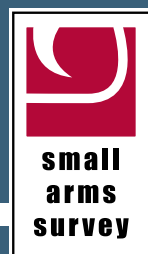


MISSING OR UNSEEN?

Exploring Women's Roles in Arms Trafficking

Emilia Dungel and Anne-S everine Fabre



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A publication of the Small Arms Survey, with support from
the German Federal Foreign Office

Credits

Published in Switzerland by the Small Arms Survey

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First published in June 2022

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Production coordinator: Olivia Denonville

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Proofreader: Stephanie Huitson

Design and layout: Rick Jones

Printed by Gonnet in France

ISBN 978-2-940548-99-6

The Small Arms Survey takes no position regarding the status or name of countries or territories mentioned in this publication.

Cover photos: see p. 60.

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Acknowledgements

This Report would not have been possible without the support, engagement, and knowledge of a number of people and entities. From the start, the project from which this Report was derived and its research scope were conceptualized, designed, and initiated by Boris Colinas, Nicolas Florquin, Gergely Hideg, Ferenc Dávid Markó, Matthias Nowak, and Mia Schöb. The project has been managed by Matthias Nowak, Emile LeBrun, and Callum Watson from 2019 to 2022. Contracted agencies Center ‘Social Indicators’, the Center for Security Studies (CENSS), and Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) implemented the general population surveys and key informant interviews in Ukraine, while Elva gathered data on the ground in Niger. Florentina Pircher supported the data collection process through literature reviews. The authors wish to express their sincere gratitude to all the above colleagues, as well as the respondents in Niger and Ukraine who took the time to answer our questions, for their vital contributions to the research design, data collection, and project management.

Furthermore, the authors are deeply indebted to reviewers Luigi De Martino, Daniel de Torres, Nicolas Florquin, Gergely Hideg, Irene Pavesi, Hana Salama, Matt Schroeder, and Callum Watson, as well as content editor Emile LeBrun, for their thorough assessments, invaluable inputs, and constructive feedback. Heartfelt thanks are also due to the participants of the research method symposium in March 2022: Aneliese Bernard, Dragan Bozanic, Fairlie Chappuis, Adenike Cole, Kheira Djouhri, Agnieszka Fal-Dutra Santos, Guy Feugap, Vanessa Gauthier Vela, Ashley Hamer, Hana Salama, Sophie Timmermans (who also wrote the workshop report), and Philomena T. Zamani.

Nicolas Florquin and Emile LeBrun (as evidenced by their various roles mentioned above) wore several hats throughout the process, but their insightful contributions, resourceful ideas, and unwavering encouragement were essential—thank you. Olivia Denonville managed the production stages of quality control with dedication and aplomb, as always, along with the talents of Ben McCann, Alessandra Allen, Rick Jones, Stephanie Huitson, and Lionel Kosirnik.

The authors would also like to express their appreciation to the German Federal Foreign Office for making this research possible through financial support to the project.

Finally, the authors are thankful to each other—for fruitful discussions, creative problem-solving, and all-round wonderful collaboration.

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

ATO/JFO	Anti-Terrorist Operation/Joint Forces Operation
KII	Key informant interview
KIIS	Kiev International Institute of Sociology
NSUM	Network scale-up method
PACER	Public Access to Court Electronic Records
SHERLOC	Sharing Electronic Resources and Laws on Crime
SLNCVS	Saint Lucia National Crime Victimization Survey
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Executive summary

Researchers and policymakers have studied the roles of women in arms offences from the perspectives of violent extremism prevention, women offenders, political activism, and transnational crime in relation to drug trafficking and human trafficking. From a small arms control perspective, though, knowledge is limited.

In order to begin filling this research gap, this Report examines the extent to which well-established small arms research methods—general population surveys, key informant interviews, and court documentation reviews—can be used to explore arms trafficking through a gender lens. In doing so, it seeks to go beyond the victim paradigm to better understand the types of roles that women play, if any, in arms trafficking and, similarly, their motivations.

Focused around three case studies—in Niger, Ukraine, and the United States—the Report finds that the combined use of the aforementioned methods was fruitful, with each approach highlighting specific aspects. Although it is important not to extrapolate the findings beyond the contexts in which they were gathered, the data revealed women to be involved in varied roles in arms trafficking, including high-risk activities and, in a few instances, leadership positions.

Similar to research findings on other types of trafficking and criminal activities, the study identified economic necessity, financial gain, and familial ties, including intimate partners, as factors that drive women to participate in arms trafficking schemes. An additional motivation to engage in these types of activities stemmed from grievances over lack of public policy and services.

Note: The research on Ukraine carried out for this Report took place before February 2022.

Key findings

- The use of different approaches—general population surveys, key informant interviews, and court case documentation reviews—to understand the gendered dimensions of arms trafficking in Niger, Ukraine, and the United States helped to shed light on specific aspects of the topic. Triangulating these methods in the same setting has the potential to enrich understandings of gender roles in arms trafficking.
- Applying these three methods for the purposes of this study revealed women to be involved in varied roles in arms trafficking, including high-risk activities and, in a few cases, leadership positions.
- The identified roles of women in arms trafficking include the following: procurers or buyers (including as straw purchasers); sellers; couriers/transporters; information gatherers; messengers/intermediaries; mediators/brokers; and other functions (such as assisting others by hiding arms and criminals).
- Factors that drive women to participate in arms trafficking schemes reportedly often stem from economic necessity or profit, familial ties (including intimate partners), and grievances over lack of public policy and services.
- Future research on the topic could include broader reviews of possible gender-specific motivations for, and roles of, both women and men in arms trafficking. Such studies could help prevention efforts by providing a fuller picture of different modus operandi.
- Future research on the gender dimensions of small arms issues would do well to ensure that the entire process is gender responsive, from conceptualization and design to implementation.

“The roles of women in arms trafficking have rarely been considered through a small arms lens, since this field has traditionally focused largely on women’s roles as either victims or peacemakers.”

Introduction

Both researchers and policymakers have studied the roles of women in arms offences from the perspectives of violent extremism prevention, women offenders, and political activism, as well as in transnational crime in relation to drug trafficking and human trafficking. The roles of women in arms trafficking have rarely, however, been considered through a small arms lens, since this field has traditionally focused largely on women's roles as either victims or peacemakers. As a means of expanding this small arms-related focus, and thereby gaining a fuller picture of potentially different modus operandi of arms trafficking, this Report sets out to both scrutinize some commonly used methods in the small arms field from a gender perspective, and consider how they apply to learning about women's roles in arms trafficking.

This Report presents three common methodological approaches in the small arms domain: general population surveys, key informant interviews (KIIs), and criminal court document reviews. These are analysed from gender-responsive perspectives, including that of feminist methodological scholars. The Report includes examples of how these methods can be applied and implemented in the field to learn about women in arms trafficking, based on new research undertaken in Niger (2020–21), Ukraine (2020), and the United States (2020). These countries were chosen as the Small Arms Survey had carried out work there previously and therefore already established points of contact for accessing information. In addition, the geographical diversity was seen as beneficial in order to study experiences in different regions. Finally, the Small Arms Survey organized a symposium on methods for researching women and arms trafficking in March 2022, with participants from international organizations, NGOs, and academia, to discuss initial findings from the study and future research on the topic.¹ Inputs from symposium discussions are also reflected in this Report.

The Report begins by outlining perspectives on women in crime to situate the study within the research agenda, and by providing an overview of definitions and delimitations (see Box 1). It then examines the three methodological approaches from the perspectives of gender as well as small arms work, and considers how these findings may be applied for the purposes of this study in Niger, Ukraine, and the United States. It assesses the usefulness of the methods in each setting, before concluding with reflections on ways forward to better understand the active roles of women in arms trafficking and related activities.

The study does not attempt to provide a fully comprehensive analysis of the topics covered, nor does it suggest that the findings can be extrapolated to all settings. Due to restrictions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the research team faced methodological challenges such as a limited ability to follow up in the field and the need to coordinate the research remotely. In addition, elections in Niger posed an obstacle to accessing key informants. Given the, at times, incomplete data, the study shifted its focus—exploring not only what can be learned about women in arms trafficking, but also how to go about doing so, and the merits of such methods. ●



Evidence on women's roles in different types of trafficking undermines the notion of women as hapless and unwilling criminals.”

I. Research context

Women's roles in crime is an understudied topic that only began to receive attention in the 1970s (Bailey, 2013, p. 120). Once it did, theorists suggested that, as women were becoming more active participants in the labour market, their visible participation in criminal activities would increase as well (Selmini, 2020, p. 347). Although this prediction turned out to be largely incorrect—in that women continued to represent a small portion of offenders—research since the 1970s has revealed that many women who were involved in criminal activities held influential positions. This trend has become more evident since the 1990s, including in transnational organized criminal networks (Selmini, 2020, pp. 346–48). It should be noted that the increased visibility of women offenders does not mean they were absent beforehand: gender bias in crime statistics and the tendency to view women as victims, among other factors, may have skewed our understanding of women's roles in crime (Arsovska and Begum, 2014, p. 102).



Protesters outside the trial against Beate Zschäepe hold up signs with pictures of her victims, on 11 July 2018. Zschäepe was the only surviving member of the neo-Nazi cell National Socialist Underground (NSU) and was

Barberet (2014) notes the contradiction² in perceiving women offenders as ‘emancipated’, due to their involvement in crime, yet always victimized or oppressed as it is assumed that they are not free to choose this participation (p. 140). Instead, their choices are attributed to externally coercive circumstances, such as destitute family members, abusive partners, or extortion. Women’s roles in crime are also frequently stereotyped as nurturing and passive (Borde, Page, and Moura, 2020, p. 74). As well as being a broad generalization, the ‘women as victim’ narrative leaves out contexts where women have long been expected to work and participate in income-generating activities, even if such activities are criminal (Arsovska and Begum, 2014, p. 94).

In fact, evidence on women’s roles in different types of trafficking undermines the notion of women as hapless and unwilling criminals. Research shows that women participate in multiple roles in drug trafficking—including of a strategic, leadership, and managerial nature—although to a lesser degree than men (UNODC, 2022, pp. 3, 30–31).



sentenced to life in prison for ten deadly shootings, in addition to two bombings and other crimes of attempted murder and robbery. Source: Guenter Schiffmann/AFP

Box 1 Definitions and delimitations

This study focuses on the trafficking of **arms**, generally small arms, light weapons, their parts and components, and their ammunition.³ The term ‘firearms’ is sometimes used to refer to ‘small arms’, which in turn is sometimes used to cover both small arms and light weapons. **Arms trafficking** refers to the transport of illicit small arms, whether within a single country or across national borders—normally a criminal offence.

Illicit small arms are defined as ‘weapons that are produced, transferred, held, or used in violation of national or international law’ (Schroeder and King, 2012, p. 314). ‘This definition acknowledges the many different forms that illicit arms flows can take, and includes both in-country and cross-border flows of small arms and ammunition’ (Florquin, Lipott, Wairagu, 2019, p. 24).

This Report uses the term **sex** to refer to the ‘physical or biological classification as male or female assigned to a person at birth based on a combination of bodily characteristics’, compared to the term **gender** which refers to ‘socially constructed ideas about the attributes and opportunities associated with a person based on their assigned sex’ (Schöb and LeBrun, 2019, p. 20). While sex-disaggregation speaks to differences between male and female subjects, for ease of flow, this Report uses ‘women’ and ‘men’ synonymously with the former.⁴ The Report therefore takes a binary approach, as the data could be disaggregated by sex but did not allow for the consideration of gender identities. Delving deeper into roles in arms trafficking or other crimes played by members of the gender-diverse community is an area that warrants further research.

While the traditional perception of women as ‘mules’ in drug trafficking might suggest that they participate passively or as a result of coercion, studies show that female couriers mostly make conscious decisions to engage in such activities (UNODC, 2022, pp. 3, 28), implying hazardous behaviours that challenge masculine stereotypes of precarious and risk-taking action (Harper, Harper, and Stockdale, 2002, p. 104). These assumptions may be one reason why women’s specific functions in arms trafficking have not yet been studied in depth. Florquin, Lipott, and Wairagu (2019) note instances of women smuggling arms, ammunition, and parts and components in the Central African Republic and Uganda, calling for ‘more information . . . to understand the recruitment, role, means, and motivations of women and girls involved in small arms trafficking’ (pp. 42, 65). Further, studies of women in armed groups, especially violent extremist groups, have touched on women and arms trafficking and the perpetration of violence—for example as suicide bombers (Abatan and Sangaré, 2021, p. 3). Little is known, however, about the range of these roles, and even less about the methodological approaches to learning about them; this Report seeks to unpack both. ●



Assessing men's and women's sense of safety, attitude towards arms and arms possession, and opinion of arms in their communities helps situate the phenomenon of arms trafficking within the broader security context.”

II. General population surveys

General population surveys are one of the most commonly used tools to gather data on armed violence and small arms (for some examples, see below). In broad terms, surveys provide systematically collected data on a range of topics from a sample of individuals. A national survey can be representative of the overall population using a random sample of responses from across a country,⁵ while a targeted one provides data for a representative sub-group of the population. A random sample is designed using demographic data—from a recent census if available or through other methods for estimating population size.

Crime victimization surveys⁶ and surveys on the perception of small arms and light weapons are frequently used in the field of small arms and armed violence. The latter includes questions on, inter alia, perceptions of safety and formal security provision, attitudes and practices related to small arms, availability of firearms, acquisition and ownership of firearms, awareness of the illicit weapons trade in the community, and armed violence victimization (UN, 2018b; UNDP and SSBCCSSAC, 2017). Small arms and light weapons perception surveys are particularly useful for informing national legislation on small arms control, national action plans on small arms and light weapons, and other relevant policies or programmes as part of national baseline assessments and indicators (Florquin, Lipott and Wairagu, 2019; UN, 2018b). In this sense, surveys can help to fill gaps in administrative data that are often lacking, especially on civilian firearms holdings and outcomes of the misuse of firearms.

To ensure that the sample is representative of the population group and that it is possible to conduct a gender analysis,⁷ surveys need to consider whether the sex distribution of the population in question is balanced, and apply appropriate weights if not. In addition to sampling, survey questions should also allow for the collection of sex- (or ideally gender-⁸) and age-disaggregated data to get as comprehensive a picture

Table 1 Pros and cons of general population surveys

Method	Information source	Pros	Cons
General population surveys	Respondents from a sample of individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-section of population surveyed provides general insights as a basis for refining approaches • Repeatable and comparable • Allows for the use of a sex-balanced sample 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to capture clandestine and illegal activities • Difficult to uncover less prevalent phenomena • Requires significant human and financial resources

as possible of the situation (UN, 2018b, p. 16). This, in turn, could support a gender analysis that allows for a more nuanced understanding of small arms-related dynamics, in terms of not only their gendered impacts—how firearms impact men and women differently—but also how people perceive and use firearms. The Small Arms Survey has conducted surveys since its inception, including in Burundi, Kosovo,⁹ Nepal, Nigeria, and South Sudan.¹⁰ More recently, the summary reports for these surveys provide sex-disaggregated data and some gender analysis.

One downside of general population surveys is the significant financial and human resources they require, especially those carried out using face-to-face interviews. Although options such as interviewing participants via telephone or conducting online questionnaires can reduce costs in some settings, they may not in others (Alvazzi del Frate and Hideg, 2021, p. 15). Another possibility is to add a module on perceptions and experiences of firearms in an existing relevant multipurpose survey, such as an omnibus survey, so that the cost can be shared among partners; this was the approach used for this study.

Additional challenges arise when surveys include questions on sensitive topics such as illegal activities. Firstly, as is the case with other methodologies, respondents show ‘social desirability bias’, which can incentivize them to report (only) socially desirable responses and avoid admitting to non-normative behaviours such as self-incriminating or shameful experiences (Krumpal, 2013, p. 2041). Secondly, surveys conducted face to face can also create risks for enumerators—those administering the survey—in terms of their personal safety, as well as for respondents, in terms of possible self-incrimination. Consequently, it is difficult for surveys to capture illegal activities. Lastly, general population surveys are not well suited to uncovering less prevalent phenomena—which could include illicit activities.¹¹

How surveys are administered impacts their ability to capture gendered differences on arms and security issues. It is therefore crucial to carefully select enumerators; to take into account considerations related to gender—for example, to ensure that female enumerators survey female respondents—as well as possible ethnic and political dynamics; and to make sure questions are formulated in clear and simple language. These elements can affect the results of the survey, especially for sensitive topics such as firearms (Karp, 2018, p. 5). In addition, while survey questionnaires generally include closed-ended questions with a few open-ended questions, which ensure comparability between respondents’ answers, they leave little scope for participants to explain their answers further or for enumerators to record this. Feminist research methodologists, in particular, highlight the importance of not limiting respondents’ answers, but rather allowing them to speak freely and express their experiences as fully as possible. To increase open-ended questions, surveys can be complemented by KIIs or focus group interviews (Lokot, 2021, p. 4).¹²

Gender and perceptions of firearms in surveys

To obtain a more refined sense of men's and women's attitudes to, and knowledge of, arms trafficking, it is important to take a broader look at issues pertaining to perceptions of firearms. In this regard, assessing men and women's sense of safety, attitude towards arms and arms possession, and opinion of arms in their communities helps situate the phenomenon of arms trafficking within the broader security context. National surveys can provide valuable data on licit and illicit firearms possession (Florquin, Lipott and Wairagu, 2019, p. 67). According to Dönges and Karp (2014), '[I]arge-sample public surveys are the most comprehensive technique for establishing the scale and breakdowns of civilian gun ownership' (p. 2). This is particularly true for countries where '... gun licensing and registration are not required or easily evaded' (p. 2).

National and multilateral initiatives have attempted to integrate questions on the ownership and perception of firearms into crime victimization surveys (Central Statistical Office of Saint Lucia, 2020; Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 2020; van Dijk, van Kesteren and Smit, 2007, p. 279). In the Jamaican survey, for example, 45 per cent of male respondents believe that the presence of a gun in the household increases their sense of security, though for women the figure is 36 per cent (Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 2020, pp. 68–69).¹³ Similarly, in the Saint Lucia National Crime Victimization Survey (SLNCVS), over half of the respondents felt a greater sense of security with the availability of a firearm in the household, although only three per cent of the sample replied 'yes' when asked whether they had a firearm in the household (Central Statistical Office of Saint Lucia, 2020, p. 62). To estimate the presence of firearms in the households in St Lucia, researchers applied an emerging method to indirectly map the households that may possess a firearm based on inputs from respondents from 'other households' in the same neighbourhood—also referred to as the network scale-up method (NSUM).¹⁴ The so-called 'capture and recapture' method can also be used to estimate hidden aspects of a population based on what is already known about that population. This method was used, for example, to estimate the number of illegal firearm owners in the Netherlands in 2005 based on a known number of people who belonged to various criminal group categories and had been arrested for the illegal possession of a firearm at least once between 2001 and 2003 (Bruinsma and Spapens, 2018, p. 294). These methods can overcome the social desirability bias of survey respondents.

Survey-based research has highlighted that there are far fewer women who own guns than men. For example, a 2016 South Sudan national small arms and light weapons survey conducted by the Small Arms Survey demonstrated similar results: men in their thirties or early forties were the most frequently cited owners of firearms in armed households (UNDP and SSBCCSSAC, 2017, p. 34).¹⁵ A Nigeria national small arms and light weapons survey also showed a similar pattern (Small Arms Survey and PRESCOM, 2021, p. 48). Additionally, female respondents—whether gun owners or not—tend to be either less informed about, or not as inclined as male respondents to mention, the

presence of guns in their household or community (Dönges and Karp, 2014, p. 2); however, this may depend—particularly when it comes to surveys—on socio-cultural factors and contexts (such as whether an area is in conflict), but also on whether the female respondents were able to respond freely and without fear of repercussions. Surveys may therefore assess the likelihood of household members acknowledging the availability of firearms in the household rather than the actual possession of firearms (Dönges and Karp, 2014, p. 3). Regarding the gender bias of survey responses on firearms ownership, studies in the United States have indicated not only that women may be less likely to report a firearm in their home, but also that men may ‘overstate their gun collection to impress the interviewers’ (Cook, 2013, p. 39).¹⁶ These are factors that call for caution when formulating questions for and analysing the results of small arms-related perception surveys; nevertheless, the reliability of the findings lies more in the trends that emerge from the surveys rather than the absolute numbers (Dönges and Karp, 2014, p. 2). Broader testing of the NSUM used in the SLNCVS would help assess whether this approach has the potential to overcome gender biases.

Exploring women’s roles in arms trafficking through surveys

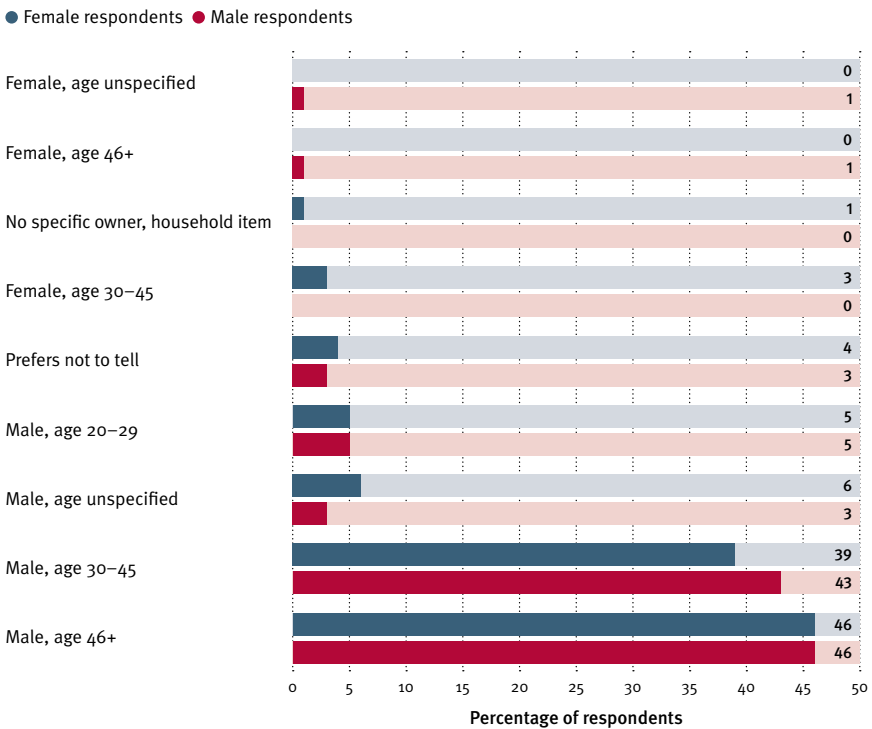
The Small Arms Survey commissioned two sets of surveys, in Ukraine and Niger, to begin exploring women’s roles in arms trafficking in these contexts. In Ukraine, a general population survey was conducted to understand the perceptions of women and men towards guns in general, while in Niger a community survey focused specifically on arms trafficking. Both countries experienced restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected data collection and caused resource and time constraints. Nevertheless, the insights gathered offer food for thought for future entry points and lessons for calibrating methodological approaches to learn more about the topic.

Ukraine

In the framework of this study, the Small Arms Survey contributed a set of questions to an omnibus survey conducted by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) on opinions and views related to socio-political and socio-economic issues of the adult population of Ukraine. This survey was administered in September 2020, in territories controlled by the Government of Ukraine at the time,¹⁷ through computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI), owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, using a randomized sampling approach.¹⁸ The Small Arms Survey commissioned questions related to involvement in social protest; perceptions of safety and security; and opinions on firearms possession and measures related to the illegal possession and smuggling of firearms, as well as Anti-Terrorist Operation/Joint Forces Operation (ATO/JFO) veterans.¹⁹

The survey provided results from 2,001 interviews (KIIS, 2020, p. 2), including 1,095 with female respondents.²⁰ Most respondents felt safe in their neighbourhood, and, regarding small arms specifically, noted few if any small arms-related incidents.²¹ The key findings of the survey include the following: few households were reportedly armed;²² gun owners tended to be men aged 30 and over; and women were more reluctant to indicate, or perhaps less aware of, the presence of firearms in their home.²³ As seen in other studies, such as Dönges and Karp (2014, p. 2), men were more likely than women to report the presence of a firearm—with male respondents in the Ukraine survey twice as likely as women to do so. It is noteworthy that a few women but no men spoke of firearms as household items with no specific owner (see Figure 1). This suggests that men own these firearms, or at least see them as their personal objects.²⁴ This is also in line with global social norms that associate gun ownership, possession, and use with men and masculinity (Myrntinen and Schöb, 2022, p. 8).

Figure 1 Responses to the question ‘Could you please explain who is/are the owner(s) of the firearms in your household, according to gender and age only?’

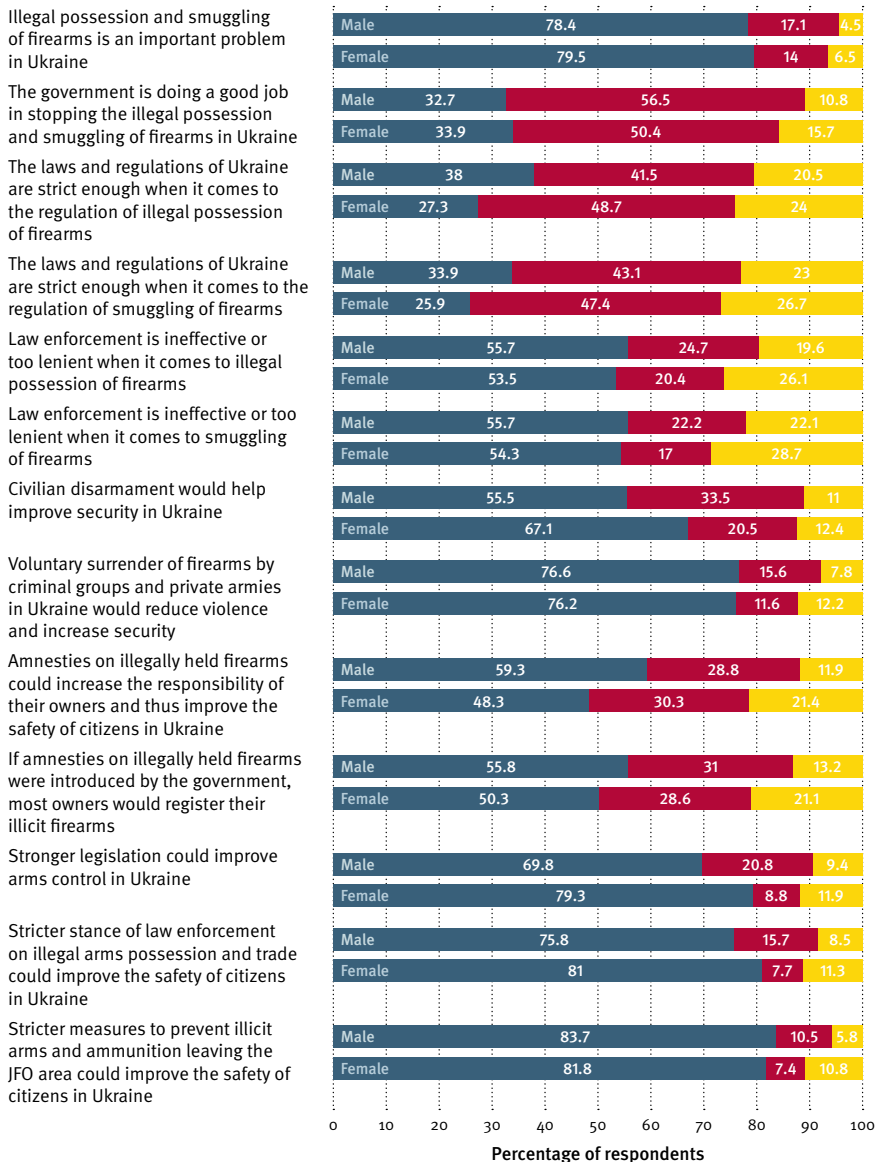


Note: This figure is based on responses from male and female respondents living in an armed household.

Source: KIIS and Small Arms Survey (2020)

Figure 2 Respondents' opinions on illegal possession, smuggling of firearms, and control measures in the omnibus survey in Ukraine, by sex

● Very much agree/agree ● Disagree/very much disagree ● Don't know/not available



Source: KISS and Small Arms Survey (2020)

The most striking difference between men’s and women’s responses related to questions on whether law-abiding citizens of Ukraine should be able to legally own firearms. Almost half (48 per cent) of the male respondents agreed, compared with only 18 per cent of the female respondents, suggesting that women may consider weapons in the household as a risk factor rather than a means of protection.²⁵ This shows that views are more polarized when it comes to the legal acquisition and possession of firearms. The ongoing conflict in the east of the country (at the time the survey was conducted) and the blurred lines between legal and illegal ownership of firearms owing to an unclear legal framework (Martyniuk, 2017, p. 4)—combined with respondents’ scepticism about the effectiveness of existing gun control measures (see Figure 2)—could have an impact on respondents’ concerns about the acquisition of firearms by civilians. Figure 2 also shows that a similar proportion of men and women feel that arms trafficking and illegal possession are important problems in Ukraine, and that stricter regulations and civil disarmament measures, such as amnesties and voluntary surrenders, are needed to address them.

Niger

A survey on border communities was carried out in Niger—with questions on women and arms trafficking contributing to a larger data collection effort on violent extremist organizations in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Niger, and Togo. Of these interviews, 204 were conducted in Niger (Elva and Small Arms Survey, 2021). Due to COVID-19-related restrictions, as well as the elections taking place in the country at the time, the following findings have some limitations. Restrictions affected the availability of, and access to, respondents, and some were reluctant to answer sensitive questions owing to the election period. Despite reassurances about anonymity, they still feared authorities gaining access to their answers. Another challenge was that some questions related to firearms trafficking may not have been formulated clearly enough for laypersons: certain answers suggested that some respondents did not fully understand the questions. In spite of these limitations, the survey still provided interesting insights into both the method and the subject matter.

The data collection team interviewed 50 women and 154 men between the ages of 18 and 60 in Niger.²⁶ Only six respondents, all male, claimed that women are involved in selling and buying arms, with the remaining 198 noting that women are not part of the illicit arms market. They attributed intermediary, seller, and buyer roles to women traffickers, in that order. When asked to consider why women may have an advantage over men in certain arms trafficking activities, respondents selected the following two answers: ‘less scrutiny by authorities’ and ‘easier access to certain areas’ (Elva and Small Arms Survey, 2021). These findings suggest that either very few women participate in arms trafficking, or their involvement is simply not well known. Interestingly, informants were more vocal when asked about women’s roles in criminal and terrorist

groups more generally than when discussing women in arms trafficking. Both male and female respondents identified women in criminal and terrorist groups as transporters, information gatherers, and sellers and buyers of merchandise, as well as intermediaries, accomplices, and guides. These respondents may be more knowledgeable about women in criminal and terrorist groups, as they had been selected for their particular insight into violent extremism.

Summary of survey findings

The surveys carried out for the purposes of this study in Ukraine and Niger offered an understanding of different societal levels: the Ukraine survey provided information on general perceptions on safety, security, and firearms possession and regulation, while the Niger survey saw data collected on perceptions of specific illicit arms activities, such as trafficking.

In Ukraine, both men and women in 2020 felt safe in their neighbourhoods and agreed that stricter regulations were required to respond to arms trafficking; they also seemed to hold similar ideas about who owned guns in their communities—that is, mostly men aged 30 and above, as reported by nearly 80 per cent of both female and male respondents. Only 18 per cent of women surveyed, however, felt that law-abiding citizens should own guns, whereas this percentage was more than double for men, at 48 per cent. This suggests that women in the country likely view guns in households as risk factors. The reticence of women towards gun ownership resonates with findings from other contexts such as South Sudan or Jamaica, as mentioned above.

The vast majority (198 out of 204) of Nigerian survey respondents believed that women were not involved in arms trafficking in their country; however, over half of the respondents said that women participate in criminal and terrorist groups in various roles—both direct and indirect. Participants were likely more knowledgeable on this topic, but, as discussed in the ‘Research context’ section, it also resonates with literature that suggests that more is known about women’s activities in armed—especially extremist—groups than in other activities related to arms trafficking.

Lessons and insights for future research through surveys

The use of surveys to conduct small arms research focusing on women’s roles in arms trafficking provided initial insights into perceptions on the issue in the two contexts surveyed; however, this method can likely be applied in a more targeted way through more in-depth follow-up work.

Using surveys to learn about women in arms trafficking in the Ukrainian context seems to have proved useful for mapping perceptions on the topic. The respondents provided

some initial impressions that can be leveraged to design more targeted surveys in the future and, in particular, to form focus group discussions to unpack the perceptions further. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 is, of course, likely to have a significant effect on perceptions of safety, security, and weapons, and any future work would need to also remain cognizant of other effects from this conflict on would-be respondents.

In Niger, the survey has helped to provide a preliminary understanding of women's roles in arms trafficking, and many of the insights gained can be used to formulate more targeted questions in the future. As with Ukraine, the responses shed light on perceptions of arms trafficking rather than offering 'objective' facts, but this is still valuable for mapping out the topic and discerning entry points for future work. One lesson to take forward is the need to ensure that questions are clear. Close coordination with partners based in, and knowledgeable of, the area under review will help to ensure that the research design is tailored to fit the local context in terms of implementation. ●



If going beyond the first impressions of traditional informants is important, ensuring diversity and representativeness among informants is even more so—such as ensuring researchers view women as important actors and holders of information.”

III. Key informant interviews

The goal of KIs is to glean qualitative information from those with expert or specialist knowledge about a certain topic. Initially used in anthropological studies for researchers to build trust, establish a rapport, and ensure long-term engagement with local communities to learn from and about their perspectives, KIs have since been adapted to serve as a cost-efficient way to quickly assess a problem, especially for policy-oriented research (Lokot, 2021, p. 3).

Interviews—whether referred to as KIs, expert interviews, or in-depth interviews (terms used interchangeably for the purposes of this discussion)—can uncover detailed information, personal beliefs, and individual motivations, including on sensitive topics. Unlike quantitative data collection, KIs offer researchers and interviewees alike more opportunities to clarify questions and responses, thus providing even greater insight and minimizing possible misunderstandings (UCLA CHPR, n.d., p. 9). The insights and overviews gained through KIs, however, cannot be generalized to apply to entire populations without significant sample sizes (p. 9).

Table 2 Pros and cons of KIs

Method	Information source	Pros	Cons
KIs	People with specialized knowledge on a topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides in-depth information • Allows for sensitive information to be discussed as trust can be built between interviewee and interviewer • Allows for a participatory approach, giving a ‘voice’ to the interviewee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to generalize findings to apply to a broader group • Power hierarchy between interviewee and interviewer can result in interviewee not being heard • Key informants are often those in traditional seats of authority or power, which means the voices of informed but ‘ordinary’ people may not be heard • Information can therefore be skewed towards the elite

Feminist methodological researchers caution that KII responses can be affected by the inherent hierarchy between the interviewer and interviewee. These researchers note the importance of addressing such power dynamics so that the respondent can share their views and stories in an open setting without having their inputs manipulated (whether purposefully or not). In fact, feminist scholars call for power hierarchies to be noted and addressed throughout the entire research process (Atkinson and Sampson, 2019, pp. 56–57; Lokot, 2021, p. 2).

Informants in KIIs are considered ‘key’ owing to their specific knowledge on a topic—whether due to their academic proficiency, experience as a practitioner, or role as a community member with a particular status or position, to name a few; however, who qualifies as an expert, and who gets to make this decision, is often debated (Döringer, 2021, p. 265; Payne and Payne, 2004, p. 134) and can be influenced by a researcher’s own biases. Key informants also frequently serve as ‘gatekeepers’ to further information from their community or knowledge group, offering researchers a beneficial starting point for the ‘snowball method’ of letting one interviewee lead them to the next (Lokot, 2021, p. 3; Payne and Payne, 2004, pp. 134–35).

Despite being originally sought out to provide ‘ordinary’ community perspectives, key informants are now typically seen as more informed than ‘ordinary’ people (Lokot, 2021, p. 2). Feminist social scientists question the design and application of KIIs because, if a person has power due to their knowledge, it follows that those who do not have knowledge do not have that power. In addition, those with knowledge and power are often men—whose knowledge is traditionally viewed as objective, official, and legitimate—while women’s is seen as subjective and lived, or experienced (Lokot, 2021, p. 2). By treating those with power as extraordinary, and by speaking only with men, researchers may not only inadvertently reinforce power structures, but also miss vital information from (women) informants that may not traditionally be identified—and therefore recommended—as sufficiently ‘key’ (Lokot, 2021, p. 5). Nevertheless, if going beyond the first impressions of traditional informants is important, ensuring diversity and representativeness among informants is even more so—such as ensuring researchers view women as important actors and holders of information (Payne and Payne, 2004, p. 136). More work seems to be needed to highlight the latter, as discussions on the selection process of key informants are at times vague or lacking in detail—although this may sometimes be intentional to respect confidentiality (Lokot, 2021, pp. 2–3; UCLA CHPR, n.d., p. 9).

Understanding women’s roles in small arms-related and other types of crimes through key informant interviews

Other than their widespread use in all social sciences, KIIs are often used in policy-oriented research on topics in the small arms and security domain. These include, but

are not limited to, issues concerning firearms, firearm-related crime and violence, women's roles in armed groups, organized crime activities, and drug trafficking.

For example, studies have employed KIs to learn about small arms proliferation in a variety of contexts, including illicit arms flows in Honduras (Nowak, 2016) and Nepal (Paudel, 2014), and cross-border arms trafficking across West Africa and the Sahel (Mangan and Nowak, 2019). Similarly, Hales, Lewis, and Silverstone (2006) carried out in-depth interviews in prisons with convicted offenders to learn about the illicit firearms market in the UK. What distinguishes Hales et al. (2006) from many other policy research studies is their in-depth discussion on methodology and sampling (pp. viii, 17–18), including noting the gender breakdown of interviewees, even if they were all men. Many of the other small arms studies reviewed for the purposes of this paper do not offer sex-disaggregated information on the informants, which makes it difficult to ascertain the diversity, and therefore reliability, of the interview sample.

Numerous studies rely at least in part on interviews to examine the role of women in firearms-related and interconnected illicit activities. Abatan and Sangaré (2021) explored the roles of women in the violent extremist groups *Katibat Macina*²⁷ and *Boko Haram* through interviews and were able to ascertain support, operational, and 'domestic and reproductive' functions (p. 13). This study also offers a relatively detailed methodology—explaining the rationale behind target groups and research sites (Abatan and Sangaré, 2021, pp. 5–13). Arsovska and Begum (2014) investigated women's roles in transnational organized crime by analysing data from the United States, Europe, Western Africa, and the Western Balkans, through a triangulated mixed-methods approach, using expert workshops and focus group discussions followed by in-depth interviews. Their findings revealed that women play diverse roles at different levels in transnational organized crime groups. The study concluded that this has probably always been the case but our understanding of women's involvement in these groups has likely been skewed by crime statistics bias, western stereotypes, and preconceptions of women as victims (pp. 91, 103).

Bailey (2013) explored women's motivations to engage in drug trafficking through interviews with 12 women incarcerated for such offences in Barbados. He focused on analysing the women's own accounts and found that their motivations were mainly rooted in different life circumstances and experiences of victimization—such as poverty, abuse, or emotional dependence—with 'greed' being the one important exception (pp. 124, 135, 136). Similarly, Klein (2009) carried out interviews with women incarcerated for drug trafficking in the UK in order to understand their experiences and found that many felt agency, and none seemed completely unaware of what they had been smuggling (p. 388). Barberet (2014) also highlights additional studies on women as drug couriers, human traffickers, and even genocidaires that problematize the preconceived notion of women as only victims, characterized as nurturing and risk averse (pp. 144–47).

Thus, the interviewing technique is frequently used when examining issues related to firearms and crime, and to understand the roles of women in trafficking-related crimes, such as participation in violent extremist groups, organized crime, and drug trafficking.

Unfortunately, very few, if any, studies using the KII approach have looked at women in arms trafficking specifically. The next subsection addresses this gap by discussing how an established small arms research method such as KIIs can be used to explore a relatively novel subset of questions around women in arms trafficking.

Exploring women's roles in arms trafficking through key informant interviews

For the purposes of this study, the Small Arms Survey commissioned sets of KIIs in Niger and Ukraine (see Tables 3 and 4). As with the surveys, the COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruptions to the data collection efforts. The KIIs should also be viewed as an initial scoping exercise of the use of KIIs to unpack the role of women in arms trafficking rather than an in-depth analysis of the topic. Furthermore, despite the similarity of some of the research findings across the regions, the comparability of these cases should be considered limited given their very different societal and political contexts.

Niger

The Small Arms Survey commissioned a social science research organization to conduct ten KIIs in Niger in 2021: three with informants in government positions and law enforcement and seven with informants from civil society. All ten of the interviewees were men, which means that the findings do not reflect women's own perspectives. Given the general elections, which were being held in Niger at the time of the interviews, as well as COVID-19 restrictions, the commissioned agency found it difficult to identify willing respondents, let alone a diverse group of interviewees in terms of gender and expertise. As a result, the interviews also provide insight into the possible misgivings of male-dominated expert networks and a lack of awareness of the nature and range of roles potentially played by women.

All informants noted that women do participate in criminal networks. The criminal roles identified by the respondents included acting as informants or suicide bombers ("kamikazes"), and hiding criminals and arms (for criminals and terrorists when encountering patrols), to name a few.

But of course. Most often it is women who inform them about the checkpoints, about the patrols. Information that they themselves receive from the military and

officials using their bodies. On a strategic level, we can say that they are also used as suicide bombers. And finally it is also women who hide [criminals'] weapons [from the authorities].

—NGO staff, male (response translated from French)

Women play a very important role in these networks because they provide a lot of information; they are considered as an intelligence unit.

—Law enforcement, male (response translated from French)

When asked about the most common type of trafficking for women to be involved in, the informants indicated drug trafficking and human trafficking. Only two respondents specifically mentioned arms trafficking: one reported that women are involved in all types of trafficking, including arms; and the other said that men are generally afraid to participate in arms trafficking—and the women even more so. As a result, the interviewee felt that when women do play a role, they tend to perform discreet functions, such as intelligence gathering.

They are more active in drug trafficking and theft. But when it comes to arms trafficking as such, they are in the minority. You are well aware that these kinds of trafficking are recent in our country. So even men are afraid to venture into these practices, and women even more so. So, as we underlined earlier, the roles of women and girls remain essentially that of information and protection in the trafficking of illicit weapons in our country.

—Government official (uniformed), male (response translated from French)

Replying to the question on women's roles in arms trafficking, specifically, respondents listed a number of roles (see also overview in Table 3):

- information gatherers;
- messengers or intermediaries;
- arms couriers;
- support roles (hiding arms on their person—due to the inability of male officers to search women—or covering up crimes for family members); and
- suicide bombers ('kamikazes'—noting specific examples of female suicide bombers in Diffa).

Most agreed that men (could) also fulfil these roles but gave mixed responses about whether women have a comparative advantage over men when it comes to carrying out these tasks.

Most respondents suggested that the positions filled by women are limited or secondary in terms of rank, with the exception of two respondents: one who reported that women are involved in information gathering, which he did not consider a support role; and another who mentioned that they also play a tactical role, which he seemed to perceive as going beyond a ‘support’ role. No respondents knew of any women with high-level responsibilities in crime groups themselves, however. The KIIs again identified economic factors as women’s most significant motivation for getting involved in arms trafficking activities, with one respondent noting the difference between drivers in (semi-)urban settings:

The prevailing precariousness in certain semi-urban regions of the country pushes women to engage in trafficking. In urban areas it is the desire for easy enrichment.

—NGO staff, male (response translated from French)

Additionally, respondents spoke of socio-cultural factors such as social ascent or empowerment, religion, forced marriage, family issues linked to revenge, limited public policy, abandonment by the state, and lack of choices due to the involvement of partners or other family members. They also noted security factors such as the risks of living in regions plagued by terrorist attacks and human trafficking incidents, as well as people’s idleness and lack of education.

Although, as already noted, these accounts must be interpreted with caution (especially due to the men-only sample) the Nigerien key informants did identify roles of women in arms trafficking—highlighting that this type of smuggling is becoming more widespread. Some responses appear to be based on perceptions, rather than experience, given the lack of concrete details offered. Nevertheless, the respondents seemed well-informed on the topic of arms and arms trafficking in the country, so the limited level of detail could simply reflect the lack of information available. The female suicide bombers in Diffa, mentioned by some key informants, constitute an interesting example of the crime–terror nexus, which—combined with the increasing prominence of violence carried out by women in terrorist groups (UNODC, 2019, p. 30)—merits further scrutiny. It is also linked to the notion of reconsidering men’s attitudes towards women and risk-taking behaviour, which future research involving KIIs with women experts and traffickers could help validate.

Ukraine

In total, 32 KIIs were carried out by the Center ‘Social Indicators’ and the Center for Security Studies (CENSS) in August–October 2020 in Ukraine for the purposes of this study—8 of which were with female respondents, and 24 with men. The KIIs were divided into two sets: one focused on interviewees from the security and justice sector (17

respondents, referred to here as Set 1), and the other composed of people who deal with arms issues in either personal or professional capacities, including veterans and gun sellers and owners (15 respondents, referred to here as Set 2). The objective of this division was to separate and compare different perspectives and insights on arms trafficking networks. The key informants included police, veterans from the conflict zone (aka the ATO/JFO zone), customs officers, journalists, lawyers, academics, gun sellers, gun owners, and gun owner association members, as well as one person incarcerated for a gun-related crime.

When it came to the roles of women in crime generally, the level of experience and knowledge among informants varied. Set 2 seemed to base their responses largely on assumptions: when asked whether women were involved in trafficking, some responded that they supposed this was possible, but the answers suggested that they had not considered it prior to the KIs. Conversely, likely due to their professions, the respondents from Set 1 seemed more familiar with the topic, noting various activities of criminal organizations that may involve women. They listed drug trafficking; human trafficking; sex work (including seducing men for criminal purposes and acting as 'stress relievers' for male criminals); various communication tasks (such as acting as intermediaries); organizers²⁸ (only noted in cases of drug and human trafficking); and petty theft and robbery. The lawyers among the key informants noted that, according to official national statistics, the only type of crime that women committed more than men was fraud.

Well, you know . . . if we are being honest, female criminals haven't gone anywhere, so. . . . We have women's prisons, right? And they are not empty. Accordingly, there is such a thing as female crime. Is it pronounced? In a certain aspect, yes. But let's not forget that, as in any profession, the criminal world also has its own distribution of professions and specializations, right? That is, women often . . . deal in fraud. More, so to speak, intelligent ways of making money. Where there is less . . . fraud, less prostitution and so on and more brute force instead. . . . Let's say, there are female killers, but they are not as common as male ones.

—Lawyer, male

They're usually accomplices. That is, they, so to speak, can look for a victim. If it's a violent crime aimed at obtaining material values. Or they look for buyers. Or they win someone's trust by deception. That is, they establish contact in some way, seller-buyer or a crime victim. This is work that's mostly related to communication, winning someone's sympathy, trust. It's not implementation or realization [of criminal activities].

—Lawyer, male

All respondents spoke of the increase in illicit arms in the country. At times, it was unclear whether informants had concrete knowledge about the roles of women in arms trafficking or whether they were making assumptions about what those roles might be. The following roles were noted by respondents who seemed to have genuine insight (see also overview in Table 3):

- assassins, snipers, and murderers;
- couriers, mules, and transporters—especially as ‘shuttle traders’;²⁹
- ‘straw purchasers’;³⁰
- information gatherers;
- mediators to negotiate arms deals or act as sellers; and
- other support roles (such as storing and hiding weapons for other criminals or taking the blame for a man’s crime in the hopes that courts will be more lenient with women).³¹

I’ll tell you honestly. I don’t know. But I hope this is really confidential. I did not do anything [in buying my gun]. My husband did all this. When we lived in Donetsk. He bought everything. . . . I knew how to use weapons. . . . He took me only once to some office, I put my signatures and that’s it. I also took the gun there. To be honest, I don’t even remember who we went to. This was already in a past life. And to this day he pays for my hunting ticket. . . . At the beginning of the conflict, all marginal persons managed to obtain weapons. There was even a joke on the Internet: ‘even Donetsk drug addicts were puzzled because they were given a machine gun’. But my husband and I moved away at the beginning of the conflict. There were no stationary checkpoints at that time. And my husband negotiated with someone, they took us. We took out almost everything. It’s obvious, money can deal [with] everything.

—Gun owner, female

The most commonly noted role was that of courier or transporter. Several respondents said that the movement of arms from the ATO/JFO zone to the rest of Ukraine by volunteer fighters represented a key source of illicit arms. As both women and men make up the volunteer force, informants suggested that women may have a comparative advantage in transporting arms from the ATO/JFO zone. This is because they are less associated with criminal activities and therefore less thoroughly checked for goods when moving across a border. One female ATO veteran noted how easily she crossed through checkpoints, and therefore encouraged her colleagues to be extra vigilant when checking women at these locations.

I returned to the ATO zone already after all of my fighting things, and I realized that I was travelling in civilian clothes and nobody checked me at checkpoints.

I was a small girl in a hat, who is invisible. . . . I have always told my guys, well, when the guys continued to fight, I said, I'm begging you, at checkpoints, check women, because they are the main people who will transport some data or transport weapons. And it's easy to recruit a woman in some kind of operation, actually, if she doesn't analyse enough or she's under a man's influence.

—ATO veteran, female

Similarly, many spoke of the 'shuttle traders' working to transport goods across borders, especially along the western border of Ukraine. In these cases, it is not uncommon for weapon parts and components to be sealed in packages and given to men and women paid to bring them across—often without knowing what's inside.

There are a lot of hired persons. . . . They give you something and tell you that this is a part of the washing machine. A young lady who grew up in a village on vineyards, she won't probably understand whether it is from a washing machine or from an assault rifle. . . . Only the foolish export weapons in the assembled form. Everything is exported in disassembled form or integrated into some household appliances, such as an electric heater. . . . You will not even realize that this part is not from there.

—Senior officer of national police department, arms expert, male

Respondents felt that persistent traditional and patriarchal values in Ukraine, particularly within its criminal community, prevent women from taking on more senior responsibilities in crime group hierarchies—incidentally mirroring their perception of the culture in law enforcement institutions. Some pointed to exceptions: a woman might, for example, inherit a leadership role from her husband or father, but they noted that this was only likely to last in the long run if she already held some authority to begin with. Informants also spoke of women as informal leaders (that is, the 'power behind the throne'), whereby they can have significant influence over decision-making processes—for example, as the spouse of a 'formal' leader.

In terms of women's motivations for committing crimes or joining criminal organizations, most respondents cited existing associations and links (such as a boyfriend or husband already in the criminal group) as a significant driver. As with Niger, economic reasons were the most common motivator, with KIs highlighting the high unemployment rates, low wages, and lack of child support (by the state). Respondents observed drug addiction and sex work as contributing factors—many pointed to the presence of women in drug trafficking—in addition to deceptive recruitment, where recruits may not fully understand the consequences of certain crimes. Informants were divided on the use of coercion by strangers, on the whole viewing it as less common.

The KIIs carried out on the roles of women in arms trafficking in Ukraine largely identified women as fulfilling courier, informant, mediator, and support roles to help male criminals; however, similar to Niger, some responses seemed to be based more on perceptions than facts. This is particularly true for Set 2, which relied largely on assumptions, presumptions, and ideas about the criminal world from fiction (Center ‘Social Indicators’, 2020, p. 17). This study has sought to differentiate between what seems to be conjecture and what appears to be based on concrete knowledge.

One observation is that respondents’ views of women (including those held by female respondents) seemed to affect their overall opinion of women’s roles in both crime and crime prevention activities. Particularly in Set 1, they seemed unable to distinguish between the two functions. A respondent working for customs seemed almost exasperated at the increasing number of roles available to women:

Women become so active in modern life that sometimes they even take part in cases where they do not understand anything . . . There are a lot of women in customs, soon there will be more women than men. The gender policy in the state is wrong, quotas are not needed in the government bodies, women should not be placed where they do not belong. An employer pays a woman and a man the same salary in the same position, and the functions are actually different. And they have less responsibility.

—Employee of the state customs service of Ukraine, male

Informants with more neutral to positive views of women seemed more willing to acknowledge the role of women in criminal organizations and arms trafficking as well as activities to counter these. This sample is, of course, far too small to suggest any causality; however, as noted by Arsovska and Begum (2014) in their study on the roles of women in West African and Western Balkan transnational organized crime, ‘the bias in crime statistics . . . should always be taken into close consideration when studying female criminality, or crime in general’ (p. 102).

Summary of key informant interview findings

The KIIs administered in Ukraine and Niger offered snapshots of insights and perceptions of women in criminal activities in general, and in arms trafficking in particular. Both contexts seemed to show that perceptions of women in society at large had a strong impact on whether interviewees thought women were ‘capable’ of illicit arms trafficking activities. As noted above, Barberet (2014) observes that, for some, women’s participation in crime is a form of emancipation; the findings here appear to suggest that respondents were more open to acknowledging the possible roles of women in crime if they held neutral or positive views of women.

The KII in both countries noted that women participate in criminal networks, with interviewees in Niger noting roles such as women serving as informants or suicide bombers, hiding criminals and arms, and seducing men for criminal purposes. Key informants in Ukraine reported women working as organizers and sex workers, as well as carrying out fraud, petty theft, robbery, and communication-related tasks, for criminal networks—with these women being the most likely to work in human and drug trafficking rings. This resonates with the focus of previous studies on women’s roles in these networks, such as Siegel and de Blank (2010).

On women’s roles in arms trafficking specifically, a few roles were identified in both Nigerien and Ukrainian KII sets (see Table 3), whereas some were specific to the respective countries. This included women fulfilling the roles of messengers or intermediaries and suicide bombers in Niger, and of assassins, snipers, and murderers; straw purchasers; and mediators or brokers in Ukraine. Most of these are support roles, similar to the roles of women identified in violent extremist groups in the work of Abatan and Sangaré (2021). Interviewees in Ukraine also pointed to the country’s patriarchal values to explain why women do not hold senior positions in criminal organizations. This resonates with Arsovska and Begum’s work on women in transnational organized crime groups (2014), which highlights criminal networks in Albania, other Balkan countries, and Italy as examples of similar dynamics; however, though most of the roles identified by the respondents are support roles, they are also varied, which further aligns with Arsovska and Begum’s findings.

In terms of motivations, some findings resonate with Bailey’s work on women incarcerated for drug trafficking (2013), namely situations related to economic hardship (such as a lack of child support from fathers and unemployment), and relations and associations with criminals, such as through partners or family links. Interestingly, however—and in contrast to Bailey’s findings—the KIIs seem to also suggest deep levels of frustration due to lacking public policy and state support.

Table 3 Women’s roles in arms trafficking identified by key informants

Niger	Ukraine
<p style="text-align: center;">Information gatherers Couriers/transporters</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Other support roles (such as storing and hiding weapons for other criminals or taking the blame for a man’s crime in the hopes that courts will be more lenient with women)</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Suicide bombers Messengers/intermediaries</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Snipers/assassins/murderers Straw purchasers Mediators/brokers</p>

Lessons and insights for future research through key informant interviews

Drawing on existing research on women's roles in arms trafficking-related crimes and the findings of this study, this section has shown how KIs can offer insights and specific examples, as well as personal perceptions and life narratives. Yet most of the findings present mainly the perspective of men—largely due to the difficulties in finding any interviewees willing to speak at all, owing to COVID-19 in both locations and the added factor of elections in Niger. Nevertheless, one takeaway for future research is the need to include, but also go beyond, the standard key informant networks related to small arms control—which typically lack women representation—to ensure a balanced sample of men and women, and to include women directly involved in, or affected by, arms trafficking. Future research about women must speak directly to them and make sure their voices and experiences are both heard and understood.³² It would also be useful for such research to further investigate male experts' assumptions about women's relative lack of risk-taking when playing trafficking roles.

Since accessibility to women arms traffickers can be a challenge, it may be more feasible to question women who have been convicted (and are possibly still incarcerated) for drug and, indirectly, arms trafficking. Several informants noted the relatively widespread involvement of women in drug trafficking, and numerous studies note the strong links between drugs and firearms (Bricknell, 2012, pp. 53–54; Hales, Lewis, and Silverstone, 2006, p. xv; Leuprecht and Aulthouse, 2014, p. 59; Operation LIPSTICK, 2015, p. 5). Consequently, it can be assumed that women drug traffickers are (potentially) also knowledgeable about firearms trafficking and may therefore serve as an entry point to learn more about women arms traffickers.

One aspect of women offenders not expanded on here is that of women engaged in arms-related activities as part of political actions or insurgencies. It would be helpful to further explore cases such as the female suicide bombers in Diffa mentioned by the Nigerian respondents—both for possible connections to women in arms trafficking, and for work on the crime–terror nexus.

Additionally, many respondents point to relationships as important factors in women's criminal activities, which is also supported by previous research. For example, through an analysis of media reports on women who straw purchase guns for others in the United States, Operation LIPSTICK—an educational programme in the United States—showed that almost all the cases reviewed were relationship based (that is, girlfriends purchasing weapons on behalf of their boyfriends, wives for husbands, sisters for brothers, and so on) (Operation LIPSTICK, 2015, p. 3). Similarly, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) found that women join or associate with extremist groups due to their familial relationships (UNODC, 2019, p. 38). When questioning key informants who have themselves offended, it would therefore seem prudent to inquire about

Table 4 Overview of KIIs carried out to understand the role of women in arms trafficking

Country	Number of KIIs	Women/men	Informant sector
Niger	10	0/10	Government (including the national commission on small arms and the High Authority for the Consolidation of Peace) Gendarmerie (law enforcement) NGO
Ukraine	32	8/24	Academia Customs Detainees Gun owner association members Gun owners Gun sellers Journalists Lawyers Military Police Veterans

affiliations with other (possible) offenders, though this is a sensitive matter and requires careful navigation. More generally, given the controversial nature of the topic, the questions and approach developed for future KIIs should ensure enough time and opportunities to probe respondents and conduct follow-up interviews, if needed. ●



The systematic review of court case documentation can provide information on several aspects of criminal activities, such as perpetrators, modus operandi, circumstances, items smuggled, and victimization.”

IV. Criminal court document review

Although the primary use of court case documentation is to support legal proceedings, it can also be a valuable source for research. Researchers have, for example, used criminal case records to study different types of trafficking, including drug trafficking (Natarajan and Belanger, 1998; Wood, 2017), human trafficking (UNODC, 2020a), and arms trafficking (Bricknell, 2012; Goodman and Marizco, 2010; Langlois et al., 2022; Schroeder, 2016). Depending on the format, type, and level of detail of the legal documents, the systematic review of this material can provide information on several aspects of criminal activities, such as perpetrators, modus operandi, circumstances, items smuggled, and victimization.³³

One drawback of this approach is that only cases where there is sufficient evidence to formally charge the suspects are brought to court, yet these represent only the tip of the iceberg: many potential cases do not reach court (known as the ‘criminal justice funnel’) (Farrington and Jolliffe, 2005, pp. 41–42). Furthermore, the priorities of a given criminal justice system also influence the investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases,³⁴ with evidence suggesting that ‘criminal justice responses tend to underplay the significance of firearms trafficking, . . . [which therefore remain as] a largely hidden phenomenon, only part of which comes to the surface’ (UNODC, 2020b, p.12). Another challenge when reviewing criminal case documentation relates to the nature of the source material. Indeed, the data is the result of a criminal investigation aimed at facilitating the prosecution of the defendants; it is therefore neither directly intended nor designed for research purposes. In this sense, the data may be incomplete or require further contextual information.³⁵ Combining the court documentation analysis with other research

Table 5 Pros and cons of court documentation review

Method	Information source	Pros	Cons
Desk research: the systematic review of criminal case documentation	Various court case documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Possibility to retrieve key details on perpetrators’ roles, motivations, and modus operandi ● Variety of documents that provide different kinds of information ● Time efficient ● Useful for the scoping phase to refine questions for KIIIs or focus group discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Difficulty of accessing legal documentation on criminal cases in some countries ● Prosecution of arms trafficking cases depends on the priorities and capacities of the criminal justice system

methods, such as KIs with relevant actors (investigation team, prosecutors, defendants), can address these gaps.

Exploring women's roles in trafficking through court records

The use of documentation from court cases to explore women's roles in trafficking is not new. Researchers have used this approach to study drug and human trafficking (Harper, Harper, and Stockdale, 2002; Siegel and de Blank, 2010) and transnational organized crime (Arsovska and Begum, 2014). Harper, Harper, and Stockdale (2002) explore the role of women in drug trafficking crime and how their sentencing compares with men's. By analysing demographic, criminal offence, and sentencing data on 1,715 offenders³⁶ caught smuggling drugs through London Heathrow Airport between 1991 and 1997, they found that women drug traffickers were more likely to be involved as couriers ('mules')—a high-risk and low-status role—and to carry larger quantities of higher-value 'Class A' prohibited drugs (resulting in the highest penalties) than their male counterparts (p. 107). Despite women taking more risks, the study did not find any differences between women's and men's sentencing (p. 111). Women were also more likely to be minders, organizers, greeters, and recipients of drugs shipped through post or freight (p. 107).

Siegel and de Blank (2010) analysed women's roles in human trafficking in the Netherlands through a review of Dutch court documentation from 1993 to 2004 (pp. 436–37). Based on the files of 89 women convicted of human trafficking, they established three types of profiles: supporters, partners in crime, and leaders (defined in this context as 'madams'³⁷—a term used to refer to the heads of sex worker establishments). Supporters played a subordinate role to other conspirators, partners in crime were equal in status to co-conspirators, and leaders or madams held managerial roles in the trafficking organization. The first category was the largest; the women's main motivations for participation, whether voluntary or forced, were emotional co-dependency, fear of reprisal, professional (criminal) ambitions, financial gain, and family ties with other perpetrators (pp. 440–41). The second category comprised women who had voluntarily engaged in human trafficking with their male (business or intimate) partner and, depending on the case, shared the tasks equally with them or had a managerial role (pp. 442–43). The last category consisted of women who coordinated the movement of persons, activities, and the income of sex workers. The study offers examples of madams who, having been sex workers themselves, 'took the next step in their career' for increased financial gain, suggesting voluntary engagement in this role (pp. 443–45).

Arsovska and Begum (2014) found comparable results using categories similar to those of Siegel and de Blank to assess the 'stereotypical construction of femininity (victims) and masculinity (criminals)' (p. 107) through the analysis of women's roles in transnational

organized crime in West Africa and the Balkans. By drawing on multiple data sources,³⁸ including US court cases, they concluded that ‘female involvement in transnational organized crime activities varies across socio-cultural and historic space’ (p. 106). Similar to Siegel and de Blank (2010), they found that West African women have often held active and leadership roles in criminal organizations, citing the example of madams in human trafficking networks (Arsovska and Begum, 2014, p. 107). On the other hand, women from the Balkans, particularly Albanian and Slavic women, seem to act primarily as supporters or partners in crime in organized crime groups; according to the authors, Albanians are over-represented in the former category because of the country’s strong patriarchal system (p. 107).

As illustrated above, documentation from court cases has been used to examine women’s roles in trafficking and organized crime, as well as their status compared with that of male co-conspirators in criminal networks. The Survey was, however, unable to identify any previous reviews of court cases involving women in arms trafficking, specifically.

Exploring women’s roles in transnational arms trafficking through US court cases

The Small Arms Survey developed a database of transnational illicit arms trafficking cases retrieved from US court proceedings (hereafter referred to as the ‘Trafficking Mechanics Database’) in 2015, which continues to be updated. The data is sourced from legal documentation identified through a systematic review of US government websites, and inquiries on Public Access to Court Electronic Records (PACER)³⁹ (Schroeder, 2016). The database only comprises cases prosecuted in the United States because of the availability of detailed court documents in the country—unlike in most contexts where lack of public access is one of the main barriers to using criminal case material in research. These documents also include de facto sensitive information on sensitive subjects—that is, committed crimes. Attempts by the Small Arms Survey to collect similar material from other countries have not yet been successful, either because of restricted access to material or because of the challenges of analysing non-digitized material, which takes longer to review and therefore requires additional resources.

In that respect, the United States is an exception to the rule as it provides publicly available digitized court documents—including indictments, complaints, defendants’ sentencing memoranda, statements of fact, plea agreements, official press releases, and lists of exhibits—that are no longer sealed at the time of the retrieval. This documentation contains key details about the cases, including information on the traffickers, their roles, the items trafficked, the country of destination, the smuggling techniques, the mode of transport, and the intended recipients—all relevant to studying the mechanics of illicit arms trafficking (Small Arms Survey, n.d.).

Description of the database

Using the Trafficking Mechanics Database, the research team identified cases to explore the roles of women and men in trafficking firearms, ammunition, parts, and accessories, based on the following parameters:

- the case fell under the jurisdiction of a US court;
- the case included at least one female defendant;
- the case related to trafficking from the United States to another country or territory;⁴⁰ and
- the case covered illicit activities that occurred between 2007 and 2020.

These selection criteria ensured that the cases reviewed were transnational and that observations could be made on both women's and men's roles. Based on this, the research team identified 90 cases concerning criminal activities that took place between 2007 and 2020, involved at least 489 defendants prosecuted in 28 states, and included 40 destination countries or territories of trafficked small arms. At least one-third of the defendants were women.⁴¹ More than half of the cases involved trafficking to Mexico.

Box 2 Categories added to the Trafficking Mechanics Database for gender analysis

Some variables were added to the existing database to collect data on the roles of women and men.⁴² The research team either supplemented the data of cases that had already been entered or added new cases according to the selection criteria. The variables included the following:

- *Personal background information*: data on the defendant's criminal history, personal (such as mental illness) and professional situation, history of substance abuse, personal relationships between defendants (such as family ties, romantic relationships, or long-term friendships), aliases, and legal status in the United States.
- *Description of roles*: data on the defendant's role, such as advertising, recruitment, procurement, transport, payments, or any other role (for example, leadership). This information is disaggregated by sex.
- *Motivation of women and men to join*: information on potential drivers mentioned in court documents.

These variables allow for further analysis of the perpetrators and their roles, and for the disaggregation of data by sex.

Figure 3 Roles of defendants in a selection of transnational illicit arms trafficking cases, as identified through the Trafficking Mechanics Database



Source: Small Arms Survey (n.d.)

To explore the roles of men and women traffickers, the research team added new categories to the existing Trafficking Mechanics Database (see Box 2). For analytical purposes, the research team broke down the arms trafficking process by activity (see Figure 3) and the role within that activity—for example, a straw purchaser (role) fell under the category (activity) of procurement. The research team then disaggregated the information on these roles by sex, noting whether women or men had performed a specific task. This enabled the team to zoom in on women’s roles and to explore possible gender dynamics in trafficking cases that involve both women and men.⁴³ The data collection on the background of defendants—available in the legal documentation (particularly the defendant’s sentencing memorandum, which is one of the few documents that provides the defendant’s point of view)—made it possible to explore circumstances or factors that might explain the perpetrators’ involvement in arms trafficking. Defendants’ sentencing memoranda offer the opportunity to hear women offenders’ voices—through transcripts—which aligns with feminist approaches that highlight the importance of women telling their stories (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007, pp. 77–79; Lokot, 2021, p. 2). The findings on possible factors that led offenders to engage in arms trafficking should, however, be interpreted with caution due to the small sample and the absence of statistical tests for correlation.

Summary of court case review findings

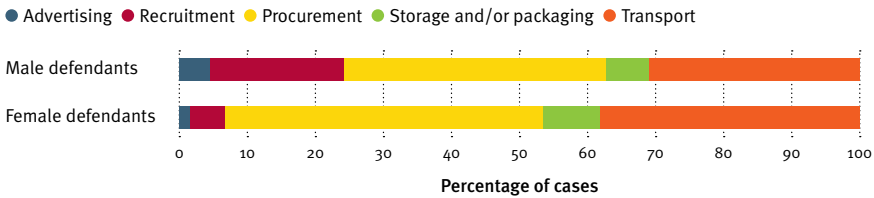
Among the different types of roles of defendants identified in the database, the two most common activities were procurement and transportation. One possible explanation for this is that many defendants were caught by law enforcement agents while purchasing or transporting items—such as during a routine traffic control or while boarding a flight (USDOJ, 2017; 2018a; 2018b). Since the majority of perpetrators were prosecuted for illicitly procuring or transporting small arms, it is not surprising that women are also over-represented in these activities (see Figure 4).

Men and women played procurement roles in a similar number of cases—68 and 61, respectively.⁴⁴ Out of the 90 cases investigated, 74 included information on the procurement methods used. In the vast majority of cases (80 per cent), the defendants were straw purchasers,⁴⁵ which is when an individual buys firearms or ammunition on behalf of purchasers who wish to conceal their identity or cannot buy firearms legally (ATF, 2021, p. 1).⁴⁶ Straw purchasing is a federal crime in the United States; however, it is hard to detect because, in many states, there are no barriers or disincentives, such as firearm registration, to prevent purchasers from immediately transferring purchased guns and ammunition to other individuals.

Nearly half of the cases (42 out of 90) in the Trafficking Mechanics Database record family ties or romantic relationships between co-defendants. In some of them, defendants, men as well as women, expressly stated that relatives or intimate partners pressured or convinced them to participate in the scheme (Small Arms Survey, n.d.). Substance abuse as well as financial issues are also identified in the database as drivers; for instance, a couple straw purchased 16 AK-type semi-automatic rifles and three .50 calibre semi-automatic rifles to smuggle them into Mexico for their drug dealer in exchange for money and drugs (Davis, 2019; USDOJ, 2019). These patterns are echoed in news reports about women who straw purchased firearms for male acquaintances or for economic reasons (Benshoff, 2019; Operation LIPSTICK, 2015; Yablon, 2015). Other sources also support the assessment that women engage in this activity for loved ones—whether family, friends, or intimate partners—in exchange for drugs and/or for economic purposes, either voluntarily or through coercion or a lack of awareness (Operation LIPSTICK, 2015, p. 2).

‘Transporter’ is the second most commonly identified role for the defendants in the cases studied. In this context, ‘transporter’ refers to perpetrators who illegally transport—or arrange for the transport of—firearms across international borders. The traffickers in these cases transported arms and ammunition in a variety of ways, including by shipping companies, by mail, by foot, in cars and trucks that are driven across land borders, and in checked luggage on commercial flights (see Figure 5).⁴⁷ Data was available for 73 of the cases studied, and men and women played this role in almost 75 and 70 per cent, respectively, of cases (with some overlap as most cases involved both men and women). Again, the results for women and men do not differ considerably (see Figure 4). As noted in the section on KILLS, respondents in Niger and Ukraine referred to the perception by law enforcement agencies that women are less suspicious and therefore useful and effective in arms smuggling. Due to the lack of data on the reasons why women held transporter positions, the court case review did not allow for an analysis of whether women had a comparative advantage and were thus more likely to be recruited for those roles. The significant number of women involved in this activity, however, resonates with the literature and reports on arms trafficking, as well as findings from the KILLS presented in this paper, that allude to women carrying firearms and ammunitions across borders (Florquin, Lipott, and Wairagu, 2019, p. 42; UNSC, 2014, annex 18; 2021, annex 73).

Figure 4 Distribution of roles* attributed to male and female defendants in the Trafficking Mechanics Database, in per cent of cases

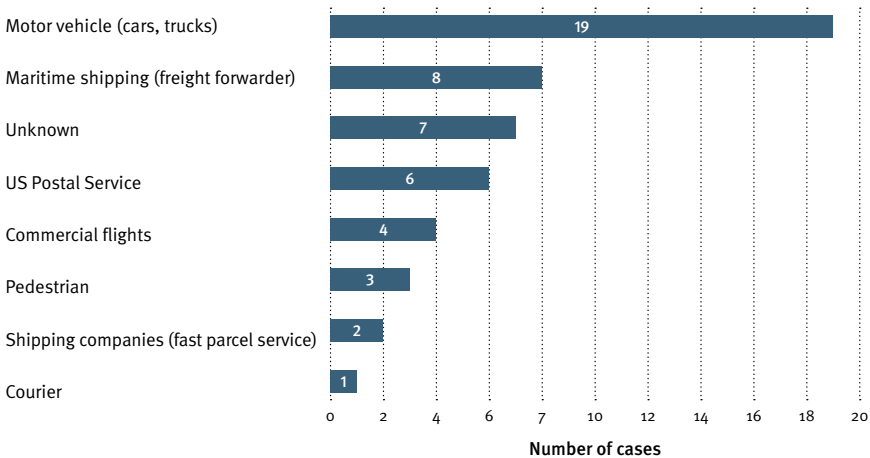


Note: * This graph does not include data on other categories—such as leader, inspection, sale, or coordination roles—but only on activities for which more complete data was available. Defendants can have more than one role in a case. The graph only includes cases in which at least one woman was involved.

Source: Small Arms Survey (n.d.)

Women recruited other perpetrators in a few cases, but the data showed that this was a more common role among men (see Figure 4). Of the 37 cases that reported the recruitment of perpetrators by defendants, only seven mentioned at least one woman as a recruiter. Few women were in charge of paying co-defendants. More men than women were cited as fulfilling leadership or coordination roles. The number of men and women in roles involving storage and packaging was the same. Very few cases in total (about ten per cent) had data on activities related to advertising—that is, identifying buyers—or for the sale of the items. Only two of the 17 cases that indicated a leadership role mentioned women as leaders or coordinators of the scheme (for example, if they coordi-

Figure 5 Mode of transport used by female traffickers, by number of cases (n=50)



Source: Small Arms Survey (n.d.)

nated the operations or were known to be in charge). Together with the few female recruiters, this suggests that women's main roles in arms trafficking may be identified, with a few exceptions, as 'supporters' or 'partners in crime', according to the Siegel and de Blank (2010) typology.

Lessons and insights for future research through court documentation analysis

Reviewing court case documentation was feasible in the US context because cases are usually made available online and therefore easy to access. The exercise proved to be relevant as documents provided diverse, detailed information. For future research efforts, it could be helpful to conduct a court case documentation review as part of the scoping phase— before the development of the survey questionnaire or interview grid—if this is followed by other methods such as KIs or surveys carried out in a similar context.

While the court cases approach used in this study allows a certain degree of analysis, there is still room for improvement. First, different types of court documents offer various levels of detail and are not always accessible.⁴⁸ It was sometimes possible to gather additional data from online newspaper articles to fill this gap, but media coverage of the specific cases studied was inconsistent. Nevertheless, a systematic review of news articles could be an additional method to consider when collecting data on women in arms trafficking. Other relevant open-source material includes UN reports,



A woman headed into Mexico from the United States at the Port of Nogales on 19 January 2022, was found to have concealed five handguns and over 40 rounds of ammunition on her person.

Source: US Customs and Border Protection

such as UN panel of experts' reports, which sometimes document trafficking cases that involve women (UNSC, 2014, annex 18; 2021, annex 73). Another possible resource is the UNODC global database of case law—SHERLOC (Sharing Electronic Resources and Laws on Crime)—which includes court documentation on firearms trafficking cases from different countries (UNODC, n.d.). SHERLOC serves as an information exchange platform for monitoring progress towards obligations under the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols, including the Firearms Protocol. Only a few cases are currently included, however, and the level of detail varies greatly.⁴⁹ The data collection process can also be resource-intensive as search capabilities are often limited and fees are charged for each downloaded page. For example, PACER does not allow users to search documents by keyword or statute and charges USD 0.10 per downloaded page. Moving forward, the use of technology, such as the automation of the data collection, would allow research to be more efficient. ●



It is assumed that men's motivations are clear because they represent a larger part of the actors; however, it would be interesting to investigate such motivations through a gender lens, ideally looking at women and men together in a joint study.”

V. Conclusion

The roles of women in arms trafficking have been understudied to date. This Report set out to learn about this topic by applying commonly used small arms research methods to explore arms trafficking through a gender lens. As research on other trafficking spheres has shown, women's roles in these contexts are varied and complex, and deserve further scrutiny—not least because increased understanding of the subject can contribute to a fuller picture of different modus operandi in arms trafficking.

Findings on women's roles in arms trafficking

The Report finds that the links between women and small arms go beyond those of the subordinated victim to include the willing and risk-taking perpetrator. The data collected in Niger, Ukraine, and the United States points to perceptions, knowledge, and documented prosecutions of women in the following arms trafficking roles: procurers/buyers (including as straw purchasers); sellers; couriers/transporters; information gatherers; messengers/intermediaries; mediators/brokers; support roles (assisting others by hiding arms and criminals); and killers.

Overall, the information collected revealed that women are mostly involved in gathering information, as well as buying and transporting small arms, which interviewees link to authorities viewing women as less suspicious and women having easier access to certain spaces, such as border areas in some countries, than men. This may reflect context-specific feminine norms that perceive women as innocent, vulnerable, and less inclined to perform such activities. Subsequently, some interview sets (notably in Niger) composed of only male interviewees suggested that male-dominated expert networks may lack awareness or fail to grasp the diversity of roles potentially played by women.

Though the findings suggest that women are over-represented in support, as opposed to leadership, positions, the Report does show that women's roles are more significant than commonly assumed. This was especially clear in the court case review. Similarly, an important finding is the high-risk nature of the responsibilities that women reportedly carry out, particularly as transporters and procurers. This should be an important consideration for the future and resonates with research findings on women in drug trafficking schemes where women traditionally perform courier duties—a very high-risk activity. It would be interesting, however, to delve deeper into whether they choose to take on these riskier roles, or whether these are simply the positions available to them. This also begs the question: to what extent are traffickers—women and men—truly aware of the risks at hand and what the role entails? Exploring this issue would enable a discussion on the voluntary nature of such engagements.



Weapons and drugs seized in a home in Fredericton, Canada, on 20 May 2020, leading to the arrest of a 27-year old woman. Source: New Brunswick Royal Canadian Mounted Police

The data indicated that the factors that drive women to participate in trafficking schemes often stem from economic necessity or profit, or familial ties, including intimate partners. Interestingly, and with some deviation from studies on women’s motivations for joining human- or drug-trafficking activities, the findings from both Niger and Ukraine suggest that disappointment in, and grievances over, public policy and services—including those related to unemployment or child support—may also be important drivers.

Future substantive research would do well to explore both women’s and men’s motivations in this sphere further. Participants in the Small Arms Survey’s expert symposium identified this as a key takeaway. It is assumed that men’s motivations are clear because they represent a larger part of the actors; however, it would be interesting to investigate such motivations through a gender lens, ideally looking at women and men together in a joint study. Increased knowledge of women and men in these roles could also prove useful from a prevention perspective. For example, an improved understanding of different, potentially gender-specific, modus operandi could provide law enforcement with a more comprehensive list of clues to watch for and investigate. Additionally, learning that women play more varied and significant roles than assumed could also help

in community-based crime prevention efforts; just as former gang or extremist/armed group members are engaged to help others leave, or to discourage them from joining in the first place, such efforts could be adapted to this context—devising programmes specifically targeting the experiences of women.

Findings on the use of small arms research methods to learn about women’s roles in arms trafficking

The use of surveys and KIIs in Niger and Ukraine, and court case reviews in the United States, confirmed previous research on the usefulness of mixing qualitative and quantitative methods to scope out a budding research topic. Different methods can reach different people, and different groups of people, with each methodological approach offering both benefits and drawbacks. Combining them allows for the topic to be studied from different angles through a triangulated approach, and for the methods to complement one another and fill any gaps. Surveys provide results that can be quantified and compared, KIIs allow the voices of the people involved to be heard, and criminal court cases bring direct and more granular information from the criminal justice sector. Participants in the expert symposium of the study recommended that, as the next step, all three methods be applied to the same topic in the same context. In terms of the sequencing of such a mixed approach in a specific setting, future research could begin with a court case documentation review to help define questions for a survey, which in turn can generate ideas about what to ask in KIIs.

Additional methods for future studies include media reviews and focus group discussions. Symposium participants identified media reviews as a useful tool for both scoping and following specific cases of interest. Focus group discussions were also considered helpful as they allow interviewees to exchange ideas, and can stimulate insights leading to new avenues that may not have been explored in individual interviews.⁵⁰

Finally, future research using surveys and KIIs would do well to consider the gender aspects of the methodologies more closely. This would require the development of clearly formulated, gender-responsive questions to be posed to interviewees by both female and male enumerators or interviewers. Interviewees would need to be selected based on their knowledge, diversity, and experience, and perhaps include those that have been directly involved in arms trafficking or similar crimes.

Similarly, incorporating a gender perspective into training of enumerators—women and men alike—will help them better engage with those who possess knowledge on the topic. Considering the issue of arms trafficking from different angles (its actors, methods, and routes) is essential to get a clearer picture that ultimately supports counter-trafficking efforts—starting by understanding *who* is involved and *how*. ●

Endnotes

- 1 Participating organizations included Conflict Armament Research, Elva, the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Pathfinders, the Sierra Leone Action Network on Small Arms, the Small Arms Survey, the South Eastern and Eastern European Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (Cameroon and Nigeria chapters), and the UN Institute for Disarmament Research.
- 2 Barberet refers to this contradiction as the 'feminist criminological perversion' (2014, p. 140).
- 3 The types of weapons included in these categories are defined in the *Report of UN Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms* (UNGA, 1997).
- 4 The European Institute for Gender Equality uses these terms in a similar way to discuss sex-disaggregated data (EIGE, n.d.).
- 5 In other words, survey results from a number of individuals in a country would yield trends that could be attributed to the whole country.
- 6 This also includes violence against women surveys.
- 7 'Gender analysis is an analysis of the gender aspects of a given problem, and is the core tool to identify gender-responsive small arms programming components. Gender analysis asks questions about the differences between the positions of people of different genders relative to each other, and about their access to resources, opportunities, constraints, and power in a given context. Gender analysis identifies underlying gender norms and their relationship to weapons and armed violence. Gender analysis also examines how gender intersects with other identity markers, such as age, class, [ethnicity], religion, sexual orientation, rural/urban location, disability, or marital status—an approach known as intersectionality' (Schöb and LeBrun, 2019, p. 25).
- 8 Sex-disaggregated data collection in this case would entail asking respondents if they are male or female, whereas gender-disaggregated data would enquire as to how respondents identify (correspondence with an international gender expert, 26 April 2022).
- 9 The designation of Kosovo is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1244 and the International Court of Justice Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.
- 10 See Pézard and Florquin (2007); Khakee and Florquin (2003); Racovita, Murray, and Sharma (2013); Small Arms Survey and PRESCOM (2021); and UNDP and SSBCCSSAC (2017).

- 11 Written correspondence with international survey expert, 6 December 2021.
- 12 For example, national small arms baseline assessments almost always apply a combination of methods, including household surveys, KIIs, and other approaches.
- 13 Most of the respondents (97.4 per cent) did not have a gun in their household (Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 2020, p. 69). It is also worth noting that most women and men interviewed felt safe in their home and walking alone during the day in their community, while about 70 per cent of the respondents felt safe walking at night (p. xii).
- 14 An example question is ‘E.03. And among these households that you think have firearms, how many of them do you know directly that they have firearms in their household, either because they have told you so personally, or because you have seen them?’ (Central Statistical Office of Saint Lucia, 2019, p. 105).
- 15 Nearly half of the armed households (45 per cent) identified men in their thirties or early forties as gun owners in their household, while 18 per cent included female gun owners; however, in 27 per cent of the armed households, respondents either refused to say or did not know who the owner was (UNDP and SSBCCSSAC, 2017, p. 34).
- 16 This may also be considered through the lens of how gun marketing and possession are shaped by cultural norms of masculinity and femininity (Myrntinen, 2019, p. 67).
- 17 The sample did not therefore include people living in Crimea, Sevastopol, and some districts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions (KIIS, 2020, p. 1).
- 18 Most of the adult population of Ukraine had a mobile phone at that time (KIIS, 2020, p. 1).
- 19 ‘The geographical area affected by conflict in eastern Ukraine is sometimes referred to as the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) zone or Joint Forces Operation (JFO) area. The ATO zone is “the territory of anti-terrorist operation in the territory of Ukraine, encompassing settlements identified by the list approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, where the anti-terrorist operation was launched in accordance with the Decree of the President of Ukraine ‘On the decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine as of April 13, 2014 “On Urgent Measures to Overcome the Terrorist Threat and Preserve the Territorial Integrity of Ukraine”’ as of April 14, 2014, No. 405/2014” (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2014). The Ukrainian government announced the completion of the ATO in April 2018 and replaced it with the JFO.’ (Schroeder and Shumska, 2021, p. 54).
- 20 Correspondence with the international survey expert who worked on this research, 6 December 2021. The gender distribution of the sample was in line with the distribution in the region according to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine (KIIS, 2020, p. 1).
- 21 Two questions addressed this aspect: ‘How frequently do crimes committed with firearms occur in your neighbourhood?’, and ‘How frequently do accidents and/or attacks with grenades occur in your neighbourhood?’ (KIIS and Small Arms Survey, 2020).
- 22 About ten per cent of the respondents replied ‘yes’ to the question ‘Do you, or does anybody in your household, have any firearms?’ (KIIS and Small Arms Survey, 2020).
- 23 This finding is based on responses to the following questions: ‘Do you, or does anybody in your household, have any firearms?’ and ‘Could you please explain who the owner(s) of the firearms in your household is/are, according to gender and age only’ (KIIS and Small Arms Survey, 2020).
- 24 Registration and licensing standards also view firearms as personal and individually owned objects (UN, 2018a, p. 14).

- 25 Answers reveal similar differences between firearm owners and non-owners, and ATO/JFO veterans and non-ATO/JFO veterans. It is interesting to note that gun owners were divided: about half disagreed and the other half agreed with the possibility of law-abiding Ukrainian citizens owning firearms.
- 26 The age of one male respondent is unknown.
- 27 Also referred to as the Macina Liberation Front (see, for example, Sollazzo and Nowak, 2020, p. 17).
- 28 Arsovska and Begum (2014) refer to 'leaders' and 'organizers' as 'women that are actively involved in the strategic planning of the trafficking/smuggling operations, and are able to bring decisions, and most importantly, have full or partial control over the finances' (p. 91).
- 29 Shuttle traders buy goods in neighbouring countries and sell them in their domestic markets (OECD, 2002, p. 89).
- 30 'Straw purchasers' purchase firearms for someone else by claiming the firearm is for themselves. For a further explanation of this term, see the section on court case reviews.
- 31 If the latter were common, there would likely be more cases of women convicted of arms trafficking; a review of court cases would be needed to ascertain this.
- 32 This point reiterates the need to pay attention to, and address, notions of power and bias, and question who is defined as 'key', as discussed in the introduction to this section.
- 33 These are some of the elements the research team retrieved from court documents reviewed for this study.
- 34 This also includes operational implications, notably cooperation between judicial and law enforcement agencies within a country, the need for international and regional cooperation between countries, and resources allocated. Strategies, programmes, and trainings have been developed to address these implications. See CARICOM IMPACS (2013); CoEU (2018); UNODC (n.d.); and USDOJ (2021).
- 35 This is obviously not unique to court cases research, but a common issue for desk research.
- 36 The study includes 471 women (Harper, Harper, and Stockdale, 2002, p. 106).
- 37 The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines the term 'madam' as 'the female head of a house of prostitution' (Merriam-Webster, 2022, definition no. 3).
- 38 Arsovska and Begum (2014) used a systematic literature review, focus groups, expert workshops, in-depth interviews, and the review of US court cases and Belgian police files.
- 39 PACER is 'an online repository of documents from US federal courts' (Schroeder, 2016, p. 1; US Courts, n.d.).
- 40 Only two cases occur between the United States and US territories overseas (namely the US Virgin Islands) (Small Arms Survey, n.d.).
- 41 In a few cases (less than ten per cent), the total number of defendants and their gender were unknown.
- 42 Existing variables include, inter alia, the mode of transport, smuggling techniques, type and number of items trafficked, destination country, and intended end users. The sources of the data remain the same as those used for the pre-existing data. For more details, see Schroeder (2016).
- 43 The vast majority of cases involve both male and female defendants; only ten cases comprise only women defendants.
- 44 Data was available for 76 cases out of the 90 cases.
- 45 Other procurement methods include direct purchase, private sale, theft, and defendant's gun store supply.

- 46 A straw purchaser commits a federal crime by including a false statement in an ATF Form 4473, which must accompany any sale from a licensed firearms dealer.
- 47 These modes only pertain to international transport, and not the domestic movement of items within the United States. Figure 5 does not include the 23 cases in which only male traffickers are identified as transporters, but they use similar modes of transport to female traffickers.
- 48 Some court case documents are either sealed or otherwise unavailable.
- 49 As of 25 April 2022, it includes 44 cases related to firearms trafficking (UNODC, n.d.). Of those cases, only six include gender considerations. The database is publicly available.
- 50 Lokot (2021) provides a feminist analysis of methods, including key informant interviews, surveys, and focus group discussions.

Cover photos

Top left: A pistol that was used in the fatal shooting of a couple at their home on Staten Island, New York, on 11 May 2020. The gun was allegedly bought in Pennsylvania by the shooter's girlfriend. Source: New York City Police Department.

Top centre: Military weapons and ammunition found in the car of a woman arrested at a checkpoint on 4 January 2022 in Hermel, Lebanon, for attempting to smuggle them. Source: Lebanese Army.

Top right: A rifle, two sub-machine guns, and rounds of ammunition were seized in the home of a woman arrested in Baqa al-Gharbiya, Israel, on 1 January 2019. Source: Israeli Police.

Bottom left: Some of the 13 weapons seized along with more than 500 rounds of ammunition during an operation in Falmouth, Jamaica, on 3 February 2022. A woman was arrested and charged with illegal possession of firearms and ammunition in connection with this case. Source: Jamaica Constabulary Force.

Centre and bottom right: An assault rifle and a converted pistol recovered on 18 May 2020 in the car of a man returning to the UK from the Netherlands. His girlfriend had paid him to collect these weapons, as well as ammunition, and smuggle them back into the UK for organized crime groups. Source: National Crime Agency (UK).

Bottom centre: 818 rounds of live ammunition hidden in a rice bag—seized from three women allegedly attempting to smuggle them between two Nigerian states. 24 June 2020. Source: Olatunji Obasa (Punchng.com).

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The Small Arms Survey is a global centre of excellence whose mandate is to generate impartial, evidence-based, and policy-relevant knowledge on all aspects of small arms and armed violence. It is the principal international source of expertise, information, and analysis on small arms and armed violence issues, and acts as a resource for governments, policy-makers, researchers, and civil society. It is located in Geneva, Switzerland, and is a project of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies.

The Survey has an international staff with expertise in security studies, political science, law, economics, development studies, sociology, and criminology, and collaborates with a network of researchers, partner institutions, non-governmental organizations, and governments in more than 50 countries.

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A publication of the Small Arms Survey, with support from
the German Federal Foreign Office