

Gun sales surge 80% in May, says research firm



In this March 15, 2020, file photo, people wait in line to enter a gun store in Culver City, Calif. Los Angeles County Sheriff Alex Villanueva, who was sued by gun-rights groups after trying to shut down firearms dealers in the wake of coronavirus concerns, said Monday, March 30, that he is abandoning the effort. (AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu, File)

Gun sales surged in May as shops reported an uptick in interest and demand amid national protests after the Memorial Day killing of George Floyd and as the COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc and stoke fear across the country.

“Almost, you couldn’t even keep up with it. That’s how crazy it was,” said Joe Hawk, owner of Guns & Roses in New Jersey. “After Memorial Day, it spiked again. It just went crazy again.”

Small Arms Analytics & Forecasting, a private research firm, estimated that more

than 1.7 million guns were sold in May, an 80% jump from May 2019.

“Yet again, firearms sales have surged in unprecedented ways,” said Jurgen Brauer, the group’s chief economist.

The stock prices for several gun-making companies, including Sturm, Ruger & Co., jumped Monday.

Larry Hyatt, the owner of Hyatt Guns in Charlotte, North Carolina, said the gun demand prompted by COVID-19 was already straining suppliers.

“Then you have this looting and rioting causing another demand, and it’s really putting pressure on inventory,” Mr. Hyatt said.

Gun sales typically increase during presidential election years and during periods of national unrest, including after mass shootings, but Mr. Hyatt said the confluence of factors is unique.

“There’s economic worry, there’s crime worry, and then you got the worry of the coronavirus — it’s [a] triple whammy,” he said.

More than 3 million checks were run through the FBI’s national instant check system last month, which was a record for May and about a 32% increase from May 2019.

The FBI numbers don’t match gun sales perfectly but are used as a general approximation to gauge the health of the market.

Small Arms Analytics & Forecasting and other market analysts subtract from their reports permit checks and other data unlikely to be related to gun sales.

“Now what you’re seeing happening across the country is only going to fuel concerns about personal safety,” said Mark Oliva, a spokesman for the National Shooting Sports Foundation, the leading trade group for the gun industry.

Sales were booming this year before the Floyd killing sparked national protests and tense standoffs between law enforcement and protesters this past week.

Five of the 10 top days for FBI checks were in March, and five of the top 10 weeks were in periods covering February, March, and April.

Mr. Oliva said recent surveys of their retailers found that as many as 40% were first-time buyers.

Small Arms Analytics & Forecasting reported that handgun sales likely clocked in at about 1 million in May, a 94% increase from last year, and the 535,000 long gun sales marked an increase of about 66%.

“They’re buying predominantly handguns — small, defensive-use handguns — and they’re telling the retailers that they’re coming in to buy guns to be able to provide for their own safety, which was our suspicion as these sales started,” Mr. Oliva said. “I expect that those will continue as we go forward.”

He said election-year politics can figure into the numbers.

Former Vice President Joseph R. Biden, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, has pledged to push for strict gun controls if elected.

Mr. Biden was among a number of officials across the country urging a de-escalation Monday as tensions over Mr. Floyd’s killing flared.

He suggested that police could be trained to engage potential threats with non-lethal uses of firearms.

“The idea that instead of standing there and teaching a cop when there’s an unarmed person coming at them with a knife or something to shoot them in the leg instead of the heart is a very different thing,” he told a gathering of black leaders at a church in Wilmington, Delaware. “There’s a lot of different things that could change.”

During the post-Newtown gun control push, Mr. Biden suggested that people could scare off attempted intruders by firing a shotgun into the air.

More than 4,000 arrests have been made across the country in recent days on charges including stealing, blocking highways, and breaking curfew, according to a tally from The Associated Press.

More than 60 Secret Service officers and special agents were injured over the weekend as protests rocked the nation’s capital near the White House. D.C. Metropolitan Police Chief Peter Newsham said Monday that the department made 88 arrests Sunday and overnight and that seven officers sustained minor injuries.

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