Inspections of Firearms Sellers Under the White House's 2021 Zero Tolerance Policy

Kathy Sanchez

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The Biden Administration announced in June 2021 that it would ramp up inspections of licensed firearms-sellers as part of a wider gun control and public safety strategy. The White House touted the increased inspections, explaining that it wanted to "crack down on rogue gun dealers" and had "zero tolerance" for them.

Here, I briefly explore limited publicly available inspection data. The Bureau of Alcohol, To-bacco, Firearms and Explosives, which conducts the inspections, launched these data on its website soon after the White House's announcement.

The Number of Inspections Grew from 2022 to 2024

The number of ATF inspections grew each year. Figure 1 shows this increase, accounting for seasonal patterns. The ATF inspected firearms sellers (known as Federal Firearms Licensees) the most during late summers.

Figure 1.



The Number of Inspections Varied by Field Office

Dallas, Kansas City and Columbus—cities in the south and midwest—had the most inspections over the full period of data (Figures 2 and 3). Field offices in the west and northeast tended to have fewer inspections. These differences are likely because ATF field offices receive more funding when they have more licensees in their area. ATF has likely set up more offices where they have more licensees.

Figure 2.

ATF Inspections by Office, Oct 2021 - Oct 2024

/// mspec	ATT inspections by Office, Oct 2021 - Oct 2024							
Columbus 2,731	Detroit 778	Philadelphia	Baltimore 465		Newark 238			
		615	Los Angele 471		St. Paul 422	New York 350		
	Denver New Orleans 811 629		nns Atlanta 575			Seattle 501		
Kansas City 2,991								
	Miami 827	Louisv 729		San Francisco 718		Nashville 708		
	Charlotte 1,125		Boston 1,115		Tampa 1,010			
Dallas 3,139 Houston 1,873		1	Phoenix 1,495		Chicago 1,159			

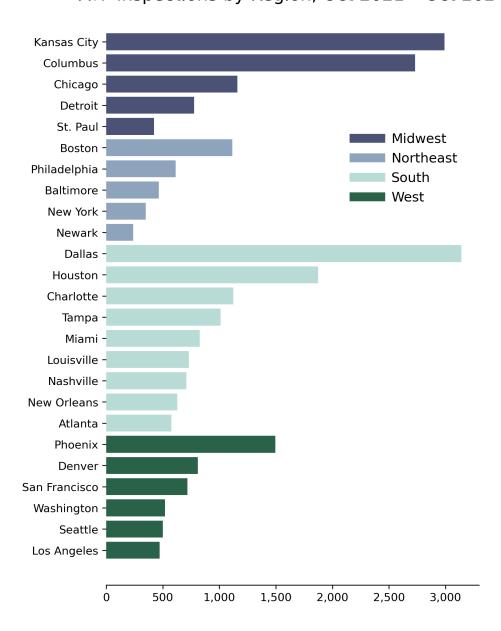
Figure 3.

ATF Inspections by Region, Oct 2021 - Oct 2024 Northeast 2,783 Midwest 8,081 West 4,515 South 10,615

Looking at offices by region in Figure 4 shows more offices in the south than the other regions.

Figure 4.

ATF Inspections by Region, Oct 2021 – Oct 2024



Inspection Results Also Varied by Field Office

Field offices that issued the most warnings and revoked the most licenses (Figures 5 and 6) were similar to those that had the most inspections (Figure 2). These similarities suggest that so-called rogue gun dealers are not concentrated in or attracted to any particular area.

Figure 5.

ATF Warnings by Office, Oct 2021 - Oct 2024

ATF Warnings by Office, Oct 2021 – Oct 2024						
Tampa	Houston	Los Angeles	St. Paul	Atlanta Newark		
40	19	11	9	6 5		
		Seattle 12	New Orlea 9	I ^{ns} San Francisco 8		
Kansas City	Louisville	Detroit	Philadelpl	lphia New York		
40	20	12	10	10		
	Baltimore	Charlotte		Chicago		
	20	18		18		
Miami	Boston	Nashville		Columbus		
42	27	26		22		
Dallas	Denver	Phoenix		Washington		
63	35	31		30		

Figure 6.

ATF Revoked Licenses by Office, Oct 2021 - Oct 2024

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Phoeniy	Denver 19	Philadelphia 11	New York 9	Newark Atlanta 4 3	
Phoenix 30		Houston	Seattle 11	Baltimor e os Ange 6 4	
	Chicago 20	14		San Francisco 8	
Charlotte 40	Nashville 20	Louisville 18	Miami 18	St. Paul 16	
Kansas City 54	Columbus 23	Dallas 21	Boston 21	Detroit 21	
	Washington 28	New Orlea 27	ns	Tampa 25	