



BTI Education * TLIM 4397 – Introduction to Homeland Security

Project title: TSA & Airport Security: A case on weapons smuggling in the U.S.

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Purpose and Motivation:

- Due to the fact that the DHS is the premier department controlling our national ports of entry, it is important to know how they keep track of legal versus illegitimate activities.
- We investigate how DHS and its agencies, namely TSA, can achieve a balance between the high volume of travel flows, and fighting security threats on a daily basis. Weapon smuggling is one of these challenges.

Problem Statement:

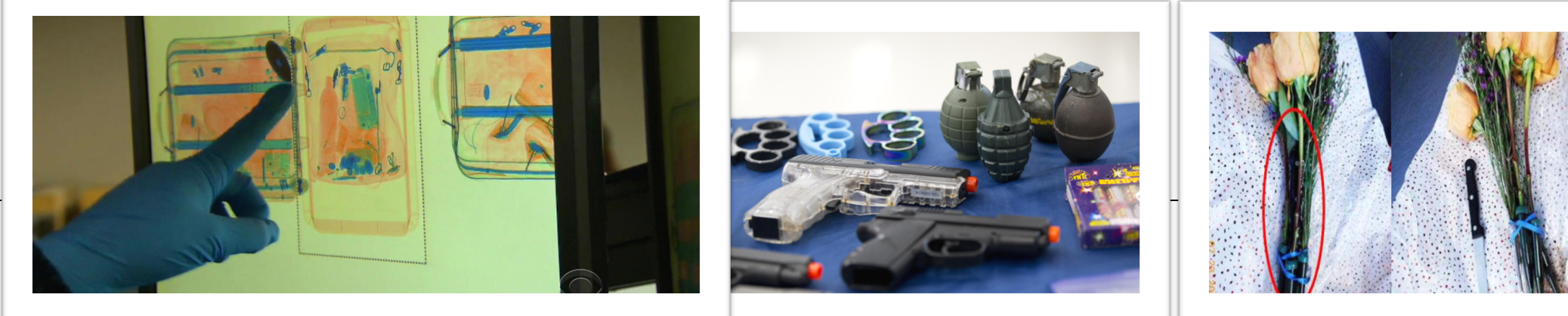
Each year, a record number of loaded weapons are found in hand luggage at U.S. airports. Most importantly, we will discover patterns by investigating how these trends change year by year.

Research Methods and Approach:

This study will be using secondary data from the DHS and TSA, one of its agencies, in charge of airport security. We seek to compare the annual TSA statistics, identifying the trends for 2017, 2018, and 2019. Namely, we will compare the annual statistical data to identify how many guns are discovered each year, which are the top 10 airports of entry with such incidents, and how the patterns change over time.



Image Source: <https://www.pcmag.com/news/new-tsa-scanning-tech-will-let-you-keep-laptops-in-your-bag>

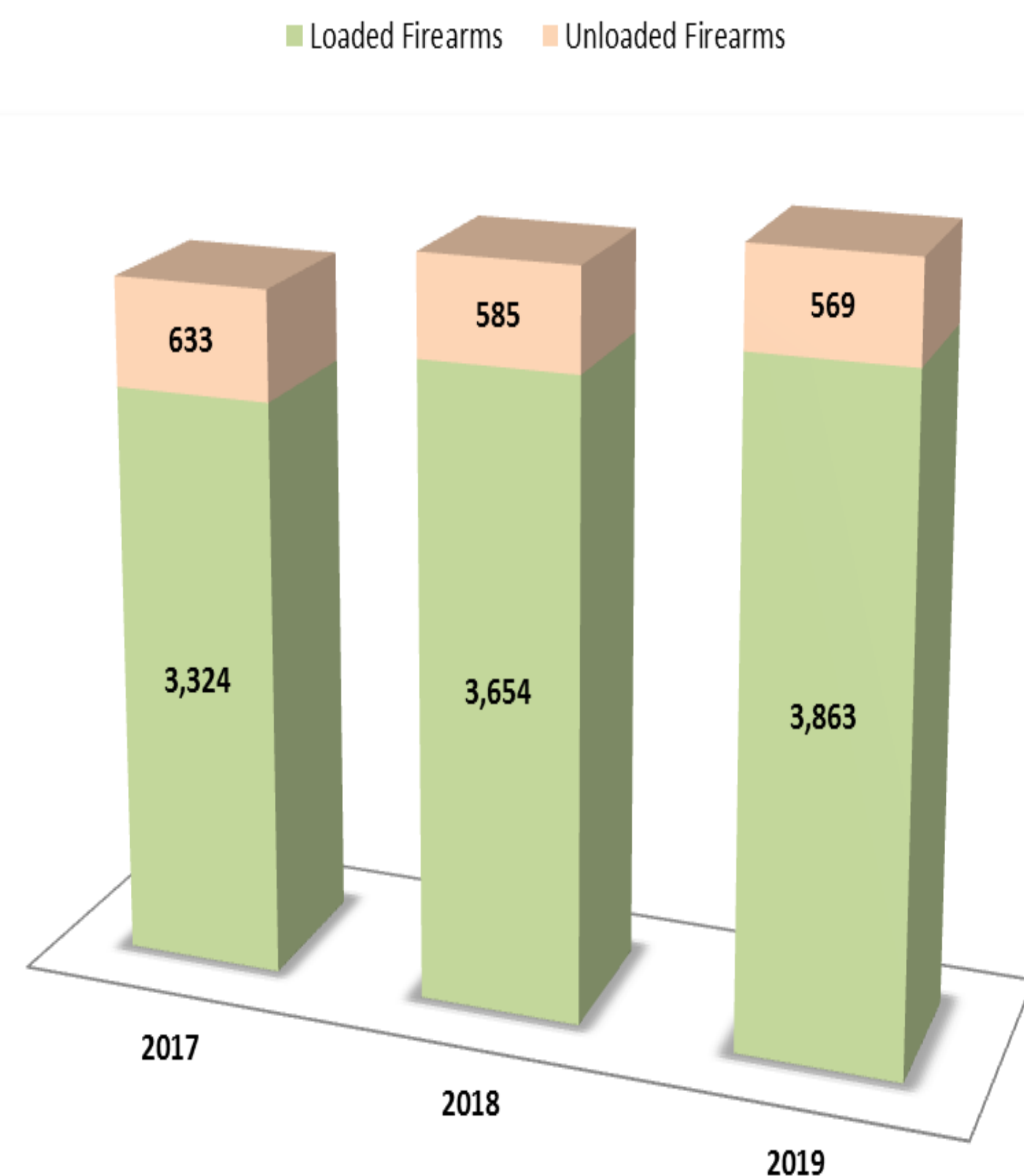


Research Analysis:

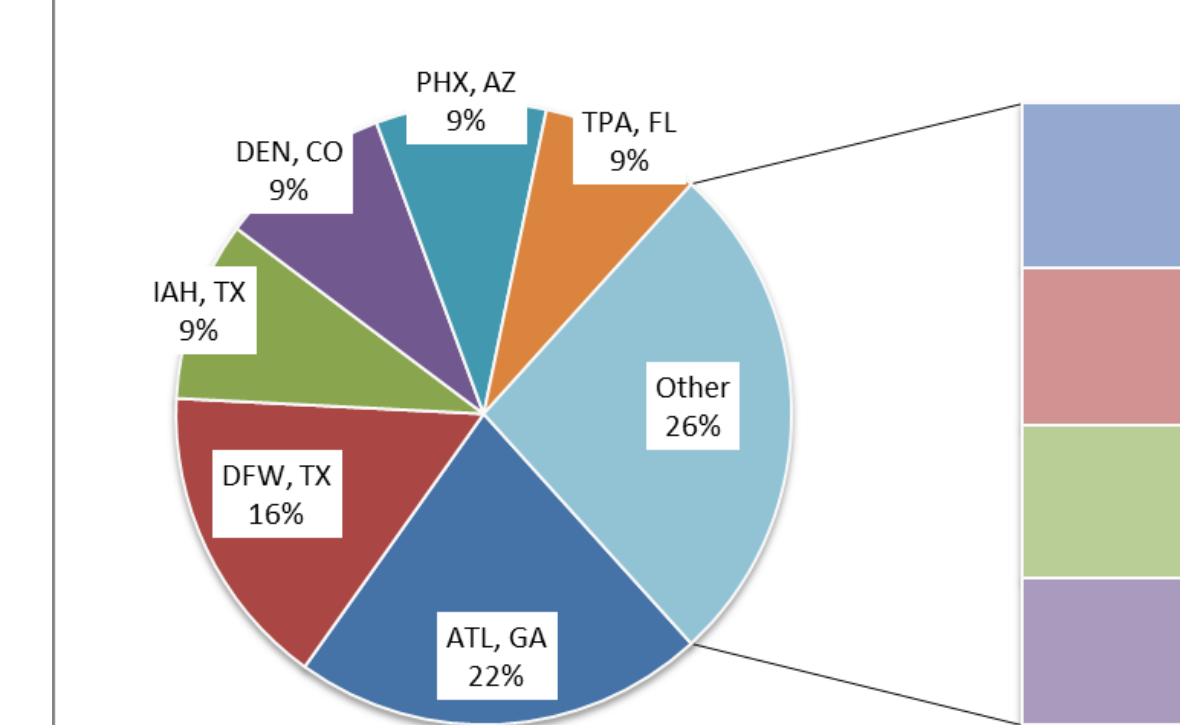
- We researched sources such as the DHS and affiliated organizations, and discovered some impressive facts and figures. We learned that TSA has over 60,000 employees who work to secure over 450 airports, share in the security of highways, railroads, ports, mass transit systems and pipelines. In a follow-up from the DHS/CBP/TSA we pulled together. While focusing on U.S. Airports and the TSA, it appears that there are 10 airports which each year consistently, from 2017 to date, hold the vast majority of weapons seized, both loaded and unloaded.
 - It appears that the vast majority of weapons seized by TSA are loaded, and this is the alarming finding of our research.
 - Since the weapons were seized prior to any incident, the reason that these persons were carrying and transporting loaded guns has not been clear for most of these cases.
 - DHS/TSA's job is to keep illegitimate entities and their weapons out of the U.S. while helping to facilitate and protect lawful international trade and travel.
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- With all the different ways of transportation and trade of goods of which we import and export, a heavy amount of illegitimate activity occurs daily at airports, railroads and ports specifically. The amount of illegal firearms, bombs and illegal possessions have increased, but TSA security has managed to increase their security to combat the issue.
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- Looking at stats of TSA through the years, the amount of illegal items that make it onto planes has dropped every year, which is credited to better technology and well trained staff. The occurrences of drug transportation by cargo at railroads and ports have also dropped therefore increasing the ability of safe trade and travel.

| Top 10 U.S. Airports with firearm discoveries | | | | | | |
|--|---------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|
| U.S. Airports (Full Name) | U.S. Airports | 2017 total | 2017 loaded | 2018 total | 2018 loaded | 2019 total |
| Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport | ATL, GA | 245 | 222 | 298 | 253 | 323 |
| Dallas/Fort Worth International | DFW, TX | 211 | 165 | 219 | 193 | 217 |
| George Bush Intercontinental Airport - Houston | IAH, TX | 142 | 124 | 129 | 120 | 140 |
| Denver International | DEN, CO | 118 | 102 | 126 | 95 | 138 |
| Phoenix Sky Harbor International | PHX, AZ | 115 | 109 | 123 | 112 | 132 |
| Tampa International | TPA, FL | 97 | 90 | 117 | 115 | 103 |
| Orlando International Airport | MCO, FL | 94 | 82 | 96 | 80 | 100 |
| Dallas Love Field | DAL, TX | 93 | 81 | 93 | 76 | 97 |
| Nashville International | BNA, TN | 89 | 71 | 89 | 83 | 96 |
| Seattle-Tacoma International Airport | SEA, WA | 75 | 60 | 86 | 80 | 87 |

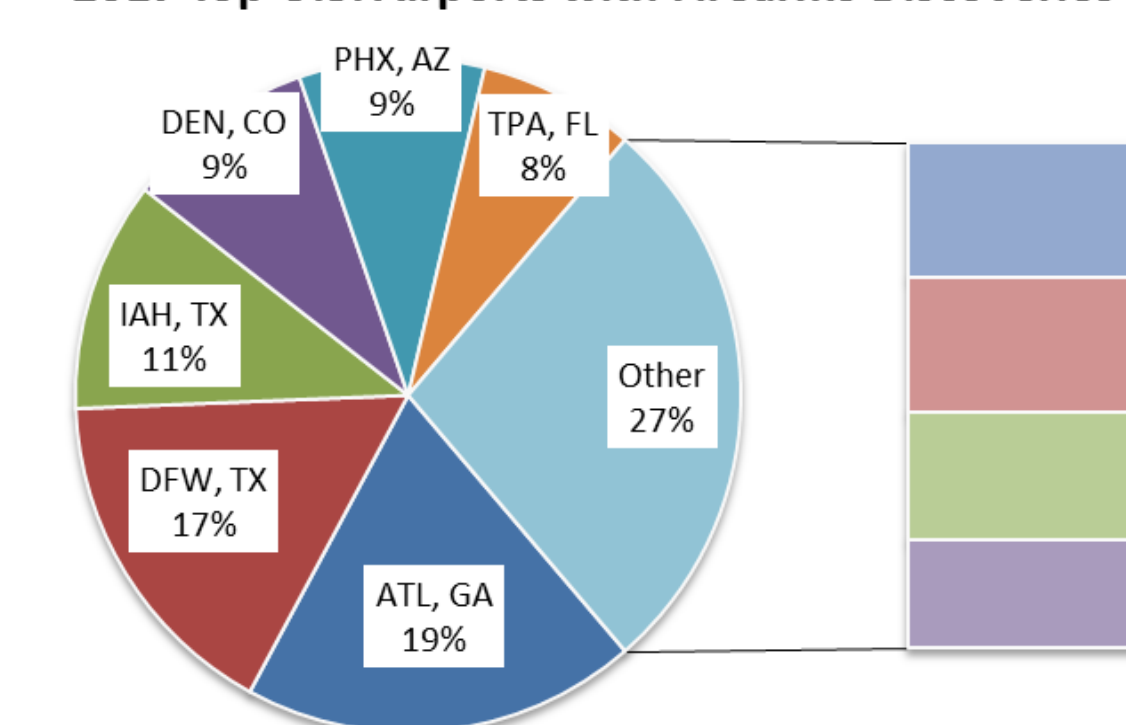
Firearms Siezed by the TSA in top 10 U.S. Airports



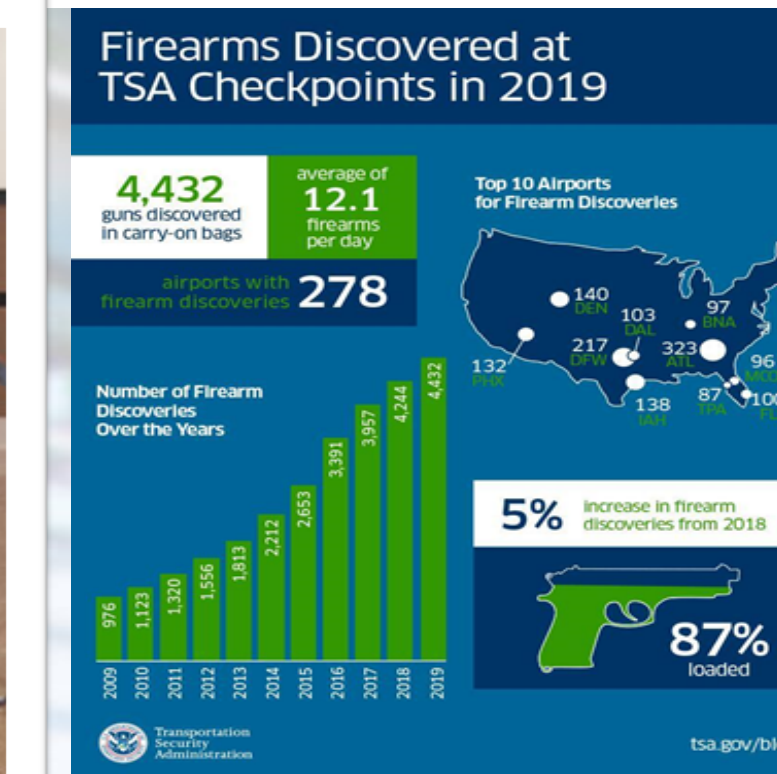
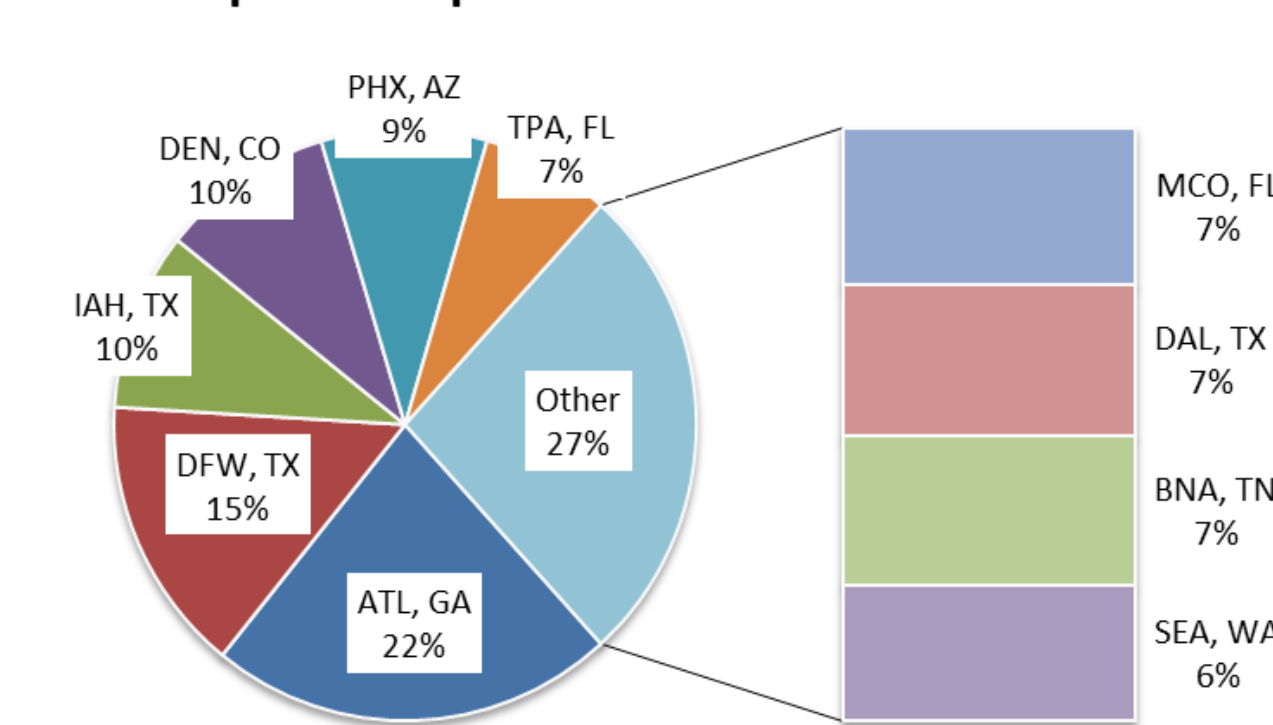
2018 Top U.S. Airports with Firearms Discoveries



2017 Top U.S. Airports with Firearms Discoveries



2019 Top U.S. Airports with Firearms Discoveries



Conclusions:

Upon examining the annual statistics for the years 2017, 2018, 2019, the number of illegal firearms, and illegal possessions have increased, but TSA security has managed to enhance security measures to combat the issue. Over time the data suggests that DHS, CBP and TSA checks at all airports borders and ways of travel will be faster due to rapid growing technology. This in turn will allow for better trade, safer and free travel flow while keeping illegitimate activities at a low rate of occurrence. It appears that the vast majority of weapons seized by TSA are loaded, and this is the alarming finding of our research.

References:

- <https://www.tsa.gov/blog/2018/01/29/tsa-year-review-record-amount-firearms-discovered-2017>
- <https://www.tsa.gov/blog/2019/02/07/tsa-year-review-record-setting-2018>
- <https://www.tsa.gov/blog/2020/01/15/tsa-year-review-2019>