

REPORT 

PROJECT TARGET

The Way of the Gun: Firearm trafficking and its impact on violence in the Netherlands

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Colophon

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Final editing: John Linnegar

Publisher: Nils Duquet, Leuvenseweg 86, 1000 Brussels

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Introduction

On 3 May 2017, the Dutch National Police had to respond to several violent incidents involving firearms: in Rotterdam; a 24-year-old criminal was shot and killed during an illegal arms deal. Police arrested four suspects;¹ in Amsterdam, at least ten shots were fired at a car and its two drivers. Fortunately, both victims survived, yet neither they nor the suspected shooter is providing more information about the context of the shooting, possibly due to their criminal records and involvement in criminal activities;² that same day in Arnhem, employees of a local municipal centre were held hostage for several hours by a 57-year-old man with a fake bomb vest, an imitation firearm and a deep resentment against the government.³ Moreover, news reports covered at least four different robberies throughout that day in which the perpetrators used (imitation) firearms to threaten their victims.⁴

Although such a high number of daily incidents involving a firearm might be unusual in the Netherlands, the examples above reflect the diverse nature of gun violence in the country. Still, the public debate about gun violence is centred mainly on specific events, such as the two public mass shootings in recent Dutch history: in 2011, 24-year-old Tristan van der Vlis shot and killed six individuals in a shopping mall in Alphen aan den Rijn, wounding 17 more. Van der Vlis used a semi-automatic Smith & Wesson M&P15 rifle, a Colt.45 pistol and a Taurus 66 revolver in the shooting – all of the firearms being registered in his name as a member of a local shooting club. Before the police could arrest him, Van der Vlis shot himself. In the aftermath of the shooting, the Dutch National Police were scrutinised in the public debate, as the shooter should not have received a firearm licence owing to previous incidents and psychological issues.⁵ Eight years later, in March 2019, 38-year-old Gökmen Tanis entered a Utrecht tram, shooting and killing four passengers and wounding six others in and around the tram. Tanis used a pistol with a silencer during the attack. Owing to the wording on the silencer and statements made by Tanis himself, the public prosecution office determined the shooting to have had an Islamist terrorist motive. A year later, Tanis was sentenced to life imprisonment.⁶

While these events, associated media reports and information based on investigations by law enforcement have resulted in the development of a body of information about the perpetrators and their victims, a knowledge vacuum exists with regard to the scope, dynamics and evolution of gun violence in the Netherlands in general, and about the firearms used in these acts of violence in particular. This chapter aims to fill this information vacuum by gathering recent primary data on shootings and bringing together information from various sources in order to assess the impact of firearm-trafficking on gun violence in the Netherlands.

The data landscape regarding firearm-trafficking and firearm violence in the Netherlands is fractured. The most complete reliable sources – police records – are not publicly accessible. News reports may be incomplete or unreliable if not confirmed by official sources, and academic studies and previously published reports are largely outdated or have focused on only one specific aspect of firearm violence, such as organised crime.

In this study, we aim to bring together and synthesise information from these different sources so as to examine and discuss the prevalence and nature of gun violence between 2015 and 2019. We also examine and discuss the types of firearm used in these violent acts, their origins and their routes to the Netherlands.

1

Background

Based on sources available publicly, it is not possible to determine the impact of firearm-trafficking on gun violence. This is due mainly to the fragmented landscape of data sources that each hold valuable information about aspects of gun violence and firearm-trafficking yet have not been brought together in a single corpus for thorough analysis. Based on these publicly available sources, we will provide a short overview of the current state of knowledge regarding gun violence and the firearms used in these violent incidents up to 2015. Data related to gun violence incidents after 2015, specifically gathered in the context of this research, are presented in the following sections.

1.1 Firearm regulation and (legal) possession

Compared to the European average, the Netherlands has a relatively low rate of legal firearm possession. This might be related to restrictive regulation: civilian firearm possession is permitted only for members of sport shooting clubs, hunters and professional use. Based on media reports, we are able to provide a rough estimate of licence-holders and registered firearms (see Table 1). While the number of licence-holders fluctuated between 60,000 and 70,000 during the period 2009–2018, the number of registered firearms decreased constantly from more than 217,000 in 2009 to 197,000 in 2018. The Dutch National Police data, as reported on by journalists, show that legal firearm possession is relatively high on the sparsely populated Dutch northern islands and also in some rural municipalities on the mainland. The possession of firearms is particularly low in the larger cities of the country: Utrecht, Amsterdam and Rotterdam.⁷

Table 1: Licence-holders and legally registered firearms in the Netherlands, 2009–2018

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Licence-holders	61,663	61,299	59,299			72,645	72,086			About 60,000
Firearms	217,330	222,288	213,126	215,034	209,922	205,347	206,231		205,347	197,357

Sources: KRO-NCRV(2019), Vermeer (2016), Vermanen (2015), Dutch Safety Board (2011)⁸

The possession of illegal firearms is difficult to measure. Using a combination of estimates from population surveys, experts and analogous comparison with other countries, the Small Arms Survey estimates that civilians in the Netherlands held 236,653 unregistered – therefore illegal – firearms in 2017, which is more than the 205,347 legally registered firearms⁹. Although this estimate provides some context for understanding the nature of firearm-trafficking and violence in the Netherlands, detailed information about the use of firearms in violent acts, their legality and origin is not accessible in public sources. The Dutch National Police, as well as institutes conducting research on firearms commissioned by the police, such as the Netherlands Forensisch Instituut (NFI – Dutch Forensic Institute), administer such information for internal purposes. It is only sometimes that statistics are published when required by journalists or when researchers are granted individual permissions.

1.2 Firearm violence

Information regarding the prevalence and nature of gun violence can be derived from various studies and reports from academic scholars and other (governmental and non-governmental) research institutes. Of particular value is a series of four reports commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Justice after the introduction of the uniform registration of firearm-related incidents across regional police offices in the Netherlands in 2001.¹⁰ These reports provide an insight into the prevalence and nature of gun violence from 1998 to 2003.¹¹ A number of studies and reports that included information regarding gun violence followed in the years after 2003, although most did not focus exclusively on gun violence specifically but rather on (organised) crime,¹² or on homicides. In 2020, a Dutch research institute published a report on the societal impact of illegal firearms, using news reports and expert interview as a source¹³.

Overall, the World Health Organization’s (WHO) official statistics report a decline in lethal gun violence since the early 2000s as measured by absolute numbers of individuals shot and killed with a firearm:¹⁴ in 2000, 0.4 individuals per 100,000 (n = 68) as opposed to 0.2 (n = 28) in 2016. A national study on homicide by Aarten and

colleagues shows that between 1992 and 2016, 35.1% of all homicides in the Netherlands were committed with a firearm.¹⁵ As homicides in the Netherlands are relatively rare, several publicly accessible sources, such as newspaper reports and police statements, provide details of these firearm homicides, including the location, context and individuals involved. However, the majority of firearm violence remains non-lethal. Spapens & Bruinsma estimated that about 90% of all shootings between 1998 and 2000 did not result in a fatality.¹⁶ Other reliable statistics on non-fatal shootings in the Netherlands until 2015 do not exist and detailed information about non-fatal cases that is accessible publicly is rare. As a result, a proper estimation of the prevalence of in particular non-lethal firearm violence is difficult. The most reliable data lie with the Dutch National Police, who have registered firearm-related fatal and non-fatal shootings in a separate database since 2018. Yet those data are not publicly accessible. Some details of incidents of firearm violence might also be derived from news reports, yet the reliability and completeness of those accounts are inferior to those of police records. Based on such news reports, as well as expert interviews, a Dutch research institute estimated that media report on average about 0.78 firearm-related incidents a day, which should be regarded as an underestimation of the total number of incidents¹⁷.

1.3 Organised crime and firearms

Because of its geographic setting and the number of sizeable ports the Netherlands possesses, the country has been an entry point to Europe for international drug-traffickers.¹⁸ Where the smuggling of drugs in the 1990s and before that included mostly cannabis from Morocco or Afghanistan, cocaine has become a more lucrative business in the 21st century.¹⁹ The Dutch border police, the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee and customs officers regularly seize large amounts of drugs in the various ports of the country. In 2020 alone, Dutch law enforcement seized more than 40,000 kg of cocaine in the port of Rotterdam, a little over 6,000 kg in the port of Vlissingen and almost 1,000 kg in Moerdijk port, in addition to another 1,000 kg seized at Schiphol airport in Amsterdam. More than 60,000 kg of this drug were seized even before the consignments reached the Dutch border.²⁰ With a street value of several billion euro, these drugs are trafficked illicitly by many criminals in the Netherlands who are either directly or indirectly involved. Among their number could be corrupt customs employees facilitating the entry of drugs into the country or kingpin criminals organising and planning trafficking routes from Latin America and other places into the Netherlands. Although the consumption of cocaine or other drugs might lead to violence, the vast majority of violence related to drug-trafficking in the Netherlands is so-called “systemic violence”: violence originating from the dynamics associated with the production or distribution of drugs.²¹

In the public debate, gun violence in the Netherlands is typically equated with such drug-related violence. Targeted killings of high-profile criminals receive considerable media attention and public interest in these criminal activities has only increased in recent years, spurred on by the coverage of several major court cases against some of the main players in the criminal milieu. In a national threat assessment of organised

crime, Boerman and colleagues report that 98 (attempted) targeted shootings that are related to organised crime activities took place between 2013 and 2015.²² In support of that, Ferwerda and colleagues report a strong interconnectedness between illegal firearms and organised crime groups (OCGs), that lure in young criminals and introduce them to illegal firearms.²³ Of particular concern for law enforcement is the assumed arms race among OCGs, both for personal protection and for (retaliatory) violence against the competition.²⁴ Yet, while (attempted) targeted killings frequently take place in public spaces, it must be assumed that other crimes in the criminal milieu involving firearms, such as threats, remain unreported and invisible both to the public, and presumably, to a large extent to law enforcement

2

Research Design

In attempting to fill the knowledge vacuum on the scope, dynamics and evolution of lethal and non-lethal gun violence in the Netherlands, we have made use of a total of four data sources: the Dutch National Police; data on firearms provided by the national forensic institute; a newly established Dutch Firearm Violence Monitor for non-lethal incidents of gun violence and – for lethal cases – information captured in the Dutch Homicide Monitor (see Table 2 below); finally, we made use of expert interviews to delve deeper into the dynamics underlying the relationship between illegal firearm-trafficking and gun violence.

Table 2: Available information per source and assessment of reliability, completeness and detail

	Dutch Homicide Monitor	Dutch Firearm Violence Monitor	Police data	NFI data
Non-lethal threats	–	X	–	–
Non-lethal shootings	–	X	X	X
Lethal shootings	X	X	X	X
Quality assessment				
Trustworthiness	+	/	+	+
Completeness	+	–	+	/
Detail	+	+	/	+

2.1 Dutch National Police data

In 2001, the uniform registration of firearm incidents was introduced across all regional police units. In 2013, these units were further merged into the Dutch National Police. With these institutional changes, the registration of firearm incidents has become increasingly structured. Since 2018, statistics on firearm-related incidents have been gathered in the police-maintained 'Firearm Dashboard', which provides information regarding individual cases of fatal and non-fatal shootings against human targets, animals or objects since 1 January 2018. It also provides information on national and regional statistics on the number of shootings, their locations and firearm seizures. Although this dashboard exemplifies the Dutch National Police's attention to and interest in structural data-gathering concerning gun violence in the Netherlands, it is not accessible to the public. Only a few statistics derived from this firearm dashboard are made public via newspapers or online news outlets, or through the Government Information Act (Wet openbaarheid van bestuur).²⁵ In the context of this research, we were granted permission to access the Firearm Dashboard in April 2021. We retrieved data from this source to triangulate and validate the data captured in the Dutch Homicide Monitor and the Dutch Firearm Violence Monitor, and as a source of information regarding firearm-trafficking.

2.2 Dutch Forensic Institute Data

The work conducted by the Dutch Forensic Institute (Nederlands Forensisch Instituut) (NFI) focuses on forensics: once a shooting is registered and the remnants of these shootings, such as a firearm, bullet fragments or shells, are recovered, firearm experts working at the NFI conduct research on the gathered evidence, if commissioned to do so by the police. The results of such investigations can reveal the types of firearm used during the shooting (if the firearm itself was not recovered), the calibre used, the range of shooting and whether the firearm used during an incident was registered in connection with previous incidents.²⁶ This information can, in turn, be used by the police and the public prosecutor to find suspects and to match firearms to specific suspects and specific incidents. Information on firearms gathered by the NFI is registered with the Integrated Ballistics Information System (IBIS), a European database for evidence related to firearms. This enables international comparisons, for example to identify whether a particular firearm has been used in several incidents across different countries.²⁷ Unfortunately, data resulting from investigations at the NFI are generally not publicly available. Moreover, it should be noted that the NFI conducts only investigations commissioned by the Dutch police. Therefore, if an incident is not considered relevant enough to be investigated further by the NFI – for example if firearms have been seized but there is no concrete evidence that a violent offence was committed with any of these firearms – information regarding those weapons might be lost. Such decisions are influenced by available resources, both the labour force and the time constraints and financial aspects.²⁸ In the context of this research, we have been able to receive an overview of anonymised case-level data for

2015–2019. Owing to anonymisation, it was not possible to link specific types of firearm to individual cases captured in the other three datasets.

2.3 Dutch Homicide Monitor

A third data source we used for this study – particularly for lethal cases – includes the Dutch Homicide Monitor (DHM), set up by one of the researchers of this study.²⁹ In its current form, the DHM contains relevant and detailed data on all homicides committed between 1992 and 2019, including homicides committed with firearms. Data derived from the monitor are based on a combination and triangulation of news reports, police data and, where available, prosecution data, individual criminal justice case files and forensic mental health reports.

2.4 Dutch Firearm Violence Monitor

The Dutch data sources discussed above each offer valuable insights, yet they all suffer to some degree from shortcomings. To paint a reliable and detailed picture of gun violence and illicit firearm-trafficking in the Netherlands, we set up a database of violent firearm-related incidents. The aim of this database, the DFVM, is to describe and compare detailed data on incidents of gun violence. We did so by combining quantitative and qualitative data from various sources: for example, from newspapers. Put simply, we have converted text into numbers that can be analysed statistically to enable us to draw comparable conclusions. To this end, we created a coding manual that served as a guide for quantifying text into numerical codes and which ensured the homogeneity of data collection. The coding manual used to establish the DFVM consists of 51 variables that collect information about the case in general (such as time and location), the firearm(s) used in the violent incident and the characteristics of the perpetrator(s) and victim(s).³⁰ The validated coding manual for the European Homicide Monitor (EHM)³¹ served as a starting point for this manual. We adapted this manual to include both fatal and non-fatal violent incidents of gun violence. The final codebook for the DFVM can be accessed online.³²

Our aim was to include all violent firearm-related incidents, including threats with (even imitation) firearms and fatal and non-fatal shootings that took place in the Netherlands between January 2015 and December 2019. Incidents were excluded when they included (even imitation) firearms that were used as a blunt object, for example to hit someone over the head. We used a broad definition of firearm that includes live-firing pistols, revolvers, rifles, shotguns, (sub-)machine guns, as well as Flauberts, air guns, alarm or gas guns, antique guns, imitation firearms or toy guns.

Initially, information derived from media sources built the basis for the DFVM. Although they are less reliable than data from police or court files, media reports have the advantage of being easily accessible and including – at least in a decent number of cases – detailed information. To systematically find all relevant news reports depicting gun-violence cases between 2015 and 2019 we used LexisNexis, a search engine for the

most relevant national, regional and local newspapers in the Netherlands. Searching with keywords such as ‘shooting’ (schietincident, schietpartij), ‘shots fired’ (geschoten, beschoten) or synonyms of (types of) ‘firearm’ (vuurwapen, pistool, geweer) resulted in more than 130,000 possibly relevant news reports being identified. These news reports were systematically evaluated for their importance in this research. Information from the remaining 3,527 news reports was then entered into the database using the coding manual. Wherever possible, information in the database was verified with information captured in court proceedings. The final result is a database that provides the opportunity for comparable, in-depth research on the phenomenon of guns and related violence in the Netherlands. Table 3 displays the type of gun violence included for each year in the Dutch Firearm Violence Monitor.

Table 3: Inclusion of data on firearms and related gun violence in this study

	Non-lethal threats	Non-lethal shootings	Lethal shootings
2015	X	X	X
2016	X	X	X
2017	X	X	X
2018		X	X
2019		X	X

2.5 Expert interviews

The DFVM offers the first unique opportunity to investigate the prevalence and, in particular, the characteristics of firearm violence incidents in addition to the victims and perpetrators of them. However, findings from the DFVM must be placed in the context in which law enforcement operates to fight gun violence and illicit firearm-trafficking in the Netherlands. Expert interviews with representatives from law enforcement (n = 4), firearm experts working at the NFI (n = 2) and a criminologist (n = 1) therefore proved invaluable to verifying findings, contextual insights and individual commentary regarding combatting the phenomena being studied.

All of the interviewees provided their consent to use the information derived from the interviews, albeit in anonymised forms. A final draft of the chapter was sent to every interviewee to ensure that the study represented their perspectives accurately.

3



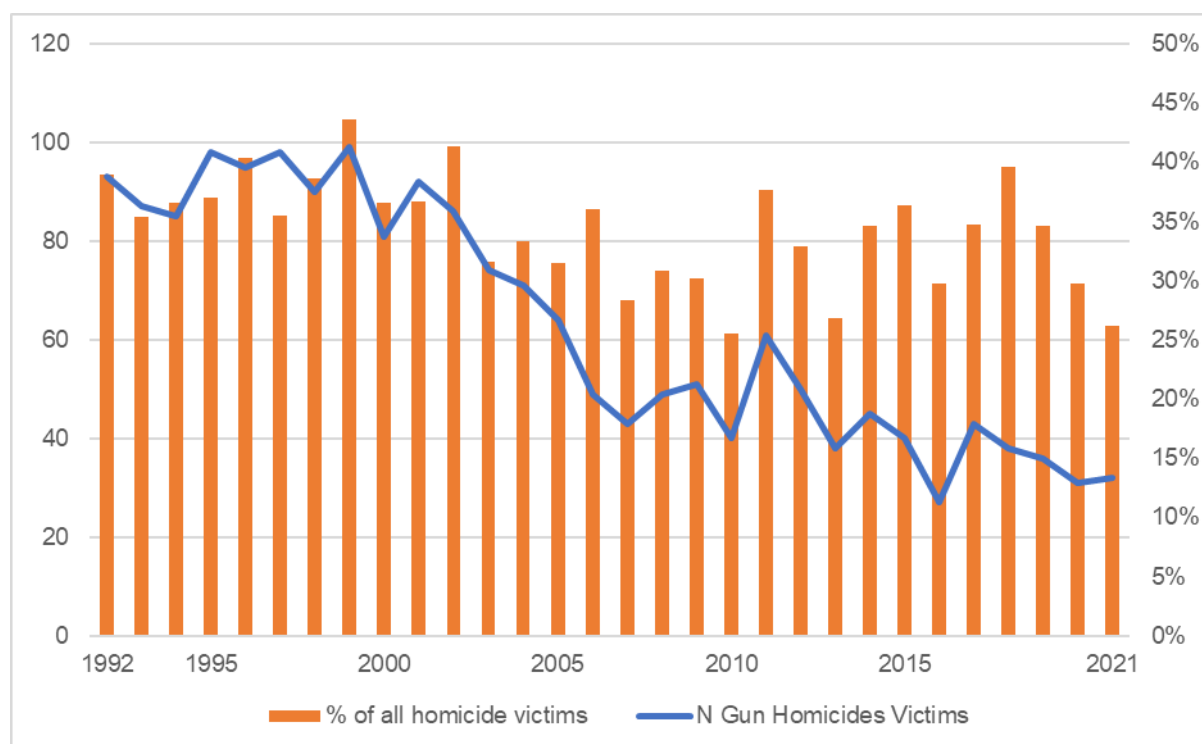
Prevalence of gun violence

3.1 Gun homicides

Unlike other crimes, homicides leave a body behind, making this type of crime more visible and detectable by the authorities,³³ regardless of reporting trends.³⁴ Other categories of crime data, including firearm data, are thought to suffer from considerable validity problems.³⁵ To name a few examples, gun violence is not defined in the same way in different countries and police also do not use the same thresholds of aggravation in classifying such offences in different countries.³⁶ Against this backdrop, homicide data are believed to have a greater external validity when compared to other types of crime.³⁷ Therefore, in what follows, we first provide an overview of gun homicides in the Netherlands in the period 1992–2019.

In doing so, we used data from the Dutch Homicide Monitor (DHM), which combines information from police reports, court data and news reports on all homicides in the Netherlands since the early 1990s. As Figure 1 below indicates, a clear declining trend in the number of victims of gun homicides can be observed. More specifically, the number of gun homicide victims in 2020 ($n = 31$) is only one-third of the number recorded in 1992 ($n = 93$). A notable exemption to this trend is the year 2011, in which Tristan van der Vlis shot and killed visitors to a mall in Alphen aan den Rijn, one of only two mass shootings recorded in the Netherlands since the start of the century.³⁸ Zooming in on the time frame 2015–2019, a total of 167 homicides in which a firearm was used took place in the Netherlands.

Figure 1: Number of firearm homicides and percentages of all homicide victims



Source: Dutch Homicide Monitor (Leiden University, 2021)

The significant decline in the number of firearm homicides does not imply that firearms have become less prevalent as a modus operandi in homicides: of all the homicides committed in the Netherlands each year, gunshot wounds were the main cause of death for on average 34.6% of all homicide victims between 1992 and 2020. In contrast with the total number of homicide victims, which has declined markedly in these years, the percentage of homicide victims killed with firearms has remained relatively stable (see Figure 1). Taking all of these years together, firearms were the most prevalent modus operandi, responsible for 35.1% of all deaths in the recorded 29 years, followed by knives at 33.4%. Looking only at the most recent years (2015–2020), however, more victims are killed with knives than with firearms.

3.2 Shootings

At a national level, the systematic registration of shootings started only in 2018. For this reason, it is not possible to determine any long-term trends regarding non-lethal shootings in the Netherlands. In 2018, police registered 577 shootings, with 120 of these cases resulting in an injury. One year later, police reported 646 shootings and 131 cases with injuries (see Table 4). Another increase in shootings occurred the following year, with 668 registered shootings in 2020, followed by a decrease to 594 shootings in

2021. The number of shootings resulting in injuries, however, did not increase proportionately.

Table 4: Shootings in the Netherlands, 2018–2019

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of shootings	577	646	668	594
Number of cases of human target with injuries	120	132	133	103

Source: Firearm Dashboard (Dutch National Police, 2022)

Other shooting-related information was available only at the local level, as reported by local police to newspapers. In Amsterdam, local police registered 37 firearm ‘incidents’ in 2017, which more than doubled to 75 incidents in the first nine months of 2019. Whether those incidents included only shootings remains unclear in the news report. The police unit in the region of Greater Rotterdam registered a similar increase from 71 shootings in 2018 to 108 shootings by mid-December 2020. Of these 108 shootings, 74 took place in the city of Rotterdam, whereas the remaining 34 occurred in surrounding areas that also fall under the jurisdiction of the police unit in Rotterdam. In total, 24 cases resulted in one or more individuals with non-lethal injuries.

Based on combined sources, our DFVM captured information on 637 non-lethal shootings for the years 2015–2019. When comparing these figures to the number of police-registered shootings for the years 2018 and 2019, it must be assumed that the DFVM includes around one-fifth of all shootings during these years. In 535 cases, shots were fired at an individual or shots were fired to threaten an individual directly. Objects such as houses or shops were targeted in 85 cases.^I For the remaining 37 cases, a specific target could not be determined. Those cases might include incidents in which shots were fired in the air, for example to try out a firearm, or shots fired at animals.

3.3 Threats

The DFVM registered 606 threats involving firearms during the years 2015–2017, which translates into around 200 firearm-related threats each year. However, we must assume that the actual number of threats with firearms is significantly higher. Non-lethal threats involving firearms might be the most difficult type of gun violence to identify. There are several reasons for this: first, the National Police are not systematically registering these threats – to the extent that they are reported to the police – as firearm-related incidents. Whether or not a police officer registers that a

^I When a house was shot at and police was able to determine that the shooting was meant as a threat against a specific resident in the house, the case was coded as a shooting against an individual. If police were not able to make such a determination, the case remained registered in the DFVM as a shooting against an object. If both an individual and a house were targeted, we coded the case as a shooting against an individual.

gun was part of the crime is dependent on the individual police officer. Although such registration would help to enhance the information on non-lethal gun violence in particular, practical reasons impede this mission. Whereas shootings usually leave behind evidence on the victim or at the crime scene – for example in the form of gunshot wounds, a bullet (fragment) or cartridge cases – it can be difficult to determine for victims, witnesses and police whether an actual (even imitation) firearm was used during a threat or whether a perpetrator used another object with a similar shape. Registering such cases as either firearm- or non-firearm-related incidents could inflate the official statistics on gun violence in the Netherlands, leading to a reduction in their comparability with other countries. Newspapers reporting on such non-lethal threats opt to report on incidents involving ‘something looking like a firearm’.³⁹ A second problem regarding the measurement of non-lethal threats with firearms is the possibly of low degree of reporting rates to the police, in particular when such crimes occur in the domestic sphere, where the victim might try to protect the perpetrator or between criminals who are not interested in involving the police. Such incidents would also rarely be reported in the media unless they occurred in a public space.

3.4 Location of gun violence

3.4.1 Geographic location

Both lethal and non-lethal firearm violence in the Netherlands is concentrated mainly in the largest cities of the country: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and the Hague. Figures 2–5 show the locations of gun homicides, non-lethal shootings and threats involving firearms. As these figures reflect, Amsterdam and Rotterdam (22.2% and 14.4% of all gun homicides, respectively) stand out in particular, with the vast majority of all homicide cases taking place in only these two cities. Relatively few lethal shootings have been registered in the northern regions of the Netherlands. Groningen, for example, the main city of the most northern Dutch province Groningen, registered only one gun homicide during this period.

Figure 2: Gun homicides (n = 167) in the Netherlands, 2015–2019



Source: Dutch Homicide Monitor (Leiden University, 2021)

Focusing on non-lethal shootings in Figure 2 specifically, similar concentrations are registered in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. Even more so, with 20.4 per 100,000 residents, Rotterdam counts relatively more non-lethal shootings than Amsterdam (20 per 100,000 residents). Those cities are followed by the Hague (8.7 per 100,000 residents), Utrecht (10.4 per 100,000 residents) and Nijmegen (9.4 per 100,000 residents), the last of these three a city close to the border with Germany.

Figures 3 and 4 highlight further clusters of gun violence in the south of the country. Although not comparable in size to those of Amsterdam or Rotterdam, in particular non-lethal shootings occur in middle-sized and small cities close to the Belgian border. In 2015, following several drug-related homicides, the (former) regional chief of criminal investigations in Brabant called the region around the border “the crime hotspot” in the Netherlands (emphasis in original).⁴⁰ A possible explanation for this pattern might be the association between these shootings and cross-national criminal activities, such as drug trafficking. We probe deeper into this issue in section 5.2 on gun violence within the criminal milieu.

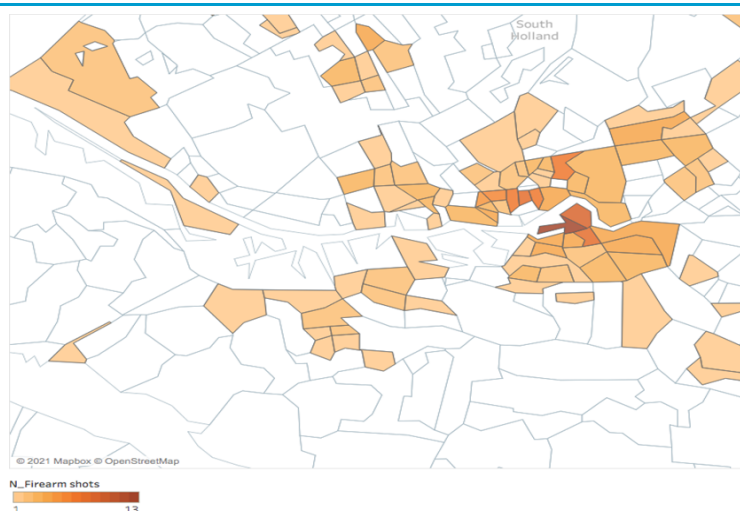
Figure 3: Non-lethal shootings (n = 167) in the Netherlands, 2015–2019



Source: Dutch Firearm Violence Monitor (Leiden University, 2021)

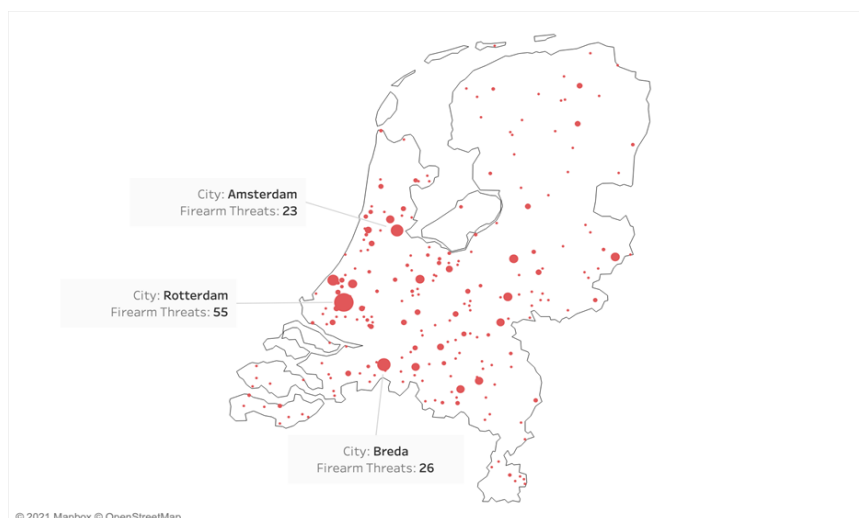
Zooming in on the concentration of non-lethal firearm violence in cities equally shows a concentration in specific neighbourhoods (measured by levels of postal code), as can be indicated in the map of Rotterdam (Figure 4). So far, ongoing research suggests that such a concentration of shootings co-occurs in spaces with other types of drug-related violence, such as the use of hand grenades, or other types of crimes⁴¹.

Figure 4: Non-lethal shootings (n = 156) in Rotterdam, 2015–2019



Source: Dutch Firearm Violence Monitor (Leiden University, 2021)

Figure 5: Threats with firearms (n = 606) in the Netherlands, 2015–2019



Source: Dutch Firearm Violence Monitor (Leiden University, 2021)

Firearm-related threats reveal a slightly different spatial pattern. The largest Dutch cities still register more incidents, yet incidents are spread all over the country, including middle- to small-sized cities. A possible explanation might be the context of the threats as opposed to lethal and non-lethal shootings: threats with firearms often occur in the context of robberies of shops, restaurants or private homes all over the country. This is as opposed to shootings that can be connected to activities in the criminal milieu, which is concentrated in specific places.

3.4.2 Crime Scene

In addition to information on the spatial location and the specific context of incidents of gun violence, our data sources provide information on the type of crime scene (see Table 5).

Table 5: Crime scene for lethal and non-lethal shootings, 2015–2019, and firearm-related threats, 2015–2017 – percentage of known cases

	Private homes	Inside vehicle	Shop, restaurant, place of entertainment	Street, park, public transportation, recreational area	Workplace & other
Gun homicide (n = 166)	29.4	16.3	7.2	45.2	1.9
Non-lethal shooting (n = 612)	27.1	4.6	10.5	55.4	2.4
Threats (n = 577)	24.4	2.4	34.3	35.7	3.2

Sources: Dutch Homicide Monitor, Dutch Firearm Violence Monitor (Leiden University, 2021)

Approximately one-quarter to one-third of all lethal (29.4%) and non-lethal (27.1%) shootings, and threats (24.4%), take place in or directly around private homes. This category includes the private homes of perpetrators, victims or another person. The majority of domestic cases take place in these private spaces, and also a significant share of criminal activities that might result in violence involving firearms, for example rip deals.

Gun homicides in cars seem to be related mostly to targeted killings in the criminal milieu where the perpetrator or perpetrators follow the victim around for some time, sometimes with spyware attached to the victim's car.⁴² In several instances between 2015 and 2019, criminals did not shy away from shooting at a victim sitting in a car while others were present in the same car as the victim.

Shootings or threats in restaurants, shops or other places of entertainment, such as bars, are relatively rare. Some of these incidents are related to nightlife violence or robberies, others to the criminal milieu, as discussed in a previous section.

Overall, a large proportion of incidents of gun violence in the Netherlands take place in urban, public spaces that are frequented by many people. Law-enforcement officials and criminologists are worried about shootings occurring in these places, as they involve many individuals who could possibly be affected directly as victims or indirectly as witnesses of a shooting or threat with a firearm, because of their public nature.⁴³

4

Contexts of gun violence

Of particular interest to this study is the context in which firearms are used, as this information might allow us to paint a picture of the legality of weapons and, in return, of the impact of illicit firearm-trafficking on gun violence. In general, providing an overview of case characteristics for non-lethal shootings and threats was difficult, given the issues of reporting in news articles and the lack of other, reliable sources. As a result, the context in which these events take place remains to some extent undetermined.

Table 6: Type of violence for lethal and non-lethal shootings 2015–2019 and threats 2015–2017 in the Netherlands: percentage of known cases

	Intimate partner violence	Other domestic violence	Criminal milieu	Robbery	Nightlife	Other
Gun homicide (n = 148)	8.1	5.5	58.8	2.0	4.1	21.5
Non-lethal shooting (n = 305)	3.6	2.6	29.6	14.7	5.6	43.9
Threats (n = 541)	3.0	0.7	2.4	74.3	2.0	17.5

Source: Dutch Homicide Monitor, Dutch Firearm Violence Monitor (Leiden University, 2021)

4.1 Domestic violence

Reports on domestic violence incidents involving firearms are relatively rare. About one in seven gun homicides between 2015 and 2019 took place in the domestic sphere. The

majority of these homicides involved intimate partners former partners. Relatively few non-lethal domestic violence incidents have been reported in the DFVM, which may be attributable to reporting bias by both the media and the police. It can be assumed, in short, that the actual prevalence of such incidents is significantly higher than those reported here or elsewhere.

Even though domestic incidents involving a firearm usually gain less public attention due to their private nature, a number of cases in the five years under study have piqued the interest of the public and the media. In 2015, for example, a 36-year-old man shot and killed his ex-girlfriend with several shots after a physical fight in public in front of her house. The perpetrator had numerous licences for firearms and was considered a trained shooter.⁴⁴ In Rotterdam, a 16-year-old student was shot dead at her school by her then 29-year-old ex-boyfriend whom she reported several times to the police for stalking, prior to her death.⁴⁵ Both perpetrators of these gun homicides were sentenced to more than ten years in prison. A particularly stirring case of a lethal domestic incident involves the shooting of a family in Dordrecht: the 35-year-old father, a police officer, used his service weapon to kill his two daughters (eight and 12) and his wife (27), before committing suicide.⁴⁶ The latter is also an example of a homicide and a suicide committed with a firearm. Previous studies in Europe and abroad have shown that homicide-suicides are more likely to involve firearms than other types of lethal violence.⁴⁷

4.2 Criminal milieu

More than half (58.8%) of all gun homicides, and almost 30% of non-lethal shootings were associated with the criminal milieu, in particular targeted shootings of criminals involved in drug-related activities. Violence in the criminal milieu is connected to activities of (semi-) organized crime groups, that are involved in drugs-trafficking or other illegal endeavours, such as rip deals. There are many examples of such (lethal) violence in the Netherlands: in June 2016, a 70-year-old man was shot dead in front of his house. He was thought to have been involved in transporting cocaine in collaboration with others. One of his business partners would later commission the man's killing after he suspected that the man had kept several kilos cocaine from a larger transport to the United Kingdom for himself.⁴⁸ This assassination is not a stand-alone case: the man suspected to have commissioned the murder is part of one of the biggest court cases against organised crime in the Netherlands, the Marengo matter, which started in March 2021. In that court case, a total of 17 suspects were tried for at least six targeted killings, several attempted assassinations and membership of an organised crime group. Law enforcement and journalists have linked more than 15 homicide victims to the head of the group, ranging from his close acquaintances to rivals, as well as the brother and the lawyer in the crown witness.⁴⁹ All of these victims were killed with firearms. Many victims were shot in public spaces, such as on the street, or in their own cars, which might explain the high percentage of lethal shootings occurring in those places (see Table 5 crime scene).

In many of the cases of gun violence within the criminal milieu, both offender and victim(s) are usually involved in illegal activities. Yet, in recent years, violence has spilled over beyond the groups, for example in the targeted killings of Derk Wiersum, the lawyer of a crown witness, and Peter R. de Vries, a crime journalist.⁵⁰ Although some have claimed that such incidents showcase an increase in lethal gun violence, the annual number of gun homicides have not increased significantly so far. Rather, this spill over of violence could indicate a change in how gun violence is utilized by members of criminal groups.⁵¹

While most of these public assassinations are well recorded by news outlets and usually lead to the generation of official police statements, non-lethal shootings among criminals may remain largely unknown. This is because neither the victims nor the perpetrators of such crimes, if captured, are willing to provide information to either police or the media. What remains of such events are typically only witness reports of shots being fired, people running away from the crime scene, and (fired) bullets.

More recently, hand grenades have been used in combination with shootings. A spatial comparison of incidents where lethal and non-lethal shootings occurred and hand grenades were found shows an overlap in the same areas, both on a national and on a local scale.⁵² Although the connection between firearms and hand grenades has not been studied extensively in the Netherlands yet, anecdotal evidence would suggest that hand grenades are used in the criminal milieu and as an extortion tool, similarly to targeted shootings at the houses of rivals.⁵³

4.3 Robberies

Robberies account for a large percentage of threats with (imitation) firearms (74.3%), some non-lethal shootings (14.7%) and very few lethal shootings (2%). This category includes robberies of shops, supermarkets, restaurants, private homes and. Accounts of such events are found frequently in the media as they usually involve several victims or witnesses, such as shop owners, customers or other bystanders who are willing to recount details of the event to journalists. For example, in February 2016, a 28-year-old man with a previous record of theft, burglary and robberies threatened a cashier, a customer and a young child with a firearm when he robbed a local textile store. Police arrested the perpetrator later, confiscating a firearm and various types of drug during the arrest.⁵⁴ In another attempted robbery, six youngsters between 13 and 16 years old attempted to rob a 30-year-old woman in Arnhem using an imitation firearm. They were arrested by police later that night.⁵⁵

Shootings during robberies are relatively rare but they do occur. In 2019, a jewellery store in Breda was robbed. Four perpetrators entered the store, fired several shots and attacked the security guard and a customer. No one was injured by the gunshots. The perpetrators were able to escape.⁵⁶ Although official statistics covering robberies with firearms do not exist (in particular, when no shots were fired), based on our

observations we may argue that a fraction of these crimes are committed with imitation firearms, gas pistols or other objects with a similar shape and look like real firearms.

4.4 Nightlife violence, accidents and other types of shooting

Many shootings and threats with firearms do not fit the categories given above, such as threats between non-criminal business partners, longstanding rivalries between families or groups of youngsters that culminate in violence. For example, in 2018, a fight over a woman ended in a shooting that led to two individuals being seriously injured in Roermond. The shooter had previously received a firearm from one of his friends, who was later also arrested by the police.⁵⁷ In another case, a woman was shot and injured her arm when her upstairs neighbour tried to hide his firearm under his girlfriend's bed, accidentally pulling the trigger in the process.⁵⁸

Whereas these previous examples include human targets, a significant proportion of shootings in the Netherlands are directed at buildings, mainly bars, shisha lounges, coffee shops or shops. These shootings appear to be used as a means of extortion or threat: the perpetrators may not be interested in causing physical harm to their victims, yet they intend to send a clear message. Furthermore, such shootings tend to result in financial consequences for the victim, as local government representatives tend to close businesses or ban individuals after repeated incidents of violence aimed at them.

The following case illustrates how effective this criminal method can be. A jewellery store in Utrecht opened its doors in July 2019 and was shot at three times between the end of July and mid-September. In all three incidents, a shooter arrived on a bicycle at night and fired several shots at the façade of the house before escaping. The local authority ordered the mandatory closure of the store for five weeks after the second and third shootings in an attempt to restore calm in the neighbourhood, but the owners decided to close the store after the third shooting.⁵⁹ The perpetrator(s) of these shootings were not found, as is often the case.

Private homes are shot at less frequently. Based on witness statements of neighbours, journalists typically connect such shootings to a criminal background of the resident living in the house that was shot at. Such suspicions can rarely be proven, as police avoid making statements so as to protect the privacy of individuals and the victims are reluctant to speak.

5

Victims of gun violence

Lethal gun violence resulted in the loss of 184 lives between 2015 and 2019. More than 93% of all these gun homicide cases included only one victim. Two cases involved four victims, the highest number of victims per case recorded in those years: the terrorist attack in Utrecht and the homicide of four men in a grow-shop¹ in Enschede.⁶⁰

Table 7: Gender and age of victims of lethal and non-lethal shootings, 2015–2019, and threats, 2015–2019 in the Netherlands – percentage of known individual victims

		<18	18–24	25–39	40–59	60+	Total: type of gun violence
Gun homicide (n = 179)	Male (n = 155)	1.1	9.5	44.2	28	4.1	86.6
	Female (n = 24)	4.2	1.2	5.7	1.8	1.2	13.4
Non-lethal shooting (n = 186)	Male (n = 160)	6.3	22.1	35.7	16.1	5.2	86.0
	Female (n = 26)	3.6	1.0	5.1	2.0	1.5	14.0
Threats (n = 224)	Male (n = 170)	13.4	23.7	15.8	14.4	7.6	75.9
	Female (n = 54)	3.0	3.9	7.7			24.1

Sources: Dutch Homicide Monitor, Dutch Firearm Violence Monitor (Leiden University, 2021)

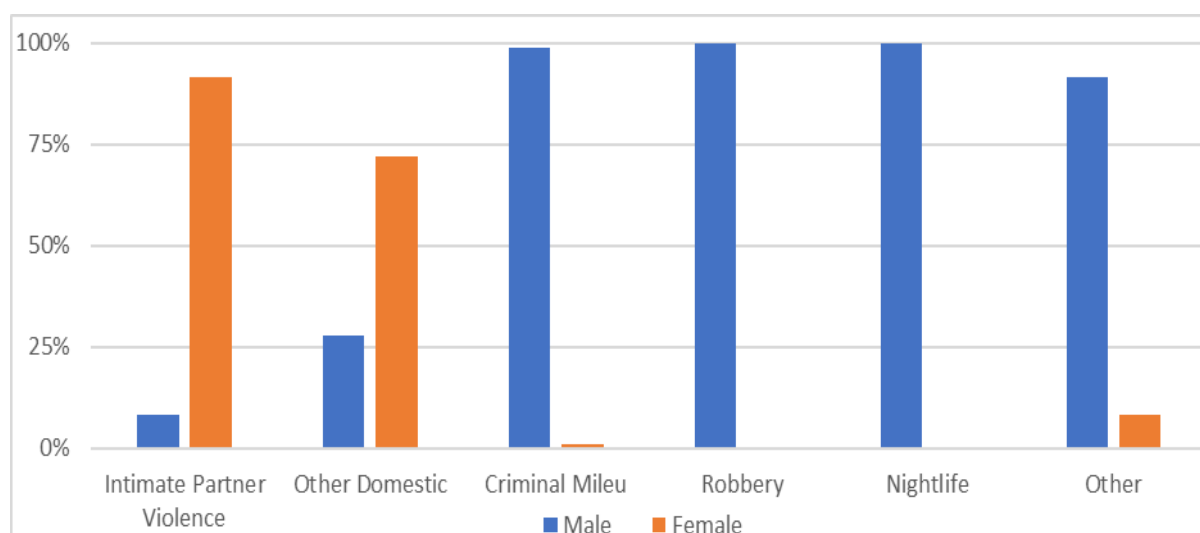
¹ A grow-shop is a retail store that sells equipment and supplies for growing plants indoors; included are stores selling hydroponic systems for horticulture and those devoted to cannabis cultivation.

5.1 Gender

The majority of gun violence victims are men across all types of gun violence registered: 86,6% (n = 155) of gun homicide victims between 2015 and 2019 are men, which is similar to the 86% of victims of non-lethal shootings registered in the DFVM. The fraction of male victims is slightly lower in the case of non-lethal threats involving firearms, at 75.9%. Women make up between 13% and 24% of gun violence victims.

One explanation for this significant difference in victim gender may lie in the context of gun violence. In all types except domestic gun homicides, men dominate as victims; but more than 91% of all victims of gun homicides involving intimate partners and 72% of other domestic homicides are women.

Figure 6: Gender of gun homicide victims by type of lethal gun violence in the Netherlands, 2015–2019



Source: Dutch Homicide Monitor (Leiden University, 2021)

A similar distribution across different contexts of gun violence is visible. The slightly higher percentage of female victims of threats can be explained by the presence of robberies of shops and street robberies which involved female employees or customers.

5.2 Age

Almost half (44%) of all male victims of lethal gun violence were aged between 25 and 39 (see Table 8). The youngest victim killed with a gun between 2015 and 2019 was only five years old; the oldest 74. The average age of gun homicide victims is almost 36 years. Non-lethal shootings registered in the DFVM seem to involve younger individuals in their 20s, which sets the average age of non-lethal gun violence victims at 32.5 years. More than one in five surviving victims are aged between 18 and 24. The

youngest victim involved in a non-lethal shooting was a two-year-old toddler girl, who was grazed by a bullet when two groups of young men shot at each other on the street after a drug-related fight.⁶¹ Fortunately, she was not seriously injured. The age of victims of threats with (even imitation) firearms does not follow a specific pattern.

5.3 Other characteristics

In addition to victim age and gender, both the DHM and the DFVM aim to gather information about the personal background of perpetrators and victims. These include civil status, country of birth, whether the victim was intoxicated or under the influence of drugs during the crime and beforehand, and whether the individual has a criminal, if not violent, past.

An initial analysis of the information regarding the country of birth of gun violence victims confirms the findings of previous studies:⁶² victims of Turkish and Moroccan decent are over-represented as victims of both lethal and non-lethal shootings, compared to their share of the national population. Other information regarding the victims' backgrounds was not available from media reports.

In conclusion, in line with previous studies,⁶³ lethal and non-lethal gun violence in the Netherlands is mainly a male problem. In general, however, it must be noted that the number of individuals affected by gun violence in the Netherlands is higher than any official statistic will show: not only individuals with lethal or non-lethal gunshot wounds must be considered victims, but also individuals who were threatened with a (even an imitation) firearm, possibly fearing for their lives.

6

Offenders of gun violence

For the 167 gun homicides recorded in the Netherlands between 2015 and 2019 a total of 254 perpetrators were identified. These include not only the individuals who fired the lethal shots, but also those who were also associated in the crime, such as the driver of a getaway car or the individual who planned or commissioned the homicide. In a little more than half (58.1%) of all gun homicides in the five years under review, only one perpetrator committed the crime; almost one-quarter of all cases (23.5%) involved two perpetrators. Three incidents during the same period involved five or more perpetrators – all of which are the result of drug-related conflicts.

A little less than half (47.2%) of all non-lethal shootings ($n = 255$) recorded in the DFVM¹ were committed by one individual and around one-quarter (24.3%) were committed by two perpetrators. A similar distribution can be seen in the category of threats including firearms, although the maximum number of perpetrators (12) is higher than that for lethal and non-lethal shootings (five each). It should be noted here that number of perpetrators does not necessarily equal the number of firearms present during the event. Some perpetrators might participate in street robberies with a firearm or shootings without holding a gun – for example, as the driver of the getaway car. For the purposes of this research, we nevertheless counted them as perpetrators of a firearm-related incident.

¹ The distinction between perpetrator and victim is less clear in the context of non-lethal gun violence, in particular in the category of threats. Some individuals listed in the DFVM as either might be considered both a victim and a perpetrator at the same time. It is not rare that, for example, two groups of young men encounter each other in the street, which leads to both sides shooting at each other. As it is not always possible to determine who shot first, the number of victims and perpetrators should not be considered fully reliable, not even for the partial number of shootings and threats included in the DFVM. If such a determination were possible, we coded the individual taking the first shot or threatening someone else first as the perpetrator. In cases in which such information was not available and a determination as victim or perpetrator could not be made based on the severity of the injuries, we randomly assigned roles.

Table 8: Gender and age of perpetrators of lethal and non-lethal shootings, 2015–2019, and threats, 2015–2017 – percentage of known cases

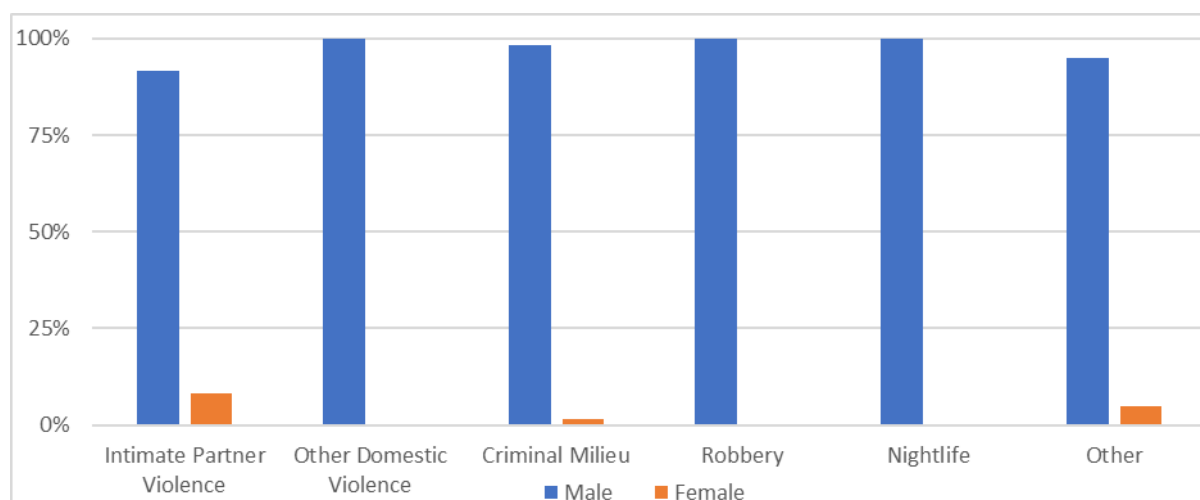
		<18	18–24	25–39	40–59	60+	Total: type gun violence
Gun homicide (n = 187)	Male (n = 181)	n/a	29.9	47.7	19.0	2.3	96.8
	Female (n = 6)	n/a	0.0	66.7	16.7	16.7	3.2
Non-lethal shooting	Male (n = 234)	7.6	30.8	38.3	20.3	3.9	98.3
	Female (n = 4)	0.0	0.0	75.0	25.0	0.0	1.7
Threats (n = 355)	Male (n = 343)	24.8	31.9	30.6	12.2	0.6	96.6
	Female (n = 4)	33.8	41.6	8.3	16.6	0.0	1.7

Sources: Dutch Homicide Monitor, Dutch Firearm Violence Monitor (Leiden University, 2021)

6.1 Gender

Similarly to the victims of gun violence in the Netherlands, men also dominate as perpetrators of these (see Table 8). For lethal shootings, non-lethal shootings and threats, the percentage of male as opposed to female perpetrators is well above 95%. Female perpetrators are almost exclusively connected to homicides against their current or former partners (see Figure 7), yet not in other domestic homicides – for example, against their own children or other family members. Furthermore, homicides occurring in the context of robberies or nightlife violence did not involve women as perpetrators in the years studied.

Figure 7: Gender of gun homicide perpetrators by type of lethal gun violence in the Netherlands, 2015–2019



Source: Dutch Homicide Monitor (Leiden University, 2021)

6.2 Age

Perpetrators of lethal gun violence in the Netherlands are on average 32.7 years old at the time of the offence, with an age range between 18 and 75. Perpetrators of non-lethal shootings average 30.7 years at the time of the offence. The youngest perpetrator of a non-lethal violent crime between 2015 and 2019 was a 12-year-old boy.⁶⁴ The oldest perpetrator, a mentally disturbed 79-year-old man, shot his neighbour, who was seriously injured, before committing suicide with that same firearm.⁶⁵ Perpetrators of threats involving firearms are the youngest, with an average age of 25.7 years.

Comparing these ages with those of the victims of gun violence, perpetrators seem to be on average younger than their victims. Unfortunately, the data do not allow for further analysis of potential reasons for age differences between perpetrators and victims of gun violence. Moreover, given the low number of female perpetrators, these findings should be applied only to male perpetrators.



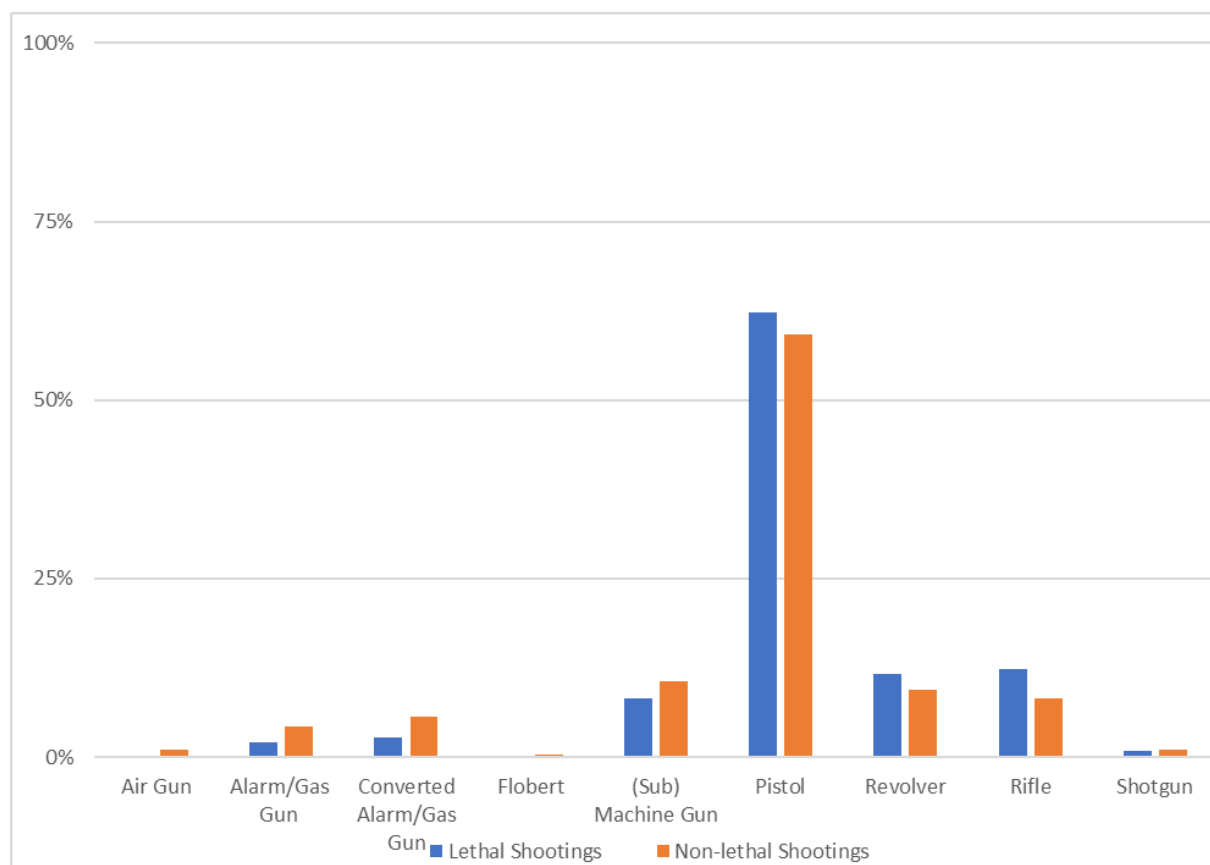
Firearms used in gun violence

For the years 2015 to 2019, the NFI has conducted more than 2,200 investigations for the Dutch police into the remaining evidence of shootings. A little more than 180 of these investigations were related to lethal shootings involving human victims. Another 670 investigations examined evidence of non-lethal shootings that were directed at people. For almost all (n = 146) the lethal shootings and about half (n = 373) of the non-lethal shootings, experts were able to determine a (possible) type and brand of firearm used (see Figure 8). The following analysis is therefore based on the estimations of researchers at the NFI, whose level of reliability is considered high.

7.1 Types of firearm

More than half of all lethal (62.3%, n = 91) and non-lethal (59.2%, n = 221) shootings involved pistols. Although NFI experts registered a broad range of types, possible brands or models of pistols used, a number of them stand out due to their prevalence: the Glock, Zastava and so-called CZ pistols.

Figure 8: Types of firearm used in lethal (n = 146) and non-lethal shootings (n = 373) in the Netherlands, 2015–2019



Source: Firearms used in shootings against individuals, 2015–2019 (Nederlands Forensisch Instituut, 2021)

The Glock pistol of Austrian production is the most commonly used in both lethal and non-lethal shootings in the Netherlands.⁶⁶ Between 2015 and 2019, it was used in about 20% of shootings against individuals for which a type of weapon could be determined. Other types of pistol often (about 15%) used in lethal and non-lethal shootings include pistols produced by the Serbian manufacturer Zastava Arms, formerly known as Crvena Zastava. Another East-European brand of pistols used in shootings involving human targets in the Netherlands are those produced by Ceska Zbrojovka (CZ) in Czechia. Many of their pistol models were originally produced as firearms for the Czech military and police.⁶⁷ Common types of pistol produced in South- and Central Europe that came up during investigations by the NFI originate from Beretta (Italy), which has an almost 500-year-old tradition of producing firearms, and the Carl Walther GmbH in Germany, which produced several models of the well-known Walther PP (“Police Pistol”) between 1929 and 1999. Pistols were used in a variety of incidents between 2015 and 2019, including targeted killings in the criminal milieu,⁶⁸ drunken fights in a club on New Year’s Eve that ended in fatal shots,⁶⁹ or escalated road-rage incidents.⁷⁰

Rifles and (sub-)machine guns, on the other hand, are almost exclusively used in shootings occurring in the criminal milieu, as described in a previous section. Among the group of rifles, the AK-47 or similar types of automatic rifle are the most common, accounting for about 10% of shootings between 2015 and 2019 for which a type of firearm could be determined.⁷¹ With regard to (sub-)machine guns, the NFI also registered the use of Samopal vzor 61 machine guns, commonly known under the name “Škorpion”, or similar models. This type of firearm is also produced by Czech arms producer Ceska zbrojovka, and is known for its use in the Vietnam War and also in the Yugoslav Wars, besides other conflicts. Another type of (sub-)machine gun used in the Dutch context of gun violence is the Uzi, which originated in Israel but is used by a number of law-enforcement agencies across Europe, such as in Lithuania or Romania.

In the category of revolvers, various models by producers Smith & Wesson dominate other brands. Experts from the NFI estimate that Smith & Wesson revolvers were used in at least 25 shootings between 2015 and 2019.

The use of (converted) gas or alarm pistols is of particular interest: the conversion of de-activated or gas and alarm pistols appears to be one of the main routes through which guns enter the illegal market.⁷² In the Dutch context, gas or alarm pistols accounted for at least 30 shootings and 4.7% of fatal and 9.9% of non-fatal shootings between 2015 and 2019 that involved a human target, and for which a type of firearm could be determined by the NFI. Converted gas or alarm pistols in particular were used in three (2.8%) fatal and 21 (5.6%) non-fatal shootings. Other types of gun, such as air guns, Floberts or shotguns, account for only a very small percentage of firearm violence in the Netherlands, based on the fraction of cases for which the NFI was able to estimate the type of firearm.

Finally, although not registered as types of firearm with the NFI but nevertheless noteworthy are the imitation firearms.⁷³ According to the current Dutch laws, the possession of imitation firearms is allowed, yet carrying them in public is not. As previously discussed, such firearms are used frequently during robberies and threats in which the perpetrator does not require a live-firing weapon. Although such imitation firearms are not lethal, they can cause the same psychological damage to victims, because it is often not possible to distinguish an imitation from a live-firearm gun. Police have also emphasised the danger to the carrier of these imitation firearms, as police must assume that any object resembling a firearm might be live-firing, which could trigger protocols for these situations that allow the police to shoot at an armed individual when necessary. To inform the public about the dangers of imitation firearms, police conducted an information campaign in July 2018.⁷⁴

7.2 Loading mechanisms

Estimates of the type of firearm used in a specific incident also allow for an estimation of whether firearm can be categorised as (1) a single-shot, (2) a semi-automatic or (3) an automatic firearm. Ignoring possible individual modifications to guns used in

criminal shootings, the results of our estimate based on the type of firearm used in 406 fatal and non-fatal shootings involving a human target between 2015 and 2019 are presented in Table 9. When a firearm is capable of performing in any of the three categories listed above, we have chosen the highest possible category.

Figure 9: Loading mechanisms of firearms used in selected lethal (n = 114) and non-lethal (n = 292) shootings in the Netherlands, 2015–2019

	Lethal shootings (n = 114)	Non-lethal shootings (n = 292)
Single-shot	19.3%	17.1%
Semi-automatic	57.0%	60.6%
Automatic	23.7%	22.3%

Source: Firearms used in shootings against individuals, 2015–2019 (Nederlands Forensisch Instituut, 2021)

The patterns of loading mechanisms of firearms used in lethal and non-lethal shootings with a human target are similar. This implies that similar firearms are used and that the outcome of a shooting might not be dependent on the type of firearm, but could depend on other factors, such as intent or experience of the perpetrator. More than half of all the shootings involved a semi-automatic gun, most of which are pistols. The second most prevalent category entails automatic firearms, including rifles such as the AK-47 or (sub-)machine guns such as the Uzi or the Škorpion. Together, both categories make up between 75% and 80% of all shootings registered with an estimated type and loading mechanism. Single-shot firearms, accounting for 19% and 17% of lethal and non-lethal shootings respectively, almost exclusively entail incidents in which a revolver was used (n = 42), and also a small number of incidents in which a shotgun was used (n = 5). This division is of particular interest with regard to determining the legality of these weapons. This matter is discussed in a forthcoming section.

7.3 Calibre

Between 2015 and 2019, the NFI investigated the forensic evidence of more than 2,200 shootings, including lethal and non-lethal shootings at human beings, but also at animals, objects or unspecified areas, such as shootings in the air. For each of these incidents, the calibre of the bullets fired was determined by forensic experts based on the remaining evidence in the form of fired (fragments of) bullets, fired cartridge cases

or other identifiable forensic evidence. In the five years under review, 51 different calibre types were used in shooting incidents in the Netherlands. Taking into account the whole period since the start of registration in 2009 until the end of 2020, 72 different types were identified in total. The five most prevalent types of calibre are listed in Table 10. Of particular interest here might be the calibre type of the 6.35 × 15 mm Browning, which is commonly used in converted gas or alarm pistols. The prevalence of this calibre as the fifth most-common type encountered between 2015 and 2019 might be another indicator of the widespread occurrence of these types of firearm.

Table 9: Types of calibre used in registered shootings (n = 2,215) in the Netherlands, 2015–2019

Type	Cases investigated	% all calibres
9 mm Parabellum	755	34.1
7.65 mm Browning	470	21.2
9 mm PA Knal	187	8.4
7.62 × 39 mm	123	5.6
6.35 mm Browning	107	4.8

Source: Calibres of firearms used in shootings against individuals, 2015–2019 (Nederlands Forensisch Instituut, 2021)

7.4 Legal status

None of the sources used in this report provides reliable and complete statistics about the legality of firearms used in incidents of gun violence between 2015 and 2019 in the Netherlands. However, official data provided by the NFI about the types of firearm used and the legal context of firearm regulations allows for a careful estimation of the legality of the firearms used.

One category of firearms whose possession is illegal under the current law in all circumstances is automatic firearms. Of the 406 lethal and non-lethal shootings at human beings that were registered with the NFI in the years under study, and for which a type and loading mechanism could be determined, 22.7% (n = 92) fell within the illegal category. The National Police are particularly worried about the growing incidents involving automatic firearms. These have been observed for several years: in their National Threat Assessment Organised Crime, published in 2017 and based on

confidential law-enforcement reports, Boerman and colleagues indicate that an arms race occurred among organised criminal groups (OCGs) or individuals involved in organised crime. Where automatic firearms were once rare, criminals may now feel the need to acquire increasingly more dangerous firearms for personal protection against rivals, who are also arming up.⁷⁵ Law-enforcement officials and firearm experts interviewed in the context of this research voiced similar concerns.⁷⁶

More complicated is the estimation of legality for semi-automatic and single-shot firearms, which is the largest category, accounting for 59.6% and 17.7% of known cases of shootings respectively during the period. The current *Wet Wapens en Munitie* prohibits the possession and use of semi-automatic firearms for the general population, but leaves room for special permissions – for example, for hunters, sport shooters or collectors under specific circumstances. Given the relatively low rate of legal firearm ownership⁷⁷ and our earlier conclusion that most of the gun violence in the Netherlands takes place in the context of the criminal milieu, it must be assumed that many semi-automatic firearms – mostly pistols – are in the illegal possession of their owners¹. How many of these firearms were trafficked from abroad is unknown.

¹ Legally owned firearms, for example by sport shooters, may also be semi-automatic. The available data unfortunately does not allow an estimation how any semi-automatic firearms are owned legally, opposed to illegally.

8



Firearm-trafficking and trade

The Netherlands is not a producer of firearms, but manufacturers are registered in the country. Consequently, it can be assumed that a large percentage of firearms used in criminal activities must have been (illicitly) trafficked into the country. But hard – empirical – data on firearm-trafficking are not publicly accessible. This overview of information regarding firearm-trafficking is therefore based on previous (academic), although sometimes outdated (2002–2008), studies and reports regularly commissioned or directly published by law-enforcement agencies, otherwise publicly accessible sources, interviews with law-enforcement representatives and also data on firearm seizures provided by the Dutch National Police in the context of this research.

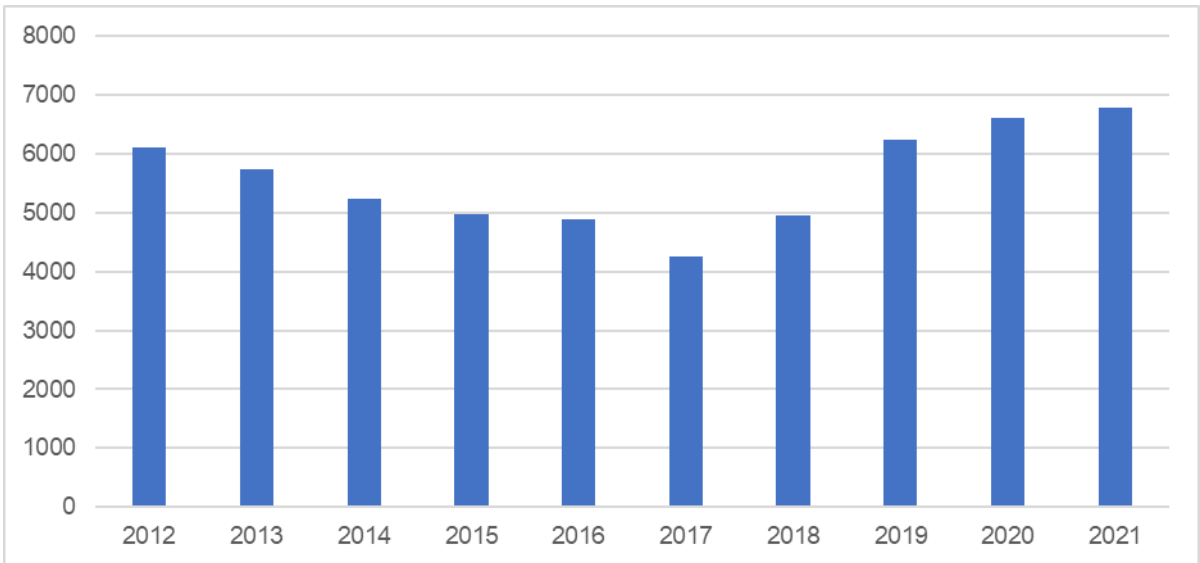
8.1 Prevalence

Measuring the prevalence of firearm-trafficking is difficult, owing to the illegal nature of the phenomenon. As mentioned briefly in a previous section, the Small Arms Survey estimated that more than 230,000 illegal firearms circulated in the Netherlands in 2017, based on self-reporting surveys, expert opinions and analogous comparisons with other similar countries.⁷⁸ In 2004, Spapens and Bruinsma estimated the Dutch market in illegal firearms to have a net worth of approximately €10 to €15 million annually, based on the assumption that 10,000–15,000 firearms are trafficked into the country each year.⁷⁹ More concrete evidence of illicit firearm-trafficking might be derived from the number of criminal cases related to the arms trade and also the number of firearms seized by law enforcement.

Police statistics regarding annual criminal cases connected to the illicit arms trade are accessible on a public data portal covering the period from 2012 until 2020 (see Figure 10).⁸⁰ The illegal category of arms trade entails both the illicit possession of and the trade in firearms. The maximum sentence for illicit trade in firearms in the Netherlands is eight years.⁸¹ In the first five years of reporting, the annual number of criminal cases of illicit arms trade decreased by 30%, from 6,109 registered cases in

2012 to 4,252 in 2017. After 2017, the number increased again to more than 6,500 cases by the end of 2021, which translates into 37.9 cases per 100,000 of the population. Although the latest statistics indicate an increase in the illicit trade in and the illicit possession of arms, including firearms, previous studies and interviews with law-enforcement officials suggest that structural issues with registration or changes in the enforcement of laws might influence these annual numbers.⁸² Furthermore, the official statistics do not allow a disaggregation of illicit possession or illicit trade in firearms.

Figure 10: Annual number of cases of criminal arms trade, including possession of and trade in firearms and other weapons in the Netherlands, 2012–2020 (n total = 48,935)



Source: Registered crimes and reports by type of crime and municipality (National Dutch Police, 2022)⁸³

8.2 Types of firearm seized

Information regarding the actual number of firearms seized is not as publicly accessible as statistics on the number of arms trade cases. In 2015, based on police statistics, media reported that police seized almost 24,000 firearms between January 2013 and August 2015, including imitation firearms and firearm parts (see Table 11).⁸⁴ Approximately one-third of the seized firearms could be classified as pistols and revolvers, followed by imitation firearms and alarm or gas pistols. Machine pistols constitute the smallest category.

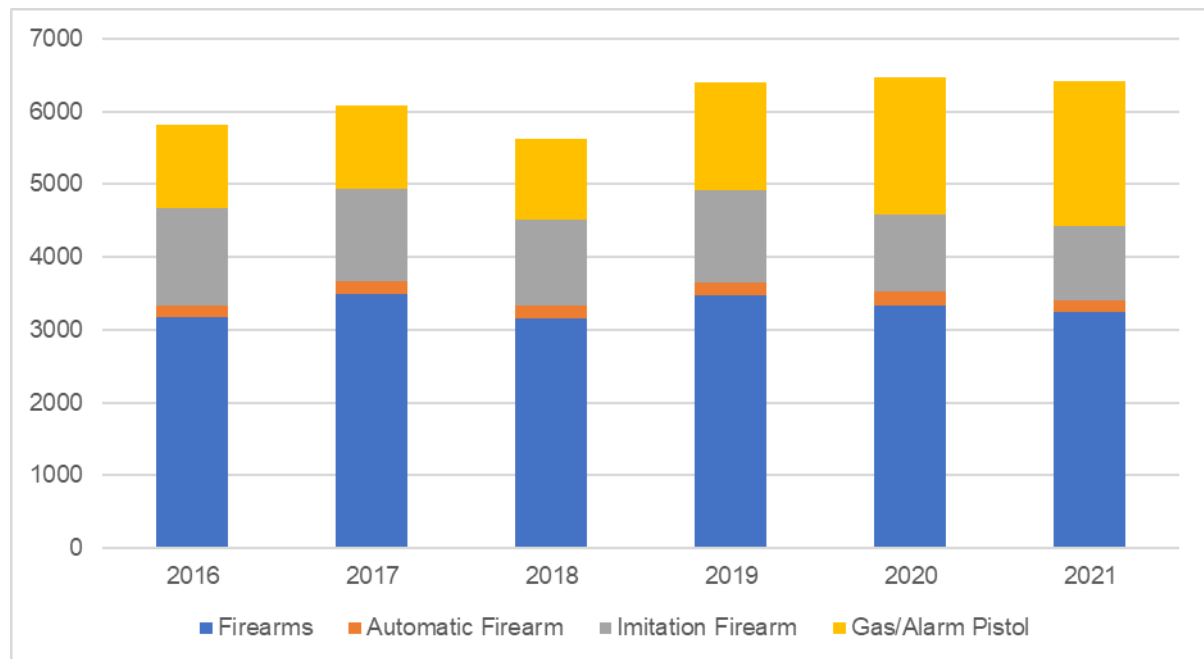
Table 10: Number of seized firearms by type in the Netherlands, 2013–August 2015

	Pistols and revolvers	Rifles	Machine pistol	Imitation firearm	Alarm/gas pistol	Firearm parts	Firearm parts
	7,264	3,706	546	4,344	4,316	1,874	1,676

Source: National Dutch Police, as reported by NOS⁸⁵

In the context of this research, the Dutch National Police provided us with data for the period 2016–2021 from their Firearm Dashboard (see Figure 10). In the five years under review, the Dutch National Police seized between 5,621 (in 2018) and 6,472 (in 2020) firearms from individuals, for example during an arrest after a violent incident or after searching a house.

Figure 11: Types of firearm seized in the Netherlands, 2016–2020



Source: Firearm Dashboard (Dutch National Police, 2021)

The data also allow a distinction to be made between the types of firearm seized: the number of firearms (including pistols, revolvers, rifles and shotguns) seized has remained relatively stable at on average 3,300 each year. Seizures of automatic firearms have increased by almost 20% between 2016 and 2019, from 166 to 199. Even more significant is the 64% increase of seized (converted) gas and alarm pistols. These numbers support previous warnings by law-enforcement officials and other firearm experts of an arms race with an increasing presence of automatic firearms⁸⁶ and innovative new ways for OCGs to bypass regulations regarding firearms possession.⁸⁷

It must be noted here that the numbers of seized firearms differ significantly between police districts. For example, the regional police team in Rotterdam seized almost twice as many firearms (n = 442) in 2020 as the team in Amsterdam (n = 252). From interviews with law-enforcement officials and a criminologist we learned that such a difference might be explained by the varying degrees of importance ascribed to the issue of illegal firearms and, with that, different administrative approaches.⁸⁸

8.3 Routes of firearm-trafficking

Because of its geographical position, the Netherlands appears to be both a country of destination and a transfer country for firearm-traffickers. Firearm experts interviewed for this research estimate that firearms entering the country for transfer might be further trafficked to Belgium and the United Kingdom.⁸⁹ Most firearms entering the country from abroad, however, remain in the Netherlands.

Countries of production of the trafficked firearms vary: many illicit firearms in the European market originate from Belgium, Germany and Italy. In 2010, 50% of seized pistols, 25% of revolvers and 13% of automatic firearms originated in those three countries.⁹⁰ Police experts then assessed that the importation of firearms from these countries of production had remained relatively stable since 2000. Other firearms used in violent incidents in the Netherlands were produced in former European conflict areas, mainly the Balkan states and the former Soviet states.⁹¹ Several studies published between 2002 and 2012 discuss the origins of firearms seized in the Netherlands specifically. Their results, in combination with interviews conducted with law-enforcement officials and firearm experts for this study, show that similar points of origin existed in the early 2000s as now.⁹² According to a 2002 report by Spapens and Bruinsma, live-firing firearms later seized on the Dutch market had been produced in former Balkan states, specifically countries now known as Serbia and Montenegro as well as in Croatia.⁹³ Although the violent conflicts in the region ended in the 1990s, it is estimated that there are still thousands of firearms circulating in the region, well after the end of the conflicts in the late 1990s.⁹⁴ The authors suggested that the flow of firearms from the Balkans might decrease after the end of the conflict, yet all other relevant studies until 2012 still indicate the Balkan as an importance country of origin in the European firearm-trafficking system.⁹⁵ Even 20 years later, in the 2020 report by Ferwerda and colleagues and our interviews held with firearm experts suggest little change to this pattern⁹⁶.

Other countries in Eastern Europe, in particular Slovakia, play an important role for firearm-traffickers: previous studies have noted that many firearms originating from Slovakia enter the market legally before being de-regularised via theft or criminal brokering.⁹⁷ Investigations into shootings within the criminal milieu, and tracing of these firearms, have led Dutch law enforcement to one particular arms seller in Slovakia, who sold 'more than 10,000 de-activated firearms throughout Europe'.⁹⁸ De-activated firearms are particularly prevalent in Slovakia. However, owing to the lack of regulations to standardise the de-activation of firearms at the EU level, such firearms are easily re-activated into live-firing guns by individuals of the criminal circuit in the Netherlands.⁹⁹ The same holds true for alarm and gas pistols that are legally bought abroad and enter the illegal market by being converted into live-firing firearms in the Netherlands or elsewhere.¹⁰⁰ Whereas a report published in 2008 still pinpointed Portugal as a main country where these gas and alarm pistols are converted,¹⁰¹ a more recent report from 2017 and interviews with law enforcement now suggest that a large number of these pistols originate from Turkey, are bought in Bulgaria and converted in the Netherlands, where they are then used in illegal activities.¹⁰²

In 2017, the European Union addressed both issues of deactivated firearms and alarm and gas pistols in the newest Firearm Directive (Directive 2017/853/EC). Since then, the possession of deactivated weapons is included in the scope of the directive, and thus regulated. The 2017 Firearm Directive also includes a definition for gas and alarm pistols, simplifying their classification and regulation. Nonetheless, deactivated weapons and gas and alarm pistols that came into legal possession before the implementation of the 2017 Firearm Directive may still impact the illegal use of firearms today.

8.4 Modus operandi

Firearm-trafficking in the Netherlands may be described as a so-called ‘ant-trade’: small-scale and on-demand. Traffickers make use of the open borders within the Schengen Area of the European Union to smuggle small amounts of firearms over borders, often via inconspicuous cars or hidden in the cargo of trucks.¹⁰³ In 2019, for example, police arrested a 33-year-old man who attempted to smuggle 303 kg of cocaine, two Kalashnikovs and three pistols across the Belgian border into the Netherlands using a hidden compartment in his van.¹⁰⁴ An anonymous tip led to his arrest by the Dutch police immediately after he crossed the border and, subsequently, to his being sentenced to seven years in prison.

A relatively new way of smuggling firearms into the Netherlands is the use of parcel shipments from abroad, mainly from the United States, ordered through the darknet or so-called ‘strawmen’.¹⁰⁵ Firearms are shipped in parts and shipments are concealed, which impedes detection by Dutch customs at Schiphol Airport or other entry points into the country. When asked about this particular type of trafficking, a law-enforcement official suggested that such parcels might be used more frequently to receive firearms for non-criminal purposes, such as for suicides. Criminals, he added, would rather use personal connections to receive firearms trafficked via European roads, which are less prone to detection.¹⁰⁶

Little is known about the brokering of illicit firearms once they have entered the country. In a national assessment of the threat originating from organised crime, Boerman and colleagues argue that the social network of firearm-traffickers in the Netherlands is loose and works together only occasionally.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, owing to the relatively small size of the network, members know how to find each other easily so as to cooperate, whenever necessary. That same report also suggests that the lines between brokers and the ‘end-users’ of firearms have become less formal and more diverse. Although earlier reports proposed that OCGs had close relationships with particular firearm-traffickers,¹⁰⁸ criminals now seem to rely on several sources at the same time.

8.5 Offender characteristics

Firearm-trafficking offenders can be categorised into different groups, based on the role that they fulfil: for instance, couriers who smuggle firearms from abroad into the Netherlands; those responsible for the conversion of alarm and gas pistols or the re-activation of firearms within the Netherlands, and the brokers who sell these firearms on to criminals.¹⁰⁹

Earlier research reports suggest that the group of couriers is ethnically diverse and linked to the country of origin of the trafficked weapons. Spapens and Moors, for example, noted in 2005 that criminals prefer hiring traffickers in the country of origin of the firearms, owing to their contacts with producers or sellers there.¹¹⁰ De Vries, on the other hand, notes the relatively large percentage of Dutch nationals, in particular those of Moroccan descent,¹¹¹ whereas Spapens and Bruinsma explicitly mention OCGs from former Balkan countries being actively involved in the trafficking of firearms in the late 1990s and the early 2000s.¹¹² Although the nationalities of couriers of firearms may differ, several studies report that couriers are involved not only in the illicit smuggling of firearms, but also in other criminal activities.¹¹³

Whereas little is known about the individuals who are involved in the conversion or re-activation of firearms and gas or alarm pistols, the latest publicly available reports on firearm-trafficking and trade in the Netherlands provide some information about brokers. Boerman and colleagues suggest that specific population groups seem to be over-represented as potential suspects or proven perpetrators in the police registers, namely, 'trailer park residents, members of outlaw motor-cycle gangs, OCGs of Antillean or former Yugoslavian descent and matured criminal youth groups'.¹¹⁴ The last group of youth criminals is, according to the authors, involved not only as brokers, but also as end-users of firearms.

9



Obstacles for analysing the impact of firearms trafficking on gun violence

In the previous sections, we have presented synthesised data from various sources, including publicly accessible news articles, academic studies and other reports, and also not aggregated data that is not publicly accessible but which was provided by law enforcement and the NFI in the context of this research, and also that gleaned from individual interviews. Based on this information, we set up the Dutch Firearm Violence Monitor, from which can draw some conclusions about the prevalence, dynamics and nature of gun violence in the Netherlands between 2015 and 2019. We found that between 570 and 670 shootings occurred in the Netherlands annually, resulting in on average 35 lethally and non-lethally wounded victims each year. The number firearm homicides has been declining since the early 1990s. More than half of all lethal and around 30 percent of non-lethal shootings are related to activities in the criminal milieu, such as targeted killings of rivals, rip deals or other often narcotic-related criminal activities. Furthermore, gun violence is very locally concentrated, not only in the largest cities in the Netherlands – Amsterdam, Rotterdam, the Hague and Utrecht – but also in specific neighbourhoods and streets within these cities. We also provided an impression of the types of firearm used in such violent incidents, and the existing knowledge about firearm seizures, the routes of firearm-trafficking and the individuals involved in such criminal activities. As the rate of legal firearm ownership is relatively low compared to other European countries and we did not come across many reports of incidents with legally owned firearms, we must assume that the vast majority of shootings in the Netherlands is committed with illegal firearms. This fits with our estimation that a large percentage of gun violence occurs within the criminal milieu and other illegal activities. Although the origin of these illegal firearms remains largely undetermined, experts suggest that many stem from the Balkan countries or Slovakia and are being trafficked to the Netherlands through small-scale shipments via cars.

Still, it is difficult to determine the actual impact of firearm-trafficking on gun violence in the Netherlands. That is due mainly to a lack of availability and quality of data, and a lack of prioritisation of these issues on several levels.

9.1 Issues regarding data availability and quality

Although the synthesis of information presented in the previous sections provides a unique insight into the phenomena of gun violence and illicit firearm-trafficking, there are several shortcomings that should be discussed. Simply put, available data are not reliable or complete enough to evaluate such an impact definitively.

Empirical data that we collected and coded for the Dutch Firearm Violence Monitor may provide a representative sample of incidents of gun violence, yet it remains incomplete. The use of newspapers as a primary source decreases its trustworthiness, due to possible sensational selection bias and unverified information from newspapers. Through triangulation with police data and public court records, we tried to increase the trustworthiness as much as possible by comparing information gathered via news articles with these trustworthy sources. Whenever we found contradictory information across sources, we preceded information from court records in preference to police data and police data in preference to news articles. Furthermore, our findings are comparable with a recent empirical study conducted in Dutch,¹¹⁵ which increases the validity of our results.

Open sources, such as news articles provide very little to no information on the (types of) firearms used during violent incidents. The data received from the NFI are invaluable in this research, due to the technical expertise of their staff and the high quality of their data. Investigations of firearms by the NFI are commissioned by the police, with the objective of matching a suspect to a firearm or possibly to a lethal incident, to find information that could lead to a possible suspect or to find the firearm used. As a result, research on bullets or firearms by the NFI is focused on aspects that could aid these police investigations, such as determinations of calibre or possible types and brands of firearm involved in an incident. At the same time, the police might not commission each firearm seized or used during a shooting to be examined by the NFI. As a result, the dataset given by the NFI does not provide full coverage of the firearms used or seized between 2015 and 2019. Furthermore, it might not always be possible for firearm experts at the NFI to determine the type of firearm based on the available evidence. Consequently, we do not have information regarding the firearm available for each shooting registered by the Dutch National Police.

The most complete and trustworthy data source regarding gun violence and firearm-trafficking is the Dutch National Police. Nevertheless, changes in the structure of the institution, including the merger of 25 regional and one national police team into one organisation in 2013 impeded the comparable registration of firearm-related crimes at a national level until the creation of the Firearm Dashboard in 2018. The Dashboard includes aggregated statistics on registered shootings and firearm seizures, and also detailed information on each individual case. While this Firearm Dashboard is a significant step in the right direction in gathering information about the phenomena of firearm violence and seizures, the type of information currently gathered in the Dashboard is meant for operational use rather than for research purposes, including the research at hand. Furthermore, the level of detail of the data included in the Dashboard

by the Dutch National Police largely depends on the willingness of individual police officers attending crime scenes involving incidents of gun violence to document their observations. Consequently, the quality of the data varies case by case. Moreover, the Firearm Dashboard does not synthesise individual case information with details on firearms used in each case supplied by the NFI.

9.2 Investigation of a firearm's track record

These data sources, taken together, result in a fragmented landscape of sources that each contain valuable information. However, the main impediment to assessing the impact of firearm-trafficking on gun violence is the lack of information regarding the track record of an individual firearm. While investigations by the NFI focus on aspects that could aid these police investigations, investigating the origin of a firearm, the previous owner or its pathway into illegality is not part of the remit of the NFI. Consequently, there is no estimate of the number of firearms used during gun violence incidents presented in the previous sections that were previously trafficked into the Netherlands, based on NFI data.

Investigating the potential history and origin of a firearm lies with the Dutch National Police, yet interviews with law-enforcement experts reveal several practical reasons for a lack of data regarding this issue.

First, as mentioned by several interviewees, in many firearm-related crimes (including homicide), the gun is never recovered. In such cases, perpetrators take the firearms with them when escaping the crime scene in order to avoid leaving any evidence or to keep the firearm for its material worth or possibly a future crime. The NFI reports that they investigate around 300 cases each year in which police collected evidence from a shooting without a firearm being recovered, as opposed to an additional 200 cases in which a firearm involved in a shooting (at some point) could be located by police.¹¹⁶ In other words, for the majority of shootings, a firearm cannot be recovered and therefore not undergo investigation into its origin and history.

A second practical problem that the Dutch National Police face regarding the investigation of firearm-trafficking is the immense investment in time and other resources that this kind of crime demands, as pointed out by several law-enforcement officials during our interviews and prior public statements.¹¹⁷ If the origin of a firearm cannot be tracked down via a serial number or other direct indicators on the firearm, police officers are dependent on other evidence that could showcase a firearm's history, including:

- DNA evidence on a firearm (which was used in the case of the 2012 double assassination in Amsterdam);
- analysis of the social and professional networks of a suspect; or
- statements of a suspect or other individual involved in a case.

In addition to this, firearms have a long lifespan, can change users regularly and potentially cross borders several times. As a consequence, police investigations into a firearm's track record are time-consuming and require significant financial as well as human resources. In addition, such investigations might also be dependent on cooperation with other European countries, countries in which the European firearm legislation might differ slightly or those that prioritise gun violence even less.

9.3 Lack of institutional prioritisation at the EU and national levels

Underlying each of these practical impediments, however, is the lack of structural prioritisation of this topic among law-enforcement agencies. While three interviewees working in law enforcement reveal that the issue of trafficked firearms is a much-discussed item in working groups focused on gun violence and related topics, it received less prioritisation in the broader national agenda on the fight against crime in the Netherlands. Even more so, the lack of prioritisation is a structural issue, which was already noted in reports published in the early 2000s, and several others since then.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, the lack of prioritisation is felt at several levels, as pointed out by our interviewees.

At the level of the EU, firearm-trafficking has long been treated as a subjugated topic to other related topics such as organised crime or human-trafficking. In the 2017 Serious and Organized Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) by Europol, for example, the trafficking in firearms was discussed briefly and mainly in relation to terrorist attacks in Europe in which firearms were used.¹¹⁹ Although such events are impactful and must be dealt with, everyday firearm-trafficking within the EU is more diverse and complex and, for this reason, requires specific focus. The hope is that the 2020–2025 EU action plan on firearm-trafficking will renew the attention by national law-enforcement entities to the issue of firearm-trafficking, resulting in increased investments and consequently a greater impact on gun violence across the continent and beyond. The 2021 SOCTA report did not indicate evidence of a focus on firearm-trafficking specifically, as it was described as a 'subsidiary activity to drug-trafficking'.¹²⁰

Nationally in the Netherlands, the lack of prioritisation is based on a number of additional factors that were mentioned throughout interviews held with law-enforcement officials and external firearm experts: first, gun violence in the Netherlands is not felt evenly across the country. As discussed previously, gun violence in the form of lethal or non-lethal shootings is concentrated in a handful of cities, where the impact on neighbourhoods and law enforcement is greater than in, for example, the northern regions in the Netherlands, where incidents of gun-related violence are relatively rare and other types of (violent) crime may be more prevalent and prioritised by authorities. Secondly, our interviewees pointed out that the practical impediments to investigations into firearm-trafficking mentioned previously require structural investments in human and financial resources that are scarce to begin with.

In the light of the complexity of such investigations, a cost–benefit analysis may not speak in favour of such investments.

9.4 Focus on national illegal firearm–trafficking

That is not to say that Dutch law enforcement is not trying to limit the impact of firearm–trafficking on the Netherlands. Dutch Minister of Justice Ferd Grappenhuis labelled the combat against illegal firearms a “top priority” and in a 2020 statement, Dick Schouten, head of the illegal firearm portfolio at the National Police, expressed the dedication of law enforcement to intensifying and increasing the number of investigations into illicit firearm–trafficking.¹²¹ However, the main focus currently is on seizing firearms that have already entered the country instead of investing resources in investigations leading to information on the transportation routes used, the individuals involved in firms’ trafficking and brokering, and the origins of firearms. These efforts resulted in a number of large–scale seizures in recent years¹.

The total and exact impact of the number of firearms imported into the Netherlands via illicit routes cannot be measured. In 2020, Dirk-Jan Schouten, then responsible for firearm–related criminal offences at the Dutch National Police, voiced his concern at the continuous flow of guns into the country that are in return being used to commit serious crimes.

Even though much is still to be known about the prevalence and nature of gun violence, we know that is one of the most extreme and most lethal forms of violence that has a ripple effect: it impacts not just the direct victims, but also witnesses or whole neighbourhoods. There should be no doubt that potential causes, such as the trafficking of illicit firearms into the Netherlands, require attention at all levels of society: from researchers who can fill the vacuum of knowledge on the phenomenon to law enforcement and (local) government that are responsible for finding effective ways to combat firearm–trafficking and gun violence at a national, regional and local level, and transnational organisations, such as the EU or the UN, to support the efforts to combat it.

¹ For example, in February of 2020, police arrested ten suspects and searched 17 locations in the Netherlands after a months-long investigation into the group’s illegal trade in firearms. Another large-scale trade in firearms was discovered in the follow-up investigation after a double assassination in Amsterdam in 2012, which exemplified the increased violence among OCGs at that point in time. Evidence of a firearm used during that lethal shooting led authorities to five men. During the search of the 66-year-old main suspect’s home and office (partly located in Belgium), the authorities found one Kalashnikov, 46 revolvers, one machine pistol, eight semi-automatic pistols and several rifles, ammunition, parts of firearms, two hand grenades and 35 kg of amphetamines. For the illicit trade in firearms in the Netherlands, the suspect was sentenced to five-and-a-half years in prison, taking into account previous offences.

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