

Unpacking Production: THE SMALL ARMS INDUSTRY

What is the small arms industry? In response to this question, the chapter offers an initial answer: although it is frequently treated as a single entity, the industry is in fact highly differentiated.

Consequently, global production trends have diverse effects on the different firms that comprise the small arms industry.

Indeed, trends are often specific to certain products and firms. They raise questions that call for a new approach to the study of production. Such questions include:

- Do broad changes in defence procurement affect all manufacturers of small arms and light weapons similarly?
- Are there great differences between companies that principally manufacture small arms as opposed to light weapons?
- What are the linkages between small arms and non-small arms-related production?
- How does the capacity to manufacture small arms vary qualitatively between countries?

The chapter aims to answer these questions and to provide a foundation for future evaluations of small arms and light weapons production. It disaggregates the 'industry' into six sectors of similar products and production practices and orients them in relation to all types of manufacturing industry, as opposed to simply arms production.

The chapter follows three broad lines of inquiry, which complement earlier explorations of companies and their production, financial, and workforce data:

- the degree to which production technologies and processes differ from one variety of small arm and light weapon to another;
- the extent to which companies that produce small arms and light weapons differ in terms of their size and manufacturing activities; and
- the global distribution of companies operating in different sectors of small arms and light weapons manufacturing and its implications for the illicit trade in these armaments.



A Heckler & Koch MP5 9 mm sub-machine gun modified with accessories, including extra magazines, a magazine coupler, and under-barrel flashlight.

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The chapter concludes that:

- There is a great deal of differentiation in the types of firms in the small arms industry and the products they produce.
- Global trends thought to affect the industry as a whole often influence sectors within the industry very differently.
- The illicit proliferation of various types of arms has distinct implications for individual sectors of the industry.
- A number of these sectors and the products they manufacture have escaped even modest research and policy attention to date.
- Measures must be targeted at specific sectors and the countries and regions that host them.

Small arms production sectors

SECTOR 1: REPAIRS AND SPORADIC PRODUCTION

Producers in this sector differ from all other types of productive activity in the small arms and light weapons industry in that most do not manufacture complete systems. The majority of producers listed here specialize in repairs and only the larger enterprises engage in limited production. Even in these cases, production usually entails the assembly of parts made elsewhere, rather than on site.

SECTOR 2: COMPONENTS AND ACCESSORIES

Firms included in this sector manufacture simple accessories and do not produce such items as precision optical equipment and fire control systems. Examples of accessories include scope mounts, sound suppressors, and mounting rails, while components may comprise objects such as grips, slides, springs, and barrels.

SECTOR 3: SPECIALIZED PRODUCTION

In contrast to producers of components and accessories, the firms in this sector manufacture complete weapon systems. They remain distinct from household-name producers (Sector 4) in that they make a relatively limited set of product types, usually in few configurations, and typically of a quantity short of mass production.

SECTOR 4: HOUSEHOLD-NAME PRODUCTION

Household-name producers manufacture complete weapon systems yet produce a relatively limited array of products, which are almost exclusively small arms. These firms differ from specialist producers in that they mass-produce weapons. To draw an analogy with the automobile industry, these companies appear to inhabit the kind of broad space occupied by manufacturers such as Ford or Renault.

SECTOR 5: EXTENSIVE-RANGE PRODUCTION

Extensive-range producers differ from household name producers in that they manufacture a greater variety of qualitatively different products. These items are either targeted at the military market or are based on military-oriented products. Furthermore, Sector 5 producers often manufacture explosive weaponry—often alongside large conventional weapons such as artillery—that are normally intended exclusively for the military. They are, however, distinct from Sector 6 producers in that the vast majority of products are characterized by relatively low technology and that the manufacture of electronics or optical equipment is rare.

SECTOR 6: HIGH-TECH PRODUCTION

High-tech producers manufacture high-precision components and systems, which, in many cases, parallel production processes in the aerospace, medical, and optical sectors. Among these producers are global giants of the defence industry, but also far smaller firms specializing in the production of technology-intensive electronics and optical equipment.

By presenting findings that underline differences within the small arms and light weapons industry, this chapter encourages researchers to focus on the effects of market and policy trends on individual production sectors. In turn, policy-makers stand to be better informed about the specific origins of the illicit small arms trade and how regulation affects it.