

## Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. government implements an export control system to manage risks associated with exporting sensitive items while facilitating legitimate trade. In 2020, State and Commerce transferred nonautomatic and semiautomatic firearms up to .50 caliber from State's to Commerce's export control jurisdiction. The changes were part of a multi-year effort to transfer control of less sensitive items to Commerce and limit the items that State controls to those items that provide the U.S. with a critical military or intelligence advantage.

A House report includes a provision for GAO to review the authorization process for firearms exports following the transfer of jurisdiction. GAO examined (1) how U.S. exports of firearms have changed since the transfer, (2) the Commerce-led interagency export licensing process for firearms, and (3) Commerce's efforts to monitor the end use of firearms exports. GAO reviewed documents and analyzed data related to firearms licensing, exports, and end-use checks, and interviewed agency officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 12 recommendations, including for State to develop agencywide guidance for export license reviews and for Commerce to address personnel gaps and potentially conflicting duties related to its end-use monitoring efforts. State and Commerce concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-25-106849](#). For more information, contact Nagla'a El-Hodiri at (202) 512-4128 or [ElHodiriN@gao.gov](mailto:ElHodiriN@gao.gov).

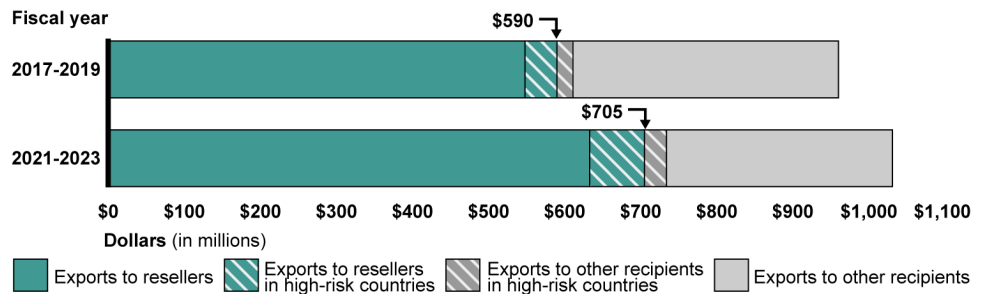
# EXPORT CONTROLS

## Improvements Needed in Licensing and Monitoring of Firearms

### What GAO Found

GAO found that the total value of U.S. commercial exports of nonautomatic and semiautomatic firearms increased since the export control jurisdiction of these firearms transferred from the Department of State to the Department of Commerce. The value rose by 7 percent, from \$960 million to \$1.03 billion, when comparing the 3 fiscal years before the transfer (2017–2019) with those after (2021–2023). The increase was driven by substantial increases in the value of exports to resellers, particularly to resellers in countries at high risk for firearms diversion or misuse (see fig.). In 2024, Commerce revised its licensing review processes for firearms exports to help reduce the risk of diversion or misuse.

**Value of U.S. Exports of Nonautomatic and Semiautomatic Firearms, Fiscal Years 2017–2019 and 2021–2023**



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data. | GAO-25-106849

Note: Values are in 2023 U.S. dollars. "High-risk countries" refers to countries the Departments of State and Commerce identified in April 2024 as high risk for firearms diversion or misuse.

Commerce oversees an interagency licensing process for firearms exports that includes a review by State for U.S. foreign policy and national security concerns. However, GAO found that State's process for conducting such reviews is fragmented across different bureaus, leading to inconsistent and duplicative efforts. GAO also found that State lacks agencywide guidance for how bureaus should conduct their reviews. Establishing such guidance could help provide greater consistency in State's reviews and assurance that licensing decisions reflect U.S. foreign policy and national security interests in different countries.

Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) uses end-use checks to ensure that firearms exports are used as intended but lacks dedicated personnel for conducting these checks in regions at high risk for firearms diversion. As a result, BIS may rely on Commerce's International Trade Administration (ITA) to conduct end-use checks on its behalf. However, conducting end-use checks may conflict with ITA's primary duties of promoting the commercial interests of U.S. exporters. For example, ITA personnel may connect a U.S. business to a firearms distributor to promote U.S. exports and then later be asked to conduct an end-use check on that distributor, which could restrict those exports. Yet, BIS and ITA do not have guidance on how to segregate potentially conflicting duties. Without guidance, BIS lacks reasonable assurance that ITA personnel have appropriate qualifications and are conducting end-use checks impartially to help mitigate the risk of firearms diversion. Without dedicated personnel to conduct its end-use checks, BIS risks inconsistent end-use monitoring globally.