The analysis comes at a time when Congress is considering legislation to tighten access to guns, and the state Legislature is considering laws to make it easier to get a concealed weapons permit.

If the federal government wants to reduce gun crime, it should enforce existing laws, said Dave LaCourse, public affairs director for the Second Amendment Foundation, which is libertarian.

"But the agency that's set up to put the screws to the bad guy is almost being cut in half," LaCourse said.

Last month, Wayne County and the City of Detroit sued gun manufacturers and dealers, saying they used a strategy of "willful blindness," looking the other way when guns are sold illegally. As a result, county law enforcement alleged that nine of 10 dealers sold guns to people who indicated they were buying on behalf of a minor or felon with them.

Both U.S. Attorney Saul Green of Detroit and Special Agent Michael Morrisey, head of the ATF in Michigan, dispute the numbers from the Free Press study. The reports analyzed for the study came from the Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys and are made public by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) at Syracuse University.

"The numbers have gone down," Green said. But he said he does not accept the data the Free Press analyzed as definitive.

Green said that the decline follows a general downward trend in crimes.

For example, according to police records, Detroit had 559 homicides in 1993 and 453 in 1998.

The increased use of local-federal task forces may play a role in the decreased federal gun cases, he said. "We have a lot more cooperation than we had in the past and some of the cases developed might go to local prosecutors," he said.

Morrisey and ATF officials in Washington said the bureau shifted its investigative strategy, targeting more serious violators.

The number of ATF investigators on the street declined both nationally and in Michigan, and some of the remaining agents have taken on added duties.

The number of licensed gun dealers in the state has dropped, from about 11,000 in the early 1990s to 2,488 as of earlier this month, and was expected to drop even further.

"We're doing more with less," Morrisey said. "I think we're doing better quality with less, too."

And a program started in the last two months in Detroit could reverse the downward trend. Operation Countdown hopes to use tough federal gun laws to take felons caught with guns off the streets.

Between 1993 and 1997, the median prison term for those convicted of murder by the ATF stayed fairly constant at around 30 months, which suggests if agents were targeting more serious violators, they did not receive greater sentences.

"We gather the facts and present them to the U.S. Attorney for prosecution. It is up to the court to decide the sentence," Morrisey said.

Anchored on a few cases, he said. "And some of these sentences fell under guidelines enacted by Congress."

While the number of people prosecuted declined in eastern Michigan, agents in the district referred more people for prosecution in 1997 than in any other federal district. The eastern district had a high number of referrals in 1993-1996 as well.

The Eastern District of Michigan covers the eastern half of the Lower Peninsula.

In the Western District of Michigan, which covers the rest of the state, the number of federal prosecutions fluctuated but the annual totals were much less than in the east.

If recent undercover investigations in Wayne County are an indication, finding illegal gun sales will continue.

Between March 24 and April 14, undercover teams who told gun dealers they were juveniles and convicted felons bought weapons from nine out of 10 dealers.

Morrisey, who took over ATF Michigan operations last August, said his bureau can inspect gun dealers only once a year unless the dealer is considered "high risk." The ATF targeted more felons with guns, Morrisey said.

"Those are as easy as going out and picking up blades of grass," he said.

But the number of guns on the street did not decline. Morrisey said. The ATF began concentrating on licensed and unlicensed dealers who supply guns illegally to violent felons. One dealer can supply guns used in many crimes, he said.

The ATF has 33 fewer agents on the streets of Michigan than it had in 1992, he said. And some of those agents have more duties related to their specialized training in arson and explosives.

Some are assigned to state task forces, so the criminals they help arrest might not show up in the ATF's statistics, he said.

The ATF also assigns agents to gang reduction programs in schools, and the bureau investigates cigarette bootlegging, arson fires and explosions, not just gun violations.

IT WORKS IN RICHMOND

While the ATF has shifted its emphasis nationally away from individual felons with guns, one city that strictly enforced federal firearms laws saw a reduced murder rate.

In Richmond, federal prosecutors began in March 1997 to prosecute every gun case in the city of 200,000, said Jim Comey, executive assistant U.S. attorney. Officials advertise the tougher enforcement of Project Exile on billboards and television ads, Comey said.

"We have been selling deterrence the way they usually sell Wrangler jeans," he said.

It has worked, Comey said. Defendants ask lawyers to stop their cases from going "Exile." When cops pat down suspects on traffic stops, some say they are not stupid enough to carry a gun.

It has also kept the murder rate down. The city had 146 homicides in 1997 and 95 in 1998, he said. The number of firearm-related homicides dropped from 122 in 1997 to 78 in 1998.

Comey doesn't give Project Exile all the credit. Crack is waning in popularity; the state abolished parole three years ago, and drug enforcement has increased. He and others say it should not be seen as the answer for every city, although both gun-rights and gun-control advocates support it.

Federal and local officials in Detroit have joined to start a similar program. Operation Countdown, which began about two months ago, is operating in a few precincts. Already eight cases have been referred to federal prosecutors, said Bob Agacinski, deputy chief in charge of career criminals for the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office.

He said the program, which involves the ATF and Detroit police, has strong support from both Green and Wayne County Prosecutor John O'Hair.

"I think it's going better than we thought," Agacinski said.

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Mr. Williams, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

As in executive session the President's Official laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting sundry nominations which were referred to the appropriate committees.

(The nominations received today are printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

REPORT ON THE NATIONAL EMERGENCY WITH RESPECT TO BURMA—MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT—PM 33

The President Official laid before the Senate the following message from the President of the United States, together with an accompanying report; which was referred to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

To the Congress of the United States:

As required by section 401(c) of the National Emergencies Act, 50 U.S.C. 1641(c), and section 204(c) of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), 50 U.S.C. 1703(c), I transmit herewith a 6-month periodic report on the national emergency with respect to Burma that was declared in Executive Order 13047 of May 20, 1997.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON.


REPORT ON THE NATIONAL EMERGENCY WITH RESPECT TO IRAN—MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT—PM 34

The PRESIDING OFFICER laid before the Senate the following message from the President of the United States, together with an accompanying report; which was referred to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

May 27, 1999