

THE GREAT BRITISH SHOOTING — SHOW —

0.00006 PER CENT

Numbers often tell the story more clearly than commentary ever could. When the proportion of gun crime committed by licensed firearms holders amounts to just 0.00006 per cent of all recorded criminal offences, it raises a fundamental question: what problem are policymakers attempting to solve?

The UK has long maintained an outstanding record for public safety in relation to legally held firearms, supported by a gun control framework widely regarded as robust and effective. Yet proposals to re-align Sections 1 and 2 of the Firearms Act 1968 continue to gather momentum despite data suggesting that lawful ownership presents a negligible risk.

Set against a national backdrop of declining gun crime, the case for sweeping structural change becomes harder to reconcile with the available evidence. Indeed, the figure is so tiny that it is not recorded as a standalone category by the Office for National Statistics — less a measurable trend than a statistical anomaly.

The statistic sits within a broader national context that is often overlooked in the licensing debate. As of March 2025, gun crime accounted for just 0.1 per cent of all recorded crime in the UK, continuing a downward trajectory observed over the past six years.

Gun Trade Association CEO Stephen Jolly argues the data raises serious questions about the rationale for aligning shotgun controls with those governing rifles. The organisation argues that such a move could carry profound economic consequences, estimating a potential impact of £2.38 billion across the gun trade, the wider shooting sector, the Exchequer and the UK economy as a whole. The Exchequer alone could face lost tax revenues in the region of £600 million per annum.

Beyond the financial implications, the GTA warns that further regulatory complexity risks placing additional strain on already stretched police firearms licensing departments. More critically, it suggests that systemic overload could introduce new public safety risks — a concern sharpened by lessons drawn from the Plymouth shooting in 2021, where licensing failures were subject to intense scrutiny.

From the Association's perspective, the issue is not the strength of existing controls but the effectiveness of the licensing infrastructure itself. Current safeguards surrounding legally owned firearms are characterised as robust and effective, while the licensing system is described as being in urgent need of structural reform.

Central to that argument is a call for the creation of a National Police Firearms Licensing Authority, supported by a modernised National Firearms Licensing Management System (NFLMS) and aligned with the proposed introduction of a National Police Service in 2034.

To better understand the origins of the data, Gun Trade Insider spoke with Tim Cooper of TDC Research about the sources behind the gun crime figures and the methodology used to arrive at such a striking conclusion. TDC Research was retained by the GTA late last year to conduct its members' survey on the potential economic impact of re-alignment of Section 1 and 2 licensing on the trade.

Cooper is quick to stress that the figure is not the product of speculation or advocacy, but of

working within the scope of publicly available evidence. The analysis draws primarily on Office for National Statistics crime data, parliamentary written answers and a Freedom of Information response obtained in March 2024 relating to firearms-related homicides involving certificate holders.

"The key point is precision," Cooper explained. "There is very little data that directly links offences to the licensing status of an individual or the legal status of a firearm. Where that distinction exists, it tends to appear only in very specific categories."

For the year ending March 2025, police in England and Wales recorded approximately 6.6 million crimes across all offence types. Of those, firearms offences accounted for around 0.1 per cent, a reduction from 0.2 per cent the previous year.

Separate ONS datasets show offences in which a shotgun was reported to have been used have also declined significantly over time, falling from 687 incidents in 2018–19 to 346 in 2024–25. Those figures combine long-barrelled guns and sawn-off weapons and do not distinguish between licensed and illegally held firearms.

The 0.00006 per cent figure is derived from the only category where licensing status can be identified: homicide. In the year ending March 2024, four homicide offences were recorded in England and Wales in which a licensed firearm was used. A Freedom of Information response

covering the same period also identified four firearms-related homicides committed by certificate holders in the same time period.

While it cannot be definitively proven that the two datasets refer to the same incidents, Cooper said the overlap represents a reasonable working assumption when attempting to establish a worst-case scenario.

Newly published data from ONS was released as this article went to press. Drawing on information from national policing intelligence streams, it shows offences involving firearms across England and Wales have now fallen by approximately nine per cent between September 2024 and September 2025, measured on a year-on-year basis (February 2026).

This means that January of this year recorded the lowest level of firearms discharges since 2018, accelerating the broader downward trajectory observed in recent years. While regional variations remain, particularly in metropolitan areas facing organised crime challenges, the national trend points towards declining levels of firearms-related offending.

For policymakers considering structural changes to licensing legislation, those figures sit alongside the statistical rarity of offences involving certificate holders.

Taken together, they raise questions about whether proposed regulatory changes — most notably, a re-alignment of Sections 1 and 2 — are addressing the areas of greatest demonstrable risk. ■