legal framework governing gun ownership and purchase, vary widely among states and areas within them. Some argue states which allow local law enforcement the ability to approve or deny concealed carry permits and which require permits to purchase handguns export illegal firearms at a lower rate tend to have fewer exported firearms with a time-to-crime of less than two years (Mayors Against Illegal Guns, 2010).
Federal partnerships with state and local law enforcement have also likely had an impact on weapons trafficking trends in one example of the Mississippi Delta. In 2010 the ATF, Mississippi state officials and Clarksdale, MS police teamed up to conduct a sweep of Clarksdale’s firearms traffickers. This was one aspect of a larger law enforcement campaign to minimize Clarksdale’s crime and increase community safety. This specific event likely had an impact on the Mississippi Delta aspect of the firearms trafficking route to Chicago as Coahoma County saw the largest number of completed firearms traces by far (Crews, n.d.).

Additional firearms trafficking routes exist in the United States, but because of regional variations in investigation results, specific trends from routes to New York, Boston, and California cannot be adequately applied to the route to Chicago, Illinois (USDOT ATF, 2000, p. 11). The “Iron Pipeline” is a firearms trafficking route from states along the eastern seaboard from which 80-90% of New York’s recovered crime guns have originated since the mid-nineties (Spitzer, 2015, p. 773).

**FIREARMS TRACING**

Firearms tracing is the means by which law enforcement can connect firearms in criminal investigations to suspects, identify potential firearms traffickers, prove ownership, and determine the sources of crime guns. Comprehensive tracing allows the detection of firearms trafficking patterns on state, interstate, and international levels by compiling the types of firearms recovered in a given area, sources of those guns, individuals associated with those firearms, and other trends related to trafficking. Basic firearms trace results summarize the legal commerce trail of a given firearm, including the manufacturer, initial FFL-sanctioned purchase, and initial purchaser (USDOJ ATF,
This firearms trace data can identify suspects for specific law enforcement action, inform planning to interdict trafficking transactions, and provide the basis for evaluation of the effects of gun control legislation changes (Cook & Braga, 2001, p. 277).

Successful traces require the requestor name, agency, and address; the possessor’s and known associate names; the recovery location and address; and the complete and accurate description of the firearm in question, including the serial number, manufacturer, manufacturer city and state, model, and caliber or gauge. Importer name, importer city and state, and country of origin are also required for imported firearms tracing. Complete trace results reveal the time to crime, FFLs in the distribution path to include manufacturers and retailers, an explanation of the trace findings, and contact information for other agencies with common links. These links may include common purchasers or possessors, retail FFLs, and recovery locations (USDOJ ATF, 2012).

eTrace is ATF’s paperless trace request and analysis system which allows real-time law enforcement access to form submission, trace progress monitoring, previous trace results, and data querying. Standard reports produced by eTrace include the total number of firearms traces requested by year, the status of those requests, the most frequently traced firearm types, the most commonly associated crimes, top FFLs to whom crime guns are traced, and the ages of recovered and traced firearms possessors (USDOJ ATF, 2012).

Firearms traces may be impossible in the cases of an incomplete or inaccurate firearm description or serial number, loss of firearms transaction records, manufacture prior to the 1968 Gun Control Act mandating distinct serial numbers, or for firearms which were not manufactured in or legally imported into the United States (USDOJ ATF,
Other reasons firearms tracing may not be possible to complete stem from the fact that the guns may have entered the secondary market, where transaction records and background checks are not federally mandated or required by many states. The secondary market is made up of individuals who are not “engaged in the business” of selling firearms and are therefore not required by the Gun Control Act of 1968 to hold an FFL (18 U.S.C. § 922 (a)(21)(c)). The only federal requirement on sales by non-FFLs in the secondary market is that they may not “knowingly” sell a firearm to a prohibited person (Cook, et. al, 2005; USDOT ATF, 2000; 18 U.S.C. §922 (d); 18 U.S.C. §922 (x)(1)).

Because a trace may not be completed without the serial number and duplication is common among manufacturers, it is necessary to provide the manufacturer information and other markings for tracing. Trace results will only designate a firearm lost or stolen if it was previously reported as such to the ATF by an FFL or an interstate shipper. Otherwise, local law enforcement agencies must check the Gun File in the National Crime Information Center for reports of a firearm being lost or stolen (USDOJ ATF, 2012). Obliterated serial numbers, which are more common among guns recovered from youth than adults, innately make firearms tracing impossible and are a strong indicator of a firearm having been trafficked (Cook & Braga, 2001).

In addition, variations in tracing policies among law enforcement jurisdictions make comprehensive firearms tracing at state, regional, or particularly interstate levels more complicated. Some departments trace “comprehensively,” meaning they trace each recovered firearm, while others trace only for investigations (Knight, 2011). Additionally, some states with stricter gun control have firearm owner registries, so their jurisdictions may initiate and complete traces with those databases and never request a formal trace
from the ATF (Cook & Braga, 2001; Knight, 2011). This significantly alters the ATF’s overall picture of firearms tracing at the state and national levels, artificially raising out-of-state traces for states with strict gun laws (Knight, 2011, p. 10).

Firearms trace requests which are sent directly to the ATF are first checked with the National Tracing Center’s (NTC) records of out-of-business FFLs and multiple purchase reports. If these databases do not have matches, the NTC then contacts the manufacturer or importer for the distributor’s information and follows the trail to the first retail sale to get the buyer’s information (Cook & Braga, 2001, p. 280-281). “End-to-end” or “investigative” traces are expensive and uncommon but are completed on occasion and include determining all points of retail and secondary market sale, and contacting all persons involved in transactions through the last possessor from whom the gun was recovered (Cook & Braga, 2001).

Firearms tracing is an imperfect practice which is affected by a variety of factors in addition to those discussed above. “New” guns recently purchased at initial retail sale may be recovered and/or successfully traced more frequently than “old” guns because they are more prevalent in circulation (Cook & Braga, 2001). Alternatively, “old” guns from the relatively unregulated secondary market may be recovered in connection to crime more often than “new” guns, but are much more difficult to trace (Koper, 2013). Research on actual retail purchasers of firearms, or firearm disposition in general, is often restricted because so many states do not maintain any sort of registry.

As mentioned in the “Firearms Tracing” section, trafficking route patterns cannot necessarily be applied among different routes. This being said, Koper (2013) conducted a study on firearms sold in the Baltimore metropolitan area from 1994 to 1999 and
recovered in Baltimore by 2000. This was before the implementation of the Tiahrt Amendments in 2003, which prohibit the sharing of trace data with anyone other than law enforcement agencies. The current paper attempts to study similar factors affecting firearms trafficking but is limited by the restrictions imposed by the Tiahrt Amendment.

Koper’s (2013) study demonstrates an application of firearms trace data that gave the Baltimore government and law enforcement information necessary to better address their crime gun problem. Of 72,000 guns sold in the Baltimore metropolitan area during the five-year timeframe, more than 1,800 were recovered in the city. Koper (2013) used this data to determine that Baltimore’s crime guns were most likely to be “Saturday Night Special” style guns, small (9mm or smaller with a 3” or shorter barrel), cheap (under $150), easily concealable, and low-quality. Firearms in Koper’s (2013) study were four times more likely to be recovered in Baltimore if the original purchaser was African American, but 20% less likely to be recovered if the original purchaser was a male, suggesting straw purchasing as a method of diversion to the illegal market (p. 302). For the firearms in his dataset Koper (2013) found that they were far more likely to be recovered in relation to a crime if the FFL previously sold guns that were diverted to illicit commerce and less likely to be diverted if the FFL dealt in large volumes.

LEGISLATION RELATED TO FIREARMS TRAFFICKING

Federal Legislation

America is governed by a system of federalism whereby state legislation shapes much of the policy landscape (Spitzer, 2015). Decentralization of gun regulation legislation in America, while politically advantageous and reflective of variations in
regional and local preferences, may be partially to blame for incentivizing weapons trafficking (Coates & Pearson-Merkowitzz, 2017). For states like Illinois, which has some of the strictest gun laws in the country, criminals will travel to neighboring states with significantly weaker laws to meet the demand (Kahane, 2012). These policy discrepancies incentivize traffickers to obtain guns in states with lax gun legislation and sell them in the secondary illicit market in legislatively strict states for high profit margins (Mayors Against Illegal Guns, 2010; Spitzer, 2015). By strictly limiting the number and type of weapons available to a short list of eligible purchasers, Illinois has created a large quantity of potential buyers of trafficked guns.

Across the country, there are hundreds of state and local laws supplementing federal firearms regulations. Generally, guns flow from legislatively lax states to legislatively strict states, reflecting a natural gravity model (Kahane, 2012). Kahane (2012) also contends that a trafficker’s choice source state, however, is based on both source state laws and the distance between the source and destination states. As distance between the source and destination increases, transactions should theoretically decrease. Conversely, for two neighboring states, trafficking should be higher. The relationship between source and destination state legislation is similar. When a destination state enacts an additional gun regulation, the source state will typically export more guns to the destination state, a trend known as “policy spillover,” when the market for particular goods shifts out-of-state and effectively voids the stricter regulation (Coates & Pearson-Merkowitzz, 2017). If a source state enacts a new gun law though, that state will export fewer guns and its imports will rise. The ultimate price tag on a trafficked gun is
dependent on each of these factors as higher legal risk and a larger distance between source and destination should increase the cost of the product (Knight, 2011).

Federal gun legislation has been slow to evolve, with the last two major changes being the Gun Control Act of 1968, requiring firearms dealers to have a federal license and restricting prohibited persons from purchasing firearms (18 U.S.C. 923), and the Brady Bill of 1994 (18 U.S.C. 921-922) requiring that FFLs conduct background checks prior to finalizing transactions (Knight, 2011). Under the Gun Control Act of 1968, FFLs are required to keep transaction records for twenty years, may not sell firearms to non-residents of the state in which they are licensed, and report sales of multiple firearms in one transaction, thefts, and losses to the ATF’s National Tracing Center (Cook & Braga, 2001). While the Gun Control Act and the Brady Bill have solidified federal firearms commerce regulations, there remains no section “specifically devoted to punishing the diversion of firearms from lawful to unlawful channels,” (USDOT ATF, 2000). In other words, while there are criminal violations for engaging in acts which may add up to trafficking, there is no federal legislation against firearms trafficking, leaving that responsibility to the states.

**Mississippi Legislation**

Mississippi firearms regulations are among the loosest in the country. Mississippians are not required to hold a permit or license to purchase, own, or carry firearms either openly or concealed (Miss. Code. Ann. §45-9-101(24)). There is no state registration of arms and the Castle Doctrine is enacted. Counties and municipalities may not enact any restrictions on possession, transportation, sale, ownership, or transfer of
firearms, ammunition, or components to such except in relation to pawnshops (Miss. Code. Ann. §45-9-51(1)(g)).

Prohibited persons under Mississippi code include minors under the age of 18, felons (Miss. Code. Ann. §97-37-5(1)), persons with mental illness or intellectual disability who have been court-ordered to treatment or home health care, persons acquitted by reason of insanity or intellectual disability regardless of if they are ordered to treatment, adults with mental weakness incapable of managing their estate and who have been appointed a guardian by the court, and those deemed incompetent to stand trial (Miss. Code. Ann. §45-9-103(1)). These regulations fall in line with minimum federal firearms regulations.

Mississippi legislators have recently passed laws to become comparable to stricter states in prosecuting the trafficking of stolen firearms. It is a felony “for any person knowingly or intentionally to possess, receive, retain, acquire, or obtain possession or dispose of a stolen firearm,” or attempt to do so. It is also a felony “for any person knowingly or intentionally to sell, deliver, or transfer a stolen firearm,” or attempt to do so (Miss. Code. Ann. §97-37-35). The first conviction of any of the above results in a felony receiving five years in state prison. Subsequent convictions are considered felony trafficking in stolen firearms and carry at least fifteen-year sentences (18 USC §924(e)). Any of the above crimes in concert with any other crime are considered separate felony sentences with an additional five years. Additionally, the solicitation, persuasion, or encouragement of an FFL to violate transfer laws or the providing an FFL with materially false information to purchase a firearm carries a sentence of up to three years and/or up to a five thousand dollar fine (Miss. Code. Ann. §97-37-105(1-3)).
SOCIODEMOGRAPHICS RELATED TO CRIMINALITY

Current literature on criminality and sociodemographics does not focus specifically on firearms trafficking, likely due to the difficulty of obtaining firearms tracing and trafficking data at the individual purchaser or possessor levels. Vaughn, Perron, Abdon, Olate, Groom, and Wu’s (2012) study does, however, address correlates of adolescent handgun carrying, estimating that 3.1% of all United States adolescents aged 12-17 carried a handgun in 2011. Vaughn, et. al, (2012, p. 2013) determined that selling or using drugs, theft valuing more than $50, and a history of fighting in school or physically attacking someone are behavioral factors which correlate with handgun carrying in adolescents. According to Lochner’s (2004) human capital approach study on education and work in relation to crime, property and violent crime proclivity tends to rise into the teen years, stabilize in the late teens, and decline thereafter.

While Lochner (2004, p. 18) asserts that males with married parents and “more educated mothers” are significantly less likely to commit crimes, Vaughn, et. al, (2012) argues that the presence of a father figure in the household is not related to firearms carrying by juveniles. However, Vaughn, et. al, (2012) does report that youths who carry firearms are less likely to report parental involvement, and that the strongest parental insulator against juvenile firearms carrying is telling the youth he or she did a good job on something or that the parents are proud of something the youth did in the past year. Vaughn, et. al, (2012) also suggests that race, ethnicity and status of enrollment in school do not correlate with firearms carrying by youths.
Education and Crime

According to Lochner’s (2004, p. 4) study on human capital and criminality, older, more intelligent individuals commit less crime than younger, less educated persons due to higher human capital and wage earnings which heighten the cost of crime if caught. A heightened cost of crime is reflected in Amin, Flores, Flores-Lagunes, and Parisian’s (2016) study on the Job Corps program, an educational and vocational training program for disenfranchised youth, and its impact on participant arrests. Amin, et. al, (2016) estimated that a high school degree, GED, or vocational training reduces arrests by 32.6% and that effects may be larger for males versus females and for African Americans versus Caucasians.

Traditionally, the Job Corps program has pushed attendees toward a GED or vocational degree, but in light of a stronger arrest-reducing factor and larger financial returns, the emphasis is now shifting to completing a high school degree (Amin, et. al, 2016, p. 272). Further, Lochner’s (2004, p. 17) study finds that high school graduates are 81% less likely to be arrested than high school drop-outs. 30% of men with less than ten years of education will earn income from crime, while 24% of high school graduates and only 17% of their college-going counterparts will do the same. Lochner’s (2004) human capital model caveats these findings, explaining that they are applicable more to unskilled crime, such as violent and property crimes, than to white collar crimes such as forgery, fraud, embezzlement, and counterfeit, which should peak later in life and may even increase with age and experience in the workforce.
SUMMARY

An aggregate, big-picture perspective of interstate firearms trafficking routes can be derived from the tracing of firearms and spent brass, and the resulting follow-up. The gravity model of trade patterns explains that areas with high income and low poverty should theoretically import more firearms than they export, while areas in the opposite situation should export more firearms than import. The gravity model discusses geographic distance between source and destination as well, suggesting that with sources and destinations closer together, there should be more trafficking than between those further from one another. Alternatively, gang affiliates do not tend to experience high transaction costs because firearm loans and rentals are facilitated within gangs by leadership.

Firearms tracing is by no means a perfect system with complete traces sometimes impossible to achieve. Transition to the secondary market serves as the largest and most widespread cause of incomplete tracing. Because fully comprehensive firearms tracing at a regional or federal level is nearly impossible, other trafficking routes like those to New York City and Boston are not applicable to the Chicago being discussed in this study. This inability for generalization among trafficking routes is also impacted by the variation in related trends among routes, including but not limited to gang involvement, law enforcement tracing practices, rural versus urban factors. Further, due to Tiahrt Amendment limitations, there are very few studies which address sociodemographic factors related to domestic firearms trafficking.

Internet and gun show sales do not require thorough background checks and therefore may allow otherwise ineligible purchasers to obtain firearms. Some states have
enacted their own provisions to supplement federal legislation. However, the variation in legal framework and enforcement among states and municipalities creates more opportunities for skirting both federal and state law. While state firearms regulations are an important piece of the gun trafficking puzzle, their direct impact on firearms trafficking to Chicago is unclear due to the gamut of legislative strengths among the four states in the scope of this study.

Sociodemographics relating to firearms trafficking are difficult to assess for a number of reasons, but a few studies exist which discuss juvenile carrying of firearms and sociodemographics as they relate to general crime proclivity. Trends among urban youth toward carrying firearms are closely related to the presence of parents in their lives and to a history of selling and/or using drugs. As a whole, criminal activity tends to increase with age into the late teens, then drop off shortly thereafter. Further, education is negatively correlated with unskilled violent and property crimes but is less negatively (possibly positively) correlated with white collar crime.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

METHODOLOGY

The sample population for this study includes Mississippi, Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin socio-demographics at the county level as obtained from 2000 and 2010 United States Census and the 2012 American Community Survey data.

The ten Mississippi counties which provided the highest number of trafficked firearms to Chicago, Illinois between 2001 and 2012 were analyzed to address trends among them and to determine if the trends were anomalies compared to surrounding counties which did not traffic nearly as many firearms during the period. These counties of interest include Coahoma, Hinds, Leflore, Bolivar, Washington, Madison, Yazoo, Sunflower, Grenada, and Clay. Eighteen of the other counties in the state supplied 50-98 trafficked firearms to Chicago, Illinois during the 2001-2012-time period, however they were not addressed as counties of interest as the minimum was set at 110.

The three remaining states with the highest number of trafficked firearms to Chicago between 2001 and 2012 – Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin – were analyzed to address the applicability of trends relevant to firearms trafficking in Mississippi. Based on this study’s initial observations of Mississippi firearms trafficking to Chicago, poverty, median household income, and race appear to be most closely linked to high rates of trafficked firearms exports at the county level.

These sociodemographic datasets were selected based on the overall trends in the Mississippi data. Racial trends were essentially the same in Mississippi between 2000 and 2010, so for the sake of simplicity, only the most recent 2010 data was collected for
Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin. The poverty rates and median household income levels varied more in Mississippi between 2000 and 2010 both geographically and in their relation to each other. For instance, Union County saw a 5.7 percentage point increase in poverty with a $3,246 median household income increase, while Stone County held a steady poverty rate with a $13,233 income increase, and Choctaw County dropped 3.4 points in poverty and increased $3,924 in median household income. Since these differences are potentially more influential to firearms trafficking than race alone, their values were collected for Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin from both 2000 and 2010.

Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin were evaluated based on trends observed in Mississippi in order to either validate their influences on firearms trafficking or to establish differences in each state. Then, the remaining variables assessed in the Mississippi research – gender, age, and the number of federal firearms licensees (FFLs) per county do not appear to be linked with firearms trafficking at the county level and so were not addressed in Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin. Differences in firearms trafficking links likely indicate different state and regional lifestyles impacting propensity to traffic guns. For comparison purposes, state averages were used to analyze each demographic within states as there is far too much variation in values across states. While it does not appear to be connected in Mississippi, population was recorded for Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin as the high-trafficking counties for these three northern states gravitate around metropolitan areas.

Initially an analysis of legislative differences among Mississippi, Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin was planned. However, it appears clear that variations in state gun control legislation do not directly affect a state’s proclivity to traffic firearms. This is most
clearly expressed by the contrast in Mississippi and Illinois firearms legislation, which fall at nearly opposite ends of the spectrum respectively (Mayors Against Illegal Guns, 2010). Indiana and Wisconsin both fall between Mississippi and Illinois in terms of firearms legislation, further suggesting that these laws in terms of preventing firearms trafficking out of each state may be less impactful than intended. An evaluation of firearms regulations in all 50 states would be required to determine their impact on and relevancy to interstate firearms trafficking.

**DATA COLLECTION**

The foundational dataset for this study which provided the county-level breakdown of firearms trace results for crime guns recovered in Chicago, Illinois from 2001-2012 was provided by Kevin Quealy and Tim Wallace, the authors of the 2013 *New York Times* article, “Where 50,000 Guns Recovered in Chicago Came From.” The number of firearms recovered in Chicago and sourced from each county in the United States is listed in this dataset and was used to identify counties of interest for Mississippi, Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin.

Census demographic data was collected from 2000 and 2010 as the aggregate county-level firearms trace data in which the inspiration for this research lies was gathered from 2001 through 2012. The 2012 American Community Survey (2010-2015) was used only for Mississippi income and poverty rates. As the Census is conducted every 10 years, 2000 and 2010 information are most relevant to the data’s time period. Updated information, when available, was helpful to better understand the trends as they have evolved more recently.
U.S. Census data from 2000 and 2010 was collected for Mississippi on a county level for population demographics of age, gender, and race. The 2006-2010 American Community Survey from the United States Census Bureau provided 2010 high school graduation rates, median income, and poverty levels. Each set of data was compared between the years from which it was collected for changes over the decade, except education as it was only available for 2010.

County-level demographic data from Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin was collected from the 2000 and 2010 U.S. Censuses. Like the Mississippi data, the 2000 and 2010 Census demographics are most relevant to the firearm recovery dataset’s time period of 2001-2012. Poverty rates, median household income levels, and population were collected from both the 2000 and 2010 Census for all Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin counties. The median household income was selected for comparison because a mean value is too heavily influenced by very high and very low earners. Each state’s racial make-up was only collected for 2010.

Additionally, FFL counts on a county level were obtained from the ATF’s public Data and Statistics page from January 2014 and January 2017. January of 2014 was selected as this is the oldest public listing for FFLs at the county level. Additionally, January of 2017 was selected to determine if there was a significant difference in FFLs from 2014-2017 to understand the likelihood of major FFL shifts prior to 2014.
CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS OF DATA
ORGANIZATION OF DATA ANALYSIS

With the aggregate results for each county in the United States from 2001 through March 2012, the Mississippi county counts were placed on a series of maps (Appendix) to visualize the high-trafficking regions of the state (K. Quealy, personal communications, September 1, 2017). For high-count counties along state lines in Mississippi, neighboring county counts from other states were assessed and verified that high-count patterns are state-specific and not part of a larger regional framework.

In addition to the trace result counts, populations of each county were applied to determine if population sizes might be connected to the disparities in certain counties’ high number of trace results. Population demographics at the county level were also examined to include age, education, income and poverty levels, gender and racial makeup, number of federal firearms licensees (FFLs), and other socioeconomic factors.

For the validation research, the count of trafficked firearms recovered in Chicago, Illinois and traced to each county in Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin were placed on a series of maps to visualize the high-trafficking regions of each state during the 2001-2012 period. In addition to trace results, county-level values for poverty rates, median household income, racial makeup, and population were mapped for Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin as they were for Mississippi.
ANALYSIS OF DATA

County Traces

Mississippi. Mississippi’s ten counties of interest which trafficked at least 110 firearms are Coahoma, Hinds, Leflore, Bolivar, Washington, Madison, Yazoo, Sunflower, Grenada, and Clay (Map 1). These ten counties trafficked between 110 and 447 firearms to Chicago from 2001 to 2012. Coahoma county had the highest count of recovered firearms in Mississippi at 447.

Six of the ten Mississippi counties of interest, including Coahoma, fall distinctly within the Mississippi Delta boundaries, while Grenada, Madison, and Hinds lie just outside what is traditionally considered the Delta. Alternatively, Clay county is positioned much further east than its high-trafficking counterparts. Madison and Hinds counties are home to the Jackson metropolitan area, the largest urban area in the state, while the Delta counties are far more rural.

Illinois. Illinois’ ten counties of interest are Cook, Du Page, Will, Kane, Lake, Kankakee, Winnebago, Champaign, Sangamon, and Peoria (Map 2). These ten counties were selected for study in Illinois based on the same criteria that Mississippi counties were chosen – they each trafficked at least 100 firearms to Chicago streets during the 2001-2012-time frame. Cook county had the most recovered firearms traced of any at 15,781. Chicago is Cook’s county seat and while gun sales are illegal within city limits, the county allows gun sales and is geographically the most logical and quickest source of firearms, either by illicit transfer or theft.

The contiguous four counties – Du Page, Will, Kane, and Lake – were the source for 456-1,879 firearms recovered on Chicago streets. Kankakee and Winnebago are both
separated from Cook county by only a short distance. Champaign, Sangamon, and Peoria are spread across the middle of the state, but their county seats are all in the top 10 largest Illinois cities by population. An additional eight counties with at least 50 firearms recovered in Chicago were identified statewide.

**Indiana.** The top nine source counties in Indiana for firearms recovered on Chicago streets are Lake, Marion, Porter, St. Joseph, La Porte, Allen, Elkhart, Cass, and Hendricks (Map 3). These counties each trafficked between 101 and 2,715 firearms to Chicago, Illinois between 2001 and 2012. Indiana’s Lake county, neighbor to Chicago’s Cook County, was the source of the most recovered firearms at 2,715, more than double that from Marion county, the next highest-supplying Indiana county at 1,106 firearms.

To the East of Lake County, Porter, La Porte, St. Joseph, and Elkhart counties are the next closest counties to Chicago respectively. These counties each supplied between 144 and 905 guns to Chicago’s streets. The remaining top four source counties, Marion, Allen, Cass, and Hendricks, are located in the middle of the state. Marion and Hendricks counties are home to the Indianapolis area and the majority of the largest municipalities in the state. Fort Wayne, Indiana’s second largest city, is the seat of Allen county. An additional eight counties which supplied at least 50 firearms recovered in Chicago were identified through the north and central regions of the state, with two outliers, Jackson and Williamson, in the far southwest corner of the state.

**Wisconsin.** Based on the minimum of 100 trafficked firearms threshold, Wisconsin has four counties of interest – Milwaukee, Kenosha, Racine, and Dane (Map 4). Milwaukee county sourced 394 firearms recovered in Chicago from 2001-2012, while the other three counties of interest ranged from 102-124. Kenosha, Racine, and
Milwaukee counties each align just north of Chicago and are home to Milwaukee, Wisconsin’s most densely populated city and its surrounding metropolitan area. Dane county is three counties to the west of Milwaukee and is home to Madison, Wisconsin’s second largest city. Four remaining counties supplied at least 50 firearms to Chicago, three of which lie between the Milwaukee area and Dane County. The fourth, Brown county, home to Green Bay, is four counties north of Milwaukee.

**Analysis.** Almost 36,000 of the 50,000 firearms traced by the Chicago Police Department from 2001-2012 were recovered in Illinois, Indiana, Mississippi, and Wisconsin. Illinois trafficked 22,051 firearms to Chicago with Indiana trafficking 7,747, Mississippi trafficking 4,296, and Wisconsin trafficking 1,647.

Mississippi’s high-trafficking counties of interest were generally located in the rural Delta and urban Jackson metropolitan area. Each of Wisconsin’s four counties of interest, five of Indiana’s nine, and seven of Illinois’ ten are geographically very close to Chicago. Three of Indiana’s remaining four counties of interest and Illinois’ remaining three have populations above 100,000.

**Poverty**

**Mississippi.** Mississippi’s poverty rate increased by 1.3% to 21.2% between 2000 to 2010 (Map 5). By 2012, the American Community Survey showed another 1.1% increase to 22.3%, demonstrating a much swifter rise in poverty between 2010 and 2012. Since at least 2000, nine of the ten counties of interest had higher poverty rates than the state as a whole by up to 23 points. The remaining county, Madison, had poverty rates lower than the state average since at least 2000 by 5.9-8.2 points.
Of Mississippi’s remaining 72 counties, 38 had poverty rates consistently higher than the state average since 2000. The highest poverty rates in 2000 and 2010 were Yazoo and Holmes counties respectively, both of which border the Delta. The state, as a whole, bears a far higher poverty rate than the other states in this study. Aside from the southern nine Gulf Coast counties and seven in the northeastern corner of the state, the majority of the rest of the state struggles with poverty rates above the state average.

**Illinois.** From 2000 to 2010, Illinois’ poverty rate increased by 1.9 points to 12.6% (Map 6). According to the 2010 census, of the ten counties of interest, six bore rates of poverty higher than the state average by 0.8 to 7.9 points. Of the remaining 92 counties, 45 had poverty rates above the state average with the highest being Jackson County in the southwestern tip of the state. The other half of the state held poverty rates below the average, as low as 3.9% in Kendall County.

Du Page, Will, Lake, and Kane counties represent the counties of interest with poverty rates at least 3.5 points lower than the state average. These four counties surround Cook County whose county seat is Chicago, the nexus of this research. Champaign, Winnebago, Cook, Kankakee, Peoria, and Sangamon counties are the six above the state average poverty rate respectively. Regarding state poverty trends, the southeast and central regions of the state suffer from the most densely located high poverty rates, while the northernmost third of the state has the fewest counties meeting or exceeding the state’s average.

**Indiana.** Between 2000 and 2010, Indiana experienced a four-point increase in the average poverty rate from 9.5% to 13.5% (Map 7). The 2010 census showed 34 of Indiana’s 92 counties suffering rates of poverty between 0.2 and 6.7 points higher than
the state’s average. Of the nine counties of interest, six were included in the higher poverty group with rates from 13.7% to 17.3%. The other 58 counties in Indiana held poverty rates below the state average as low as 4.5% in Hamilton County just north of Indianapolis.

Marion, Lake, St. Joseph, Cass, La Porte, and Elkhart counties represent the Indiana counties with poverty rates at or above the state average. Marion county suffers the highest poverty rate at 17.3%. Hendricks, Porter, and Allen counties each had poverty rates below the state average by at least 1.2 points. Porter county is located between Lake and La Porte, Allen to the south and east of that grouping, and Hendricks just west of Indianapolis. For Indiana as a whole, the high poverty counties are roughly grouped in a line across the southern third of the state and in a diagonal line from the northwest corner of the state to the central eastern border.

**Wisconsin.** Wisconsin’s poverty rate between 2000 and 2010 rose by 2.9 points to 11.6% (Map 8). In 2010, three of the state’s four counties of interest for high firearms trafficking had rates of poverty at or above the state average. Of the remaining 68 counties, 32 had higher poverty rates than the state with the highest being Sawyer at 20.1% in the northwestern area of Wisconsin. The other 36 counties boasted poverty rates as low as 5.4% in southeastern Washington County.

Milwaukee, Kenosha, and Dane counties are the higher poverty counties of interest. These three fall to the southeastern corner of the state, just north of Chicago and Cook County, Illinois. Racine county is just below the state average with 11.5% of its population in poverty. General geographic trends for Wisconsin poverty rates follow the northern border and fall in rough southern lines on both sides of the state. The lower-
poverty counties are loosely grouped in the mid-eastern region, a central north-south line in the center of the state, and in the western curve of the state.

**Analysis.** Poverty rates in each of the four states in this study rose between 2000 and 2010 by at least 1.3 percentage points with Mississippi having the highest over the decade and Wisconsin at the lowest with 11.6%. In 2010 nine of Mississippi’s ten counties of interest and more than half of the remaining counties were above the state average poverty rate of 21.2%. Six of Illinois’ ten counties of interest and 49% of its remaining counties were above the state average of 12.6% in 2010. Six of Indiana’s nine counties of interest and one-third of its remaining counties rose above the 2010 state average of 13.5%. Three of Wisconsin’s four counties of interest and 47% of the remaining were above the 2010 state average of 11.6%.

**Median Household Income**

*Mississippi.* From 2000 to 2010 Mississippi saw an increase in its median household income of $6,551 (Map 9, Map 10). One county of interest, Madison, and 17 others held median household incomes above the state average by 2010. Six of these - Lafayette, Lincoln, Pearl River, Stone, Perry, and Greene – rose by at least $9,000 from their 2000 median income levels, which were below the state median. The other 64 counties in Mississippi, including the remaining nine counties of interest, fell below the state median income since at least 2000.

Each of the nine counties of interest with income below the state median also suffered poverty rates above the state average. Mississippi’s entire western border, with the exception of DeSoto and Warren counties, suffers household incomes below the state median. Madison county has the second-highest median household income in the state,
just behind DeSoto county, which lies on the southern side of Memphis, Tennessee. Sixteen counties with high median household income also have lower than average poverty rates, illustrating a wealthier and more financially stable population in the southern Gulf Coast region, the Jackson metropolitan area, and the northern area just south of Memphis.

**Illinois.** Between 2000 and 2010 Illinois experienced an increase in median household income of $9,145 (Map 11). Fifteen Illinois counties, including four of interest, boasted median household incomes rising above the state’s median by up to $24,162. The remaining 87 counties, including six counties of interest, fell below the state income median by $1,503 to $28,157 with the lowest being Hardin in the far southeastern region of the state.

Lake, Du Page, Will, and Kankakee are the four counties of interest whose median household income is far higher than that of the state’s. Incidentally, these four counties are the same ones that boast lower than average poverty rates and surround Chicago’s Cook County. Cook, Sangamon, Kankakee, Peoria, Winnebago, and Champaign respectively represent the six counties of interest with higher median household income than the state. The far northeastern corner of Illinois, as well as a small north-central grouping, boast wealthier counties while the rest of the counties’ median household incomes are less than the state median.

**Indiana.** Indiana’s median household income increased from 2000 to 2010 by $6,130 (Map 12). Thirty-four counties, including five counties of interest, held median household incomes above the state’s rate of $47,697 by up to $34,250. Indiana’s other 58 counties, including four of interest, had median household incomes below the state’s
median by $218 to $10,659 with Fayette county in the eastern region being the lowest in the state.

Hendricks, Porter, Lake, and Allen counties are the four counties of interest with median household incomes higher than the state’s. Lake and Porter are located closest to Chicago in the far northwestern corner of Indiana, while Allen is in the northeast and Hendricks is just west of Marion county. Cass, St. Joseph, La Porte, and Elkhart are the remaining four counties of interest whose median household income is below the state’s median. The lower-income counties of Indiana are grouped similarly to the high-poverty counties diagonally from the northwest corner to the central eastern border and in the lower third of the state.

**Wisconsin.** The 2010 census for Wisconsin recorded a higher median household income than 2000 by $7,807 to $51,598 (Map 13). Twenty counties, including three counties of interest, earned median household incomes by up to $23,398 above the state rate. Wisconsin’s remaining 52 counties, including only one county of interest, dropped below the state’s median household income by up to $15,980. The lowest-earning county was far northern Iron, bringing in a median of $35,618.

Dane, Kenosha, and Racine counties are the three counties of interest with median household incomes above the state’s. Kenosha and Racine are the two closest to Chicago, while Dane County is just north and west of them. Milwaukee is the only county of interest with a median household income below the state’s average at $43,215. Wisconsin’s high-income counties are grouped in the southeastern side of the state with three outliers in the center of the state and two on the far western border. Most of the
central and all of the northern regions of Wisconsin earned less than the state’s median household income for 2010.

**Analysis.** Each of the four states in this study had increased median household incomes between 2000 and 2010 by at least $6,130. Mississippi had the lowest median household income at $37,881 in 2010 while Illinois had the highest at $55,735. The same nine of Mississippi’s ten counties of interest which had poverty rates above the state average had median household incomes below the state’s. Illinois’ four counties of interest with median household incomes below the state were also the same four with higher poverty rates. Four of Indiana’s nine counties of interest and three of Wisconsin’s four had median household incomes above the state average.

**Race**

**Mississippi.** As of the 2010 Census, 96.1% of Mississippi’s population identifies as either white or black, with 0.9% Asian, 0.5% American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 2.4% identifying as “Some Other Race” or “Two or More Races” (Map 15) Hispanics and/or Latinos of any race represent 2.7% of Mississippi’s population. The 2010 Census reports that Mississippi averages at 59.1% white and 37.0% black.

Only three of the ten counties of interest encountered a smaller racial disparity between 2000 and 2010, by 1.2%-4% with the other seven increasing the divide by 4.2%-16.9% (Map 14, Map 15). Both the 2000 and 2010 censuses show that 24 of Mississippi’s 82 counties had an African American majority, which ranged from 50.9% to 85.7% of the 2010 population. Grenada and Madison counties were the only two high-trafficking counties with white majorities according to both census data sets and had 56.9% and 57% respectively in 2010. The other eight high-trafficking counties made up one-third of the
state’s counties with African American majorities ranging from 57.1%-72.9% in 2010, suggesting a connection. However, this is not conclusive as there are other Mississippi counties with higher proportions of African American populations.

Forty-three counties in Mississippi, including all ten counties of interest, have higher black portions of their populations than the state average by 0.3 to 48.7 percentage points. The remaining 38 counties have higher than state average white portions of their populations by 0.1 to 38.4 percentage points. The counties with higher white populations than the state average for the most part reflect the low-poverty and high-income portions of the state.

**Illinois.** Eighty-six percent of Illinois’ population as of the 2010 Census identifies as either white or black, with 4.6% Asian, 0.3% American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 9% identifying as “Some Other Race” or “Two or More Races” (Map 16). Those who identify as Hispanic or Latino of any race represent 15.8% of Illinois’ population. According to the 2010 Census, the state averages 71.5% white and 14.5% black.

Seven counties in Illinois, including counties of interest Cook, Peoria, and Kankakee, had black proportions of their population between 0.6 and 20.9 points higher than the state average. The remaining 95 counties, including the other seven counties of interest, reported a lower than average percentage of their population as black. Alternatively, three counties, one being Cook, reported lower than state average white populations between 55.4 and 64.4%. The remaining 99 counties reported the white population as being between 1.9 and 27.1 points higher than the state average.

Geographically speaking, two of the counties reporting higher black populations than the
average are located in the very southern tip of the state, two are in the Chicago region, and the remaining three are spread through the central part of Illinois.

**Indiana.** As of 2010, 93.4% percent of Indiana’s population identifies as either black or white, with 1.6% Asian, 0.3% American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 4.7% as “Some Other Race” or “Two or More Races” (Map 17). Hispanic or Latino of any race represent 6% of the population. The 2010 Census reports that Indiana averages 84.3% white and 9.1% black. Geographically speaking, four of the six counties with higher than the state’s average black population are located in the far north of the state, with Marion located in the center and Vanderburgh at the very southern tip.

Marion, Lake, St. Joseph, Allen, and La Porte counties of interest, in addition to southern Vanderburgh county, had black populations at or larger than the state average by up to 17.6 points. The remaining 86 counties, including counties of interest Porter, Hendricks, and Elkhart, had black populations lower than the state average. On the other hand, only seven counties, including counties of interest Elkhart, Marion, Lake, La Porte, St. Joseph, and Allen, reported smaller proportions of their populations than the state average as being white, between 62.7% and 84.1%. The other 85 counties reported average white populations higher than the state average by at least 1.9 points.

**Wisconsin.** According to the 2010 Census, 92.5% of Wisconsin’s population identifies as either white or black, with 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 2.3% Asian, and 4.2% as “Some Other Race” or “Two or More Races,” while 5.9% identify as Hispanic or Latino (Map 18). Wisconsin’s state average of white and black inhabitants are 86.2% and 6.3% respectively. Geographically, the three counties with higher black
proportions in their populations are located in the far southeast corner of the state, adjacent to Chicago and Cook County, Illinois.

Milwaukee, Racine, and Kenosha counties are the only three to report that the black proportions of their populations grew between 6.6% and 26.8%. These three counties also happen to report lower than state average white proportions of their populations, between 60.6% and 83.8%. None of the remaining 69 counties have above the state average black populations, but five report lower-than state average white proportions of their populations.

**Analysis.** Each of Mississippi’s ten counties of interest, three of Illinois’ ten, five of Indiana’s nine, and three of Wisconsin’s four, have higher black portions of their populations than the state average. Black majority counties are only found in Mississippi, which is very much distinguished from Illinois, Indiana, or Wisconsin in its racial makeup as each of the other states have a racial disparity of 57 to 79.9 points between Caucasians and African Americans, while Mississippi’s disparity is only 25.1 percentage points.

**Population**

**Mississippi.** Mississippi’s population rose by only 122,639 people during the decade between the 2000 and 2010 Censuses (Map 19). Nine of the ten counties of interest for high firearms trace results had a population decline while Madison county’s population increased by 27.5% to over 95,000. As of the 2010 census, eight of the ten counties of interest had populations between 20,634 and 51,137, with Madison and Hinds at 95,203 and 245,285 respectively. The remaining counties in the state had between 1,406 and 187,105 people.
While the northern, south central, and southeastern sections of the state saw an increased population, the western and north central region populations decreased. Of the eleven counties along Mississippi’s western border, nine experienced a population decline between 868 and 11,840 from 2000 to 2010.

**Illinois.** Between 2000 and 2010, Illinois’ population rose by 411,339 people (Map 20). Eight of the ten counties of interest experienced population increases between 3,061 and 175,294 individuals. Cook County was the only Illinois county of interest whose population decreased by 3.39% to 5,194,675. By 2010, Illinois’ ten counties of interest had populations ranging from 113,449 to 5,194,675, while the remaining 93 counties ranged from 4,320 to 308,760 people. This shows that the nine counties of interest represent some of Illinois’ largest, most urban metropolises. The northeastern counties of Illinois, near Chicago, and the south-central counties experienced the most population growth, while the rest of the state either declined or remained approximately the same.

**Indiana.** Indiana’s population rose by 403,317, or 6.63%, between the 2000 and 2010 Census (Map 21). Eight of Indiana’s nine counties of interest had increased populations between 2000 and 2010, except Cass, which decreased by 4.8% to 38,966. As of 2010, the nine counties of interest (except Cass) had populations ranging from 111,467 to 903,393. The remaining 83 counties in Indiana have populations ranging from 6,128 to 274,569. With the exception of Cass, Indiana’s counties of interest, like Illinois’ represent many of the state’s largest areas.
Roughly the lower half of Indiana, as well as its northernmost counties, experienced increased populations by between 36 and 42,939. Alternatively, the remaining 29 counties saw decreased populations between 30 and 2,212.

**Wisconsin.** Between 2000 and 2010, Wisconsin’s population rose by 323,311 people (Map 22). Each of the four counties of interest increased populations by 0.8% to 14.4% over the ten years. By 2010, each of these counties had populations from 166,426 to 947,735, while the rest of the 68 counties in Wisconsin had populations between 5,916 to 389,891. Again, this pattern is similar to Illinois’ and Indiana’s metropolitan trends.

The 19 counties with decreased populations are grouped mostly in the northern third of the state. These counties’ populations decreased by between 54 and 1,635. The remaining 49 counties (not including four counties of interest) increased by 1 to 29,124. This is much different than the four counties of interest as the highest growth for these 49 counties is less than 1/5 of the smallest population growth of the counties of interest.

**Analysis.** As with racial disparities, Mississippi is distinguished from Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin with regard to population. The three northern states’ counties of interest are some of the largest in terms of population in each state. Only two of Mississippi’s ten counties of interest have more than 52,000 people, while the remaining counties in the state range from 1,406 to 187,105. This vast range in population suggests little connection between population and high levels of firearms trafficking in Mississippi.

**Remaining Mississippi Sociodemographics**

**Gender and Age.** Males between the ages of 18 and 24 are statistically the largest demographic of criminals in the United States. As of 2010, 10.3% of Mississippi’s
population was aged 18-24 with 48.6% of the state’s residents being male. Additionally, half of the high-trafficking counties (Yazoo, Madison, Grenada, Clay, Washington) had a lower percentage of persons aged 18-24 than the state average at 8.6-9.5% of the population (Map 23). Perhaps surprising on the surface, only two of the counties of interest, Sunflower and Yazoo, had a higher male population than the state average at 53.4% and 54.4% respectively, while the other eight had a female majority ranging from 52%-54.1%. In many trafficking cases, however, straw purchasers make the original retail transaction of a firearm for the true purchaser who is not eligible, often due to felony or other restrictive conviction. A person ineligible to purchase or possess a firearm often seeks assistance from those close to them, frequently a female (girlfriend, sister, etc.) without a criminal record who may appear less suspicious.

**Education.** In 2010, 79.6% of Mississippi residents aged 25 and older were high school graduates. Only 23 of Mississippi’s 82 counties exceeded this, including Madison and Hinds at 87.9% and 83.6%. The other eight counties of interest had lower rates of high school graduates over 25 than the state average, ranging from 68.8%-78.4%. Issaquena county, having trafficked no firearms to Chicago from 2001 to 2012 and bordered by counties of interest Washington and Yazoo, had the lowest rate of high school graduates aged 25 and older in the state at 59.7% (Map 24). Counties with high school graduate populations higher than the state average are congregated near the Gulf Coast, the Jackson region, and far north region of the state, while the entire Delta region was below the state average.

**FFLs.** As of 2014 population estimates, Mississippi has 3.43 FFLs per 10,000 people (Map 25). Madison, Bolivar, Grenada, and Yazoo counties have 4-6.5 FFLs per
capita, while the other six counties of interest have 1.4-3 FFLs per capita. Benton and Issaquena counties have no FFLs, and thereby default to zero per capita. Choctaw county has the highest number of FFLs per capita at 9.6, followed by Winston county at 8.1.

Five of the ten high-trafficking counties had more FFLs in 2017 than in 2014, while two had fewer and three had the same number. The southern and northwestern regions of the state generally had more FFLs in 2017 than in 2014, while the Delta had mixed results. Additionally, there is a region stretching from Panola and Quitman to Chickasaw and Webster and down to Newton, Lauderdale, and Clarke counties which had consistently fewer FFLs in 2017 than in 2014.

**Analysis.** Mississippi does not have any obvious patterns across the state of gender, age, education levels, or FFLs per capita with regard to high-firearms trafficking counties.
CHAPTER 5
FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

This study evaluated the sociodemographic factors connected with firearms trafficking to Chicago, Illinois from the major sources of illegal guns: Mississippi, Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin. The primary purposes of the study were (a) to determine what differentiates high-trafficking counties in Mississippi from the rest of the state, and (b) to determine if these same factors apply to Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin. Conclusions reached by this study, as well as their implications and future research recommendations are discussed below.

CONCLUSIONS

Mississippi Contributions to Chicago Crime Guns

Mississippi’s ten highest-trafficking counties, Coahoma, Hinds, Leflore, Bolivar, Washington, Madison, Yazoo, Sunflower, Grenada, and Clay, recorded between 110 and 447 traced firearms between 2001 and 2012, and are concentrated in the Mississippi Delta and Madison-Jackson regions. Sixty-six of Mississippi’s other 72 counties had between one and 98 firearms traced which were recovered in Chicago during the eleven-year time period.

This firearms trafficking in Mississippi is likely linked to high poverty and low median household income. Seven of ten counties of interest had higher poverty than the state average and eight of ten had lower than the state median household income for both 2000 and 2010 (Maps 9-10). The Delta region, home to all by one of the high-trafficking
counties, was the area most affected by poverty and low household income since at least 2000 and increasingly into 2010.

Race appears to be connected with firearms trafficking in Mississippi, although inconclusive, as eight of the ten high-trafficking counties had African American majorities of 54% - 69.9% in 2000 and 57.1% - 75.5% in 2010. Of the other 72 counties, only 17 had African American majorities ranging from 50.4% - 86.5% in 2000 and 51.5% - 85.7% in 2010. Madison and Grenada counties are the outliers in terms of race with Caucasians holding a majority of 60.3% and 57.9% in 2000 and 57% and 56.9% in 2010 respectively. The remaining 55 counties had Caucasian majorities ranging from 50.5% - 94.9% in 2000 and 49.5% - 97.5% in 2010 (Maps 14-15).

Age may be connected to Mississippi firearms trafficking as half of the high-trafficking counties had higher rates of adolescents aged 18-24 than the state average of 10.3% and eight of the ten had lower rates of individuals 25 and over with high school diplomas than the state average of 79.1% in 2010 (Maps 23-24). Only 16 other Mississippi counties had higher percentages than the state of persons aged 18-24, demonstrating that age may associated, but it is not the only factor (Map 23).

The relationship between education and firearms trafficking may be more complex, however, as 51 of the 72 remaining counties were also below the state average in individuals 25 and over with high school diplomas of 79.1%, suggesting an overall want of education in Mississippi (Map 24). This being said, higher education levels have been shown to have an overall protective impact on criminality due to an increased capacity for reasoning and rationalization, enhanced skills and job training, and additional opportunities for employment, potentially allowing for a higher income.
Population does not appear to have any link with firearms trafficking in Mississippi as the ten high-trafficking counties ranged from 10,117 to 250,800 in 2000 and from 8,223 to 245,285 in 2010 with no geographic patterns. The other 62 counties in Mississippi with lower trafficking rates ranged from 2,274 to 189,601 in 2000 and from 1,406 to 187,105 in 2010, again without geographic patterns (Map 19).

Additionally, gender does not likely play a role in Mississippi firearms trafficking either, with only Yazoo and Sunflower counties having a higher percentage of males in the population than the state average of 48.6% at 54.4% and 53.4% in 2010 respectively (Map 23). Other counties with more males than females are congregated in the far north and far south regions of the state. The implication of large gender disparities would theoretically support young-adult males representing the highest-offending demographic, but this does not appear to be the case (statement from ATF Special Agent in Charge, Oxford, MS, October 25, 2017).

FFL density does not appear have a connection to Mississippi firearms trafficking as only four of the ten high-trafficking counties had more FFLs per capita than the state average of 3.43 per 10,000 residents in 2014 (Map 25). There is no obvious geographic trend in FFL density across the state, further distancing this factor from firearms trafficking.

**Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin**

Based on Mississippi data, race and income seem to be the factors most closely linked with firearms trafficking as each of the 10 counties of interest had higher than the state’s average black population and eight of ten had larger black than Caucasian populations (Map 15). However, this pattern is not reflected in Illinois, Indiana, or
Wisconsin (Maps 16-18). Each of these three states show trends based on high poverty rates, high median household income, and highly-populated urban areas, demonstrating that strong Mississippi connections do not match strong connections in Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin.

Illinois’ high-trafficking county locations reflect a trend toward urban areas as they fall in the most highly-populated parts of the state (Map 20). The counties surrounding Chicago and Cook County are the most highly populated, followed by Champaign, Sangamon, and Peoria, counties of interest which are each home to large communities located in central Illinois. This trend is repeated in Indiana and Wisconsin as well (Maps 21-22). Indiana’s counties of interest fall in the Gary metropolis just across state lines east of Chicago and in Marion and Hendricks counties, the home of the Indianapolis area. Wisconsin’s high-trafficking counties of interest are congregated in the heavily populated southeast corner of the state just north of Chicago in the Milwaukee area. The Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin counties closest to Chicago may be higher in trafficking due to more mobility between and contact with the city than their more rural counterparts in Mississippi.

**IMPLICATIONS**

Should all four states have shown trends with the same sociodemographic factors, a clearer, more supported conclusion would be established. However, because Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin high-trafficking areas are so clearly connected with high populations and not with racial disparities, they must innately be treated differently than Mississippi’s far more rural high-trafficking counties. Mississippi’s trends of racial
disparities are thereby emphasized when compared with the lack of connection in the three northern states.

The interstate gravity model is not necessarily supported for gun trafficking in the three northern states, where most of the high-trafficking counties are close to Chicago and export firearms at far higher rates than they import. The gravity model would have the wealthier counties exporting fewer firearms than poorer counties, which is the opposite from the case of wealthy counties surrounding Chicago which traffic far more firearms than their poorer counterparts. It appears that sheer distance from Chicago may impact firearms trafficking from Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin counties more than their economic standings.

**FUTURE RESEARCH**

While this study touched on age, gender, and education with relation to firearms trafficking in Mississippi, limited sociodemographic data made it difficult to effectively evaluate their influences, if any. Because of strict Tiarht Amendment regulations limiting firearms trace data publication, there are very few studies which focus specifically on sociodemographic data in relation to firearms. However, various studies have shown that young adult males are more likely than other sociodemographic groups to engage in criminal activity and that high levels of education can serve as a protective factor against criminality. A better understanding of the impact of age, gender, and educational attainment with regard to firearms trafficking would be beneficial.

Mississippi firearms trafficking may also be understood better through a study on what other factors differentiate Issaquena, Humphreys, and Sharkey counties which
trafficked no more than 17 firearms to Chicago, from their high-trafficking Delta neighbors. Information on income disparities in the Delta counties would also be interesting to compare to the median household incomes reported.

One of the more important needs for future research into firearms trafficking to Chicago is an evaluation of sociodemographic factors relevant to trafficking from Alabama, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Ohio, which each trafficked at least 1,000 firearms to Chicago between 2001 and 2012. These four states were excluded from this study because of time constraints, however, they would be interesting to evaluate as they are much further from Chicago and therefore more like Mississippi. This may shed light into the differences in which sociodemographic features were linked in Mississippi versus those in Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin.

Additionally, Clarksdale, Mississippi is the seat of Coahoma county and was home to a major depot for the Illinois Central Railroad, which provided a direct trip to Chicago during the Great Migration. Clarksdale is regionally known for high violent crime rates and a poor relationship between the community and local law enforcement. Further, Larry Hoover, founder of the Gangster Disciples, has familial ties to the area, supporting suggestions that gang activity is responsible for much of the firearms trafficking from the area (statements from ATF Special Agent in Charge, Oxford, MS, October 25, 2017). Gang activity is beyond the scope of this study due to the absence of county-level data on which gangs are active where. However, understanding that dynamic between Mississippi and Chicago would likely prove beneficial to addressing firearms trafficking and other crime in the Mississippi Delta.
References


Mayors Against Illegal Guns. (2010). Trace the guns: The link between gun laws and interstate gun trafficking.


Map 1 – Mississippi Traces
Map 3 – Indiana Traces
Map 5 – Mississippi Poverty
Map 6 – Illinois Poverty
Map 7 – Indiana Poverty
Map 8 – Wisconsin Poverty
Map 9 – Mississippi Income
Map 10 – Mississippi Income and Poverty (ASC 2012 Estimates)

2012 ACS Estimates
Median Household Income $38,882
Population in Poverty 22.3%

Mississippi Income and Poverty (ASC 2012 Estimates)
Map 11 – Illinois Income
Map 12 – Indiana Income
Map 13 – Wisconsin Income
Map 16 – Illinois Race

2010 Racial Makeup

- White 71.5%
- Black 14.5%

Map showing the racial makeup of Illinois counties with various percentages indicated in different counties.
Map 17 – Indiana Race

Percentage of Population in Poverty

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<th>2000</th>
<th>9.5%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
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[Map of Indiana showing percentage of population in poverty by county.]
Map 19 – Mississippi Population
Map 22 – Wisconsin Population
Map 23 – Mississippi Age and Gender
Map 24 – Mississippi High School Completion
Map 25 – Mississippi FFLs