

# Dark Web Drug and Firearm Markets

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**PURPOSE:** Unregulated dark web markets ease accessibility and expand consumer bases for both firearms and drugs. This brief seeks to illustrate how this virtual economy facilitates the purchase and sale of these illicit physical products.

**SCOPE:** Dark web drug and firearm markets pose a prominent threat to public safety due to:

1. Increased **ease of access** to illicit substances and weapons, especially for vulnerable populations and persons with firearm possession restrictions.
2. Decreased **likelihood of detection** as a result of the anonymity provided by encrypted hidden websites, the use of VPNs to conceal IP addresses, online peer-to-peer currencies that remain unattached to consumer information, and effective concealment strategies used to ship or receive illicit or dangerous goods.
3. **Growing global market share** over the past decade
  - a. **Drugs:** in 2013, the largest dark web retailer for illicit substances was the Silk Road, which produced a monthly revenue of \$7 million. Since disbanding as a result of FBI investigation, over 50 retailers have taken its place, and global monthly illicit drug revenues from cryptomarkets are now estimated to be between \$12 and \$21 million.
  - b. **Firearms:** in 2017, the RAND Corporation was the first to explore dark web firearm cryptomarkets. Though limited in their assessment, they estimated an average of 136 firearm sales per month, producing an estimated monthly gross revenue around \$80,000.
4. Economic Impact – the dark web facilitates an **expanding transnational** drug and firearm trade with shipment across borders.

## PRODUCT AVAILABILITY AND SELECTION PROCESS:

1. Common firearms and drugs for purchase on the dark web:
  - a. Firearms: Handguns, long guns, explosives, ammunition, and firearm parts and components.
  - b. Drugs: Marijuana, prescription drugs, ecstasy or MDMA, stimulants (e.g. amphetamines), psychedelics, opioids, alcohol, and tobacco.
2. Process by which consumers purchase and receive illicit goods: (Screenshots from single-shop vendor Black Market)

