Supplemental
Appendix

to the

Prepared Testimony of
Nick Suplina

Everytown for Gun Safety

House Committee on Oversight and Reform

EVERYTOWN
FOR GUN SAFETY

Resources Linked and Attached

1. ***Resources on Gun Violence***

Report: Mass Shootings in America
https://everytownresearch.org/maps/mass-shootings-in-america/

Report: Firearm Suicide in the United States
https://everytownresearch.org/report/firearm-suicide-in-the-united-states/

Index: Not an Accident
https://everytownresearch.org/maps/notanaccident/

Report: When the Shooting Stops
https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-impact-of-gun-violence-on-survivors-in-america/

Fact Sheet: The Impact of Gun Violence on Children and Teens
https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-impact-of-gun-violence-on-children-and-teens/

Issue Page: The Impact of Gun Violence on Black Americans
https://www.everytown.org/issues/gun-violence-black-americans/#what-are-the-solutions

Fact Sheet: The Impact of Gun Violence on Latinx Communities
https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-impact-of-gun-violence-on-latinx-communities/

Report: The Economic Cost of Gun Violence
https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-economic-cost-of-gun-violence/

2. ***Resources on Gun Policy***

Fact Sheet: Six Gun Violence Prevention Priorities for the 117th Congress
https://www.everytown.org/report/six-gun-violence-prevention-priorities-for-the-117th-congress/

Report: Unchecked: An Investigation of the Online Firearm Marketplace
https://everytownresearch.org/report/unchecked-an-investigation-of-the-online-firearm-marketplace/

Report: Five Things to Know About Crime Guns, Gun Trafficking, and Background Checks
https://everytownresearch.org/report/five-things-to-know-about-crime-guns/

Release: ATF Data Shows Increases In Key Indicators Of Gun Trafficking During 2020
https://everytownsupportfund.org/press/everytown-analysis-atf-data-shows-increases-in-key-indicators-of-gun-trafficking-during-2020

Report: Untraceable: The Rising Specter of Ghost Guns
https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-rising-specter-of-ghost-guns/

Fact Sheet: Update Background Check Laws
https://everytownresearch.org/report/update-background-check-laws/

Fact Sheet: Assault Weapons and High Capacity Magazines
https://everytownresearch.org/report/assault-weapons-and-high-capacity-magazines/

3. Resources on Gun Industry & Policy

Issues Page: Lack of Gun Industry Accountability
https://everytownresearch.org/issue/lack-of-gun-industry-accountability/

Solutions Page: Smart Guns and Gun Safety Features
https://everytownresearch.org/solution/smart-guns-and-gun-safety-requirements/

Solutions Page: Prohibit Bump Stocks and Other Conversion Devices
https://everytownresearch.org/solution/prohibit-bump-stocks/

Solutions Page: Repeal Gun Industry Immunity
https://everytownresearch.org/solution/industry-reform/

4. Clarification of Testimony

See Attached

Introduction
Twelve-Year Overview
Most mass shootings happened in private homes
Many mass shooters were prohibited from possessing firearms.
Mass shooters often displayed warning signs
Domestic violence was a part of most mass shootings
Mass shootings involving assault weapons or high-capacity magazines were far deadlier.
Mass shootings cause indelible harm to survivors and communities
Conclusion

Mass Shootings in America

Since 2009, there have been **277 mass shootings** in the United States, resulting in **1565 people shot and killed** and **1000 people shot and wounded.**

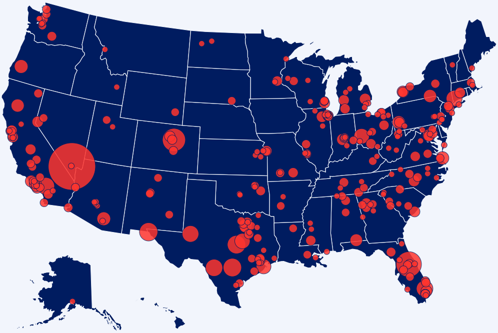
All Mass Shootings

United States (277)

● ● Dot size indicates the relative number of people shot in each mass shooting.

All Mass Shootings

2009 – 2022



Data is up to date as of: Jun 3, 2022

November 21, 2020 | Reports

Download Data

Twelve Years of Mass Shootings in the United States

An Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund Analysis

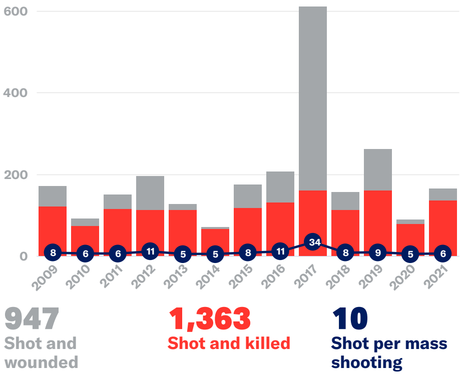
Last updated: June 4, 2021

Introduction

In the years between 2009 and 2020, the horrific scenes of mass shootings have haunted the nation's collective conscience. Each breaking news alert floods the nation with grief and anger at this senseless, preventable violence. The United States is not the only country with mental illness, domestic violence, or hate-fueled ideologies, but our gun homicide rate is 26 times higher than other high-income countries.[1] The difference is easy access to guns. This connection is not just theoretical. US states with weaker gun laws and higher gun ownership rates have higher rates of mass shootings.[2]

While the popular perception may be that mass shootings are the nation's largest share of gun deaths, the data tells a different and more complex story. In reality, mass shootings are the tip of the iceberg of this country's gun violence crisis. More than 99 percent of gun deaths in the US are from shootings other than mass shootings.[3] Nevertheless, because of the high number of casualties and often extensive and horrific media coverage associated with them, each mass shooting sends shockwaves of pain and harm through families, communities, and the nation. Just like the daily gun violence that contributes to the more than 110 gun deaths each day in the US, mass shootings are largely preventable through evidence-based policy interventions.

Mass shooting casualties since 2009



This analysis reflects a compilation of 12 years (2009 to 2020) of original data on mass shootings in the United States, sourced from media reports and official police and court records. These records enable unique insights into the circumstances of mass shootings. For full details on data collection, see our methodology.

Mass shootings are not a random, inevitable element of American life today. Rather, this report illuminates trends that can help point lawmakers to strategies to curb these tragedies. These trends include that **mass shootings are often:**

- perpetrated by someone who was legally prohibited from possessing a firearm;
- perpetrated by someone who displayed prior warning signs;
- intermingled with acts of domestic violence; and
- far deadlier when they involve assault weapons and high-capacity magazines.

Definition of a mass shooting

Everytown defines a mass shooting as any incident in which four or more people are shot and killed, excluding the shooter.

By this definition, the United States experiences an average of 19 mass shootings every year, ranging from 15 in 2010 and in 2014 to a high of 24 in both 2011 and 2013. However, there exists no consensus on the definition of a mass shooting. Counts under other definitions range from a dozen per year to nearly one mass shooting every day depending on factors such as casualty thresholds or whether the mass shooting was in public or not.

By any count, the number of mass shootings that plague this country is far too high, and the counts are just a small fraction of the lives left forever changed after the tragedy of a mass shooting. To read more on Everytown's definition, see our methodology.

Twelve-Year Overview

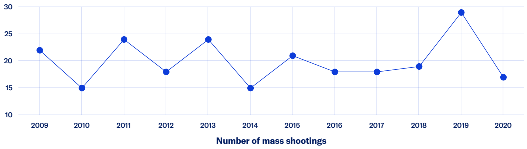
Between 2009 and 2020, 1,363 people in the United States were killed and 947 more were wounded in 240 mass shootings, an average of 20 shootings each year. Among the casualties were at least 362 children and teens killed as well as 21 law enforcement officers killed and 35 wounded. These numbers are staggering, yet they represent just a small portion of the lives forever changed after a mass shooting shakes a community with terror and grief.

1 in 4

1 in 4 mass shooting victims were children and teens.

Download

Number of mass shootings each year

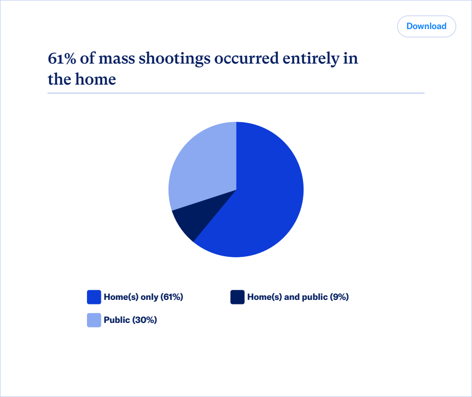


In nearly all mass shootings over this period, the shooter was an adult man who acted alone.[4] Thirty-two percent of mass shooters, or 92 shooters, ended with the perpetrator dying by suicide, and another 24 shooters were killed by responding law enforcement.[5] The remaining 145 mass shooters were taken into custody by law enforcement, while the outcomes and identities of 23 remain unknown.

Most mass shootings happened in private homes

The archetypal mass shooting occurs in a public place like a school or a bar. While mass shootings in public places tend to receive more media attention, the majority of these shootings actually occur in private homes.

Between 2009 and 2020, 61 percent of mass shootings occurred entirely in the home and another 9 percent occurred partially in a home and partially in a public location. Thirty percent occurred entirely in public spaces like schools, malls, or bars. Of these public mass shootings, the majority (59 percent) occurred at least partially in a place of business such as a restaurant or retail store, and 11 percent occurred in a school.[6] These public mass shootings were deadlier: While 39 percent of mass shootings occurred at least in part in public, they resulted in 51 percent of all mass-shooting deaths over this 12-year period.

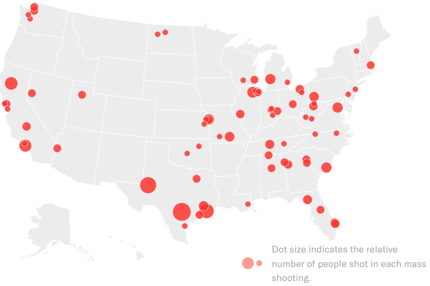


61% of mass shootings occurred entirely in the home

Many mass shooters were prohibited from possessing firearms.

In the absence of a comprehensive federal law that requires background checks on all gun sales across the country, criminals, domestic abusers, and other prohibited people can easily avoid background checks in 29 states simply by buying guns from unlicensed sellers—including strangers they meet online.

Mass Shooter Legally Prohibited From Having Guns
2009 – 2020



Dot size indicates the relative number of people shot in each mass shooting.

1 in 3

1 in 3 mass shootings involved a shooter that was legally prohibited from possessing firearms at the time of the shooting.

The harm posed when people who should not have guns can easily avoid a background check is particularly evident in mass shootings, where one in three incidents involved shooters that were legally prohibited from possessing firearms at the time of the shooting, whether because they had a felony conviction, had been adjudicated mentally ill by a court of law, or had a domestic violence restraining order, among other reasons.[7] These shootings resulted in 364 deaths and 125 injuries, or one in four deaths and one in 10 injuries, that may have been prevented with a stronger, more comprehensive background check system.[8]

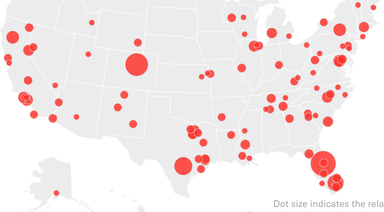
Closing loopholes in our federal and state background check laws can prevent guns from ending up in the hands of those who are legally prohibited from having a firearm. Read more about how background checks save lives and protect communities.

Mass shooters often displayed warning signs

Perpetrators of mass shootings often display warning signs before the violence, such as engaging in recent acts or threats of violence or violating a protection order. These warning signs present opportunities for intervention that could save lives. In fact, in more than half (56 percent) of the mass shootings in this analysis, a shooter exhibited at least one dangerous warning sign prior to the shooting. Combined, shooters demonstrating dangerous warning signs took 596 lives and wounded 260 more, equating to more than half of mass shooting deaths and a third of all injuries.[9]

Mass Shooter Exhibited Dangerous Warning Signs

2009 – 2020



Dot size indicates the relative number of people shot in each mass shooting.

The fact that so many mass shooters displayed warning signs prior to their acts of violence highlights the opportunities to intervene and prevent these tragedies. Extreme Risk laws are one such opportunity. Sometimes referred to as “red flag” laws, these laws empower loved ones and law enforcement who recognize warning signs to petition a court to temporarily restrict a person’s access to firearms when they pose a significant risk of using them to cause harm. Research shows Extreme Risk laws are effective in saving lives, especially in cases of firearm suicide. Read more about the research here.

56%

In 56 percent of mass shootings, the shooter exhibited dangerous warning signs before the shooting.

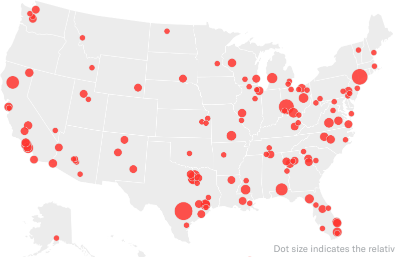
Everytown for Gun Safety. “Mass Shootings in America 2...

Domestic violence was a part of most mass shootings

Although many people think of mass shootings as random acts of violence, this analysis shows that most mass shootings are not at all random: In at least 53 percent of mass shootings between 2009 and 2020, the perpetrator shot a current or former intimate partner or family member during the rampage. These domestic violence-related mass shootings resulted in at least 632 people shot and killed and 106 people wounded, amounting to almost half of all mass shooting deaths and one in ten injuries.

Mass Shootings Involving Intimate Partner or Family Victim(s)

2009 – 2020



Dot size indicates the relative number of people shot in each mass shooting.

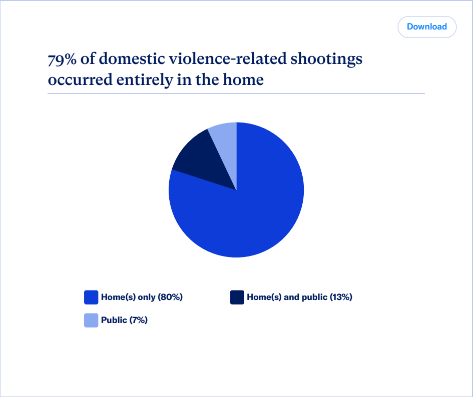
Nearly 3 in 4 children and teens killed in mass shootings died in an incident connected to domestic violence.

Too often, children and teens are the victims of domestic violence mass shootings: Of the 362 children and teens killed in all mass shootings in the past 12 years, nearly three in four (72 percent) died in an incident connected to intimate partner or family violence.

53%

53 percent of mass shootings were domestic violence-related.

The findings about domestic violence-related mass shootings and where mass shootings tend to occur are interlinked. Nearly all of these domestic violence-related shootings involved at least one victim in a private home (93 percent), and 80 percent of them occurred there entirely and never moved into a public space.[10]



79% of domestic violence-related shootings occurred entirely in the home

Everytown for Gun Safety. "Mass Shootings in America 2009-2020". Everytown for Gun Safety. (2021). https://bit.ly/3fQBlc2

In at least 71 mass shootings, the shooter had a known previous history of domestic violence. In 56 of those mass shootings, the shooter shot and killed an intimate partner or family member as part of their rampage.

Intimate partner and family violence are far more likely to turn deadly when guns are involved. Abusers with firearms are five times more likely to kill their female victims, and guns further exacerbate the power and control dynamic used by abusers to inflict emotional abuse and exert coercive control over their victims.[11] Read more about the deadly nexus between domestic violence and guns and the policies that help prevent domestic homicides here.

Mass shootings involving assault weapons or high-capacity magazines were far deadlier.

When assault weapons and high-capacity magazines were used in mass shootings, they resulted in far more deaths and injuries. Between 2009 and 2020, the five deadliest mass shooting incidents in the US all involved the use of assault weapons and/or high-capacity magazines: Las Vegas, Orlando, Newtown, Sutherland Springs, and El Paso. [12]

Assault weapons and high-capacity magazines were disproportionately used in public mass shootings. Of the shootings with known weapon type, 76 percent of those that involved an assault weapon and/or high-capacity magazine occurred in public compared to 44 percent of those that involved a handgun.[13]

81%

81 percent of mass shootings involved a handgun.

Everytown for Gun Safety. "Mass Shootings in ...

16%

16 percent of mass shootings involved an assault weapon.

Everytown for Gun Safety. "Mass Shootings in ...

55%

55 percent of mass shootings involved a high-capacity magazine.

Everytown for Gun Safety. "Mass Shootings in A...

HANDGUNS

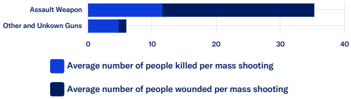
Most mass shootings—81 percent—involved the use of at least one handgun, and 60 percent involved only handguns.[14] At least 17 shooters used only a handgun with a high-capacity magazine.

ASSAULT WEAPONS

Assault weapons are generally high-powered, semiautomatic firearms designed to fire rounds at a greater velocity than most other firearms, and, when combined with high-capacity magazines, they enable a shooter to fire a devastating number of rounds over a short period. In the 12 years from 2009 to 2020, there were at least 30 mass shootings (16 percent of those with known weapon data) that involved the use of an assault weapon, resulting in 347 deaths and 719 injuries. In other words, mass shootings that involved an assault weapon accounted for 25 percent of all mass shootings deaths and 76 percent of injuries. While not used in the majority of mass shootings, when they were, it left six times as many people shot per incident than when there was no assault weapon.[15]

Download

Assault weapons led to 6x as many people shot per mass shooting



Source: Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "Mass Shootings in America 2009-2020," (2021).

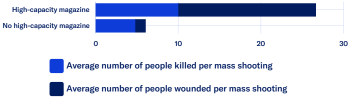
Last updated: 3.18.2022

HIGH-CAPACITY MAGAZINES

High-capacity magazines allow a shooter to fire more rounds without pausing to reload. The more rounds a shooter can fire consecutively, the more gunshot wounds they can inflict during an attack.[16] While nearly every assault weapon used in a mass shooting over this period included a high-capacity magazine, an additional 20 mass shootings involved the use of high-capacity magazines with other guns. In total, at least 42 mass shootings involved high-capacity magazines, which resulted in 422 people killed and 710 people wounded. Of those 42 mass shootings that involved high-capacity magazines, three-fourths occurred in public places.[17] As a whole, the mass shootings we know involved the use of high-capacity magazines resulted in nearly five times as many people shot on average as those that did not.[18]

Download

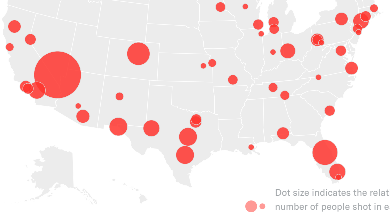
High-capacity magazines led to 5x as many people shot per mass shooting



Source: Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "Mass Shootings in America 2009-2020," (2021). "No high-capacity magazine" includes incidents where magazine capacity is unknown.

Last updated: 3.18.2022

Assault Weapons or High-Capacity Magazines
2009 – 2019



Dot size indicates the relative number of people shot in each mass shooting.

A growing body of research shows that states can reduce gun violence by limiting access to assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. States with restrictions on magazine size experience mass shootings at less than half the rate of states without restrictions.[19] Another study estimated that mass shooting deaths were 70 percent less likely to occur when the federal prohibition on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines was in effect.[20] In fact, when looking at possible factors such as socio-demographics and gun laws, laws restricting magazine size were by far the strongest predictor of a state's rate of mass shootings.[21] Read more about assault weapons and high-capacity magazines and the policies that help prevent their use in gun violence here.

> Between 2009 and 2020, the 5 deadliest mass shootings all involved assault weapons and/or high-capacity magazines.

Mass shootings cause indelible harm to survivors and communities

> Every bed was full. We had people in the hallways, people outside, and more people coming in.
>
> **Dr. Jay Coates, a trauma surgeon in Las Vegas**[22]

The destructive reach of a mass shooting stretches far beyond those killed and wounded, damaging the well-being of survivors, their families, and communities. Studies of survivors from various mass shootings consistently find that mass shootings harm the mental health of both direct survivors and community members, including psychological symptoms like post-traumatic stress and depression.[23] Even those living far away, such as those watching coverage of a mass shooting on the news, can experience increased fear of crime or victimization and uncertainty about their safety at school and in the community.[24]

Mass shooting response also burdens health care systems, local economies, and taxpayers. One researcher estimated that the cost of the Las Vegas mass shooting would be at least $600 million after tallying costs such as medical and mental health care, police work, work loss and employer expenses, and quality of life.[25] The fear of mass shootings only increases these costs—one investigation found that since Columbine, at least $811 million federal dollars have been spent to help school districts hire security guards.[26]

> "While I have no physical scars, I have had increased anxiety and hypervigilance in my daily life since that day. Outdoor events are difficult for me, and I constantly think of an escape plan, wherever I am. We need change, so no one has to be afraid of 'fireworks' ever again."
>
> **Geena Marano, a survivor of the Las Vegas mass shooting.**[27]

Conclusion

Only through understanding the true nature of mass shootings can we begin to seek evidence-based solutions. Lawmakers should pass legislation requiring background checks on all firearm sales, temporarily removing firearms through Extreme Risk laws, keeping firearms out of the hands of domestic abusers, and restricting the purchase, possession, and manufacture of assault weapons and high-capacity magazines.

DID YOU KNOW?

Women in the U.S. are 28 times more likely to be killed by guns than women in other high-income countries.

Everytown analysis of the most recent year of gun deaths by country (2015 to 2019), GunPolicy.org (accessed January 7, 2022).

Join Us.

Every day, more than 110 people in America are killed with guns. The gun homicide rate in the U.S. is 26 times higher than that of other developed countries, but research shows that common-sense public safety laws can reduce gun violence and save lives.

JOIN US

Key Findings
Recommendations
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

FACT SHEET

Firearm Suicide in the United States

8.30.2019 | Last Updated: 12.28.2021

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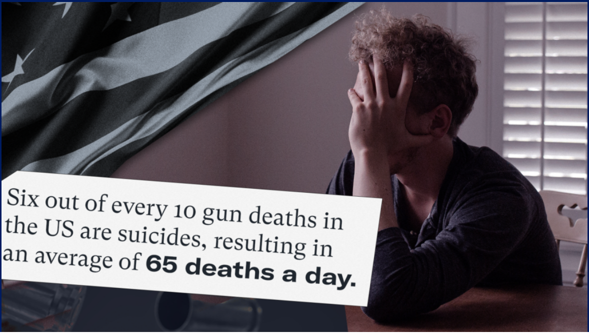
Learn More: Child & Teen Gun Safety Extreme Risk Laws Gun Suicide



Six out of every 10 gun deaths in the US are suicides, resulting in an average of **65 deaths a day.**

> *Mikey, a 13-year-old boy from Upstate New York, was friendly and engaged. One day in January, he shot and killed himself with one of his father's guns. Mikey's suicide came as a shock. "He may have gotten angry for some reason. At that age you're not thinking how final a gun is."*
>
> *–Alexandria Bodden, Mikey's older sister and gun violence prevention advocate*

Firearm suicide is a significant public health crisis in the United States, claiming the lives of nearly 24,000 Americans every year, including more than 3,100 young people and 4,400 veterans.[1] Six out of every 10 gun deaths in the US are suicides, resulting in an average of 64 deaths a day.[2] And the problem is getting worse: Over the past decade, the United States firearm suicide rate has increased 12 percent.[3] This trend is of particular concern among young Americans, whose firearm suicide rate has increased 53 percent over the past 10 years,[4] and for veterans, who have a firearm suicide rate one and a half times higher than nonveteran adults.[5]

24k

Each year, nearly 24,000 Americans die by suicide.

CDC, WONDER, Underlying Cause of Death, 2016–2020.

In a recent national poll, 16 percent of respondents—or roughly 40 million American adults—reported that someone they care for attempted or died by suicide with a gun.[6] But suicide, including firearm suicide, can be prevented. Removing access to firearms, a particularly lethal means, is the easiest and quickest intervention. Policies and practices that limit or disrupt access to firearms, such as those outlined later in the Recommendations section, have been shown to save lives.

Key Findings

Americans should be aware of the prevalence of firearm suicide, how having access to a gun increases the risk of suicide, and steps they can take to mitigate risk. Research shows that having access to a firearm triples one's risk of death by suicide. This elevated risk applies not only to the gun owner but to everyone in the household.[7] People who live in US states with high rates of household gun ownership are also almost four times more likely to die by gun suicide than those in states where fewer households have guns. This relationship remains strong even when controlling for other factors associated with suicide, like poverty, unemployment, serious mental illness, and substance abuse.[8]

Access to a gun robs a person in crisis from a second chance at life.

There is a popular misconception that suicide is inevitable, that suicidal ideation is a permanent condition. But most people who attempt suicide do not die—unless they use a gun. Across all suicide attempts not involving a firearm, 4 percent result in death. But for gun suicide, those statistics are flipped: Approximately 90 percent of gun suicide attempts end in death.[9] And the vast majority of those who survive a suicide attempt do not go on to die by suicide.[10] Everytown's recent analysis of hospital records strongly reaffirms this research on the lethality of firearms. More than 60 in 100 gun deaths each year are by suicide, while just three in 100 hospital visits each year due to a nonfatal gunshot wound are the result of a suicide attempt. A reduction in suicide attempts by firearm would result in an overall decline in the suicide rate.[11]

Firearm suicides follow sharply divergent demographic patterns.

Men, white Americans, and those living in rural areas are disproportionately affected. Men represent 86 percent of firearm suicide victims; they are nearly 7 times more likely than women to die by firearm suicide.[12] For men, firearm suicide rates largely increase with age, and are especially high for males 55 and older.[13] For women, firearm suicide rates are highest in the 45-to-60 age range.[14]

86%

Men represent 86% of firearm suicide victims.

CDC, Underlying Cause of Death, 2016-2020.

White Americans represent 84 percent of all firearm suicide victims, and have the highest rate of firearm suicide by race.[15] American Indians / Alaska Natives also have a disproportionately high rate of firearm suicide, with the second-highest rate of firearm suicide among the country's five major racial and ethnic groups.[16]

Americans living in rural areas experience far higher rates of firearm suicide than those living in urban areas.[17] The average firearm suicide rate increases as counties become more rural,[18] and the rate of firearm suicide in the most rural counties is 2.5 times higher than in the most urban counties.[19]

For further discussion of factors related to firearm suicide in each of these demographic groups, see Firearm Suicide by Congressional District.

LEARN MORE ABOUT FACTORS RELATED TO FIREARM SUICIDE

FIREARM SUICIDE BY CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Report

Recommendations

Firearm suicide can be prevented. There are actions we can take to mitigate the risk of suicide and save lives. Effective suicide prevention in the United States requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses the complex interplay between individuals, groups, community, and larger societal factors that impact firearm suicide. As such, the following policy recommendations are categorized by these four overlapping points of intervention.

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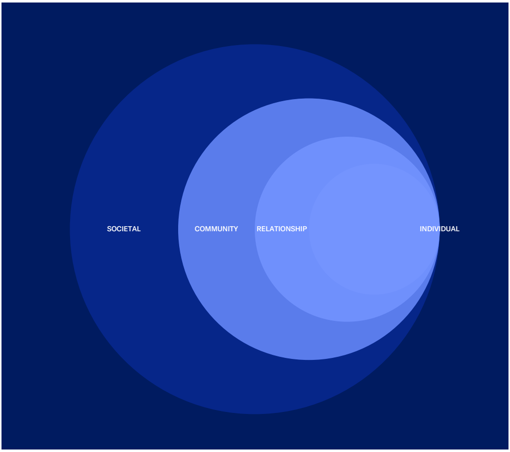
A multi-faceted approach is needed to address the complex interplay between individuals, groups, community, and larger societal factors that impact firearm suicide.



Individual-level interventions promote behaviors and attitudes that can mitigate the risk of gun suicide among those most at risk.

IN-HOME SECURE FIREARM STORAGE.

Policies and practices that disrupt the easy and immediate acquisition of firearms have been shown to save lives. Secure firearm storage can help mitigate the risks of firearm suicide, especially for children. Approximately 4.6 million American children live in households with at least one loaded, unlocked firearm.[20] When American children die by firearm suicide, over 80 percent use a gun belonging to a family member.[21] One study found that households that locked both firearms and ammunition were associated with a 78 percent lower risk of self-inflicted firearm injuries and an 85 percent lower risk of unintentional firearm injuries among children, compared to those that locked neither.[22] And researchers estimate that if half of households that store at least one unlocked gun moved to lock all of their guns, 251 youth fatalities from firearm suicide and unintentional shootings could be prevented in a single year.[23] These lives saved would make up one-third of all preventable youth deaths from firearm suicide and unintentional shootings that year.

80%

Over 80% of child firearm suicides involved a gun belonging to a family member

R. M. Johnson , C. Barber, D. Azrael, D. E. Clark, and D. H...

Many cities and states have laws that require or encourage secure storage. Twenty states and the District of Columbia have some form of secure firearm storage law.[24] And 15 states have passed Child Access Prevention (CAP) laws, which impose criminal penalties when a person fails to securely store a firearm and a child gains unauthorized access to it. States with laws mandating secure storage or with CAP laws saw an 8 percent decrease in overall suicide rates and an 11 percent decrease in firearm suicide rates among adolescents aged 14 to 17.[25]

Not all firearm storage options are equal. There is a wide variety of firearm storage devices, including lock boxes, cable locks, trigger locks, and gun vaults. However, there is limited guidance on which storage devices are most effective at reducing access, by minors and other unauthorized users in particular. The federal government should provide such guidance, focusing on which devices are most effective at reducing firearm access across different populations at heightened risk for suicide — such as teens or young adults in the home — and what is represented in advertisements for storage devices.

OUT-OF-HOME FIREARM STORAGE.

Individuals in crisis can also choose to securely store their firearms outside of the home with an eligible friend, relative, or law enforcement, or at a storage facility or shooting range. States, cities, and community organizations can facilitate and spread awareness of out-of-home storage options by developing and publishing maps that display the specific locations where secure out-of-home gun storage is offered. Local gun storage maps are available in Colorado,[26] Washington,[27] and Maryland.[28] The federal government should embrace this model and develop maps for states across the country.

As a secondary alternative to storing firearms out of the home, individuals can reduce their access to firearms by securing their firearms in a key-locked storage device (lock box, gun safe, gun vault) and, in a time of crisis, give the keys to the device to a friend or family member. This can, in effect, remove access to firearms without the individual turning over the actual firearms.

Relationship-level interventions engage and empower others to educate about the risk of firearms and help limit an at-risk individual's access to firearms.

EXTREME RISK LAWS.

To protect individuals in crisis, several states have passed Extreme Risk laws as a way to temporarily remove firearm access. Extreme Risk laws give immediate family members and law enforcement a way to intervene before warning signs escalate into tragedies by petitioning a court for an order to temporarily remove guns from dangerous situations. If a court finds that a person poses a serious risk of injuring themselves or others with a firearm, that person is temporarily prohibited from purchasing and possessing guns, and any guns they already own are held by law enforcement or another authorized party while the order is in effect. Studies in Indiana and Connecticut estimate that one suicide is prevented for every 10 to 11 firearm removals under Extreme Risk laws.[29] Nineteen states and DC currently have Extreme Risk laws in place.[30]

Examples of Extreme Risk laws being used to temporarily remove firearms from dangerous situations.

- 2018 | ROSEVILLE, CA +
- 2019 | NEW LEBANON, NY +
- 2019 | CRANSTON, RI +
- 2020 | MONTCLAIR, VA +
- 2020 | VIRGINIA BEACH, VA +
- 2020 | BARTHOLOMEW COUNTY, IN +

For these laws to be effective, it is critical that families and other eligible petitioners are aware that they are empowered to take action. The federal government can support these efforts by establishing a federal grant program for states to train law enforcement and court personnel on Extreme Risk laws, develop protocols for enforcement of orders, and raise public awareness of this life-saving process. Further, federal law should establish a strong federal Extreme Risk process that can be used in federal courts in all fifty states.

MEDICAL COUNSELING ON ACCESS TO LETHAL MEANS.

Physicians and other medical professionals are crucial sources of information about the risk of firearm access. By asking their patients about firearm access and counseling them about firearm suicide risk, medical professionals can help prevent these deaths. Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM) is one example of a program that trains medical professionals to perform this practice.[37] The federal government should develop best practices, training programs, and guidance on how and when physicians should perform suicide assessments and inquire about firearm access.

Community-level interventions engage and empower community groups, organizations, and institutions to help prevent gun suicide in their community.

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND PURCHASER EDUCATION.

Access to a firearm increases the risk of suicide for all people in a household.[38] In many communities, gun dealers are considered trusted messengers by gun owners and can play a role in building public awareness about the suicide risk posed by firearm access and how to mitigate those risks. For example, through a program called the Gun Shop Project, dozens of gun shops nationwide have begun displaying and distributing materials with information about the risks of firearm access—particularly as it pertains to suicide.[39] To build on the success of programs like the Gun Shop Project, the federal government should require that gun purchasers and firearm permit applicants be given safety information about the suicide risks associated with firearms in the home, best practices for responsible gun storage, and suicide prevention information. More groups and institutions should be empowered to help prevent gun suicide in their communities by training and educating natural helpers to recognize warning signs for suicide respond to individuals in crisis.

Societal-level interventions focus on how policy, social and cultural norms, and other large-scale factors can mitigate the risk of firearm suicide.

FIREARM PURCHASE PERMITS.

States with permit-to-purchase (PTP) laws, which require an individual to obtain a permit in addition to a background check when buying a handgun, see reductions in firearm suicide.[40] Connecticut’s enactment of PTP and comprehensive point-of-sale background check laws were associated with a 15 percent decline in the firearm suicide rate over the following decade.[41] By contrast, when Missouri repealed its PTP law, the state experienced a 16 percent increase in the firearm suicide rate over the following five years.[42]

SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE AND CRISIS CENTERS.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (“Lifeline”)—a growing national network of over 170 local- and state-funded crisis centers—is a critical resource for individuals in crisis and can be an important intervention point for lethal means counseling. The Lifeline is staffed by trained counselors who assess callers for suicidal risk, provide crisis counseling, and offer referrals including lethals means counseling when someone mentions they have firearms or other lethal means in the home. The Lifeline's call volume increases annually and is expected to increase even more given the recent recommendation to switch to an easier-to-use 3-digit number.[43] More federal and state resources should be allocated to Lifeline to ensure Americans in crisis can access immediate help—particularly in states that have higher rates of suicide.

WAITING PERIODS.

A mandatory waiting period can also help prevent firearm suicides. A waiting-period law requires a certain number of days to elapse between the purchase of a firearm and when the purchaser can actually take possession of that firearm. Policies that create this buffer are associated with reduced rates of firearm suicide.[44]

VOLUNTARY DO NOT BUY LISTS.

Some states have created a process for individuals who know they are at risk for suicide to voluntarily block themselves from purchasing, and in some cases possessing, a firearm for a limited period of time, known as Voluntary Do Not Buy Lists or Voluntary Prohibition Lists. Virginia established a Voluntary Do Not Buy List in 2020[45] and a similar program is being piloted in Washington.[46]

INCREASED ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH AND MEDICAL SERVICES.

Roughly two in three Americans who attempt suicide visit a health care professional in the month before the attempt.[47] Increased access to mental health and medical services, including suicide prevention services, can help prevent a rise in suicide deaths. Efforts to increase access to mental health and medical services should consider how different populations receive medical care and how obstacles to medical care vary across populations.

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE

If you or someone you know is in crisis, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), or text HOME to 741741 to reach the Crisis Text Line for free from anywhere in the US.

MORE INFORMATION ON SECURE STORAGE OF FIREARMS

Learn how you can help others improve their secure firearm storage practices with Be SMART.

Everytown Research & Policy is a program of Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, an independent, non-partisan organization dedicated to understanding and reducing gun violence. Everytown Research & Policy works to do so by conducting methodologically rigorous research, supporting evidence-based policies, and communicating this knowledge to the American public.

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Report

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The ATF announced a final rulemaking clarifying that the core building blocks of ghost guns are firearms under the law.

Fact Sheet

Ghost Guns Recoveries and Shootings

Everytown Research & Policy has collected examples of reported murders and shootings using ghost guns since 2013.

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Cuando el tiroteo se detiene: El impacto de la violencia con armas de fuego en los sobrevivientes de los Estados Unidos

Report

DID YOU KNOW?

Women in the U.S. are 28 times more likely to be killed by

guns than women in other high-income countries.

Everytown analysis of the most recent year of gun deaths by country (2015 to 2019), GunPolicy.org (accessed January 7, 2022).

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Gun Violence in America

Join Us.

Every day, more than 110 people in America are killed with guns. The gun homicide rate in the U.S. is 26 times higher than that of other developed countries, but research shows that common-sense public safety laws can reduce gun violence and save lives.

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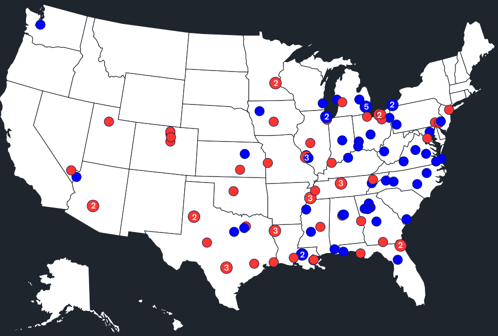
#NotAnAccident Index

In 2022 there were at least **117 unintentional shootings by children,** resulting in **51 deaths** and **73 injuries** nationally.

2022 ⌄	United States (117) ⌄	CLICK TO FILTER ● Death ● Injury	Clear filters



Data is up to date as of: May 28, 2022

Reports Download Data

Every year, hundreds of children in the US gain access to firearms and unintentionally shoot themselves or someone else. This is #NotAnAccident.

To better understand these shootings—and how they can be prevented—Everytown collects information from media reports about incidents in which a child under 18 unintentionally shoots themself or someone else. Details about each incident include ages of both shooters and victims, date, location, type of firearm, and other information.

Our 2021 report, "Preventable Tragedies: Findings from the #NotAnAccident Index," provides a deeper understanding of where, when, and how unintentional child shootings occur and the steps we can take to prevent them.

Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America launched the Be SMART campaign to raise awareness that secure gun storage–storing guns unloaded, locked, and separate from ammunition–can save children's lives.

See a case missing from our tracker? Please let us know.

LEARN MORE ABOUT UNINTENTIONAL SHOOTINGS

PREVENTABLE TRAGEDIES: FINDINGS FROM THE #NOTANACCIDENT INDEX

Report

Be SMART

We must make sure firearms are stored securely

The Be SMART framework is designed to help parents and adults normalize conversations about gun safety and take responsible actions that can prevent child gun deaths and injuries. Visit Be SMART for more information on preventing unintentional shootings by children.

LEARN MORE

DID YOU KNOW?

Women in the U.S. are 28 times more likely to be killed by guns than women in other high-income countries.

Everytown analysis of the most recent year of gun deaths by country (2015 to 2019), GunPolicy.org (accessed January 7, 2022).

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Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund®

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Community Trauma
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Conclusion

REPORT

When the Shooting Stops

The Impact of Gun Violence on Survivors in America

2.3.2022

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LEER EN ESPAÑOL

Cuando el tiroteo se detiene: El impacto de la violencia con armas de fuego en los sobrevivientes de los Estados Unidos

Executive Summary

> “We can only learn to live with it and through it—[it] never goes away.”
>
> *—A gun violence survivor*[1]

The trauma of gun violence doesn’t end when the shooting stops. Across the country, people from all walks of life have been impacted by this public health epidemic: in a national poll, 58 percent of adults reported that they or someone they care for have experienced gun violence in their lifetime.[2] More people die from gun violence by early February in the United States than during an entire calendar year in other high-income countries.[3] In addition, millions more in the United States are shot and wounded, threatened with a gun, or witness an act of gun violence in their lifetime.[4] For this reason, Everytown for Gun Safety marks National Gun Violence Survivors Week annually in February.

Experiencing gun violence has lasting emotional, physical, legal, and financial impacts on survivors as well as their communities. The breadth and diversity of the survivor experience is directly related to the wide-ranging nature of America’s gun violence crisis. Gun violence can take many forms, including gun suicides and suicide attempts, gun homicides and assaults, domestic violence involving a gun, school shootings, shootings by police, and unintentional shootings, among other incidents. Identifying as a survivor of gun violence encompasses many different experiences: witnessing an act of gun violence, receiving threats with or being wounded by a gun, or having someone you know or care for wounded or killed with a gun.

Yet America’s culture of silence around gun violence means that too often we do not talk about or fully understand the lifelong impact on survivors. One of the consequences of this silence is that many survivors of gun violence do not receive the support and services they need to live with their trauma and heal. There is also the mistaken assumption that surviving gun violence is something survivors “get over,” while the impacts are actually lifelong, profound, and complex.

To help shatter that silence and elevate the voices of survivors in the national gun violence prevention conversation, Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund (“Everytown”) conducted a wide-ranging survey of more than 650 survivors from October to mid-November 2021. We collected data about the type of gun violence that survivors have experienced as well as the stories of survivors in their own words, while allowing respondents to remain anonymous. Together, the data illustrate the magnitude of America’s gun violence epidemic and its lasting impacts on individuals and communities. Among the key findings are as follows:

- Nine out of 10 gun violence survivors report experiencing trauma from the incident.
- More than half of those who had experienced gun violence within the last 12 months were most likely to rate the impact of trauma as a 5 out of 5, meaning

that trauma frequently affects their well-being and/or their functioning.

- Half of survivors reported that they experienced gun violence in a home: their own, a neighbor's, a friend's, or a family member's.
- Nurses, doctors, and medical or hospital staff were the most likely to say they experienced the impact of gun violence through their work, followed by people who work at schools, including educators and staff.
- Two-thirds of survivors who were shot and wounded expressed the need for mental health services, therapy, and support. They also expressed the need for legal assistance as the victim of a crime (**49 percent**); financial assistance to deal with medical expenses such as physical therapy, rehabilitation services, and surgical equipment (40 percent); home health care (25 percent); and help covering funeral related expenses (7 percent).
- Nearly one in three survivors said that they needed legal assistance as a victim or for the death of a family member.
- One in three survivors said they needed financial support to help cover funeral costs or medical costs, or to make up for income lost because of death or injury.

This report is divided into five sections discussing bereavement and grief from gun death, healing after gun injuries, living in fear of gun violence, the impact of persistent gun violence, and recommendations for how to better support survivors and prevent violence.

We strive to center the experiences of survivors, and through this work we hope to honor them by providing a deeper understanding of who they are, what they have experienced, and how we can better support them.

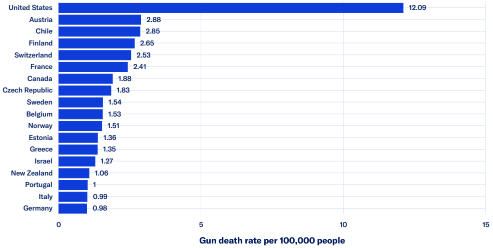
Introduction

> "Dealing with the inconsistencies of healing, both physically and emotionally. The existence of being this gray person in a world where everyone else sees everything as black and white. I'm either completely fine and it's over and done, or I'm this wounded person who can never be functional—the lack of understanding that I am not really either, but some days may be one or the other…."
>
> *—A gun violence survivor*[5]

America's gun death rate—which is 13 times higher than that of other high-income countries—makes us a global outlier.[6] Every year, more than 40,000 Americans are killed in acts of gun violence, and approximately 85,000 more are shot and wounded. That is the equivalent of over 110 people shot and killed each day in the United States, with more than 200 others shot and wounded.[7] The crisis disproportionately impacts Black, Latinx, and other communities of color.

Download

The US Gun Death Rate is 13 Times That of Other High-Income Countries.



Source: Everytown analysis of the most recent year of gun deaths by country (2015 to 2019), GunPolicy.org (accessed January 7, 2022).

With death and injury tolls this high, America is undeniably a nation of gun violence survivors. But the impact of gun violence extends far beyond those killed or wounded. Witnessing an act of gun violence, being threatened with a gun, or having a loved one wounded or killed with a gun also makes someone a gun violence survivor, among other experiences. A poll found 58 percent of American adults or someone they care for reported experiencing gun violence in their lifetime.[8]

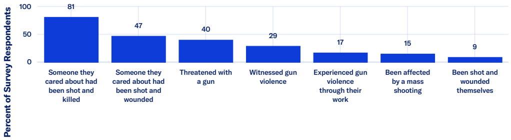
Results from Everytown's survivor survey, which included responses from over 650 participants, provide an in-depth look at the experiences, needs and perspectives of gun violence survivors and present data to inform support services and gun violence prevention work going forward. Much of the rich material in this report going forward that captures the voice and perspectives of survivors, including many verbatim quotes, are taken from this anonymous survey.

While several very valuable surveys of survivors have been done in the past, this one is the most geographically comprehensive (with respondents from 46 states) and the broadest, looking at gun violence survivors across the full scope of types, ranging from mass shootings and intimate-partner gun violence to suicide, community gun violence, and more.

The scope of America's gun violence crisis means that there are gun violence survivors from every walk of life with a diverse array of experiences.

Download

A Nation of Survivors



Source: Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, Gun Violence Survivor Survey, November 2021. https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CLYN9TR.

> “No services were ever offered, law enforcement officials seemed more interested in pressing charges against the perpetrator. Myself and my younger daughter were simply, I believe, considered to be bystanders.”
>
> *—A gun violence survivor*[9]

---

9 out of 10

9 out of 10 gun violence survivors report experiencing trauma from the incident.

Source: Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, Survivo...

Yet the trauma of gun violence—which is long-lasting, complex, and unique to each person—is often not well understood or holistically addressed. Nine out of 10 gun violence survivors report experiencing trauma,[10] yet fewer than half of survivors said they had access to the support, assistance, or services they needed to cope with its impact within the first six months or a year or more after the incident.[11]

Trauma can and does interfere with survivors’ physical and mental health and impacts their relationships, work, financial situation, and family life. Survivors who had experienced gun violence within the last year were most likely to say that trauma frequently affects their well-being and/or their functioning.

Those who had experienced gun violence within the last 12 months were most

> likely to rate the impact of trauma as a 5 out of 5: 54 percent responded that the trauma frequently affects their well-being and/or their functioning.

Furthermore, the violent, unexpected, and sometimes random nature of gun violence means that, for many survivors, there is no such thing as a full recovery or an end to the healing process. The experience is not something to simply "get over" or "move on from." Furthermore, some survivors are exposed to persistent gun violence in the places where they live, leading to community trauma. For many, it feels like a scar that never heals and a lifelong journey of trauma and grief that ebbs and flows based on one's lived experiences.

For this reason, gun violence survivors often report needing counseling not only for short-term support in the immediate aftermath of an incident, but for longer-term care to be able to cope with the lasting trauma. Survivors listed counseling as their largest unmet need, while their smallest unmet need was for immediate crisis services. Nearly one out of every four survivors identified the need for additional counseling services.[12]

Everytown compiled this report to share the voices of gun violence survivors as they express what support they needed after the incident and barriers they encountered in accessing it. This report provides a data-driven perspective on the scope of America's gun violence crisis and draws on primary source survey data that are both quantitative and qualitative in nature to explore survivors' experiences.

The report is divided into five sections:

1. Bereavement and Grief from Gun Death, where we put the toll of the crisis into context, focusing on gun homicides and suicides;
2. Healing After Gun Injuries, where we explore the experiences of people who have been shot and wounded;
3. Intimidation and Fear, where survivors speak about the trauma of receiving threats or experiencing intimidation against certain targeted groups from such gun violence incidents as mass and school shootings, hate crimes, and armed protests and the intimidation and fear in domestic violence;
4. Community Trauma, where we discuss the effects of persistent community violence on neighborhoods; and
5. Charting the Way Forward, where we offer solutions on how we can better support survivors and prevent gun violence in the future.

Bereavement and Grief from Gun Death

The sheer quantity of gun deaths in the United States—more than 110 people shot and killed each day—means that individuals and families are continuously being initiated into what some survivors refer to as "a club no one wants to belong to." While people can recover from grief, the challenges they face can be persistent and life-long.

Our focus here is on gun suicide and homicide because these two forms of gun violence account for the great majority of gun deaths each year; suicides make up six in 10 gun deaths, with homicide, including shootings by police, accounting for nearly four in 10.[13] The United States' elevated gun homicide rate represents the starkest disparity compared to other high-income countries. While the overall gun death rate of the United States is 13 times that of other high-income countries, the gun homicide rate is 26 times higher than these peer countries.[14]

In the immediate aftermath of gun death, survivors face not only bereavement and grief but often financial barriers, stigmatization, and challenges accessing the services they need.

Additionally, children who have experienced the loss of a parent or caregiver to sudden death face unique challenges that impact their development long into adulthood. Children who have lost a parent are more likely to experience posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, impairment of their daily ability to function, and suicidal ideation.[15] The death of a child's caregiver is also associated with a whole host of ripple effects, including housing instability, separations, mental health problems, shorter schooling time, and higher risks of suicide and violence.[16]

Among survey respondents, six out of 10 said their loved one was killed in a gun homicide.[17] The unexpected, traumatic nature of these deaths—and the feeling that a loved one has been taken or ripped out of their families and communities in an instant—brings with it a profound and lasting sense of grief.

Families and communities of color are disproportionately impacted by gun homicide. Black Americans represent the majority of gun homicide victims and are 10 times more likely than white Americans to die by gun homicide.[18] Young Black men face the greatest risk and are 22 times more likely than young white men to die by gun homicide.[19]

In addition to the tragedy of lives taken, the trauma has lasting effects on the wider community, as is discussed further below on community gun violence. Twenty-three percent of Black American adults and 22 percent of Hispanic American adults report that someone they cared for has been killed with a gun.[20]

One form of homicide in particular, shootings by police, reverberate well beyond those individuals directly involved to impact whole communities. On average, police fatally shoot three people in the United States every day.[21] In this facet of gun violence, the United States is also a global outlier: the rate of fatal shootings by police in the United States is at least 15 times higher than its peer countries, including Australia, England and Wales, Germany, and New Zealand.[22] And for each person shot and killed by police, two more are shot and wounded in a way that requires emergency room care or hospitalization.[23]

The toll of this form of gun violence falls heavily on one community. A key contributor to trauma in Black communities is police violence. Police shoot and kill Black Americans at nearly three times the rate of white Americans and unarmed Black Americans at four times the rate of unarmed white Americans.[24]

> "A cop shot me. A militia member shot my friend. I don't trust cops or feel safe around them."
>
> *—A gun violence survivor*[25]

Though the direct victims of police violence are disproportionately Black young men, whole communities are traumatized by abuse from police. While they have not personally experienced this violence, repeated experiences of being pulled over, invasively searched, or tasered, coupled with the relentless news of death by police, have made whole communities survivors. The nationwide protests of 2020 showed clearly how trauma from police violence affects communities of Black Americans as a whole.

The shooting of unarmed civilians by police also has a corrosive impact on crime more broadly, eroding residents' trust in police and willingness to collaborate on issues of public safety. This in turn contributes to continuing violence that then repeats the trauma.

For young people, this trauma has consequences that affect their life course. A 2021 study that looked at outcomes among Los Angeles high school students in communities where police killings took place showed marked decreases in students' academic performance, development of learning deficiencies related to PTSD and depression, and higher levels of high school dropouts. These impacts were most pronounced for Black and Latinx students living in close proximity to police shootings of Black and Latinx people.[26]

> "My husband killed himself, and now my son is statistically three times more likely to do the same. My brother killed himself, and now my sister-in-law lives with the image and loss every day."
>
> *—A gun violence survivor*[27]

America's unimaginably high firearm suicide rates, with nearly 24,000 Americans dying by firearm suicide every year,[28] also leave behind survivors who face particular challenges. In fact, many families do not consider themselves survivors of gun violence, because society does not understand the unique role of firearms in our suicide epidemic. It is a prevalent misconception that if a person contemplating suicide is not able to get a firearm, they will use another method equally likely to result in death. While this is sometimes the case, nearly all other methods are less lethal, making it far less likely that an attempt will result in death. For example, 90 percent of suicide attempts using a gun result in death; by comparison, only 4 percent of suicide attempts by other means are fatal.[29] And the vast majority of people who survive a suicide attempt do not go on to die by suicide.[30]

A better understanding of the relationship between easy access to guns and the risk of suicide makes it clear why firearm suicide is an integral part of gun violence.

The grief that survivors of gun suicide face is exacerbated by the way that mental illness and suicide are uniquely stigmatized in our culture, leading many survivors to feel isolated or unable to share their experiences.[31] Survivors of gun suicide were also more likely than other survivors in our survey to say that they did not seek help or services immediately after the death of their loved one.[32]

Healing After Gun Injuries

> "Severe depression, fear, isolation. PTSD. Self-doubt. Affects my family and has ruined relationships. I am in constant fear everywhere I go. Financially, it's been hard. I let my self-doubt and fear get in the way."
>
> *—A gun violence survivor*[33]

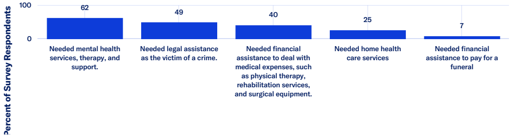
Every year, approximately 85,000 Americans survive a gunshot wound, more than double the number killed with a gun.[34] Over time, the toll of these shootings magnifies: according to a national poll, an estimated 8 million people have been shot and wounded in their lifetimes, or 4 percent of American adults.[35]

Gunshot wound survivors face a lifelong healing process[36] and may experience a broad array of difficulties, including psychological trauma, loss of work, and steep medical costs.[37] Aside from immediate hospital costs associated with the wound, these survivors can encounter lifetime medical care costs, including readmission(s) to the hospital and nursing care. Many survivors report that the psychological effects of the shooting remain long after their wounds have physically healed. A recent systematic review found that after hospitalization for gunshot injuries, survivors had high rates of PTSD, chronic pain, readmission, and poor mental health; they were also less likely to report having been able to return to work or levels of social functioning that they had before the gun injury.[38]

> “His entire life has changed. He deals with depression and pain often. I know that my friend is still here and I am so thankful for that, but at the same time, it is like he has been taken.”
>
> *—A gun violence survivor*[39]

Download

Survivors who were shot and wounded expressed the following needs:



Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, Gun Violence Survivor Survey, November 2021.

Overlapping experiences with gun violence meant that some survivors in our survey had to arrange funerals or manage the estates of deceased loved ones as they were also trying to heal.[40]

The impact of firearm wounds for young people is particularly damaging. In a study of children and young adults who were hospitalized for nonfatal firearm-related injuries, nearly half of patients were discharged from the hospital with some disability.[41] Many gun injury survivors are left to live with bullets or shrapnel inside their bodies, which may cause long-term pain and serve as a constant reminder of the traumatic injury.

> "He was shot in the face and is disfigured. It affects his self-esteem and the type of job he can get. It has altered his public and personal behavior and attitude and left physical scars."
>
> *—A gun violence survivor*[42]

Gunshot wounds can lead to disability, permanent disfigurement, pain, and injury, as well as mounting medical bills. Gun violence continues to financially burden survivors by diminishing wages and productivity. Estimates suggest that productivity loss—the sum of the value of wage and household work lost due to short- or long-term disability in the recovery phase—totals an average of $33,000 for each survivor of an assault by firearm,[43] as well as time spent investigating, prosecuting, and punishing violent perpetrators.[44]

> "I have permanent/ongoing health issues—physical and mental. The impact interrupted my financial well-being—I am single and the sole provider of my own financial health. My career (at its height) was severely interrupted (it affected my career and salary growth, and along with that, my ability to contribute to my own retirement fund.) Other members of my family were personally impacted by the incident of gun violence in which I was wounded, too."
>
> *—A gun violence survivor*[45]

Intimidation and Fear

> "I have had two gun violence incidents. The one that still haunts me is the threatening, stalking me with the gun. I think if someone would have protected me, helped me find resources to heal, it would have been beneficial."
>
> *—A gun violence survivor*[46]

Feeling safe is foundational to a healthy life and to our ability to live, work, play, and thrive. Being threatened with a gun, or living through a mass or school shooting, hate crime, or other incident in which guns are used to terrorize, coerce, or control people, erodes that safety. Those who live through this type of fear and intimidation are survivors of gun violence, even if no shots were fired.

Four out of 10 survivors in our survey reported being threatened or intimidated with a firearm.[47] The threats and intimidation can take many forms, but the primary goal is the same: to instill fear in others and use the specter of violence to exert control over them.

Half of the survivors in the survey reported experiencing gun violence in a home—their own or that of a family member, neighbor, or friend. Domestic violence survivors face a particular challenge in that the closed-door nature of this violence means that survivors can often feel invisible or struggle to access the support and services they need. And while domestic abuse of any kind is devastating, the presence of firearms creates a relentless atmosphere of fear. In addition, it makes abuse more likely to turn deadly.

1 in 2

Gun violence is not distant or far away. One in two survivors experienced gun violence at a home—their own, a neighbor's, a friend's, or a family member's.

Everytown for Gun Safety, Survivor Survey, November 20...

70

Every month, an average of 70 women are shot and killed by an intimate partner.

Everytown analysis of CDC, National Violent Death Repo...

Last updated: 1.26.2022

Yet domestic violence with a gun is astonishingly prevalent: every month, an average of 70 women in the United States are shot and killed by an intimate partner,[48] and many more are shot and wounded. Nearly one million American women alive today have been shot or shot at by an intimate partner.[49] Again, the United States stands apart. Women in the United States are 28 times more likely to die by firearm homicide than women in other high-income countries. Put another way, 92 percent of all women murdered by gun in high-income countries were from the United States.[50]

One study of domestic violence and coercive control found that women who had been threatened with a gun—or feared that their partner would use one against them—had more severe psychological symptoms than women who had endured other types of abuse, such as psychological or physical abuse.[51] According to the author, "The fear of a firearm threat—just the fear of the threat, not even the actual threat—is significantly associated with PTSD. It's stronger even than the link between physical or sexual abuse and PTSD."[52]

Another example of widespread intimidation and fear involves school shootings. The return to in-person learning in 2021 following COVID-19 lockdowns has coincided with a surge in incidences of gunfire on school grounds. In 2021, there were at least 199 incidents of gunfire on school grounds, resulting in 47 deaths and 122 injuries nationally, according to a database maintained by Everytown. The fall semester of 2021 was the worst by far: between August 1 and December 31, 2021, there were at least 126 instances of gunfire on school grounds, the most instances and casualties since Everytown began tracking them in 2013.

> "[I have a] fear of being on a school campus."
>
> *—A gun violence survivor*[53]

75%

Although, <1% of gun violence at schools in the US are mass shootings, 75% of youth ages 15 to 21 cite mass shootings as a primary source of stress.

American Psychological Association, “Stress in America:...

The prevalence, and threat, of school shootings has created a generation of young Americans who are growing up with the constant fear of being shot and killed in a place they should feel safe. For students who have experienced other incidents of gun violence in their communities, the trauma and symptoms are compounded. This is taking a significant emotional and psychological toll. In a 2018 national poll, 75 percent of youth ages 15 to 21 cited mass shootings as a primary source of stress, and more than one in five of them who are in school reported that the possibility of a shooting at the school is a source of stress on a day-to-day basis.[54]

While school shootings are relatively rare—accounting for less than 1 percent of the more than 40,000 annual US gun deaths—they instill a deep sense of fear in communities, propelling school systems to take immediate action. Measures designed to mitigate risks of school shootings, however, including active shooter drills involving students or lockdowns, can be traumatic in and of themselves.[55] While there is almost no research affirming the value of involving students in school shooter drills for preventing shootings or for protecting the school community when they do occur, research by Georgia Tech and Everytown has found that shooter drills that involve students can be traumatizing for the entire school community.[56] Active shooter drills in schools are associated with a 39 percent increase in depression, a 23 percent increase in physiological health problems, and a 22 percent increase in concerns over deaths—for children as young as five up through high schoolers, their parents, and school staff.

> “I was living in a hostile and racist town. I did not think that there were services for me there.”
>
> *—A gun violence survivor*[57]

10k+

In an average year, more than 10,300 hate crimes in the U.S. involve a firearm–more than 28 every day.

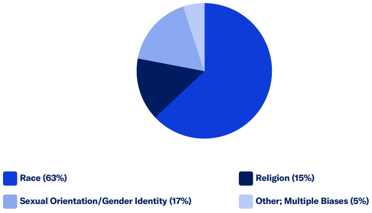
Everytown analysis of BJS, “Hate Crime Victimization, 20...

Hate-motivated gun violence is another aspect of fear and intimidation surrounding firearms in the United States. In addition to the fear caused by the prevalence of gun violence in public and home spaces, survivors in the survey also reported fearing that they would be targeted because of an identity they hold. In an average year, over 10,300 hate crimes are committed with a gun—more than 28 each day.[58]

The vast majority of hate crimes are directed against communities of color, religious minorities, and LGBTQ people. In 2020, about 63 percent of reported hate crimes were motivated by racism, more than half of which were motivated by bias against Black people, while 15 percent were motivated by religious bias, most often anti-Semitism, and 17 percent were motivated by anti-LGBTQ bias.[59] In addition to the direct effect of hurting and injuring a person because of who they are, these acts of violence also create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation for whole demographic groups.

Download

Hate Crimes by Bias Motivation, 2020



Source: FBI, "Crime Data Explorer: Hate Crime in the United States."

Last updated: 1.27.2022

The recent increase in hate crimes—13 percent in 2020 compared to 2019[60]—not only impacts individual survivors but also reverberates through entire communities. For individuals struggling against bias, news of a violent hate crime targeting members of a shared identity group can feel like a personal attack, creating an atmosphere of fear and terror. At the same time, the identity-targeting nature of hate crimes can make it harder for survivors to receive the support they need. As one survivor told us in the survey, they doubted their ability to get appropriate services or support locally because of the bias in their community.

Another area where intimidation, rather than actual shots fired, has a negative impact on survivors is related to gun carrying at demonstrations. The alarming rise in armed demonstrations in recent years, which pose immediate public safety issues, has further exacerbated an atmosphere of fear and terror for gun violence survivors. While armed events represent a small proportion of the total number of public demonstrations in the country, they are significantly more likely to involve violence or destructive behavior: roughly one out of every six demonstrations where firearms were present included reports of violent or destructive activity.[61]

While proponents of carrying guns at demonstrations say that they are simply exercising their right to openly carry a firearm in public, the effect and primary motivation of doing this activity are to frighten and intimidate their opponents. This fear is often far more acute for survivors of gun violence and can have a particularly chilling effect on their ability to exercise their First Amendment rights. Several of the survivors surveyed said they feel uncomfortable or anxious around firearms following a trauma they had experienced from gun violence.

> "I have a lot of anxiety about guns. Hearing/reading about gun violence makes me very upset. I once had a panic attack at a drum performance because the drumming sounded like gunshots to me. Very often when I'm out in public, I have intrusive thoughts about someone appearing with a gun and shooting me/others."
>
> *—A gun violence survivor*[62]

Our survey made it plain that it isn't only people who are shot and wounded who live with the lifelong trauma of gun violence. Instead, everyone who witnesses acts of gun violence, who has cared for someone wounded or killed with a gun, or who feels threatened with serious harm—whether it is physical, mental, or emotional, and regardless of whether it is a one-time event or threat and intimidation over a period of time—is a survivor.

Community Trauma

The preceding section discusses the various ways in which sporadic or even random acts of gun violence and intimidation can impact those not physically harmed. But what happens where gun violence and intimidation is sustained and concentrated in a community? Community trauma is not only the sum of the hurt and suffering of individuals. It is also a collective trauma experienced in communities with elevated levels of violence. In these situations, the label of survivor is an all-too-common experience. Black communities across the United States suffer this trauma, as homicide, police violence and hate crimes contribute to trauma at multiple levels—individual, family, and community. The term "community trauma" seeks to name an effect that many in Black communities know to be ever-present and deeply problematic.

The manifestations of this type of trauma extend far beyond those who directly witness violence and even beyond those who have experienced intimidation with or fear because of a gun. It is compounded by interactions with other forms of violence. That can include exposure to structural violence such as underinvestment in social services, the education system, and decent housing. And it can include historical violence such as the legacy of slavery or predatory banking practices.

Living with a constant backdrop of gun violence leaves indelible marks on the memory that can alter the health, choices, and lifelong trajectory of children, young people, adults, and the collective community in serious and lasting ways. Pervasive community gun violence has a particularly devastating impact on children. Children and adolescents exposed to violence, crime, and abuse are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, suffer from depression, anxiety, and PTSD; fail or have difficulties in school; and engage in criminal activity.[63] Stress related to community gun violence affects student performance and wellbeing in schools, from lower standardized test scores to more disciplinary problems.

The trauma that results from community gun violence also has an impact on community trust. As entire neighborhoods face high levels of trauma, cohesion can break down, and the bonds of cooperation can weaken. This results in such changes as neighbors being less likely to intervene when trouble crops up and less chances for informal solidarity and involvement of adults that contribute to safer communities. This community trauma can dampen residents' capacity and willingness to work together to address the causes of trauma and build safer communities.[64]

Charting the Way Forward

> "If the university I was studying at had social workers or counselors, I would have asked them for help."
>
> *—A gun violence survivor*[65]

Gun violence shapes the lives of the
thousands who experience it and the

thousands who experience it and the millions who witness it, know someone who was shot, or live in fear of the next shooting. While there are no simple solutions to an epidemic this complex, there are clear steps we can take both to break the cycle of violence and provide survivors with the support they need to be able to heal.

1 in 2

Fewer than one in two survivors said that the support, assistance, or services that they needed to cope with the impact of gun violence was available to them within the first six months or a year or more after the trauma.

Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, Gun Violence S...

The Everytown Survivor Network is a nationwide community that connects survivors to each other, amplifies the power of survivor voices, offers trauma-informed programs, provides information on direct services, and supports survivors who choose to become advocates.

RESOURCES FOR SURVIVORS OF GUN VIOLENCE

- Trauma and Gun Violence
- Coping with Traumatic Grief
- Acute Stress and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
- More Resources for Survivors of Gun Violence

Following are some of the other resources survivors expressed a need for, with information about how to access them.

Counseling

Nearly one in four survivors surveyed identified the need for additional counseling services.[66] Gun violence survivors often report needing counseling not just for short-term support but for longer-term care to be able to cope with the trauma from the experience.[67] This reflects the reality of the response to gun violence in America: after an initial burst of support following a shooting, many survivors struggle to access care.

Various mental health resources and techniques can be instrumental in healing communities that experience gun violence. However, because mental health services are predominantly provided through private medical insurance or Medicaid in the United States, survivors reported a plethora of financial and bureaucratic barriers to receiving long-term counseling. Additionally, some survivors shared that they feared retaliation or judgment if they were to seek out counseling due to the stigmatization of mental health.

RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE

If you or someone you care about are in need of counseling or mental health support you may contact the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Distress Helpline at 1-800-985-5990. You can also text the Public Distress Helpline by texting "TalkWithUs" to 66746. More information on resources for victims and survivors of gun violence is available here.

Support Groups

> "[I would have benefitted from] support from other survivors earlier on. I didn't identify as a survivor of gun violence for years and would have benefitted from acknowledgment, support, and likely from therapy."
>
> *—A gun violence survivor*[68]

Survey respondents also said they experienced an unmet need for support groups, either clinical or peer-to-peer in nature.[69] These groups can help survivors feel less isolated and help them heal knowing that others have gone through similar experiences.

Support groups allow survivors to process their experiences with a group of individuals who have been through something similar, and often with the assistance of a clinician trained in conducting support groups for individuals with trauma.

The Everytown Survivor Network can help connect survivors with each other for support.

FIND CONNECTIONS THROUGH THE EVERYTOWN SURVIVOR NETWORK

Everytown Survivor Network SurvivorConnect Program →

> "We stay in touch many years later despite living in different cities, and I feel as though he saved my life."
>
> *—A gun violence survivor*[70]

Family Support and Helping Children Heal

> "[I would have benefitted from] talking to someone who wouldn't have minded listening to me cry and question . . . help for my other children who were greatly affected as well and for my mom who needed just as much as I."
>
> *—A gun violence survivor*[71]

Survivors of gun violence are often part of families that are affected by gun violence too. Support often may be offered to the direct survivor or victim but not to family members, even though they also need those services. Parents many times do not know how to talk to their children about what occurred or how to navigate the myriad systems that are part of many post–gun violence incidents, such as the courts or social services agencies.

The death of a parent or caregiver can have a profound impact on children. In 2020, deaths among adults who may have had children at home—from gun violence, opioid addictions, and COVID-19—were at record highs[72] and present an urgent need for support.[73]

Programs and policies that address childhood adversity, strengthen economic support to families, identify children experiencing bereavement and mental health problems, and shore up family relationships can help.[74] Some information on the warning signs and risk factors and how to talk about mental health are available here.

In October 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and Children's Hospital Association jointly declared a national emergency in child and adolescent mental health and made recommendations related to youth mental health, which the US Surgeon General echoed and endorsed in December 2021.[75]

RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN EXPERIENCING GRIEF OR BEREAVEMENT

Children's Response to Trauma →

Taking Care of Yourself as a Caregiver →

Financial Support

> "I had to borrow money to have my son cremated."
>
> *—A gun violence survivor*[76]

The previous discussion has outlined the devastating emotional cost of our country's gun violence crisis. Another irrefutable cost is the high economic cost of gun violence. Many survivors of gun violence report needing help financially, both with covering the direct costs of gun violence, such as medical bills, legal fees, and funeral expenses, as well as compensating for income lost while they physically and emotionally heal. In total, families directly affected by gun violence in the United States bear $4.7 million in out-of-pocket costs for medical bills and mental health support each day, and $140.3 million in lost income from work absences due to injury or death. Each gun suicide results in more than $1 million in lost income and nearly $5 million in lost quality of life.[77]

Gun violence can also have severe economic consequences for entire communities. High rates of gun violence in geographic areas lower property values, slow new business creation, and reduce available jobs,[78] thereby creating the very economic and social conditions that are associated with higher violence.[79] One study estimated that surges in gun homicides slowed home value appreciation by 4 percent relative to communities that did not experience a surge in violence.[80] When survivors are supported, entire communities benefit.

RESOURCES TO HELP SURVIVORS

Navigating the Criminal Justice System →

Accessing Victim Compensation Funds →

Find Additional Support →

Federal, State, and Local Actions to Support Survivors

> “He has to live with the fact that he’s paralyzed and may never walk again. He turned his life around and helps his community and the youth in the gun violence pandemic in our city.”
>
> *—A gun violence survivor*[81]

Despite the severity of the gun violence epidemic and its associated emotional and financial tolls, the United States lacks a comprehensive system to provide financial, emotional, medical, and legal assistance to survivors. While processing the grief caused by gun violence, survivors are often forced to shoulder its financial burdens alone.

In March 2021, US Sen. Bob Casey (D-PA) and Rep. Dwight Evans (D-PA) reintroduced **federal** legislation to help gun violence survivors find the resources and benefits available to support the wide range of needs of those affected by the unrelenting toll of this violence. The Resources for Victims of Gun Violence Act establishes an Advisory Council to assess the medical, educational, financial, legal, workplace, housing, and other needs of gun violence survivors and to disseminate that information through all relevant channels. Everytown strongly supports this bill, which is still pending.

Under the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), there is a Crime Victims Fund distributed to states, resourced from court fines and fees. However, too many gun violence survivors are unaware of this funding source or struggle to access these funds both due to criteria that are overly rigid and to bureaucratic red tape. As the survey shows, many gun violence survivors are not provided adequate support to navigate the aftermath of the incident financially, emotionally, medically, and legally.

At the state level, victim compensation funds available to survivors of gun violence are a valuable resource. But too many survivors are not aware of this resource, and obstacles and restrictions make the funds difficult to access. Everytown's report Hurdles to Healing details recommendations directed to policymakers to reduce bureaucratic hurdles that survivors encounter. Many of these recommendations could be addressed through state-level legislation. States can also dedicate American Rescue Plan Act dollars to support much-needed services for gun violence survivors, with financing available at the state and local levels.

Local work to support survivors can take the form of increasing availability of local services, helping to build awareness of survivor resources at all levels of government and from community-based organizations, and making sure that survivor perspectives and voices are included wherever decisions are being made on behalf of those who are living through the trauma of violence.

An overwhelming message of our survey was that fewer than half of survivors had access to the various forms of assistance they needed in the year after the incident.[82] This points to an urgent role for local agencies to support the services and strategies that will foster health and wellbeing as well as healing in their communities. This includes adequate physical and mental health services, strategies to rebuild trust and social relationships in communities, and robust support for community-based violence intervention programs to disrupt cycles of violence.

Innovative ways to increase awareness of existing survivor resources could include outreach beyond the traditional venues—law enforcement and criminal justice advocates—to include community events, medical facilities, libraries, salons, and other easily accessed public places.

A final set of actions involves including survivor voices in all forums and agencies where gun violence and its aftermath are being discussed. This could mean including survivors as staff in violence prevention offices, in advisory committees to advise mayors and local government on gaps in services, as speakers at town halls and other public events on gun violence, and many other opportunities to learn from those who have firsthand experience of the needs and perspectives of survivors.

Finally, the ability to design these actions relies on solid research on the long-term health outcomes of firearm injuries and the full impact of these incidents on the lives of survivors. And this research is sorely lacking. A recent review found only 10 studies in the last two dozen years focused on these long-term consequences.[83] Future research needs to encompass not just the medical impacts of these injuries but also all of the other ramifications of firearm injuries on the lives of immediate survivors and those who love and care for them.

Conclusion

> "I have remained active in the community where gun violence has always challenged the quality of life of its citizens."
>
> *—A gun violence survivor*[84]

We will continue to be a nation of survivors unless we take action at the local, state, and federal levels to prevent gun violence. By passing laws to strengthen the background check system, disarm domestic abusers, fund community violence intervention programs, and give families and law enforcement the tools they need to act on warning signs to protect people in crisis and prevent mass shootings, we can prevent gun violence from shattering lives and communities.

Gun violence forever changes the lives of people who experience it, witness it, and are threatened by it—and survivors live with its trauma every day. But they also find the strength to fight to save the lives of others, bringing their empathy, courage, and resilience to the gun violence prevention movement and challenging all of us to do the same. It is vital that we support gun violence survivors with the resources they need to heal, and continue to elevate their voices in our nation's gun safety policy conversation.

Everytown Research & Policy is a program of Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, an independent, non-partisan organization dedicated to understanding and reducing gun violence. Everytown Research & Policy works to do so by conducting methodologically rigorous research, supporting evidence-based policies, and communicating this knowledge to the American public.

THE LATEST

The Rise of Firearm Suicide Among Young Americans

Firearm suicide is having a devastating impact on American youth, particularly during COVID-19. But suicide can be prevented.

Report

ATF's Final Rule to End the Proliferation of Dangerous, Untraceable Ghost Guns

The ATF announced a final rulemaking clarifying that the core building blocks of ghost guns are firearms under the law.

Fact Sheet

Ghost Guns Recoveries and Shootings

Everytown Research & Policy has collected examples of reported murders and shootings using ghost guns since 2013.

Data Tracker

Cuando el tiroteo se detiene: El impacto de la violencia con armas de fuego en los sobrevivientes de los Estados Unidos

Report

DID YOU KNOW?

Women in the U.S. are 28 times more likely to be killed by guns than women in other high-income countries.

Everytown analysis of the most recent year of gun deaths by country (2015 to 2019), GunPolicy.org (accessed January 7, 2022).

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Every day, more than 110 people in America are killed with guns. The gun homicide rate in the U.S. is 26 times higher than that of other developed countries, but research shows that common-sense public safety laws can reduce gun violence and save lives.

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Introduction
Key Findings
Recommendations

FACT SHEET

The Impact of Gun Violence on Children and Teens

5.29.2019 | Last Updated: 12.28.2021

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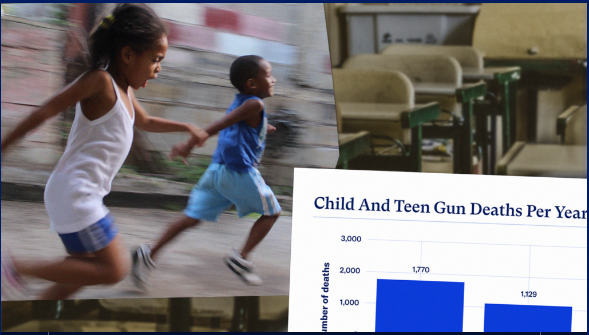


Introduction

Children and teens in the US experience staggeringly high rates of gun deaths and injuries. They are also harmed when a friend or family member is killed with a gun, when someone they know is shot, and when they witness and hear gunshots. Gun homicides, non-fatal shootings, and exposure to gun violence stunt lives and, because of their disproportionate impact, reflect and intensify this country's long-standing racial inequities.

Black and Latinx children and teens are impacted by gun violence at higher rates than their white peers, in part because of deliberate policy decisions that created segregated neighborhoods and underinvestments in their communities.[1] Exposure to gun violence has an impact on children's and teens' psychological and mental well-being and affects their school performance, among other factors. When neighborhoods and schools are not safe from gun violence, entire generations of American children are affected.

When Davonte was asked what he wanted for his birthday, he didn’t ask for a big celebration, he only said, “I’m glad I made it to see 18.” He was shot and killed less than one week after turning 18. He had previously spoken before the Baltimore City Council on youth violence prevention.

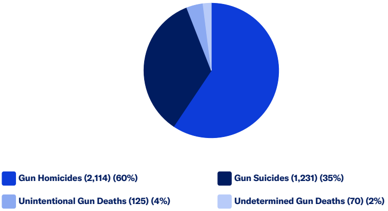
Key Findings

The Deadly Impact of Guns on Children and Teens in America

Annually, more than 3,500 children and teens (ages 0 to 19) are shot and killed, and 15,000 are shot and wounded—that’s an average of 52 American children and teens every day.[2] And the effects of gun violence extend far beyond those struck by a bullet: An estimated three million children witness a shooting each year.[3] Gun violence shapes the lives of the children who witness it, know someone who was shot, or live in fear of the next shooting.

Download

Gun deaths among children and teens by intent



Source: CDC, WONDER, Underlying Cause of Death, 2016–2020, Ages 0–19.

Last updated: 12.28.2021

Firearms are the leading cause of death for children and teens.[4] This is a uniquely American problem. Compared to other high-income countries, American children aged 5 to 14 are 21 times more likely to be killed with guns, and American adolescents and young adults aged 15 to 24 are 23 times more likely to be killed with guns.[5]

When American children and teens are killed with guns, 60 percent are

homicides—more than 2,100 deaths per year.[6] Children are particularly impacted by the intersection of domestic violence and gun violence. For children under age 13 who are victims of gun homicides, 85 percent of those deaths occur in the home, and nearly a third of those deaths are connected to intimate partner or family violence.[7] Between 2009 and 2018, 72 percent of child and teen victims of mass shootings died in incidents connected to domestic violence.[8] Data drawn from 16 states indicate that nearly two-thirds of child fatalities involving domestic violence were caused by guns.[9]

Another 35 percent of child and teen gun deaths are suicides—1,200 per year.[10] And firearm suicide has been rising dramatically: Over the past decade, the firearm suicide rate among children and teens has increased by 55 percent.[11] For people of all ages, having access to a gun increases the risk of death by suicide by three times.[12] Research shows that an estimated 4.6 million American children live in homes with at least one gun that is loaded and unlocked.[13] The combination of suicidal ideation and easy firearm access can be lethal. When children under the age of 18 die by gun suicide, they are likely to have used a gun they found at home: Over 80 percent of child gun suicides involved a gun belonging to a parent or relative.[14]

Gun violence manifests in a myriad of ways in American schools, and school shootings have created new anxieties for the younger generation of students. According to an Everytown analysis, there have been at least 549 incidents of gunfire on school grounds from 2013 to 2019.[15] Of these, 347 occurred on the grounds of elementary, middle, or high schools, resulting in 129 deaths and 270 people wounded.[16] While mass shootings like the incident at Sandy Hook Elementary School—and, more recently, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and Santa Fe High School—are not commonplace, schools are more likely to experience gun homicides and assaults, unintentional shootings resulting in injury or death, and gun suicide and self-harm injuries. All incidents of gun violence in schools, regardless of their intent or victim count, compromise the safety of students and staff.

Children and teens who live in cities are at a significantly higher risk of gun homicides and assaults compared to their peers in rural areas. Ninety-two percent of all hospitalizations of children for firearm injuries occur in urban areas (counties with over 50,000 residents).[17] These injuries have lifelong consequences: Almost 50 percent of the wounded have a disability when they are discharged from the hospital.[18] Fifteen- to 19-year-olds in urban areas are hospitalized for firearm assaults at a rate eight times higher than 15- to 19-year-olds in rural areas.[19] Urban and low-income youth are much more likely to witness gun violence than suburban and higher-income youth.[20]

The Disproportionate Impact of Gun Violence on Black and Latinx Children and Teens

As with gun violence generally, impact among children and teens is not equally shared across populations. Black children and teens in America are 14 times more likely than their white counterparts to die by gun homicide.[21] Black children and teens are 13 times more likely to be hospitalized for a firearm assault than white children.[22] Latinx children and teens are three times more likely to die by firearm homicide than their white peers.[23]

White and Black children may live in the same city yet experience it differently. Due to policy decisions that enforce racial segregation and disinvestment in certain communities, gun violence is concentrated in Black neighborhoods within cities, many of which are marked by high levels of poverty and joblessness and low levels of investment in education.[24] A high concentration of these factors in a neighborhood is referred to as “concentrated disadvantage” and is a strong predictor of violent crime. Youth in neighborhoods that experience concentrated disadvantage can be isolated from institutions such as schools and jobs, increasing the risk that they will engage in crime and violence, thus feeding into this vicious cycle of violence.[25]

Black and Latinx children in cities are exposed to violence at higher rates than white children. Exposure includes witnessing violence, hearing gunshots, and knowing individuals who have been shot. Black children in Columbus, OH, were exposed to 66 percent more violence, on average, than white children.[26] In Chicago, Latinx children had 74 percent greater odds of exposure to violence, and Black children 112 percent greater odds, than white children.[27] When children in these cities are exposed to gun violence, their communities and schools often lack the resources to help them heal.[28]

The disproportionate impact of gun violence on Black and Latinx children and teens extends to schools. Among the 335 incidents of gunfire at K-12 schools between 2013 and 2019, where the racial demographic information of the student body was known, 64 percent occurred in majority-minority schools.[29] Although Black students represent approximately 15 percent of the total K-12 school population in America, they constitute 25 percent of the K-12 student victims of gunfire who were killed or shot and wounded on school grounds.[30]

25%

Although Black students represent 15 percent of the total K-12 school population in America, they make up 25 percent of K-12 victims of gunfire at school.

US Department of Education. "State Nonfiscal Survey of ...

While the above discussion shows the disparate experiences of gun violence by race and ethnicity, the data further show that **gun violence is concentrated in specific neighborhoods in cities, with some schools and certain communities experiencing gun violence with an alarming frequency.**

- Of the schools covered by gunshot detection technology in **Washington, DC**, just 9 percent experienced nearly half of all gunfire incidents. Four schools, including two middle schools and two high schools, had at least nine incidents of gunfire within just 500 feet of the school.[31]
- Similarly, in **Los Angeles**, 34 percent of middle school students in one neighborhood with high rates of violence reported exposure to firearm violence.[32]
- At certain urban middle schools in **Texas**, nearly 40 percent of boys and 30 percent of girls have witnessed a gun being pulled.[33]
- A study of 7-year-olds in an **urban neighborhood** found that 75 percent had heard gunshots, 18 percent had seen a dead body, and 61 percent worried some or a lot of the time that they might get killed or die.[34]

The Far-reaching Impact of Children's and Teens' Exposure to Gun Violence

Children are harmed in numerous ways when they witness violence. Children exposed to violence, crime, and abuse are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol; suffer from depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder; resort to aggressive and violent behavior; and engage in criminal activity.[35] Exposure to community violence, including witnessing shootings and hearing gunshots, makes it harder for children to succeed in school.[36]

Children's exposure to gun violence can also erode physical health. When children live in neighborhoods where gun violence is common, they spend less time playing and being physically active, with one study finding that children said they would engage in an additional hour of physical activity every week if safety increased in their neighborhood.[37]

Stress related to gun violence affects student performance and well-being in schools. School-aged children have lower grades and more absences when they are exposed to violence.[38] High school students who have been exposed to violence have lower test scores and lower rates of high school graduation.[39] One study estimated that Black children in Chicago's most violent neighborhoods spend at least a week out of every month functioning at lower concentration levels due to local homicides.[40] In Syracuse, NY, elementary schools located in areas with high concentrations of gunshots had 50 percent lower test scores and higher rates of standardized test failure compared to elementary schools in areas with a low concentration of gunshots.[41]

Black high school students in the US are over twice as likely as white high school students to miss school due to safety concerns.[42] In Chicago, following spikes in neighborhood violence, students reported feeling less safe, experiencing more disciplinary problems, and having less trust in teachers.[43]

Recommendations

One essential way to protect our youth and prevent children's exposure to gun violence in their communities and schools is to prevent people with dangerous histories from ever getting a gun. Recommendations for comprehensive gun safety laws include:

BACKGROUND CHECKS ON ALL GUN SALES

The foundation of any comprehensive gun violence prevention strategy must be background checks for all gun sales. Under current federal law, criminal background checks are required only for sales conducted by licensed dealers. This loophole is easy to exploit and makes it easy for convicted felons or domestic abusers to acquire guns without a background check simply by finding an unlicensed seller online or at a gun show.

EXTREME RISK LAWS

These laws, increasingly being adopted by states, empower family members and law enforcement to petition a judge to temporarily block a person from having guns if they pose a danger to themselves or others. Extreme Risk laws—also known as Red Flag laws—can help prevent suicide, too. That is meaningful because suicide accounts for nearly two-thirds of gun deaths in this country,[44] and the suicide rate among children and teens has been increasing exponentially in the past 10 years.

SECURE GUN STORAGE AND CHILD ACCESS PREVENTION LAWS

Secure storage laws require people to store firearms responsibly to prevent unsupervised access to firearms. A subset of these laws, known as child access prevention laws, specifically target unsupervised access by minors. Secure firearm storage practices are associated with reductions in the risk of self-inflicted and unintentional firearm injuries among children and teens—up to 85 percent depending on the type of storage practice.[45]

KEEPING GUNS OUT OF THE HANDS OF DOMESTIC ABUSERS

Children are frequent casualties of domestic violence homicides when a gun is involved. Research also shows that the presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation makes it five times more likely that a woman will be killed.[46] It is imperative to keep guns out of the hands of domestic abusers to keep women, children, and their families safe. When abusers are convicted of domestic violence or subject to final restraining orders, they should be blocked from purchasing guns and required to turn in those they already own. We also need to close the "boyfriend loophole" by making sure those laws apply to abusers regardless of whether the violence is directed towards a spouse or a dating partner.

In addition to evidence-based gun safety laws, there are a number of programs and strategies that communities and schools can adopt to keep children and teens safe from gun violence, some examples of which include:

THREAT ASSESSMENT PROGRAMS

Threat assessment programs—like the Everytown and AFT-endorsed Comprehensive Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG)[47]—help schools identify students who are at risk of committing violence and get them the help they need in order to resolve student threat incidents.[48] The programs generally consist of multi-disciplinary teams that are specifically trained to intervene at the earliest warning signs of potential violence and divert those who would do harm to themselves or others to appropriate treatment. Several studies have found that schools that use threat assessment programs see fewer students carry out threats of violence; and experience fewer suspensions, expulsions, and arrests.[49] Importantly, studies have shown that CSTAG threat assessment programs generally do not have a disproportionate impact on students of color.[50]

SAFE AND EQUITABLE SCHOOLS

School communities must look inside their schools to make sure they are encouraging effective partnerships between students and adults, while also looking externally to ensure that they are a key community resource. Schools should review discipline practices and ensure threat assessment programs are not adversely affecting school discipline. They should work to become “community schools” by building effective community partnerships that provide services that support students, families, and neighborhoods. If and when employing school resource officers (SROs), schools should take steps to build relationships between communities and law enforcement.

YOUTH-CENTRIC INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

A variety of programs exist to help children cope with witnessing firearm violence. School-based programs, including social emotional learning, have been shown to reduce the negative effects of children’s exposure to gun violence. Mentoring programs are effective at improving academic performance and reducing youth violence. Chicago’s Safe Passage program makes children feel safer on their way to and from school and may increase school attendance. To learn more about two specific organizations that help children succeed after witnessing violence, please explore these resources about the Hip Hop Heals and Becoming A Man programs.

If you or someone you know has been exposed to gun violence, there are resources that can help. Everytown’s Children’s Responses to Trauma provides information for parents and adults about how to support children and teens who have experienced a shooting or are upset by images of gun violence. Additional information to help with the emotional, medical, financial, and legal consequences of gun violence for individuals and communities is on our Resources page.

Everytown Research & Policy is a program of Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, an independent, non-partisan organization dedicated to understanding and reducing gun violence. Everytown Research & Policy works to do so by conducting methodologically rigorous research, supporting evidence-based policies, and communicating this knowledge to the American public.

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Join Us.

Every day, more than 110 people in America are killed with guns. The gun homicide rate in the U.S. is 26 times higher than that of other developed countries, but research shows that common-sense public safety laws can reduce gun violence and save lives.

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IMPACT OF GUN VIOLENCE ON BLACK AMERICANS

What is the problem?
News
Why is it an issue?
By the numbers
What are the solutions?
Survivor Story
Learn More

ISSUES

Impact of Gun Violence on Black Americans

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Black Americans are disproportionately impacted by gun violence. They experience 10 times the gun homicides, 18 times the gun assault injuries, and nearly 3 times the fatal shootings by police of white Americans.

Gun homicides, assaults, and police shootings are disproportionately prevalent in historically underfunded neighborhoods and cities. This lack of funding intensifies our country's long-standing racial inequities.

Local groups, residents, and city officials are driving solutions to reduce gun violence and increase safety in their communities, but data and resources are needed to support these efforts.

NEWS

Tennessee Moms Demand Action, Students Demand Action Respond to Shooting of Black Transgender Woman in Memphis

MEMPHIS, Tenn. – The Tennessee chapters of Moms Demand Action and Students Demand Action, both part of Everytown for Gun Safety's grassroots networks, released the...

11.29.2021

California Joins More than a Dozen States in Taking Steps to Improve Police Accountability and Prevent Police Violence

This month, California passed three bills to improve police accountability and work to prevent police violence, joining more than a dozen other states this year...

10.25.2021

New Associated Press Report on Police Violence Against Children Under 16

On Wednesday, the Associated Press published a disturbing report on approximately 3,000 instances of police use of force against children under...

10.22.2021

Texas Moms Demand Action, Students Demand Action Respond to Shooting of Black Transgender Woman in Arlington

The Texas chapters of Moms Demand Action and Students Demand Action, both part of Everytown for Gun Safety's grassroots networks, released the following statement after...

10.4.2021

WHY IS IT AN ISSUE?

Gun violence reflects and worsens racial inequities.

Each day on average, 30 Black Americans are killed by guns and more than 110 experience non-fatal injuries. At least every other day, a Black person is shot and killed by police. These trends worsen in large cities, where Black Americans make up 68% of homicide victims. Gun violence further clusters in specific social networks and neighborhood sub-sections. For decades, residents have come together to ensure public safety within their communities through street outreach, hospital-based violence intervention programs, and more. But lawmakers need to do their part. They must prioritize community- and evidence-based solutions to gun violence, assess their racial impacts, and develop systems to end and ensure accountability for police shootings.

BY THE NUMBERS

37%

Street outreach programs such as Cure Violence are associated with up to 37 percent reductions in gun injuries.

Stat

3x

Black people in America are nearly 3 times as likely to be shot and killed by the police than white Americans.

Stat

WHAT ARE THE SOLUTIONS?

Violence Intervention Programs

Violence intervention programs provide evidence and community-informed, comprehensive support to individuals who are at greatest risk of gunshot victimization. These programs are shown to reduce gunshot woundings and deaths in the neighborhoods most impacted by gun violence.

Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Assistance Funding

Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) victim assistance funds are federal funds that can be used to support services for victims and survivors of gun violence. Many of the services eligible for VOCA victim assistance funds are already being provided by gun violence intervention programs, such as street outreach and hospital-based violence intervention programs. VOCA victim assistance grants should be used to help reduce gun violence and support gun violence survivors.

Repeal Stand Your Ground Laws

Shoot First, also known as Stand Your Ground, laws allow people to shoot to kill in public even when they can safely walk away from the danger. These laws threaten public safety by encouraging armed vigilantism. They allow a person to kill another person in a public area even when there are clear and safe ways to retreat from a dangerous situation.

Prevent Gun Trafficking

The United States lacks strong federal gun trafficking laws to crack down on illegal gun trafficking networks. Congress should pass robust gun trafficking and straw purchasing laws to help keep guns off our streets.

Stories

Open letter to Wanda Cooper-Jones, mother of Ahmaud Arbery, and all Americans

An open letter to all Americans, Like too many Black mothers in America, we know the pain Ahmaud Arbery's mother, Wanda Cooper-Jones, is feeling. We are part of a community we didn't choose—a community of mothers whose children have been taken by gun violence and then blamed for their own... Continue

Learn More

Community-Led Services for Survivors

Resource

Gun Violence in Cities

Resource

Gun Violence and the Police

Resource

City Gun Violence Reduction Insight Portal

Resource

The Impact of Gun Violence on Children and Teens

Resource

A Deadly Year in Cities — And How Policymakers Can Respond

Resource

Hurdles to Healing: Fixing Victim Compensation Funds

Resource

Invisible Wounds: Gun Violence and Community Trauma among Black Americans

Resource

Alternative Dispatch Programs

Resource

When the Shooting Stops: The Impact of Gun Violence on Survivors in America

Resource

37%

DID YOU KNOW?

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Delgado, SA. et al. “The Effects of Cure Violence in the South Bronx and East New York, Brooklyn”. *John Jay School of Criminal Justice.* https://bit.ly/33bAZdh Delgado, SA. et al. “In Denormalizing Violence: A Series of Reports from the John Jay College Evaluation of Cure Violence Programs in New York City”. *John Jay College of Criminal Justice.* (2017). https://bit.ly/2EAPUnh

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NEXT

Introduction
Gun Violence in Latinx Communities
The Disproportionate Impact of Police Violence
Policymakers Can Act to Protect Latinx Communities

FACT SHEET

The Impact of Gun Violence on Latinx Communities

9.15.2021 | Last Updated: 1.17.2022

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LEER EN ESPAÑOL

El impacto de la violencia con armas de fuego en las comunidades latinx

Introduction

Raymond “RJ” Pantoja

Lisa Espinosa’s 26-year-old son, Raymond “RJ” Pantoja, was shot and killed on April 10, 2016, in a senseless act of gun violence after he tried to stop an altercation outside a nightclub in Philadelphia. He died a hero. In honor of her son’s life, and particularly his love of music, Lisa founded Ray’s Rhythm for Justice Foundation, which provides performing arts scholarships for children who are affected by gun violence.

Latinx people in the United States are dying from gun violence every day and at rates disproportionate to their white peers. Increasingly, they are the target of hate-motivated violence, including in August 2019, when the devastating mass shooting in El Paso, Texas, laid bare the deadly consequences of hate and rhetoric against the Latinx community.

WHY WE USE LATINX

Developed within queer and trans communities, the term Latinx is a gender-neutral word designed to be inclusive of gender-fluid, gender nonconforming, and/or gender nonbinary people, as well as other queer and trans communities on the gender spectrum.

Often used interchangeably, “Latinx” and “Hispanic” have different meanings: Latinx refers to people of Latin American origin, while Hispanic refers to people of Spanish-speaking origin. Latinx is used here when we are referring to both Hispanic and Latinx communities, and Hispanic is used otherwise.

Gun Violence in Latinx Communities

Each year, more than 4,100 Latinx people die from gun violence in the United States—an average of 11 deaths every day—and 13,300 are shot and wounded.[1] Nearly two-thirds of all gun deaths among Latinx people in the United States are homicides, and Latinx people are twice as likely to die by gun homicide and four times as likely to be wounded by an assault with a gun as white people.[2] In cities, the majority of gun homicides affect young Black and Latino men in historically underfunded neighborhoods.[3] During the Covid pandemic, when gun violence surged in 2020,[4] Latinx communities experienced an even greater burden; an analysis of nine US cities found that more than 85 percent of the increase in gun violence in those cities occurred in predominantly Black and Hispanic neighborhoods.[5]

4.1k

Each year, more than 4,100 Latinx people die from gun violence in the US.

CDC, WONDER, Underlying Cause of Death, 2016–2020.

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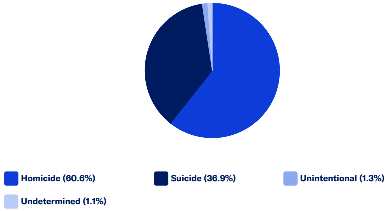
Gun Deaths Among Latinx People



Source: CDC, WONDER, Underlying Cause of Death, 2016–2020.

The burden of gun violence is also borne by Latinx children and teens, who are three times more likely to be killed by gun homicide than their white peers[6] and are also more likely to be exposed to violence in cities.[7] Young Latinx people are also increasingly impacted by firearm suicide. Each year, more than 400 young Latinx people die by firearm suicide, and the rate of gun suicide among this population has increased 128 percent over the past decade—higher than the increase among young people overall.[8]

Latinx people in the US have historically been impacted by discriminatory policies and attitudes[9] and were victimized by hate-motivated violence long before the mass shooting in El Paso. Research has found that increases in anti-Hispanic hate crimes followed increases in Hispanic immigration.[10] A Department of Justice report found that Hispanic people experienced a higher rate of violent hate crime victimization than both white and Black people in the last five years studied.[11] Bias against Latinx people, amplified by anti-immigrant policies and language from the past presidential administration, causes direct harm. A 2019 report found that 10 percent of Latinx adults had been victimized by a hate crime in the past year, though only 8 percent of those victimized felt comfortable reporting the crime to police.[12]

While gun violence clearly disproportionately affects Latinx people in the United States, the true scope of the impact is difficult to see. Hispanic people are more likely to have their ethnicity miscategorized in mortality data than white or Black people, and this issue is compounded for certain Hispanic identities.[13] Additionally, the diversity of Hispanic or Latinx identities—it is the largest US ethnic group[14] and includes people of all races—means that understanding exactly how gun violence impacts specific Latinx communities is limited by insufficient collection of race and ethnicity data.[15] Consequently, the full impact of gun violence among Latinx people in cities, states, and communities across the United States is unknown.

The Disproportionate Impact of Police Violence

Latinx people are also disproportionately impacted by police violence. In an average year, police shoot and kill over 200 Latinx people, and at a rate higher than white people.[16] And police are more likely to threaten or use physical force during encounters with Latinx people than with white people.[17] As a consequence, many Latinx people may not feel assured that law enforcement would protect them, and Latinx people generally report less confidence in police than white people.[18]

Deteriorated relationships between Latinx communities and law enforcement also present challenges in reporting and solving crimes. Police violence dramatically reduces public confidence in law enforcement, leading community members to see them as part of the problem.[19] Additionally, certain cultural elements shared by many members of the Latinx community, including histories of dictatorial leadership in Latin America and demographic status in the US, make many Latinx people wary of law enforcement.[20]

Aggressive federal immigration policies have caused a chilling effect on willingness to talk to police among Latinx people, and law enforcement's role in immigration enforcement also erodes Latinx trust in police.[21] Hispanic immigrants, particularly undocumented Hispanic immigrants, are less likely to report being victimized by a crime,[22] and fear of police inquiries into their immigration status or the status of someone they know has also made US-born Latinx people less likely to report victimization.[23] Practices like Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers appearing at hearings for protective orders have made immigrant domestic abuse survivors less likely to report the abuse.[24]

Policymakers Can Act to Protect Latinx Communities

Policymakers should address the disproportionate impact of gun violence on Latinx people in the United States with action, including by:

- Funding community-based violence intervention programs that identify individuals who are at the highest risk of shooting or being shot and work to reduce violence through targeted support and interventions. Local governments can utilize American Rescue Plan funds to support city gun violence prevention.
- Implementing policies that reduce police gun violence. Law enforcement agencies should have strong guardrails on when police may use force against civilians, ensure police are held accountable when force is used, and prioritize de-escalation, dignity, and respect. Cities may also consider implementing alternative dispatch programs, which connect people in crisis with mental health and social services in difficult situations that police might not have the training to address.
- Prohibiting all people convicted of hate crimes from having guns. While a felony conviction prohibits gun possession under federal law, a hate crime misdemeanor conviction does not. This means that in much of the country a person convicted of a violent hate crime could legally pass a background check and buy a gun.
- Passing Extreme Risk laws, which allow family members and law enforcement to ask a judge for an order to temporarily remove guns from a person who poses a serious risk of injuring others (or themselves) with a gun. This gives people in crisis a chance to seek help. Extreme Risk laws are proven to reduce rates of suicide and have shown success in preventing potential mass shootings.[25]
- Creating permanent state and local offices dedicated to gun violence prevention and research institutes with a mission to study and recommend policy solutions to combat gun violence, and putting a premium on new data collection infrastructure that can help policymakers to evaluate not only homicide, but also unintentional shootings, nonfatal assaults, and suicide.

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Executive Summary
Introduction
Government Costs Paid by Taxpayers
Costs Paid by Families and Employers
Lost Quality-of-Life
Costs by State
Conclusion

REPORT

The Economic Cost of Gun Violence

How to Recover $280 Billion For Greater Quality of Life for Americans

2.17.2021

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Learn More: City Gun Violence Gun Suicide Keeping Guns Out of the Wrong Hands

$280 billion

SUMMARY

While the United States economy has begun to rebound from the pandemic-induced recession of 2020 and 2021, the impacts of its unprecedented economic uncertainty are still evident. The pandemic has showcased the fragile, precarious state of public services, as every level of government strained to maintain basic government services, including schooling, public transportation and road systems, and critical hospital, fire, police, and sanitation functions. However, the government's ability to make long-term, critical investments to ensure the future stability of these vital services is hindered by the cost of the nation's gun violence epidemic. Our federal, state, and local governments are spending a combined average of $34.8 million each day to deal with the aftermath of gun violence across the country. The total

annual bill for taxpayers, survivors, families, employers, and communities is $280 billion. The price associated with collective inaction to prevent gun violence is not just a loss of human life, but the loss of the potential to invest in vital public services that directly correlate to a stronger economy and greater quality of life for Americans.

Put simply, America cannot afford gun violence.

Executive Summary

In an average year, gun violence in America kills nearly 40,000 people, injures more than twice as many, and costs our nation $280 billion. This staggering figure is higher than the entire US Department of Veterans Affairs' annual budget. Without a doubt, the human cost of gun violence—the people who are taken from us and the survivors whose lives are forever altered—is the most devastating. But examining the serious economic consequences of gun violence is paramount to understanding just how extensive and expensive this crisis is. And during these times of unprecedented economic uncertainty and stretched-thin health care resources from the coronavirus pandemic, these vast funds could be directed elsewhere if many of these shooting tragedies were prevented from occurring in the first place.

This $280 billion problem represents the lifetime costs associated with gun violence, including three types of costs: immediate costs starting at the time of an incident; subsequent costs such as treatment, long-term physical and mental health care, forgone earnings, criminal justice costs; and cost estimates of quality-of-life lost over a victim's lifespan.

As survivors, families, communities, employers, and taxpayers, we all pay for the enormous costs associated with this violence, whether we own a gun or not.

On an average day:

- American taxpayers pay a daily average of $34.8 million for medical care, first responders, ambulances, police, and criminal justice services related to gun violence.
- Families directly affected by gun violence everyday face $4.7 million in out-of-pocket costs for medical bills and mental health support, and $140.3 million in losses from work missed due to injury or death.
- Society loses an estimated $586.8 million per day in intangible costs from the pain and suffering of gun violence victims and their families.
- Employers every day lose $1.4 million in productivity, revenue, and costs required to recruit and train replacements for victims of gun violence.

The large variation in rates of gun deaths and injuries in the 50 states and Washington, DC, translates into substantial differences in the economic burden from this violence. Compiling this information is vital so that policymakers and constituents can understand how resources are currently being spent and to provide direction for a different tomorrow. The average cost for overall gun violence in the United States is $860 for every person. However, in states with stronger gun laws, the economic toll of gun violence is less than half this amount, whereas in states where gun laws are weaker and gun injuries and fatalities are higher, gun violence costs residents double or more this amount per person.

CALCULATE THE COST OF GUN VIOLENCE

Calculate the cost of gun violence in your local community using our interactive tool.

Introduction

In the week before Thanksgiving 2020 there were 20 shooting incidents in Dallas, Texas. When the week was over, a combination of road rage, shootouts, and drive-bys resulted in 12 people being killed and 19 injured, including a grandfather and his four-year-old granddaughter. This violence left in its wake a $10.1 million price tag for taxpayers and the loss of $101.1 million for families directly involved.[1] Today we are all paying an enormous economic cost, as well as an unmeasurable human cost of trauma and loss, for our failure to prevent gun violence.

This report doesn't try to put a price on human lives. Rather, it details the depth and breadth of America's gun violence crisis in an effort to show why we must work to solve it now. Quantifying what we all spend in the aftermath of a shooting—whether the shooting was unintentional, an assault, a police-involved shooting, or an act of suicide—helps us understand the price we pay for this violence.

This report is divided into four sections based on broad cost categories: **costs borne by the government** and paid for with taxpayer dollars, **out-of-pocket costs** paid by families and employers, **lost income**, and an estimate for the **intangible lost quality-of-life costs** of gun violence to account for pain and suffering, a commonly accepted economic principle used, for example, in jury awards. All of these economic costs ultimately pale in comparison to the pain of losing a loved one. Our hope is that by combining strong data with survivors' testimonies, we present a holistic picture of America's gun violence epidemic and the sense of urgency to solve it.

Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund worked with the leading health economist researching the cost of gun violence, Ted R. Miller, and researchers at the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE), to calculate the economic impact of gun violence. Data featured in this report is from the federal Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and other studies as detailed in the Methodological Note. This report uses an Injury Cost Model developed by PIRE that forms the backbone of the CDC's work on costing injuries from a broad array of causes, including gun violence.[2]

The Breakdown: $280 billion in Gun

Violence Costs

$3.5 billion

Medical Costs
Immediate and long-term medical care, mental health care, and ambulance and patient transport

$10.7 billion

Police & Criminal Justice Costs
Police response and investigation, court administration staff, and incarceration

$0.5 billion

Employer Costs
Employer costs for lost revenue and productivity

$51.2 billion

Work-Loss Costs
Income lost because of death and disability

$214.2 billion

Quality-of-Life Costs
Quality-of-life loss for pain and suffering

Government Costs Paid by Taxpayers

Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. was known to say that taxes are the price we pay for a civilized society.[3] Taxation buys our children's education, economic security when we are older, garbage pickup, park maintenance, food and medicine safety regulation, public safety, and much more. These government services contribute to the good of our society.

What is clear from this report's analysis is that while not every household has a gun, and while not all communities experience high levels of gun violence,[4] we all bear the economic burden of injuries and deaths caused by firearms. Roughly $12.7 billion in tax money per year pays for our country's gun violence epidemic. Instead of K–12 education funding, social services, economic redevelopment grants, and so many other vital public goods from which we all benefit, we are spending precious funding on an epidemic that brings nothing of benefit and plenty of heartbreak and broken lives. And this is happening at a time when the National Conference of State Legislatures has catalogued cuts that states are having to make in order to close budget shortfalls due to COVID-19. While costs vary depending on the circumstances of the incident, each gun fatality costs taxpayers an average of $270,399 for the initial and long-term repercussions of that incident, and each nonfatal injury costs $52,585.

$270,399

Each gun fatality costs taxpayers $270,399.

$52,585

Each nonfatal gun injury costs taxpayers $52,585.

$1.7 billion

Individuals, families, and employers pay $1.7 billion annually in out-of-pocket medical and mental health care costs for gun-related violence in America.

Government costs for gun violence—paid for by taxpayers—fall into two broad categories: medical costs and police and criminal justice costs, as detailed below. The annual medical cost of gun violence is paid partly by the government (52 percent) and partly by families and private individuals (48 percent), with the portion of medical costs borne by taxpayers of $2.0 billion. The second group of taxpayer costs, for police and criminal justice, totals $10.7 billion per year. For gun violence survivors, these services provide a lifeline many wished they never needed.

TAXPAYER COSTS

Medical Costs

Medical and long-term disability costs of gun violence cost taxpayers **$2.0 billion annually**. This includes:

- Medical care including Medicaid
- Mental health care
- Ambulance and patient transport

TAXPAYER COSTS

Police & Criminal Justice Costs

Police and criminal justice costs of gun violence cost taxpayers **$10.7 billion annually**. This includes:

- Police response and investigation
- Court Administration
- Public prosecutors and defenders
- Jail and prison incarceration

Jim Burch, President of the National Police Foundation, shares the economic toll and trauma that law enforcement experience.

READ JIM'S STORY +

Costs Paid by Families and Employers

In addition to the burden on taxpayers, individuals, families, and employers bear enormous costs for gun-related violence in America, including $1.7 billion annually in out-of-pocket medical and mental health care costs. Families also experience the loss of $51.2 billion from work loss for victims and perpetrators. Employers pay $528.7 million per year to cover the costs of employee absence due to gun violence.

The average hospital stay for a nonfatal gun injury costs $67,245—as much as the US median household income for an entire year.[5] It isn't hard to see how medical bills from gunshot injuries quickly add up and financially devastate families. The ongoing, complex nature of the medical and mental health care that some gun violence survivors require means that those costs can last years, decades, or a lifetime.

Across the country, gun violence victim and perpetrator work loss accounts for $51.2 billion per year. Families feel the loss of a missing monthly paycheck and benefits—plus the burden of caring for the injured—even more acutely when the injured person or lost family member was supporting children or a main breadwinner. While perhaps not intuitive, it is important to consider both victims' *and* perpetrators' economic losses to understand the full scope of gun violence on our society and what we lose when guns shatter lives.

Carolyn Tuft relies on Medicare after being wounded and losing her daughter to gun violence in 2007.

READ CAROLYN'S STORY +

Finally, when survivors' injuries leave them unable to work, the economy as a whole suffers. In addition to the burden of lost wages on survivors' families, gun violence costs employers $528.7 million per year. This encompasses the direct costs to productivity such as lost revenue due to unfilled jobs, the value of the time supervisors spend adjusting schedules to cover for lost work, and the cost burden of recruiting and training replacements when necessary.

PRIVATE PAYER COSTS

Medical Costs

Individuals, families, and employers pay **$1.7 billion annually** in out-of-pocket medical and mental health care costs for gun-related violence in America. This includes:

- Immediate medical treatment
- Follow-up medical care, long-term rehabilitation, prescriptions, etc.
- Mental health care services for victims and immediate family members
- Coroner services, as applicable

PRIVATE PAYER LOSSES

Work-Loss Costs

Individuals, families, and communities lose **$51.2 billion annually** in income from victims and perpetrators for gun-related violence in America. This includes:

- Forgone earnings or work due to victim injury or death and from perpetrator incarceration
- Wage equivalent for unpaid household and caregiver work for victims

EMPLOYER COSTS

Lost Revenue and Productivity

The burden of covering for employees killed or injured by guns costs employers **$528.7 million annually**. This includes:

- Lost productivity for victims' employers
- Lost revenue in case of unfilled absence
- Recruiting and training replacement workers

DeAndra Yates-Dycus's son "Dre" was shot and survived, his medical bills costing more than $10 million over six years.

READ DEANDRA'S STORY +

Lost Quality-of-Life

The damage caused by gun violence, of course, is not limited to the individual who was shot. When a person's life is cut short or altered in this way, the trajectory of their family's life changes forever as well. And the high cost that society bears extends far beyond medical bills.

In America, gun violence costs an estimated $214.2 billion annually in lost quality-of-life. These are intangible costs that quantify—based on jury awards and victim settlements—the pain, suffering, and lost overall well-being that a person and their family experience due to gun death and injury. Quality-of-life lost represents the present value of what was irreparably damaged when a victim's life was cut short or a survivor was permanently disabled by gun violence, with a higher amount for younger victims with years of life ahead of them.

QUALITY-OF-LIFE COSTS

Pain and Suffering

Gun violence costs an estimated **$214.2 billion annually** in lost quality-of-life. This includes:

- Estimate of the intangible loss of victims and survivors due to either a life cut short or a person permanently disabled by gun violence.

While these estimates are enormous, they do not include the indirect impact that gun violence has on many other people in our country, which would undeniably put the price even higher. While this report's quality-of-life lost estimate includes individuals who were shot and their immediate family, it does not include children who lost their parents, siblings, or extended family members, or those who witnessed gun violence and were marked by the trauma of it. The collective trauma we all feel when a mass shooting, homicide, or suicide occurs certainly isn't free.

The pain and suffering caused by a single gun can ripple through an entire family, as is the case with gun suicides, which account for nearly two-thirds of all gun deaths[6] and half of the cost of gun violence in America. Suicides have lower overall economic costs associated with them—largely because less is spent on criminal justice and incarceration costs—but the intangible cost in pain and suffering is a crushing weight to bear.

McKay Moore Sohlberg's husband died by suicide, putting her in financial uncertainty.

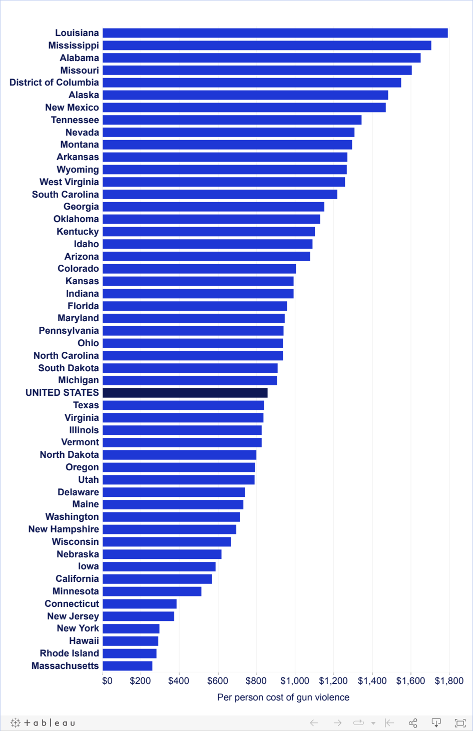
READ MCKAY'S STORY +

Costs by State

Not surprisingly, states with high levels of gun violence face higher associated costs, whereas states with lower levels of gun violence and strong common sense gun laws face a lower financial burden. Louisiana has been challenged by high levels of gun violence for a long time, with an average of 967 gun deaths per year over the past five years and a rate of gun homicide that has increased 11 percent over the past decade. At an average price tag of **$1,793** per person each year, Louisiana has the **highest** per person cost of gun violence in the United States, which translates into a very high burden for the state.

Massachusetts, on the other hand, is able to allocate far more taxpayer dollars to productive investments for its residents. Massachusetts has the lowest rate of gun deaths in the United States, with the rate of gun homicides having gone down 12 percent over the past decade. At an average cost of **$261** per person each year, Massachusetts has the **lowest** per person outlay from gun violence in the United States.

The Economic Cost of Gun Violence by State



Source: Analysis by Ted R. Miller and PIRE Institute, in 2018 dollars, based on 2017 nonfatal injuries and 2018 deaths. For further details, see Methodological Note.

See data on the economic cost in your state on EveryStat.

LEARN MORE

In states with stronger gun laws, such as Connecticut, Hawaii, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, and Rhode Island, the human and economic toll of gun violence, with a per person cost of less than $400 annually, results in more government funds to invest in education, health care, workforce development, and other valuable services and programs that can address underlying causes of gun violence. In states where gun laws are weaker and gun fatalities are higher, including Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Missouri, the per person cost of gun violence is four times higher, at more than $1,600 per resident.

The graphic below illustrates these wide differences by comparing two states with similar population sizes but vastly different costs resulting from gun violence. Missouri, with a population of 6.1 million residents, spent $9.8 billion on gun violence as compared to Washington State, with a slightly larger population (7.4 million residents) but nearly half the cost—$5.3 billion. Neither amount is cause for celebration. But Missouri is a state with some of the weakest gun laws in the country, including no law requiring background checks on unlicensed gun sales and a law allowing residents to carry hidden, loaded handguns in public with no permit or safety training required.[8] Washington, on the other hand, requires background checks on all gun sales, has an Extreme Risk law that allows loved ones or law enforcement to petition a court to temporarily prevent someone in crisis from accessing firearms, and requires that all gun owners store their firearms securely.[9]

Similar Population Sizes, Vastly Different Costs

WASHINGTON STATE

Population: 7,405,743
Cost of gun violence per person: $716

MISSOURI

Population: 6,113,532
Cost of gun violence per person: $1,606

Conclusion

There are so many things our country needs. If we didn't have to be supporting the people whose lives have been ripped apart from somebody irresponsibly buying a gun and using it, it would make a huge difference. Everybody's taxes are paying for the damage.

—Carolyn Tuft, gun violence survivor

With nearly 40,000 lives lost and almost 85,000 more injured each year, the human cost of gun violence in America is staggering. Families, friends, and entire communities suffer the long-term and irreparable impacts of these tragedies—physically, emotionally, and financially.

While survivor stories carry immense power in driving change, quantifying the financial burden of gun violence offers another important strategy and data point for doing so. This rigorous study finds that gun violence costs America an estimated $280 billion annually, toward which taxpayers pay an average of $12.7 billion, and survivors and their loved ones often pay additional millions over their lifetimes—not to mention the immense cost of quality-of-life lost. Further, some states and communities—many of which already face heightened gun violence and weaker gun safety laws—carry more of this cost than others, worsening disparities and challenges faced, and lessening resources available to prevent this cycle to begin with.

This report is part of Everytown's efforts to paint a more complete picture of the staggering cost of gun violence in America. Calculating the economic cost of gun violence is a critical addition to this narrative because it puts a price on our collective inaction and equips policymakers, advocates, local leaders, and all

Americans with additional information that can help advance action to prevent shootings and keep our families safe.

Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund would like to gratefully acknowledge the work of Ted R. Miller, Bina Ali, David I Swedler, and Bruce A Lawrence of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation for their work to calculate the cost of gun violence, Kaelyn Forde for report drafting and survivor interviews, and Jim Burch, McKay Moore Sohlberg, Carolyn Tuft, and DeAndra Yates-Dycus for their willingness to share their stories.

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Everytown analysis of the most recent year of gun deaths by country (2015 to 2019), GunPolicy.org (accessed January 7, 2022).

Join Us.

Every day, more than 110 people in America are killed with guns. The gun homicide rate in the U.S. is 26 times higher than that of other developed countries, but research shows that common-sense public safety laws can reduce gun violence and save lives.

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FACT SHEET

Six Gun Violence Prevention Priorities for the 117th Congress

12.10.2020

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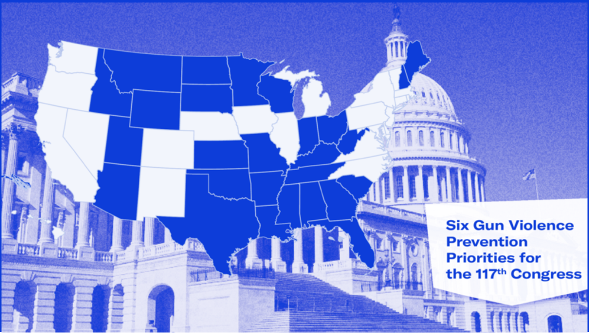
Learn More: Background Checks on All Gun Sales City Gun Violence Domestic Violence Extreme Risk Laws Gun Dealer Reform Gun Suicide Gun Violence by Police Keeping Guns Out of the Wrong Hands Lack of Gun Industry Accountability Repeal Gun Industry Immunity



It has been nearly 25 years since the last significant federal gun safety law was passed, and in that time an estimated 800,000 Americans have died from gun violence — and today, more than 100 people are killed by guns and 200 more are shot and wounded every day. With the nation in the midst of a pandemic, an economic downturn, a racial justice reckoning, an explosion in gun ownership caused in part by NRA fear mongering, and a rise in armed extremism — issues which are inextricably tied to gun violence — it's never been more important to act on gun safety than it is now.

Here are six steps the 117th Congress should take to reduce gun violence:

1. Keep guns out of the hands of people who shouldn’t have them by requiring background checks on all gun sales, which 93% of American voters support

Current federal law requires background checks for gun sales only when buyers shop with licensed gun dealers, and the Charleston loophole allows a gun to be sold before a check is completed. That means felons, domestic abusers, and people involuntarily committed due to mental health can avoid the very system designed to block them from getting guns — simply by buying from strangers they meet on the internet or getting the gun from a dealer before a check is complete. Evidence shows that it is extremely easy to find these no-background-check sales online, and that people who are prohibited from buying guns are going to those unlicensed sellers at much higher rates than gun stores, in order to get armed with no questions asked. And gun sales have skyrocketed during the pandemic, overwhelming the background check system and allowing more gun sales to proceed without a completed background check. The 117th Congress must act quickly to require completed background checks on all gun sales — the foundation of any comprehensive gun violence prevention strategy.

MORE INFORMATION ON BACKGROUND CHECKS

- **Background Checks Save Lives and Protect Our Communities**
- **How COVID-19 Has Made a Federal Background Check Loophole Even Deadlier**
- **Myths and Facts about Background Checks**
- **Unchecked: Over 1 Million Online Firearm Ads, No Background Checks Required**
- **Solution: Background Checks on All Gun Sales**

2. Intervene before tragedy strikes with an Extreme Risk (or “red flag”) law, which 87% of American voters support

Extreme Risk laws are a critical tool for intervening when someone is clearly in crisis. Where there is evidence that a person poses a serious risk of injuring themselves or others with a gun, these laws enable close family members or law enforcement to ask a judge to temporarily block access to firearms. Nineteen states have enacted these laws (seventeen since 2013), and they have been shown to reduce the risk of suicide and prevent mass shootings. A strong federal law would establish an Extreme Risk process that can be used in federal courts in all fifty states, and would provide resources to state systems — helping states implement their laws effectively and encouraging additional states to act. The need is even more urgent as COVID-19 and the accompanying economic crisis have created a perfect storm in which known suicide risk factors are colliding.

MORE INFORMATION ON EXTREME RISK LAW

A Comprehensive Approach to Extreme Risk Laws

Myths and Facts about Extreme Risk Laws

Extreme Risk Protection Orders Respect Due Process

Extreme Risk Laws Save Lives

Solution: Extreme Risk Laws

3. Disarm domestic abusers by reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)

Women in the United States are 21 times more likely to die by gun homicide than women in any other high-income country, and the presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation makes it five times more likely that the woman will be shot and killed. The COVID-19 pandemic has only intensified the factors that contribute to our current gun-related domestic violence crisis. But federal law is currently not strong enough to protect victims — because it prohibits abusive spouses from buying a gun, not abusive dating partners who don't live with the victim, even though women are as likely to be killed by dating partners as by spouses. Congress should take up the same bipartisan VAWA reauthorization bill passed in the House in 2019, closing the "boyfriend loophole" and expanding lifesaving protections that disarm domestic abusers.

MORE INFORMATION ON GUNS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act

Guns and Violence Against Women

Issue: Domestic Violence

4. Reduce police violence by passing the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act

Police violence is gun violence, and every year, police in America shoot and kill more than 1,000 people. The combination of systemic racism, white supremacy, America's gun culture, and the militarization of police is toxic — and Black people in particular are paying with their lives. In addition to the loss of life and the pain to family members and survivors, police shootings have a uniquely corrosive impact on the nation: Patterns of police violence dramatically reduce public confidence in police and lead community members to see them as part of the problem. Across the country, racial justice advocates are crying out for meaningful police reform. Congress must pass the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, which would take critical steps to address police brutality — including by raising the standard for use of force and making it easier to hold abusive police accountable.

MORE INFORMATION ON GUN VIOLENCE AND THE POLICE

- Gun Violence and the Police →
- Issue: Gun Violence by Police →

5. Prioritize solutions to the city gun violence devastating communities every day

Gun homicides and assaults occur at shockingly high rates in American cities, violence that heavily impacts racially segregated neighborhoods — reflecting and amplifying this country's long-standing systemic and structural racism. In fact, in 2015, half of the more than 13,000 gun homicides in the U.S. took place in just 127 cities, which contain less than a quarter of the population. Many of these cities were hit hard by COVID and its economic fallout and faced persistent gun violence over the summer even as other forms of crime declined. Congress should authorize robust long-term funding for proven solutions like community-based violence intervention — and also focus on upstream issues, like empowering the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) to shut down gun trafficking into our cities.

MORE INFORMATION ON CITY GUN VIOLENCE

- Community-led Public Safety Strategies →
- Gun Violence in Cities →
- Strategies for Reducing Gun Violence in American Cities →
- Issue: City Gun Violence →

6. Undo the damage the gun lobby has done to our laws, which has led to the deaths of countless Americans

For decades, the gun lobby has littered our gun laws with loopholes, weaknesses, and special protections that endanger public safety, all in service of selling more guns and mollifying the extremist elements of the gun rights movement. Now, as a result, we face both rising rates of gun violence and the rise of extremist groups that have exploited our enfeebled laws and regulations to arm themselves. To truly address gun violence, the 117th Congress should undo the gun lobby's damage to our laws and hold the bad actors in the gun industry accountable. That means treating gun dealers like positions of public trust, with high public safety standards; giving ATF and the Department of Homeland Security the resources and mandate to do their jobs; regulating firearms as consumer products, just like any other household item; ending special legal protections for the gun industry, which prevent bad actors from being held accountable for deadly negligence; and providing robust long-term funding for gun violence data infrastructure and public health research into the causes and solutions of gun violence.

MORE INFORMATION ON THE GUN LOBBY

Issue: Lack of Gun Industry Accountability

Solution: Repeal Restrictions on Gun Trace Data

Solution: Gun Dealer Reform

Solution: Smart Guns and Gun Safety Features

Repeal the Gun Industry Immunity Law

Armed and Dangerous: How the Gun Lobby Enshrines Guns as Tools of the Extreme Right

THE LATEST

How Governors Can Act on Gun Safety

Over the past two weeks the nation has experienced appalling acts of gun violence – nineteen elementary school children and two teachers murdered in their...

Fact Sheet

VAWA & NICS Denial Notification

The National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) stops tens of thousands of convicted felons, domestic abusers, and other prohibited people from buying guns each...

Fact Sheet

H.R. 6225: The Federal Firearm Licensee Act (2021)

The "Federal Firearm Licensee Act" (the "Act") is a data-driven blueprint for clarifying the responsibilities of gun dealers.

Fact Sheet

Simple Roadmap Can Vastly Reduce School Shootings — Before They Start

In the wake of yet another horrific school shooting and amidst a historic surge in gun violence on school grounds,...

Fact Sheet

110

DID YOU KNOW?

Every day, more than 110 Americans are killed with guns.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. WONDER Online Database, Underlying Cause of Death. A yearly average was developed using five years of the most recent available data: 2016 to 2020. Everytown For Gun Safety Support Fund
Last updated: 2.3.2022

More than 8 million people have joined the movement.

Add your email

NEXT

Everytown for Gun Safety Action Fund®

Executive Summary
Introduction
Key Findings
Conclusion
Explore Armslist Online Marketplace Activity in Your State

DATA TRACKER | FACT SHEET

Unchecked: An Investigation of the Online Firearm Marketplace

2.1.2021

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Learn More: Background Checks on All Gun Sales Keeping Guns Out of the Wrong Hands

CONTACT SELLER

Executive Summary

In every year since 2018, there have been more than one million ads offering firearms for sale by unlicensed sellers in states that do not legally require a background check, a circumstance that creates endless opportunities for individuals with dangerous histories to easily acquire guns. Federal law requires a background check of a prospective gun buyer only when the seller is a licensed gun dealer, leaving all other sales—such as unlicensed gun sales negotiated over the internet—unregulated and with no background check required.

For more than a decade, the online firearm marketplace has emerged as a growing market for anonymous gun purchases through websites such as Armslist, the self-proclaimed “largest free gun classifieds on the web.” Everytown has worked to understand the scope and threat of this type of commerce. This report lays out the results of Everytown’s analysis of Armslist ads between 2018 and 2020, and the findings of our prior investigations examining the criminal backgrounds of buyers, how transactions are carried out, and whether unlicensed sellers would require a background check on a private gun sale.

MAIN FINDINGS

1. Each year, 1.2 million online ads offering firearms for sale are listed that would not legally require a background check to be completed.
2. Nearly 1 in 9 prospective buyers who respond to ads from unlicensed sellers would not pass a background check, a rate seven times higher than the denial rate at licensed gun stores or in other contexts where background checks are required.
3. Following an Armslist online sale, the face-to-face transaction can be completed in under three minutes.
4. In states that require background checks on all gun sales, 84 percent of unlicensed sellers told prospective purchasers they would need to undergo a background check prior to the sale. But in states without these laws, only 6 percent of unlicensed sellers indicated a background check would be needed.

Introduction

It's been over 25 years since our federal background check law was written, and since then, the internet has emerged as a go-to place for firearm sales. The rise of online gun sites like Armslist.com has increased the danger posed by a long-standing loophole in federal law that exempts unlicensed gun sellers from the requirement to conduct a background check of a prospective gun buyer. Guns purchased on Armslist have ended up in the hands of convicted felons, domestic abusers, gang members, and gun traffickers—at times, resulting in deadly consequences.[1] While many states have filled this gap by requiring a background check on all gun sales within their borders, 28 states have yet to close this loophole, enabling unlicensed gun sellers to sell firearms to anyone, with no questions asked.

Since 2014, Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund ("Everytown") has conducted multiple investigations of the unregulated online gun marketplace and its serious threat to public safety. In 2018, our investigation into Armslist, sometimes referred to as the Craigslist of guns, revealed a massive marketplace where unchecked gun sales are taking place between complete strangers meeting online, providing criminals and other prohibited purchasers an easy avenue for access. In the years since that investigation, Everytown has continued to collect and analyze data on Armslist activity. Our findings highlight the urgent need to require background checks on all gun sales.

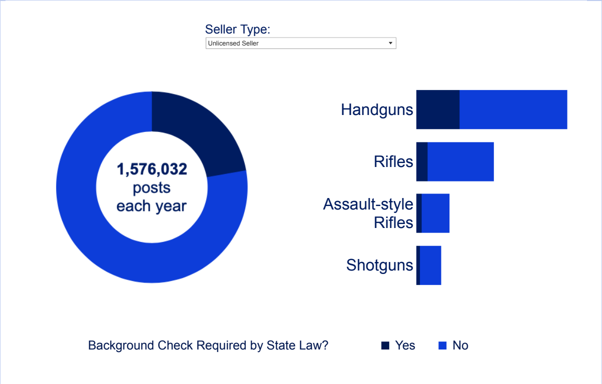
Key Findings

Over One Million Ads on Armslist Each Year Don't Require a Background Check

Armslist operates similarly to other online classified platforms such as Craigslist, whereby a seller posts the price, description, and a photo of the item for sale. Armslist allows firearm ads to be listed by both licensed gun dealers (called "premium vendors")—who are required by federal law to conduct a background check on all gun sales—and unlicensed sellers (called "private parties"), whose sales generally require a background check only if they are selling a firearm in a state that requires background checks on all gun sales.[2] And like buying a piece of furniture on Craigslist, these sales are usually initiated by email, phone, or text, then completed offline, in person.

Everytown's investigators collected over 9 million posts from Armslist between 2018 and 2020, of which 68 percent listed firearms for sale.[3]. An analysis of these gun-sale ads revealed that the majority were from unlicensed sellers.[4] Each year, sellers without a license post an average of 1.6 million ads (80 percent of all unique ads for firearm sales) on Armslist offering firearms for sale,[5] compared to an average of 393,000 ads (20 percent) from licensed dealers. Of the 1.6 million ads from unlicensed sellers, 1.2 million (78 percent) were from sellers in states that do not legally require a background check.[6]

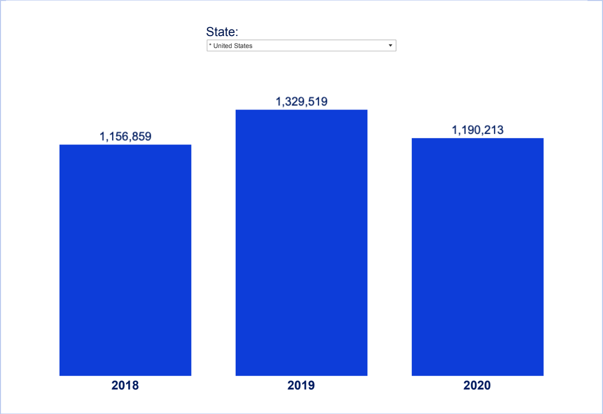
More than three-quarters of all ads by unlicensed sellers listing firearms for sale do not require a background check



Everytown analysis of posts listed on Armslist.

The staggering number of ads for firearm sales that would not require a background check has remained steady over the past few years. Indeed, there have been more than one million of these ads each year in the period from 2018 through 2020. Consistent with the overall surge in gun sales across the country during 2020, ads by unlicensed sellers offering firearms for sale on Armslist surged from 2018 to 2020, with the largest increases in Arizona (120 percent), Alaska (98 percent), and Utah (60 percent).

Over one million ads listing firearms for sale that do not require a background check are on Armslist each year



Everytown analysis of posts listed on Armslist. Laws requiring background checks on all gun sales went into effect on July 1, 2019 in New Mexico, January 2, 2020 in Nevada, and July 1, 2020 in Virginia.

Everytown's Investigation Reveals Criminals Are Trying to Buy Guns Online—And Exploiting the Online Sales Loophole Is Easy to Do

Everytown's investigations found that individuals who are prohibited from purchasing guns turn to the flourishing online firearm marketplace to get armed with no questions asked. In 2018, Everytown's investigators placed ads on Armslist in four states that do not require background checks on these unlicensed sales—Georgia, Florida, Ohio, and Tennessee.[7] Investigators then ran public records requests on would-be buyers who responded. Investigators reviewed the records of over 430 individuals who expressed an interest in purchasing the firearms. On average, nearly 1 in 9 of these prospective buyers could not legally possess a firearm—a rate over seven times higher than that of buyers who fail background checks at licensed dealers or in other contexts where background checks are required.[8]

The prohibited individuals looking to buy guns online had criminal histories that included convictions for violent felonies, domestic abuse misdemeanors, drug abuse, and active domestic violence restraining orders.[9] In addition, there were youth under the age of 18 who were illegally attempting to purchase handguns.[10] The results of this investigation likely understate the problem, because investigators did not have access to records related to some non-criminal prohibiting criteria, such as involuntary commitment to a mental institution.

1/9

Nearly one in nine of these prospective buyers could not legally own a firearm.

Everytown analysis of posts listed on Armslist.

Everytown's investigations of online gun sales

Year of Investigation	State	Rate of Prohibited Purchasers Online
2018	Georgia	1 in 9
2018	Ohio	1 in 12
2018	Tennessee	1 in 8
2018	Florida	1 in 7
2017	New Mexico*	1 in 15[11]
2016	Nevada*	1 in 11[12]
2015	Oregon*	1 in 18[13]
2014	Washington*	1 in 10[14]

**New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington now require background checks on all gun sales.*

As with sales of items through Craigslist, many firearm sales facilitated through Armslist are completed in person. To better understand how these sales take place, Everytown's investigators contacted two unlicensed sellers in Ohio—one selling a handgun and another selling an assault-style rifle—and met with them shortly afterward.

Each of these sales was completed in person in less than three minutes, and neither seller attempted to conduct a background check. One seller noted that he would only sell the gun "assuming you haven't beaten your wife lately, done any drugs, [and] you're an Ohio resident," but did not verify any such history since there is no legal requirement to do so in Ohio.

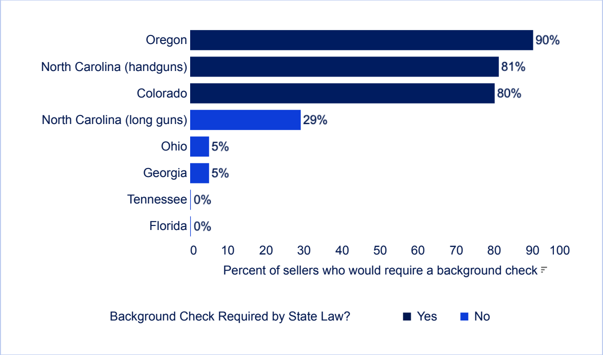
Everytown's investigators were able to complete sales facilitated on Armslist in under three minutes with no background check

UNCHECKED: Firearms For Sale Online, No Background Checks Required
Share
Watch on YouTube
She's an awesome little beast

Everytown's investigation revealed that the presence of a law requiring background checks on all gun sales significantly impacts whether unlicensed sellers will conduct background checks on prospective buyers or not. In 2018, Everytown reached out to sellers in seven states. Four do not require background checks for unlicensed sales (Florida, Georgia, Ohio, and Tennessee); two do require background checks for unlicensed sales (Colorado and Oregon); and one state requires background checks for unlicensed sales of handguns but not for unlicensed sales of rifles and shotguns (North Carolina).

In communications with 150 unlicensed sellers in these seven states, investigators expressed interest in purchasing the advertised firearm and asked the seller to explain the process for completing a sale, including whether the sale would have to be completed by a licensed firearms dealer or otherwise require a background check.[15] In states that require background checks on all gun sales, on average, 84 percent of sellers stated that the buyer would need to pass a background check before the gun was transferred. But in states without these laws, only 6 percent of unlicensed sellers indicated a background check would be required to complete the sale. The lack of a federal law requiring unlicensed sellers to screen prospective gun purchasers to ensure that they can legally possess a firearm makes it easy for prohibited individuals to acquire firearms through the online firearm marketplace.

In states with laws requiring background checks on all gun sales, on average, 84 percent of sellers indicated they would require a background check.



Everytown analysis of posts listed on Armslist.

What unlicensed sellers on armslist.com say about unlicensed sales and background checks

DOES NOT REQUIRE BACKGROUND CHECK

Tennessee

Investigator: I own a few guns but I never bought anything from this site before how does it work?

TN seller: “It’s like a newspaper classifieds, without the paper. *Just come up with a time and place to meet.... I just take your word that you are eligible.*“

REQUIRES BACKGROUND CHECK

Oregon

OR Seller: “How it goes is we go to a gun store and do a back ground check and what’s it done I give you gun you give me cash.”

Investigator: Perfect

OR Seller: “There’s one near me prolly have *the whole process done in 15 minutes tops.*“

Conclusion

The vast and growing online firearm marketplace provides an easy way for felons, domestic abusers, and other individuals who cannot legally possess firearms to acquire them with no background checks and no questions asked. Everytown’s investigation identified that every year there are over one million ads on Armslist for firearm sales that would not legally require a background check, and determined that nearly 1 in 9 people looking online to buy guns from unlicensed sellers are prohibited from having firearms. Where background checks were required by state law, the vast majority of sellers complied with the law and indicated a background check would be required to complete the sale. However, where there was no state law requirement, sellers by and large indicated that they would not require a background check for the sale to be completed, offering potential access to people who should not have guns.

There is a clear and present danger in the online firearm marketplace, and the only responsible answer is to require background checks on all gun sales in order to block purchases to people with dangerous histories. Elected officials need to update federal and state laws to require background checks on all gun sales, closing the deadly online sales loophole.

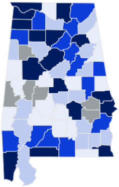
Explore Armslist Online Marketplace Activity in Your State

Learn more about Armslist activity in your state:

State:
Alabama ▾

In Alabama, background checks are not required on sales by unlicensed sellers.

Each year, an average of **43,600** posts for firearms for sale are listed on Armslist where no background check is legally required.



Posts per 100,000 residents where no background check (BGC) is legally required:

Fewer ads | More ads

BGC on all sales | No Data

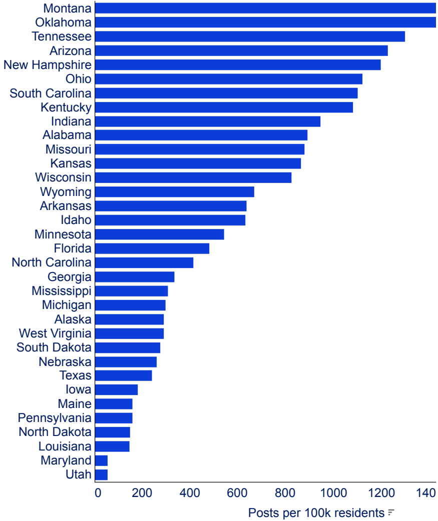
Everytown analysis of posts listed on Armslist.

Compare Armslist activity by unlicensed sellers in states that have not closed the online sales loophole:

Total or Per Capita View: Posts Per 100k Residents ▾

Firearm Type: (All) ▾

Post Type: For Sale



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Introduction
Five things you need to know
Pass background checks legislation
Explore the data
Methods & definitions

REPORT

Five Things to Know About Crime Guns, Gun Trafficking, and Background Checks

5.24.2021 | Last Updated: 3.1.2022

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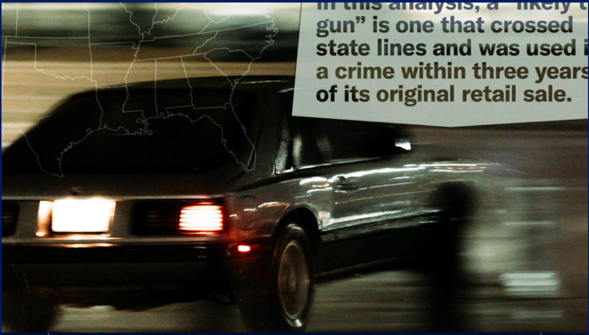
Learn More: Background Checks on All Gun Sales Gun Trafficking Keeping Guns Out of the Wrong Hands Prevent Gun Trafficking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state lines and was used i
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of its original retail sale.

Introduction

In 2018, a Chicago police officer was shot and killed in broad daylight by a person with four felony convictions. During the investigation, authorities found that shell casings from the same gun were linked to another Chicago shooting in 2017, just two months after its last known purchase in Wisconsin. They later found the gun and multiple others recovered in Chicago linked back to one Wisconsin man who would buy guns and then privately sell them through Armslist, a major gun classifieds website. Because these transactions occurred in Wisconsin—a state that does not require background checks on all gun sales—no background checks were required on the private sales, a legal deficit that helped this gun trafficking scheme succeed and led to the murder of a police officer.[1]

For decades, the US federal background check system has blocked prohibited people from buying a firearm from a licensed gun dealer. This includes, for example, people with a felony conviction or with certain domestic violence histories. Background checks are the foundation of any effective effort to keep guns from prohibited individuals, but that foundation has some dangerous cracks. While federal law requires background checks on gun sales from licensed gun dealers in the business of selling firearms, it does not require them on sales by unlicensed sellers, including by strangers who meet online or at gun shows. To address this gaping loophole, many states have enacted their own laws to require background checks on all gun sales. In states that have not addressed this gap—like Wisconsin in the above example—a private seller on the secondary market need not require a background check nor keep a record of the sale to someone who may be prohibited or who otherwise plans to use the gun in a crime or sell the gun into a criminal market. Without federal action, the current patchwork of state laws makes it easy for individuals to traffic firearms from states with weaker gun laws.

To understand the movement of guns recovered in connection with crimes—referred to as “crime guns”—Everytown analyzed gun trace data from the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) over the five-year period from 2016 to 2020.[2] ATF has found that, among traced crime guns, “new guns that have moved rapidly from the shelf of a [federally licensed dealer] to recovery by law enforcement in three years or less . . . may have been trafficked.”[3] This short “time-to-crime” when combined with other factors, like crossing a state border, is a strong indicator that a gun was trafficked.[4] We overlaid crime gun trace data—including information on time-to-crime, state of origin, and state of recovery—with information on state laws requiring background checks on all handgun sales, referred to in this report as “background check laws” to gain insight into the flow of crime guns in the United States.

To read more about how we defined terms used in this report, see the methods and definitions section.

Five things you need to know

Here are five important things you should know about crime guns, gun trafficking, and background check laws:

1. Nearly 1.3 million crime guns were recovered by law enforcement in just five years.

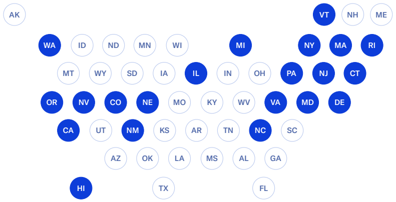
Law enforcement across the United States recovered and fully traced 1,277,439 guns used in a crime over this period.[5] In other words, over 700 crime guns are recovered and fully traced by law enforcement every day. Gun tracing occurs when a law enforcement agency requests that ATF trace a recovered gun’s sales history during a criminal investigation.[6] It’s important to note that these numbers, though alarmingly high, are an undercount. While the ATF encourages law enforcement agencies to request a trace on every gun connected to a criminal investigation, not every recovered crime gun is submitted for a trace. Moreover, not every trace is completed successfully.[7] In fact, though during the time period more than 1.7 million guns were recovered by law enforcement and traced, only 1.3 million of those guns were able to be fully traced.[8] The analysis in this report includes only crime guns in which law enforcement requested a trace that was then completed by the ATF, referred to here as “traced guns.”

2. Nearly a third of traced guns were brought across state lines before being used in a crime.

Twenty-eight percent of traced guns—357,360 guns over the five-year period—were recovered in a different state from where the original retail sale occurred. A small handful of US states drove this activity: Almost half of traced guns recovered in other states originated in just 10 states. The 10 states that exported the highest number of guns recovered in crimes were: Georgia, Texas, Virginia, Florida, Arizona, Indiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Ohio, and Alabama, respectively. Eight of these 10 states did not have background check laws during the study period. Virginia subsequently passed a law in 2020 requiring checks on all sales.[9]

Background Check and/or Purchase Permit

21 states have adopted this policy



Everytown Gun Law Rankings · Policy Profile

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3. At least 528,800 recovered guns were likely purchased with the intent to use them in a crime.

Of the nearly1.3 million crime guns traced over this period, more than 40%—528,855—were used in a crime within just three years of their initial retail sale. This short time-to-crime is a strong indication that the guns were purchased with the intent to divert them to criminal use.[10] This means that a significant number of our nation’s crime guns are relatively recently purchased. Among these low time-to-crime guns, both those recovered in the same state of their original sale and those that soon crossed state lines, 72 percent were supplied by a state without background check laws.

4. At least 99,256 crime guns were likely trafficked across state lines.

Over the five years studied, 99,256 traced crime guns were purchased with the intent to traffic them. Of course, this figure does not account for older guns—which are often trafficked alongside newer ones, so the actual number of trafficked guns is much higher.[11]

5. Nearly 80 percent of likely-trafficked crime guns came from states without background check laws.

Research shows that states without background check laws are prime grounds for criminals and traffickers looking to acquire guns,[12] while state laws requiring background checks for all handgun sales are associated with 29 percent lower rates of gun trafficking across state lines.[13] ATF trace data during this five-year period strongly supports this research. Of the 357,360 traced guns that crossed state lines, 75 percent originated in states without background check laws. This factor is even more pronounced for likely trafficked guns: 79 percent of the 99,256 traced guns recovered across state lines within three years came from states without background check laws. Nearly 60 percent of these guns ended up in a state with a background check law. The 10 states that exported the most likely trafficked guns were: Georgia, Virginia, Arizona, Texas, Indiana, Nevada, South Carolina, Florida, Mississippi, and North Carolina, respectively.

75%

75 percent of traced guns that crossed state lines came from states without background check laws.

Everytown for Gun Safety, “Five Things to Know About C...

Last updated: 3.1.2022

79%

79 percent of traced guns with a short time-to-crime that crossed state lines came from states without background check laws.

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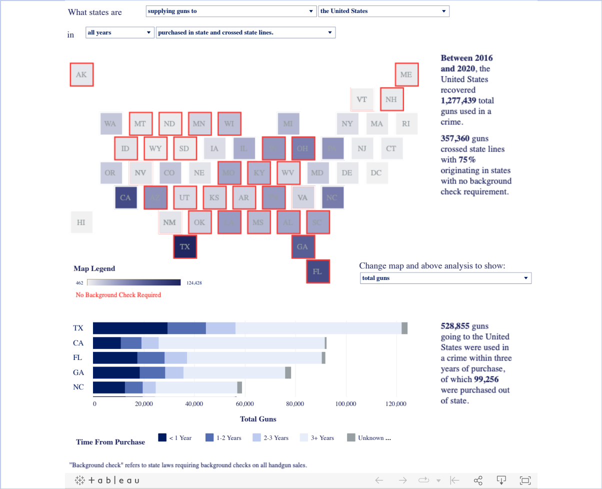
Last updated: 3.1.2022

Pass background checks legislation

Without federal action to strengthen background checks, our nation’s gun laws are only as strong as our weakest states’ laws.

Strengthening our nation’s background check law is a key component to reducing the prevalence of interstate gun trafficking. Congress must pass lifesaving background check legislation to help address the hundreds of thousands of crime guns that were trafficked out of states without a background check law. A federal law would curb the practice of crossing state lines to acquire firearms because prohibited purchasers would be unable to easily acquire guns on the secondary market regardless of the state, and records of gun sales by unlicensed sellers would be kept and could be used in tracing efforts when guns are recovered in crimes. Federal inaction on gun violence has led to more than 110 Americans being killed every day, and hundreds more wounded, costing US taxpayers an average of $35 million daily. The time to pass federal legislation to strengthen background checks is now.

Explore the data


What states are supplying guns to the United States

in all years purchased in state and crossed state lines.

Between 2016 and 2020, the United States recovered **1,277,439** total guns used in a crime.

357,360 guns crossed state lines with **75%** originating in states with no background check requirement.

Change map and above analysis to show: total guns

528,855 guns going to the United States were used in a crime within three years of purchase, of which **99,256** were purchased out of state.

"Background check" refers to state laws requiring background checks on all handgun sales.

Source: ATF Firearms Trace Data, 2016-2020

Methods & definitions

To understand how crime guns move and how background check laws affect their trajectory, Everytown Research analyzed gun trace data from the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) over the five-year period from 2016 to 2020, the most recent year of data currently available.[14] We overlaid this data with information on state laws requiring background checks.

To understand the source and recovery states of traced guns, we used the ATF dataset titled "Firearm Types Recovered and Traced in the United States and Territories." According to the ATF, traces must successfully identify a purchaser as well as the state in which the final dealer is located in order to be included in this dataset. For time-to-crime calculations, we used "Time-to-Crime – Firearms Sourced and Recovered in the United States and Territories." Inclusion in this dataset requires an identified purchaser and purchase date. For the higher count of at least partially traced crime guns, 1.7 million, we used "Firearm Types Recovered and Traced in the United States and Territories." This dataset includes all traced guns and produces the truest total counts of recovered guns submitted for a trace.

Everytown Research & Policy is a program of Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, an independent, non-partisan organization dedicated to understanding and reducing gun violence. Everytown Research & Policy works to do so by conducting methodologically rigorous research, supporting evidence-based policies, and communicating this knowledge to the American public.

THE LATEST

The Rise of Firearm Suicide Among Young Americans

Firearm suicide is having a devastating impact on American youth, particularly during COVID-19. But suicide can be prevented.

Report

ATF’s Final Rule to End the Proliferation of Dangerous, Untraceable Ghost Guns

The ATF announced a final rulemaking clarifying that the core building blocks of ghost guns are firearms under the law.

Fact Sheet

Ghost Guns Recoveries and Shootings

Everytown Research & Policy has collected examples of reported murders and shootings using ghost guns since 2013.

Data Tracker

Cuando el tiroteo se detiene: El impacto de la violencia con armas de fuego en los sobrevivientes de los Estados Unidos

Report

DID YOU KNOW?

Women in the U.S. are 28 times more likely to be killed by guns than women in other high-income countries.

Everytown analysis of the most recent year of gun deaths by country (2015 to 2019), GunPolicy.org (accessed January 7, 2022).

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Every day, more than 110 people in America are killed with guns. The gun homicide rate in the U.S. is 26 times higher than that of other developed countries, but research shows that common-sense public safety laws can reduce gun violence and save lives.

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PRESS RELEASE

Everytown Analysis: ATF Data Shows Increases In Key Indicators Of Gun Trafficking During 2020

12.20.2021

Nearly Twice As Many Crime Guns Recovered Within 3 Months of Purchase Compared With 2019; More Than 1 in 4 of All Crime Guns Recovered Was Bought in a Different State From Where It Was Recovered

The Number of Guns Recovered from People Under Age 24 Increased Faster than the Number for Any Other Age Group

Nine States Were the Source for Over Half of All Trafficked Guns in 2020

NEW YORK – Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, an arm of Everytown for Gun Safety, today released a new analysis of recently released ATF data revealing a sharp increase in guns recovered in crimes in 2020 within three months of being purchased – an indicator of possible gun trafficking. According to Everytown's analysis:

- The number of guns recovered in a crime within three months of being purchased nearly doubled from 2019 to 2020, from 19,586 to 38,377. As noted in reporting by The Trace and 538, "[l]aw enforcement officials generally view a short time-to-crime as an indicator that a firearm was purchased with criminal intent."
- The number of crime guns recovered from young adults 24 and under grew by 22% in 2020, making it the fastest growing age segment for gun recoveries, more than double the rate of increase of people aged 25 to 50.
- Over a quarter of all recovered guns moved across state lines before being recovered (27%).
- 9 states are the source for over 50% of trafficked* guns recovered in 2020: Georgia (2,259), Arizona (2,119), Virginia (1,785), Texas (1,570), Indiana (1,504), South Carolina (1,280), Mississippi (1,188), Nevada (1,162) and Florida (1,063).
- Seven states are the destination for over 50% of trafficked* guns: California (4,840), Illinois (2,446), New York (1,377), Texas (1,314), Maryland (1,283), Florida (1,114) and North Carolina (1,089).

Trafficked guns are defined as those that moved across state lines and were used in a crime in under three years from the time of purchase.*"This data sheds new light on the sharp spike in gun violence in 2020, suggesting that an increase in gun trafficking into illegal markets may have played a significant role," said **Nick Suplina, senior vice president for law and policy at Everytown for Gun Safety. "These alarming increases in key indicators of gun trafficking make it clear that we urgently need action at the federal, state and local levels to address gun trafficking and gun violence.”

DID YOU KNOW?

Every day, more than 110 Americans are killed with guns.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. WONDER Online Database, Underlying Cause of Death. A yearly average was developed using five years of the most recent available data: 2016 to 2020. Everytown For Gun Safety Support Fund
Last updated: 2.3.2022

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Every day, more than 110 people in America are killed with guns. The gun homicide rate in the U.S. is 26 times higher than that of other developed countries, but research shows that common-sense public safety laws can reduce gun violence and save lives.

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REPORT

Untraceable

The Rising Specter of Ghost Guns

5.14.2020

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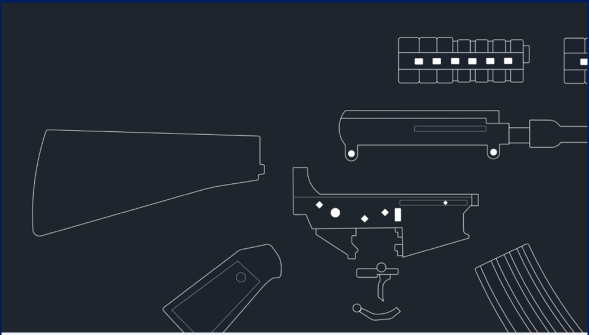
Learn More: Downloadable Guns Ghost Guns Gun Dealer Reform



SUMMARY

A ghost gun is a do-it-yourself, homemade gun made from easy-to-get, unregulated building blocks. These guns are made by an individual, not a federally licensed manufacturer or importer. The rise of ghost guns is the fastest-growing gun safety problem facing our country.

KEY POINTS

1	2	3
A ghost gun is a do it yourself gun made from easy-to-get building blocks.	These guns are made by an individual, not a federally licensed manufacturer or importer.	The rise of ghost guns is the fastest-growing gun safety problem.

PREFACE

Over the past year, Everytown has been investigating the rise of do-it-yourself, untraceable firearms known as ghost guns. As the below report makes clear, ghost guns undermine federal and state firearm laws and are a fast-growing scourge on the United States.

That was before the COVID-19 pandemic created a historic spike in gun sales.

Panic buying at gun stores is concerning enough, but at least these sales are subject to a background check. Unfortunately, the online market for unserialized ghost guns—which because of ATF inaction are not treated as firearms nor subject to a background check—has reached epidemic levels during this national emergency. Since we finalized our findings, further investigation revealed over a dozen online sellers of ghost guns experiencing shipping delays due to pandemic-related "exceptionally high demand." Based on the findings of the report, among those buyers are certain to be felons, domestic abusers, and gun traffickers who are unlawfully seeking a gun during this crisis.

Sadly, the outbreak of novel coronavirus has not stopped gun violence in all its forms nor has it decreased the demand for dangerous, untraceable ghost guns.

Introduction

In California, a 16-year-old boy shot and killed two of his classmates and shot and wounded three others with a handgun.[1] In Washington D.C., ghost guns were used in four recent fatal shootings.[2] In Arizona, a neo-Nazi sex offender bragged on Facebook about his arsenal of firearms and homemade assault-style rifles.[3] All of these people were legally prohibited from buying guns. But due to a dangerous wrong turn by ATF these individuals were able to access a haunting new source of firepower: ghost guns.

Show more

Executive Summary

In response to the proliferation of ghost guns and the unique risks they pose to public safety, Everytown prepared this report to inform the public, lawmakers, and law enforcement about the dangers of ghost guns, and call on policymakers and corporations to act to stop ghost guns from falling into dangerous hands.

First, the report surveys the rising specter of ghost guns, finding that unregulated commercial sources are expanding and ghost guns are increasingly easy and inexpensive to make. An Everytown analysis found that 68 percent of online sellers in existence today began selling ghost gun parts after 2014. Sellers provide all the necessary parts for a functional ghost gun, and claim key ghost gun parts can be made in as fast as 15 minutes, often at rates below assembled firearms sold at retail.

It perhaps is not then surprising that law enforcement agencies are recovering homemade, unserialized firearms from criminals at alarming rates. While the absence of comprehensive reporting makes analysis difficult, Everytown examined more than 100 federal prosecutions involving ghost guns, finding that ghost guns are connected to violent criminal enterprises, gun trafficking rings, and far-right extremists. This sample included more than 2,500 ghost guns, many of which were assault-style or machine guns. This first-of-its-kind analysis shows that ghost guns are not only for hobbyists, as some have claimed, but also have become a critical part of the criminal market for firearms.

Next, this report examines ghost guns' status under the law. Federal law, in fact, provides the framework for regulating ghost guns, but the report explains why—based on a dangerous wrong turn by ATF—the building blocks for ghost guns are currently unregulated under federal law.

Last, the report lays out recommendations for actions that should be taken by corporations and at the local, state, and federal levels of government:

1. ATF should adopt a new definition of "firearm frames and receivers" that would reassert regulation over ghost guns—like the proposed new definition formally submitted to ATF by Everytown in December 2019.[5]
2. If ATF fails to act, Congress should enact legislation to overrule ATF's interpretation and clarify that "unfinished" frames and receivers are firearms, prohibit the manufacture, sale, transfer, purchase, and possession of a gun without a serial number, and require ATF to collect data and publicly report on the availability and recovery of ghost guns.
3. States should pass laws to prohibit the purchase and sale of ghost guns and the critical parts to manufacture them, mandate that firearms that are manufactured at home are serialized, and require the licensure of individuals who want to manufacture firearms.
4. In states with laws that already include frames and receivers in the definition of firearm, state attorneys general should issue legal opinions to clarify the law to ensure that law enforcement can treat these parts as firearms.
5. ATF and state and local law enforcement should collect data and publicly report on the availability and use of ghost guns.
6. Companies that facilitate sales (e.g., credit cards, internet service providers, shipping) of the building blocks of ghost guns should take proactive measures to prevent the spread of ghost guns.

Ghost Gun Basics

A ghost gun is a DIY, homemade gun made from readily available, unregulated building blocks. It is produced by an individual rather than by an ATF-licensed manufacturer or importer.

A ghost gun has three key, related characteristics: It is unserialized, untraceable, and its building blocks are acquired without a background check. A firearm made by a licensed manufacturer or imported by an importer must be engraved with identifying information: a unique serial number, as well as the make and model. Under federal law as currently interpreted by ATF, ghost guns, because they require additional handiwork, are not required to have serial numbers and other identifying markings.

Because they are unserialized, ghost guns are untraceable. Typically, when police recover a firearm, they use the included serial number and other markings to initiate a trace request through ATF. ATF contacts the manufacturer to find out where it shipped the recovered gun, then the distributor to whom the gun was shipped, then the retailer who sold the gun to a consumer purchaser. By tracing a gun back to its first sale at retail, law enforcement agencies can have an initial lead in an investigation, identify straw purchasers and traffickers, and figure out how a gun arrived at a crime scene.

It is impossible to trace a ghost gun: It has no history, no records associated with it. As this report shows, the untraceability of ghost guns is one of their selling points and makes them attractive to criminals and gun traffickers trying to avoid being held responsible when their guns are recovered by law enforcement.

Because of ATF's current interpretation of the law, the core building blocks for a ghost gun can be acquired with no background check and no questions asked.

Understanding ghost guns requires knowing some basic facts about how guns are constructed. Frames and receivers are the core building blocks of firearms. In a pistol, the frame provides the basic bottom outline of the gun, housing the trigger and the magazine, while providing a foundation for the slide and barrel (i.e., the parts a bullet passes through when fired and cartridges are ejected from). In a semi-automatic rifle, the receiver houses the trigger parts and magazine and attaches to other parts.

Most ghost guns are made from "unfinished" frames and receivers. Unfinished frames and receivers are often marketed as "80%" complete, meaning a buyer needs to do only 20 percent of the work for the frame or receiver to be assembled into an operable firearm. As this report details, the difference between an unfinished frame or receiver and a finished, ready-to-use frame or receiver is a few tools and a couple of hours of work. But that small difference means everything: The unfinished frame or receiver has no serial number and can be sold without a background check, which enables people to circumvent state laws regulating assault weapons.

The difference between an unfinished frame or receiver and a finished, ready-to-use frame or receiver is a few tools and

a couple of hours of work.

Is it a ghost gun?

This report focuses on the usual core building blocks of ghost guns—the unfinished frame or receiver. Downloadable guns, undetectable guns, and defaced guns are sometimes referred to as ghost guns, but that is not always true.

DOWNLOADABLE GUNS?

Yes. **Downloadable guns** are one type of ghost gun and are created with computer code instructions programmed into a 3D printer. 3D-printed guns do not have serial numbers, and the code and 3D printer can be acquired without a background check.

UNDETECTABLE GUNS?

Maybe. **Undetectable guns** are firearms that cannot be detected by metal detectors or x-ray machines. Downloadable guns, because they typically are made with polymer, are undetectable with metal detectors unless a piece of metal is inserted into them. Federal law prohibits the manufacture, sale, and possession of undetectable guns.[6]

DEFACED GUNS?

No. **Defaced guns** are sometimes referred to as ghost guns, but defaced guns are different. A defaced gun is a commercially manufactured firearm that has had its serial number obliterated. A defaced gun gives a gun trafficker a similar advantage to a ghost gun: It is difficult to trace the gun back to them. Fortunately, ATF has the Obliterated Serial Number program to recover serial numbers from defaced guns,[7] federal law bans defaced guns,[8] and 30 states have enacted bans on defaced guns.[9]

Making Ghost Guns is Easy and Cheap

Decades ago, it may have required certain technical knowledge and skill to convert an unfinished frame or receiver into a fully functional firearm component—even more so for the unlicensed gunsmith who was building a receiver out of an aluminum block. But those days are over.

Everytown's analysis of the current market shows that ghost gun kits are designed and marketed for any person to do the necessary work. Online sellers have packaged the unfinished frame or receiver with all the other parts needed to complete the firearm and include instructional videos with easy-to-follow steps. These sellers are now one-stop shops for any person to get the building blocks, tools, and information to construct a fully operational ghost gun.

Online sellers[10] of ghost gun parts advertise how easy it is to make a ghost gun. A seller of an AK-47 build kit announced that the kit was "*one of the simplest processes to date*."[11] The seller helpfully provides a how-to video on the sale page.[12] Another seller boasts that, with their AR-15 kit, "*building time doesn't take too long. Within an hour or two, you should be breaking it in at the range*."[13] The top five instructional videos posted on YouTube that give guidance on finishing either a frame or receiver have been viewed over 3 million times.[14]

Sellers frequently offer a jig with their ghost gun kits. A jig is a device that fits around a frame or receiver and guides the drilling and milling necessary to finish the unfinished frame or receiver so that it is ready to be assembled into a functioning firearm. The kits also often include the exact drill bits necessary to finish the frame or receiver. All you need is an internet connection, a credit card, a file, and a drill—you can get everything else delivered straight to your home.

One website offering rifle- and pistol-building kits announces that their jig "makes it ridiculously easy for a non-machinist to finish their 80% lower in under 1 hour with no drill press required."[15] Another seller offers a jig for a variety of rifle receiver types that can be used to complete an unfinished receiver "in under 15 minutes with excellent results,"[16] and another claims that "[w]ithout the use of a press you can now build with ease and not spend a ton of money on the tooling needed."[17]

Computer numerical controlled (CNC) machines make finishing a frame or receiver even easier. CNC machines do the drilling and milling for the user, guided by computer code. Insert an unfinished receiver, select the appropriate design file, and a short time later you will have a precisely made, finished receiver. The creator of one of these devices specially designed to work on firearms said the purpose of his product was to help people with no technical expertise complete a ghost gun quickly.[18]

Sellers of ghost gun kits and unfinished frames and receivers offer good prices. Everytown's research found that it is possible to purchase an AR-15 build kit and a lower receiver for as little as $345.[19] And kits for making Glock-type pistol kits with a frame can go for as little as $400.[20] These prices compare favorably to the cost of buying an assembled firearm at retail.

Criminals take advantage of and profit from how easy and inexpensive it is to make ghost guns. A five-time convicted felon from Easthampton, Massachusetts, ordered all the parts he needed to make AR-15 rifles off the internet. Using a milling machine in his basement and following an instructional video, the man made ghost guns and sold them across state lines in New Hampshire, and claimed he could make a $300 profit on each.[21] Another convicted felon and alleged gang member in Salem, Massachusetts, made a profit by ordering ghost gun kits online for $400 to $500, then selling the assembled ghost guns for three times that amount.[22] This man called himself a "beast" because he was the best at making ghost gun pistols. Using tools you can get at a hardware store, he needed only 30 minutes to transform an unfinished pistol frame and parts kit into a functioning gun.[23]

How it's done

Now there are more options than ever to get a ghost gun.

The building blocks for ghost guns are available for purchase online, at gun shows, and at stores.[24] Major retailers like Brownells and MidwayUSA now offer unfinished frames and receivers and parts kits alongside regular firearms, accessories, and gear. The growth in the online market has been especially dramatic: Everytown's analysis uncovered 80 online sellers of unfinished frames and/or receivers.[25] These sites often offer all the parts a buyer needs to make their own firearm and there is frequently no limit on how many ghost gun building blocks a person can buy, with some sites even marketing unfinished frames and receivers in 5- and 10-packs.[26] Many of these websites include detailed guidance on how to finish machining a frame or receiver or even provide instructional videos that a novice builder can follow. A flourishing and unregulated online market in unfinished frames and receivers provides ready access to firearms to anyone who acquires a few basic tools and can follow simple instructions.

Sellers of ghost gun kits and unfinished frames and receivers clearly advertise that the products are meant to be built into operable ghost guns. The advertisements for unfinished frames and receivers feature pictures of completed firearms (not the unfinished product) that conspicuously show that there is no serial number. Lacking a serial number is a selling point for these products, with some products explicitly celebrating the lack of a serial number.[27] There is no doubt that these sellers are marketing firearms and no suggestion that the products being sold have any purpose other than becoming part of an operable weapon.

In addition, the sellers openly promote that these products are not regulated by ATF, often with copies of the formal letters sent from ATF saying the products are not regulated by ATF, alongside the pictures, parts, and instructional guides. Since these sellers are not required to get a license from ATF to sell the products, there is no reliable count of who is selling ghost gun building blocks as there is with gun dealers. Due to ATF's interpretation of the law, these businesses also operate outside of any ATF regulation or oversight.

Everytown undertook an investigation to better understand the size of the online marketplace. An extensive search of the internet uncovered a sample of 80 sellers offering unfinished frames and/or receivers for ghost guns. Most offered shipment directly to the customer; major credit cards were accepted at nearly all of these sites.

Additional research uncovered that online ghost gun part sales have only recently become a widespread phenomenon. Of the 80 sellers identified, Everytown found that 68 percent began offering the building blocks for ghost guns for sale between January 2015 and May 2020—only 26 of the identified sellers were offering unfinished frames and/or receivers by the end of 2014.[28] An analysis of business registrations shows that these online retailers are based in states all across the country, with at least one seller operating in 26 states.[29]

The emergence of this thriving market in ghost gun parts draws buyers who cannot legally purchase firearms. In Pennsylvania, an 18-year-old exchange student used one of these sites to get all the parts he needed to make a pistol. This was only discovered after he made a threat to "shoot up" his high school.[30] Several sellers attribute the popularity of ghost guns to perceived state action on gun safety, laying bare the appeal to those seeking to avoid gun safety laws. Still others see these easy-to-access websites as the vehicle to turn ghost gun trafficking into a business opportunity. A professional welder applied his training to making AR-15 rifles during a period of unemployment.[31] Another man quit his job because manufacturing firearms with a drill press in his home had become so lucrative.[32] A Rhode Island ghost gun trafficker told ATF that he made homemade guns because he needed the money.[33]

A Public Safety Threat

Police, concerned about a software developer's paranoid behavior, committed the man for mental health treatment and seized his guns. Years later, even though he was barred from buying a gun legally, the man bought a gun-building kit and made a Glock-style pistol. One day, he penned a note vowing to fight "[f]or all those who have [been] isolated, alienated, marginalized, and rejected" and regretting that he would disappoint his family. Then he walked into work with his ghost gun pistol and shot and wounded four coworkers before police confronted and shot and killed him. [34]

In communities across the country, law enforcement agencies are recovering increasing numbers of ghost guns. Thirty percent of guns recovered by ATF in California are unserialized, according to a 2019 report.[35] One official cited an even higher recovery rate at the local level: "*Forty-one percent, so almost half our cases we're coming across these 'ghost guns,'*" said Carlos A. Canino, special agent in charge of the ATF Los Angeles Field Division. "*What's changed is technology. The technology makes it easy for someone to make one of these, even to mass produce these.*"[36]

Other communities have seen significant ghost gun recoveries, with sharp increases in the past year. Washington, DC, saw a 360 percent increase in ghost gun recoveries, with law enforcement recovering 115 ghost guns in 2019, compared to 25 in 2018.[37] In a single week in 2020, DC police recovered six ghost gun pistols and one ghost gun assault-style rifle.[38] Similarly, from Philadelphia to Syracuse to Denver, ghost gun recoveries are increasing in cities, and law enforcement is speaking out about this growing problem.[39]

State and local law enforcement is recovering ghost guns from felons, domestic abusers, criminal gangs, drug dealers, extremists, and minors.[40] In the summer of 2018, a 25-year-old man was killed with a ghost gun in a Washington, DC shoot-out that left 32 shell casings at the scene.[41] An assault-style ghost gun was used by a shooter to pin down two law enforcement officers during a shoot-out near Catholic University in Washington, DC.[42] A Syracuse man used a ghost gun to shoot his 6-year-old nephew in the back after he showed up at his sister's house acting erratically and said: "Do you trust me?" before firing at the little boy.[43] In 2019, Onondaga County, New York, police recovered 23 ghost guns. Only one ghost gun had ever been recovered before 2018.[44]

Law enforcement leaders have been raising alarms over the effect ghost guns are having on public safety. Toniann Rebick, a criminalist with the San Diego Police Department, recalled being surprised when the first ghost gun that came across her desk, "*[t]hen a few weeks later, I had another one. All of a sudden these are common.*"[45] "*We work so hard in ensuring that individuals pass background checks and* *are responsible gun owners*," said Eddie Garcia, the chief of the San Jose Police Department. "*And that really gets thrown out the door when you have individuals that can just make a homemade gun*."[46] "*This is an emerging trend that is just continuing to increase*," Bill McMullan, then-special agent in charge of the ATF's Los Angeles Field Division, said during a press conference in 2017. "*Criminals are making their own weapons because they're not able to buy them legally*."[47] In 2018, leading law enforcement associations, including the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the Major Cities Chiefs Association, identified this public safety threat and called for action to address it.[48]

> **"We work so hard in ensuring that individuals pass background checks and are responsible gun owners. And that really gets thrown out the door when you have individuals that can just make a homemade gun."**
>
> **Eddie Garcia, Chief of the San Jose Police Department.**

These statistics and stories provide only a small window into this emerging crisis. Unfortunately, few law enforcement agencies have available data on ghost gun recoveries. Until agencies start tracking and reporting ghost gun recoveries, criminal prosecutions are the best indicator of the extent of the ghost gun problem.

Everytown reviewed 114 federal prosecutions from 2010 to April 2020 involving ghost guns, revealing 2,513 ghost guns connected to criminal activity.[49] This figure drastically under-represents the scale of ghost gun activity even within this set of prosecutions. For example, a defendant documented to have sold 23 homemade assault rifles to ATF informants and undercover officers boasted that he manufactured similar rifles "on a weekly basis" and had already trafficked 150 to customers in Mexico.[50] Another defendant sold six AR-15 style firearms to ATF agents and had "multiple boxes" of lower receivers with his drill press, vices, and other tools, indicating a much larger operation.[51]

Everytown's analysis revealed an unsurprising link between ghost guns and crime. In nearly half of the prosecutions reviewed, the defendants were prohibited from possessing any firearm and would not have passed a background check if one were required. More than 1,300 ghost guns connected to criminal activity were possessed, made, or sold by people prohibited from purchasing or possessing firearms, including felons, sex offenders, and domestic abusers. The vast majority, more than 2,200 of the ghost guns connected to criminal activity involved individuals charged with illegally manufacturing or dealing firearms. Nearly forty percent of these cases involved defendants who were prohibited from purchasing or possessing firearms.

2,500

More than 2,500 ghost guns were connected to criminal activity in 114 federal cases from 2010 to April 2020.

---

*Everytown identified prosecutions involving ghost guns or unfinished frames or receivers from press releases from ...

The federal cases also show that ghost guns are frequently used by criminal organizations and drug traffickers to facilitate their crimes. More than 1,300 ghost guns were used or sold by criminal enterprises to facilitate crimes including gun trafficking, robbery, drug trafficking, terrorism, and murder.

In one case, an associate of the Vineland Boys street gang was charged with manufacturing ghost gun AR-15s by finishing lower receivers, and selling the completed ghost guns to gang members to use in crimes. One gang member used a ghost gun AR-15 that was built from parts purchased from an online seller in an attempted murder of a rival gang member.

Given the range of organized criminal groups represented in the sample, perhaps it is no surprise that high-powered assault weapons featured heavily: Nearly 75 percent of the prosecutions involved ghost gun assault-style rifles or parts for ghost gun assault-style weapons, while nearly half of the prosecutions involved ghost gun versions of firearm types strictly regulated under the National Firearms Act, like fully automatic firearms or short-barreled rifles.

While prosecutions involving ghost guns demonstrate that ghost guns are being trafficked by criminals and possessed by people prohibited from having firearms, these prosecutions undoubtedly represent only a slice of all ghost gun–related criminal activity. Because ghost guns are untraceable, law enforcement cannot trace a ghost gun used in a crime back to the dealer that sold it or the person who first bought it.

Disarm Hate

Ghost guns arm hate-filled extremists.

Everytown's federal case review also found troubling examples of white supremacists obtaining ghost guns:

- In Arizona, FBI agents seized more than 20 guns from a neo-Nazi sex offender, including a ghost gun assault-style rifle.[52] He was caught because he bragged about his arsenal on Facebook.[53]
- A white supremacist group made its own fully automatic AR-15s after bombing a Minnesota mosque and attempting to bomb an Illinois women's health clinic.[54]
- In January 2020, authorities arrested three members of a white supremacist terror group who planned to travel to Virginia where they hoped to use a gun rights rally in Richmond to ignite a civil war.[55] One member of the group had made an AR-15 using parts and a jig widely available online.[56] After test-firing the rifle at a shooting range and noticing that more than one bullet fired at a time, he remarked, "*Oh oops, it looks like I accidentally made a machine gun*."[57]

Searches of popular online forums show that extremists openly discuss the benefit of ghost guns and share advice on how to make them. On 4chan, an online platform popular with white supremacists, commenters shared tips for building ghost guns amid a steady stream of racist, anti-Semitic, and homophobic slurs. "*Only use a drill for the holes. Use a mill for the rails and finish up with a dremel with a small bit*," one 4chan user advised. "*Don't listen to what these [slur] say, a drill press is fine for your holes*." A rabidly racist and anti-Semitic user posted a guide for building an "untraceable, unserialized AR-15," which has been circulating on 4chan for years. After an extremist in Germany used a homemade gun to attack worshipers at a synagogue, 4chan users shared a guide for making the shooter's gun. Some commenters noted how cheap and easy it is to order gun kits online and enjoy home delivery with no background check. Others extolled the benefits of ghost guns' untraceability.

ATF is Failing to Regulate Ghost Guns

As described in this report, federal authorities are admirably scrambling to contain this outbreak of ghost guns used in serious crimes through investigations and prosecutions of criminals with fully assembled ghost guns. But federal law, if interpreted properly by ATF, could cut off this scourge at the source.

Federal gun laws regulate “firearms,” so the precise meaning of that term is important. Congress broadly defined “firearm” to include completed, fully operable weapons as well as their core building blocks, frames and receivers.

> **“The term ‘firearm’ means (A) any weapon (including a starter gun) which will or is designed to or may readily be converted to expel a projectile by the action of an explosive; (B) the frame or receiver of any such weapon; (C) any firearm muffler or firearm silencer; or (D) any destructive device. Such term does not include an antique firearm.”**[58]

ATF determines when a product qualifies as a firearm and is responsible for deciding, on a case-by-case basis, when a frame or receiver meets the definition of “firearm.” ATF makes these determinations when the sellers of “unfinished” frames and receivers want confirmation that their products will not be regulated by ATF. A business sends a sample frame or receiver to ATF, and ATF provides a determination letter explaining whether or not that frame or receiver qualifies as a firearm. The sellers often post these letters to reassure customers that the product is not regulated by ATF and does not require a background check.

In these letters, ATF has taken the position that an AR-15 lower receiver does not qualify as a firearm as long as one part of the receiver—the trigger cavity—is not milled out. ATF told businesses that these unfinished receivers could be sold without serial numbers and without background checks.[59] ATF made similar determinations about pistol frames.[60] It does not matter if the unfinished frame or receiver could be made into a functioning firearm in less than one hour. Therefore, businesses are free to sell these unfinished frames and receivers—and all the other parts of a firearm—to anyone who orders them online or buys them at a gun show or store, no matter how easy it is for the buyer to turn their purchase into a working gun. Even a convicted felon can purchase an unfinished receiver or frame online because, in ATF’s view, these are essentially unregulated pieces of metal—which also means many sellers are not subject to ATF regulation and oversight.

For several reasons, ATF’s current position—that unfinished frames and receivers are not firearms—is incorrect and unwise.

First, ATF’s current position is incorrect because it contradicts federal law. Under the definition of “firearm” currently in federal law, a frame or receiver qualifies as a firearm if it can, or is designed to, or may readily be converted to be part of an operable weapon. Therefore, any frame or receiver should be considered a firearm if —with a little time and some drilling and assembly work—it can be made into a functional gun.

Second, ATF’s current position is undercut by its past positions. From the 1980s until at least 2002, ATF classified a frame or receiver based on how much work remained for that item to be made part of a functioning firearm and how long that work would take. If it took only 75 minutes to drill out the interior of an AR-15 receiver for it to be used to construct a functioning rifle, ATF determined that the receiver was a firearm subject to federal law.[61] But in the mid-2000s—after the federal Assault Weapons Ban expired and when homemade gun supplies and tools started to become more accessible online and more affordable—ATF started suggesting that it would not characterize an AR-15 receiver as a firearm as long as one part of the receiver—the trigger cavity—was not milled out.[62] The reason ATF changed its position is unclear.

Third, ATF’s position is unwise because it undermines all other federal gun laws. At their core, federal gun laws aim to “make it possible to keep firearms out of the hands of those not legally entitled to possess them.”[63] Though written long before easily manufactured ghost guns became prevalent, these laws were designed to address the same problems that ghost guns now present: the uncontrolled interstate distribution of firearms, which allows dangerous individuals to readily acquire firearms without a background check.

Federal gun laws seek to control the distribution of firearms by regulating firearm businesses, requiring all firearms to have serial numbers, and requiring firearm businesses to sell firearms only to buyers who can legally possess them. These laws require any person or business that manufactures or sells firearms to be licensed to ensure that the legal market for firearms works to keep guns away from people who shouldn’t have them. All federal firearms licensees must make a record of all the guns they stock or make and all the guns they sell or export (i.e., their acquisitions and dispositions).[64] Manufacturers and importers must stamp each firearm with a unique serial number and other identifying markings and keep records of this information.[65] Since 1994, an individual purchaser must pass a background check before buying a firearm from a licensed dealer.[66]

Federal gun laws cannot achieve their objectives if ATF simply allows businesses to sell DIY kits without performing background checks on purchase, without keeping any record of sales, and without placing a serial number on each frame and receiver.

The predictable result of ATF’s current position is the scourge of ghost guns

The predictable result of ATF's current position is the scourge of ghost guns evidenced in local ghost gun recoveries and myriad federal prosecutions of violent criminals, gun traffickers, and extremist groups, an ironic if tragic case of the government inventing the very problem it seeks to solve.

Policy Solutions and Recommendations

In February 2019, ATF received a tip about a ghost gun trafficker operating near Worcester, Massachusetts.[67] *Talking to a customer who, unbeknownst to the trafficker, was an ATF informant, the trafficker said that he could make and customize any firearm the customer wanted, offering Glock-style pistols and fully automatic AR-15s for sale.*[68] *But the trafficker was worried after seeing media coverage about people "constantly getting busted with guns . . . without serial numbers."*[69] *The trafficker suspected that ghost guns would be regulated eventually, but for the time being, "he was getting what he could before authorities started cracking down on it."*[70]

As ghost gun recoveries rise and more crimes are committed with ghost guns, law enforcement organizations have sounded the alarm and state and local governments have begun taking action. Everytown recommends that corporations and policymakers at the federal, state, and local levels take the following actions to stop ghost guns from falling into dangerous hands and to prevent gun violence.

1. **ATF should adopt a new definition of "firearm frame and receiver" to regulate the core building blocks for ghost guns.**
   Since the market for ghost guns has exploded, ATF has done nothing, as of May 2020, through formal rulemaking procedures to expressly address ghost guns.[71] ATF is responsible for issuing regulations interpreting federal gun laws. In fact, a longstanding regulation defines the term "firearm frame or receiver" but that definition provides no clarity about the condition that a frame or receiver must be in to qualify as a firearm. The regulation was not meant to provide that clarity; ATF enacted it to specify the place where a manufacturer or importer should place a firearm's serial number and other markings.[72]

   ATF could easily change its position that unfinished frames and receivers are not firearms if it amended this regulatory definition. An amended definition could make clear that a frame or receiver is a firearm if it is designed to be part a functioning firearm, or could easily be turned into one. Former acting director of the ATF, Thomas Brandon, said he thought ATF should reclassify ghost gun kits as firearms and, prior to his retirement in April 2019, was ready to recommend that certain ghost gun kits be reclassified as firearms because of the ease of assembly.[73]

In December 2019, Everytown submitted a formal request to ATF to issue a new regulation that would reassert federal regulation of unfinished frames and receivers and clarify that the lower receiver of an AR-15 is covered by the 1968 Gun Control Act's definition of firearm. ATF should adopt a new definition of firearm frame or receiver to read like this:

***Firearm frame or receiver. That part of a firearm which provides housing for the trigger group, including any such part (1) that is designed, intended, or marketed to be used in an assembled, operable firearm, or (2) that, without the expenditure of substantial time and effort, can be converted for use in an assembled, operable firearm*.**

ATF could commence rulemaking immediately and is under pressure to do so: in February 2020, US Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York wrote to US Attorney General William Barr and ATF Acting Director Regina Lombardo calling on ATF to regulate unfinished frames and receivers.[74] In April 2020, Members of the House Judiciary Committee also sent a letter to the ATF seeking answers regarding the measures the ATF has undertaken to address the surge in ghost guns sales during the COVID-19 pandemic.[75]

② **Congress should enact legislation to regulate ghost guns.**
Should ATF fail to act, Congress can pass legislation to overrule ATF's interpretation and address the ghost gun problem. In the 116th Congress, bills have been introduced to regulate unfinished frames and receivers as firearms, prohibit the manufacture, sale, transfer, and purchase of a gun without a serial number, and require government reporting on the availability of ghost guns. For example:

– Representative David Cicilline (D-RI) sponsored the Untraceable Firearms Act of 2019, which would regulate unfinished frames and receivers as firearms and prohibit the manufacture, sale, transfer, and purchase of a gun without a serial number.[76]
– Along similar lines, Representative Mike Quigley (D-IL) introduced the Trafficking Reduction And Criminal Enforcement (TRACE) Act, which would classify unfinished frames and receivers, and gun-building kits, as firearms.[77]
– Representative Adriano Espaillat (D-NY) introduced the Ghost Guns Are Guns Act, which would treat as a firearm any combination of parts for making into a firearm.[78]

In addition to passing the bills mentioned here, Congress should enact legislation to ensure that the definition of receiver covers the AR-15, require ATF to collect data and publicly report on the availability and recovery of ghost guns, and regulate the businesses that sell unfinished frames and receivers and gun-building kits.

③ **States should enact laws to regulate ghost guns.**
While a strong federal solution is critical to cutting off easy access to the parts and kits that make it so easy for criminals and other prohibited people to create unserialized and undetectable firearms, states can and should take action to empower local law enforcement to act to prevent the trafficking and criminal use of ghost guns.

In fact, several states have taken action to regulate ghost guns, and several more, including Delaware,[79] Hawaii,[80] New York,[81] Maryland,[82] and Rhode Island,[83] were actively considering ghost gun legislation before the COVID-19 pandemic led to the early adjournment or suspension of most state legislature's sessions. The District of Columbia, realizing the urgent need for action based on the rise of ghost guns used in crime, passed emergency legislation to stop the unregulated sale of the building blocks for ghost guns as the DC Council works on a permanent solution.[84]

States have taken different approaches to regulating ghost guns, but at a minimum, these laws should make it illegal to purchase or sell ghost guns and the critical parts to manufacture them. This could include provisions to ensure that unfinished frames and receivers cannot be obtained without a background check and provisions to ensure that any firearms that are manufactured are serialized. States can also consider restrictions that require the licensure of individuals who want to manufacture firearms.[85] *(See Appendix A for an overview of state ghost gun laws.)*

4 **State attorneys general should issue legal opinions to clarify existing laws to ensure that law enforcement can treat ghost gun parts as firearms.**
Recognizing the threat to public safety posed by ghost guns, state attorneys general have also taken strong steps to regulate ghost guns.

In several states, state law already includes frames and receivers in the definition of firearms. As with federal law, these laws can and should be interpreted to classify unfinished frames and receivers as firearms. In many places, state attorneys general have the power to issue legal opinions to clarify the law, and an opportunity exists to ensure that law enforcement can treat these parts as firearms. That is exactly what the Pennsylvania Attorney General recently did when he issued a legal opinion to clarify that 80% receivers meet the definition of receivers under current Pennsylvania law.[86] The effect of this was to serve notice to law enforcement that these unfinished receivers should be treated like firearms for the purposes of enforcing certain Pennsylvania firearms laws.[87]

Opportunities also exist to ensure that companies selling these products have taken steps to market and distribute them in compliance with state law. The New Jersey Attorney General sued a seller of AR-15 kits for advertising, offering, and selling the kits to New Jersey residents without warning that ghost guns are illegal under state law.[88] The New York Attorney General sent cease-and-desist letters to ghost gun companies who were offering ghost gun parts and kits for sale in possible violation of state firearm laws.[89]

5 **ATF and state and local law enforcement should collect data and publicly report on the availability and use of ghost guns.**
On February 5, 2020, FBI Director Christopher Wray appeared before the Judiciary Committee of the US House of Representatives, where he was asked whether the FBI had seen an increase in the number of ghost guns during FBI investigations.[90] Director Wray, while acknowledging the growing concern at the FBI over ghost guns, was unable at the time of the hearing to provide statistical information about ghost guns. This brief exchange highlights the simple fact that to better respond to the threat of ghost guns, we need better data and information about them and their use in gun crime. After the hearing, Representative Madeleine Dean (D-PA) sent a letter to Director Wray following up on his comments and requesting data and information on ghost gun recoveries.[91]

While ATF and other law enforcement agencies have released some limited information about the number of ghost guns and their use in gun crime, it is critical that we have strong national data and a process in place to record the number of ghost guns used in gun crimes and to know how many are recovered by ATF. To accomplish this, ATF should immediately develop an internal data collection process to record when ghost guns are involved in a criminal investigation and should release data about their use in crimes to the public as part of its reporting on crime gun recoveries. This data should be used by policymakers, researchers, and law enforcement to develop more effective and targeted policy solutions to address ghost guns.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, which was signed into law on December 20, 2019, included a provision similar to legislation introduced by Representative Max Rose (D-NY)[92] that directs the Department of Homeland Security to conduct an annual threat assessment of ghost guns for the next four years, with the first report due in June 2020.[93]

⑥ **Companies should not facilitate the sale of ghost guns in light of the risk that these firearms will be obtained by prohibited people or used in crimes**

The companies selling the building blocks for ghost guns are aware that their products are being used illegally, but they have not taken any steps to prevent firearms from falling into the wrong hands. Given that these manufacturers actively court business from those seeking to evade the law, it is unlikely that they will voluntarily change their business practices to guard against criminal abuse.

But the companies that facilitate the online acquisition of ghost guns can do the right thing by putting conditions on using or withholding their services. Mastercard, Visa, Discover, and American Express need not process sales of products like these that run a substantial risk of being used illegally. The internet service providers that host these websites can decline business from ghost gun operators, as GoDaddy and Google did with the The Daily Stormer website.[94] And common carriers like FedEx need not agree to ship packages that contain the building blocks of ghost guns. Absent meaningful action from government, these private actors could do a great deal to protect our communities from ghost guns.

Conclusion

Ghost guns are a threat to public safety. ATF's failure to regulate has allowed a marketplace for ghost guns to thrive that is being exploited by violent criminals, gun traffickers, and extremist groups. ATF can and should take immediate action to update the regulations and put a stop to the unregulated sale of the building blocks for ghost guns.

Appendix A

LEGAL OVERVIEW OF STATE GHOST GUN LAWS

California: Requires serial numbers and regulates the building blocks for ghost guns.

California requires all manufactured or assembled firearms to bear a unique serial number or mark of identification.[95] Prior to assembling a firearm, or upon moving into the state, people must apply to the California Department of Justice to obtain a unique serial number or mark of identification for unserialized guns.[96] The Justice Department conducts a background check and ensures compliance with state law before issuing the identification number.[97] Upon receiving the identification number, the owner must affix it to the firearm.[98] California prohibits the sale or transfer of these firearms.[99]

In 2019, California expanded its law to require that by July 1, 2024, all sales of firearm precursor parts must take place through a licensed vendor and to require that the state conduct background checks on transfers of frames and receivers by July 1, 2025.[100] Online sellers of precursor parts will have to deliver their parts to a vendor before they can be transferred to a buyer.[101]

Connecticut: Requires serial numbers, regulates the building blocks for ghost guns, and regulates undetectable firearms.

Connecticut prohibits manufacturing firearms without obtaining a serial number from the Connecticut Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, which is issued after a background check, and affixing it to the firearm.[102]

Connecticut also requires a background check before the sale and transfer of unfinished frames and lower receivers, generally prohibits the sale or transfer of unfinished frames and lower receivers without serial numbers and prohibits people prohibited by state law from having guns from possessing these parts.[103] Finally, Connecticut prohibits guns made from polymer plastic that are undetectable by metal detectors.[104]

Massachusetts: Regulates undetectable firearms.
Massachusetts prohibits the sale, transfer, or possession of any weapon that is undetectable by a walk-through metal detector or x-ray machine commonly used at airports.[105]

New Jersey: Requires a license to manufacture a firearm; regulates undetectable firearms; and prohibits distribution of downloadable gun schematics.
New Jersey prohibits manufacturing firearms without a manufacturer's license[106] and generally prohibits the purchase of frames and receivers without a serial number.[107] New Jersey also prohibits the manufacture or sale of undetectable firearms[108] and generally prohibits using a 3D printer to manufacture firearms and the distribution of instructions for the 3D printing of firearms.[109]

New York: Regulates undetectable firearms.
New York prohibits the possession, transport, and manufacture of an undetectable firearm.[110] The legislature is considering legislation regarding untraceable firearms.

Virginia: Regulates undetectable firearms.
Virginia prohibits the sale, transfer, and possession of plastic firearms, which are defined as any firearm containing less than 3.7 ounces of electromagnetically detectable metal in the barrel, cylinder, slide, frame, or receiver and which, when subject to an x-ray machine commonly used at airports, does not generate an image that accurately depicts its shape.[111]

Washington: Regulates undetectable and untraceable firearms.
Washington prohibits facilitating the manufacturing of undetectable or untraceable firearms by a person prohibited from having guns,[112] prohibits the manufacturing or possession of undetectable firearms,[113] and prohibits the manufacturing of an untraceable firearm with the intent to sell it.[114]

Everytown Research & Policy is a program of Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, an independent, non-partisan organization dedicated to understanding and reducing gun violence. Everytown Research & Policy works to do so by conducting methodologically rigorous research, supporting evidence-based policies, and communicating this knowledge to the American public.

THE LATEST

The Rise of Firearm Suicide Among Young Americans

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Report

ATF's Final Rule to End the Proliferation of Dangerous, Untraceable Ghost Guns

The ATF announced a final rulemaking clarifying that the core building blocks of ghost guns are firearms under the law.

Fact Sheet

Ghost Guns Recoveries and Shootings

Everytown Research & Policy has collected examples of reported murders and shootings using ghost guns since 2013.

Data Tracker

Cuando el tiroteo se detiene: El impacto de la violencia con armas de fuego en los sobrevivientes de los Estados Unidos

Report

DID YOU KNOW?

Women in the U.S. are 28 times more likely to be killed by guns than women in other high-income countries.

Everytown analysis of the most recent year of gun deaths by country (2015 to 2019), GunPolicy.org (accessed January 7, 2022).

Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund®

Join Us.

Every day, more than 110 people in America are killed with guns. The gun homicide rate in the U.S. is 26 times higher than that of other developed countries, but research shows that common-sense public safety laws can reduce gun violence and save lives.

JOIN US

- How do background checks work?
- What is the background check loophole?
- Why does closing this loophole matter?
- How do we close this loophole?
- Does closing this loophole make us safer?

FACT SHEET

Update Background Check Laws

6.10.2020 | Last Updated: 6.22.2021

Share Print

Learn More: Background Checks on All Gun Sales Gun Dealer Reform Keeping Guns Out of the Wrong Hands

Updating federal and state laws to require background checks on all gun sales is a common-sense way to keep guns out of the wrong hands and keep our communities safe. That is why:

93%

93 percent of American voters support requiring background checks on all gun sales, including 89 percent of Republicans and 89 percent of gun owners.

Everytown & Giffords Gun Safety Memo

Last updated: 3.25.2021

How do background checks work?

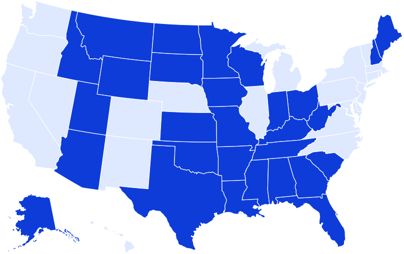
Background checks are the foundation of any effective effort to reduce gun violence and keep guns out of the wrong hands. Since federal law began requiring these background checks in 1994, over **4 million** sales to prohibited purchasers have been blocked.[1]

What is the background check loophole?

Federal law does not address gun sales by unlicensed sellers (e.g., non-dealers who sell guns online or at gun shows). This loophole enables people with felony convictions, domestic abuse restraining orders, and/or prohibiting histories of mental illness to buy guns with no questions asked.

Thankfully, 21 states and Washington, DC, have enacted laws that require background checks for all handgun sales at the point of sale and/or as part of a purchase permit.[2] But the loophole still exists in 29 states.

29 states have the Background Check Loophole



🟦 **State with Background Check Loophole**

Last updated: 4.23.2021

Why does closing this loophole matter?

22%

22 percent of Americans report acquiring their most recent gun without a background check.

Miller M., Hepburn L., and Azrael D., "Firearm Acquisition Without Background Checks: Results of a National Survey...

Everytown's research into Armslist.com—the largest online gun marketplace, which did not exist when the federal background check law was enacted 25 years ago—found that prospective online buyers are seven times more likely to fail a background check than other firearm purchasers or permit applicants, suggesting that prohibited buyers seek out opportunities to skip a background check.[3]

How do we close this loophole?

Under a point-of-sale background check law, unlicensed sellers must meet their buyers at the location of a licensed gun dealer, who runs a background check using the same process already used for the sale of their own inventory. This is convenient because:

90%

Nearly 90 percent of FBI background checks are completed immediately.

"National Instant Criminal Background Check System (N...

59k

There are nearly 59,000 licensed gun dealers across the country. That's four times the number of McDonald's and nearly twice the number of post offices.

Federal Firearms Listings. *ATF*. (2020). https://bit.ly/2SP...

99% of Americans live within 10 miles of a gun dealer—so it's easy and convenient to get the background check done.[4]

Percent of Population within 10 Miles of a Gun Dealer by State

Show 10 entries

State	%
Alabama	98.4%
Alaska	93.5%
Arizona	96.7%
Arkansas	98.2%
California	98.5%
Colorado	99.4%
Connecticut	100.0%
Delaware	100.0%
District of Columbia	100.0%
Florida	99.8%

Next ›

Does closing this loophole make us safer?

In January 2018, a woman in Appleton, Wisconsin, was shot and killed by her husband, who purchased a firearm from a seller he met online, despite his prohibiting felony conviction.[5] A background check requirement for unlicensed sales could have saved her. States that go beyond federal law and require background checks for unlicensed sales are associated with a 10 percent lower homicide rate,[6] as well as lower rates of firearm suicide[7] and gun trafficking.[8]

States that go beyond federal law and require background checks for unlicensed gun sales are associated with:

↓ 10%

States that go beyond federal law and require background checks for unlicensed gun sales are associated with 10 percent lower homicide rates.

Siegel M., and Boine C. "What Are the Most E...

↓

States that go beyond federal law and require background checks for unlicensed gun sales are associated with markedly lower rates of firearm suicide.

Fleegler EW., Lee LK., Monuteaux MC., Heme...

↓

States that go beyond federal law and require background checks for unlicensed gun sales are associated with markedly lower rates of gun trafficking.

Webster D. W., Vernick J. S., & Bulzacchelli M....

BACKGROUND CHECK STORIES

THE DANGER OF NO-QUESTIONS-ASKED GUN SALES BETWEEN STRANGERS

Fact Sheet

These stories provide a few illustrations of tragedies that could have been prevented if a background check was required when the shooter bought their gun. While they do not cover every case, these stories provide important examples of why legislation to require a background check on all gun sales is crucial.

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Report

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Report

DID YOU KNOW?

Women in the U.S. are 28 times more likely to be killed by guns than women in other high-income countries.

Everytown analysis of the most recent year of gun deaths by country (2015 to 2019), GunPolicy.org (accessed January 7, 2022).

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FACT SHEET

Assault Weapons and High-Capacity Magazines

3.22.2019 | Last Updated: 3.18.2022

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Learn More: Prohibit Assault Weapons Prohibit High-Capacity Magazines

Introduction

Assault weapons and high-capacity magazines are commonplace in mass shootings and make shootings more lethal. Research shows that restrictions on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines can help prevent mass shooting injuries and fatalities as well as reduce the devastation of daily gun violence in America.

Background

Assault weapons and high-capacity magazines are exceptionally deadly. High-capacity magazines, commonly defined as ammunition magazines capable of holding more than 10 rounds, allow a shooter to fire more rounds without pausing to reload. The more rounds a shooter can fire consecutively, the more gunshot wounds they can inflict during an attack.[1]

Assault weapons are generally high-powered semiautomatic firearms where each round has up to four times the muzzle velocity of a handgun round.[2] This means that each round from an assault weapon inflicts greater damage to the human body than a round from a typical handgun.[3] What's more, assault weapons are generally designed to fire rounds at a greater rate than other firearms, and when combined with high-capacity magazines, they enable a shooter to fire more rounds over a short period.

	Seven states and Washington, D.C. have some type of assault weapons prohibition in place.	Nine states and Washington, D.C. have some type of high-capacity magazine prohibition in place.
California	✔	✔
Colorado		✔
Connecticut	✔	✔
Hawaii	✔	✔
Maryland	✔	✔
Massachusetts	✔	✔
New Jersey	✔	✔
New York	✔	✔
Vermont		✔
Washington, D.C.	✔	✔

Key Findings

Assault weapons and high-capacity magazines are frequently used in mass shootings, resulting in more deaths and injuries. Between 2009 and 2020 in the US, the 10 mass shooting incidents with the most casualties all involved the use of a firearm equipped with a high-capacity magazine, an assault weapon, or both (Las Vegas, NV; Orlando, FL; Aurora, CO; El Paso, TX; Fort Hood, TX; Sutherland Springs, TX; San Bernardino, CA; Parkland, FL; Odessa/Midland, TX; and Newtown, CT).[4] The 2009 Fort Hood, TX, shooter—who shot and killed 13 people and injured 32 more—specifically sought out high-capacity magazines in preparation for his attack. A witness to the shooter's purchase at a Killeen, TX, gun dealer reported, "He gave me two specifications. He said he wanted the most technologically advanced weapon on the market and the one with the highest magazine capacity."[5]

A study of mass shooting incidents between 1981 and 2017 found that assault rifles accounted for 86 percent of the 501 fatalities reported in 44 mass shooting incidents.[6] An analysis of Everytown's Mass Shootings in America database similarly reveals the outsize impact the use of assault weapons and/or high-capacity magazines has on the number of casualties associated with these incidents. Between 2009 and 2020, mass shootings where an assault weapon was used accounted for a quarter of all mass shooting deaths and more than three-quarters of all injuries.[7] Shootings where assault weapons were used resulted in nearly six times as many people shot, more than twice as many people killed, and nearly 22 times as many people wounded per incident on average.[8] Incidents involving a firearm equipped with a high-capacity magazine resulted in nearly five times as many people shot, more than twice as many fatalities, and nearly 14 times as many injuries per incident on average compared to those that did not involve the use of high-capacity magazines.[9]

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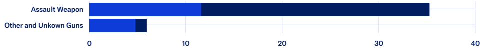
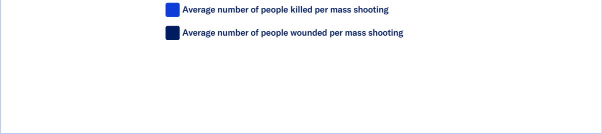
Assault weapons led to 6x as many people shot per mass shooting





Source: Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "Mass Shootings in America 2009-2020," (2021).

Last updated: 3.18.2022

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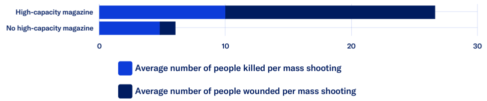
High-capacity magazines led to 5x as many people shot per mass shooting



Source: Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "Mass Shootings in America 2009-2020," (2021). "No high-capacity magazine" includes incidents where magazine capacity is unknown.

Last updated: 3.18.2022

Assault weapons and high-capacity magazines are frequently used in the crimes that plague our nation. A 2018 study estimated that firearms equipped with high-capacity magazines, which include assault weapons as well as other high-capacity semiautomatic firearms, account for 22 to 36 percent of crime guns in most places, with some estimates upwards of 40 percent for cases involving serious violence, including homicides of law enforcement officers. The problem may be getting worse: research suggests the prevalence of high-capacity magazines in guns used in crimes has grown substantially since the 2004 expiration of the federal prohibition on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines.[10]

Evidence

A growing body of research shows that states can reduce gun violence by prohibiting assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. States with restrictions on magazine size experience mass shootings at less than half the rate of states without restrictions.[11] According to Dr. Michael Siegel, a researcher at Boston University, "Whether a state has a large capacity ammunition magazine ban is the single best predictor of the mass shooting rates in that state."[12]

A 2019 study found that mass shooting fatalities were 70 percent less likely to occur from 1994 to 2004, when the federal prohibition on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines was in effect, than during the 12 years studied before and after the prohibition. Researchers estimate a federal Assault Weapon Ban (AWB) would have prevented 314 of 448 mass shooting deaths that occurred during the studied periods where the AWB was not in effect.[13]

In Virginia, the AWB was associated with significant reductions in the share of guns used in crimes that were equipped with high-capacity magazine, down to an all-time low of 10 percent in 2004. When the prohibition expired, the share of Virginia crime guns equipped with high-capacity magazines rapidly increased, reaching 22 percent by 2010.[14]

Everytown Research & Policy is a program of Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, an independent, non-partisan organization dedicated to understanding and reducing gun violence. Everytown Research & Policy works to do so by conducting methodologically rigorous research, supporting evidence-based policies, and communicating this knowledge to the American public.

THE LATEST

The Rise of Firearm Suicide Among Young Americans

Firearm suicide is having a devastating impact on American youth, particularly during COVID-19. But suicide can be prevented.

Report

ATF's Final Rule to End the Proliferation of Dangerous, Untraceable Ghost Guns

The ATF announced a final rulemaking clarifying that the core building blocks of ghost guns are firearms under the law.

Fact Sheet

Ghost Guns Recoveries and Shootings

Everytown Research & Policy has collected examples of reported murders and shootings using ghost guns since 2013.

Data Tracker

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ISSUES

Lack of Gun Industry Accountability

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LACK OF GUN INDUSTRY ACCOUNTABILITY

- What is the problem?
- Why is it an issue?
- By the numbers
- What are the solutions?
- Featured Resources
- All Resources

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Every day, more than 110 people are shot and killed in the United States, but the gun industry plays by a special set of rules that allows it to avoid responsibility and endanger public safety.

Firearms are not regulated like other consumer products. The laws regulating how guns may be sold are outdated, and members of the gun industry that skirt the law enjoy special legal protection. Guns are not required to have safety features that are shown to reduce unintentional shootings and theft. Information is hidden from the public on which gun dealers supply firearms recovered in crime. Gun dealers are rarely inspected or held accountable even though violations are common. Gun manufacturers and sellers that skirt the law have a unique, broad immunity from legal accountability.

WHY IS IT AN ISSUE?

Laws regulating the gun industry have not been strengthened since the 1960s.

The gun industry plays a central role in preventing guns from ending up in the wrong hands and ensuring that all forms of gun violence are prevented. Safety features can ensure firearms can't be accessed by thieves or children, common sense sales practices can stem the flow of illegal guns into cities, information on who supplies crime guns can lead to targeted reform efforts, and accountability in the courts can shut down or reform bad actors.

Laws regulating the gun industry have not been strengthened since the 1960s and the gun lobby has been able to write special protections for itself while weakening the agencies responsible for regulating it. A gun industry that plays by its own rules has been able to fuel a gun violence crisis with no regard for the harm it causes.

BY THE NUMBERS

2M

Gun manufacturers received nearly two million pieces of data about firearms recovered at crime scenes or in criminal investigations between 2010 and 2019.

Stat

380k

The most recent nationally representative survey found that approximately 380,000 guns are stolen from private gun owners every year.

Stat

WHAT ARE THE SOLUTIONS?

Repeal Gun Industry Immunity

The Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (PLCAA) blocks legal responsibility for gun manufacturers that have failed to innovate and make guns safer, and for manufacturers, distributors, and dealers with irresponsible, reckless and negligent sales practices that contribute to the flood of illegal firearms in our communities.

Gun Dealer Reform

Laws on how gun stores conduct their business have not been strengthened since the 1960s. Congress should pass comprehensive gun dealer reform.

Smart Guns and Gun Safety Features

A personalized—or “smart”—gun is a firearm that employs authorized-use technology, like the thumb scan or passcode available on many smartphones, to turn stolen guns and guns accessed by children into harmless pieces of steel. If widely implemented, it would be a game-changer for keeping guns out of the hands of children and criminals.

Repeal Restrictions on Gun Trace Data

Since 2003, the Tiahrt Amendments have restricted law enforcement's ability to investigate and prosecute gun crimes. This data-blocking protects corrupt gun dealers and hinders law enforcement.

FEATURED RESOURCES

The Economic Cost of Gun Violence

Federal, state, and local governments are spending a combined average of $34.8 million each day to deal with the aftermath of gun violence.

Report

Armed and Dangerous: How the Gun Lobby Enshrines Guns as Tools of the Extreme Right

For decades, the gun lobby has enabled extremists to access guns through its opposition of common sense gun laws.

Report

Untraceable: The Rising Specter of Ghost Guns

Ghost guns are do-it-yourself, homemade guns made from easy-to-get, unregulated building blocks.

Report

Stolen Guns Pose a Tremendous Risk to Public Safety

Thousands of guns are stolen every year and often wind up at crime scenes. Stolen guns pose a tremendous risk to public safety.

Fact Sheet

LACK OF GUN INDUSTRY ACCOUNTABILITY

All Resources

NRA in Crisis: 2020

Our exclusive report investigates the allegations of extortion, corruption, and a failed coup attempt in the NRA in 2020.

Report

Five Ways to Enhance the Gun Violence Prevention Strategy in Your City

Cities that have sustained success preventing gun violence have deployed multi-disciplinary, community-involved approaches to response and prevention. Below are five steps that you can take…

Fact Sheet

The SHARE Act Is Dangerous and Unnecessary

Bottom Line: Silencers pose a significant danger in the wrong hands, making it harder for bystanders or law enforcement to identify and react quickly to…

Fact Sheet

Business As Usual

History of a Loophole Americans suffer from an extraordinary rate of gun violence, 20 times higher than nations with comparable levels of economic development…

Report

Guns in Bars

Guns and alcohol don’t mix. There is strong evidence that people under the influence of alcohol are at an elevated risk of violent behavior.

Fact Sheet

DID YOU KNOW?

The most recent nationally representative survey found that approximately 380,000 guns are stolen from private gun owners every year.

Hemenway D., Azrael D., & Miller M. “Whose guns are stolen? The epidemiology of Gun theft victims”. *Injury Epidemiology*. (2017). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-017-0109-8

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SOLUTIONS

Smart Guns and Gun Safety Features

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SMART GUNS AND GUN SAFETY FEATURES
What is the problem?
How it Works

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

A personalized—or "smart"—gun is a firearm that employs authorized-use technology, like the thumb scan or passcode available on many smartphones, to turn stolen guns and guns accessed by children into harmless pieces of steel. If widely implemented, it would be a game-changer for keeping guns out of the hands of children and criminals.

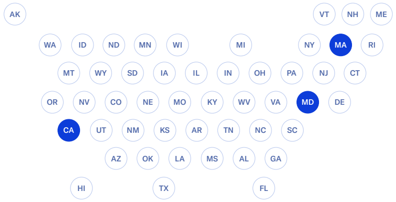
Each year, more than 40,000 Americans die by guns—including more than 3,500 children and teens. There are an estimated 393 million civilian-owned firearms in the U.S., and more than one-third of homes contain at least one gun.

Authorized-use technology, as well as basic safety features like loaded chamber indicators, magazine safety disconnects, and other features designed to prevent a child from operating the gun, should be incorporated into new models of semiautomatic handguns to help prevent firearms from being unintentionally fired.

Despite the fact that guns are inherently dangerous, they are exempt from regulation by the Consumer Product Safety Commission. In addition, the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (PLCAA) blocks legal responsibility for gun manufacturers that have failed to innovate and make guns safer.

Which states require new handgun models to have childproofing features?

3 states have adopted this policy



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SHARE

HOW IT WORKS

Smart gun technology and other gun safety features can stop unauthorized gun use.

Smart guns incorporate technology to ensure a gun can only be fired by a person who is authorized to use it. Similar to the thumb scan or passcode available on many smartphones, this technology would turn guns improperly accessed into harmless pieces of steel. Similarly, hundreds of thousands of guns are stolen every year, taken from houses, vehicles, and stores. Gun thefts often divert guns into an underground market where people with dangerous histories are easily able to obtain firearms without restriction. That is why stolen guns are often recovered at crime scenes, including at the scenes of homicides and other violent crimes. Smart guns make firearms inoperable to non-authorized users, and therefore could help eliminate the major public safety threat of stolen guns.

Other life-saving safety features can also be incorporated into semiautomatic handguns to help prevent them from being unintentionally fired. Even when a magazine is empty or removed, a round could be left in the firing chamber of the gun. A loaded chamber indicator visually indicates that a round is in the chamber, and a magazine safety disconnect prevents a gun from being fired if the magazine is removed. All new semiautomatic handgun models should have a loaded chamber indicator and a magazine safety disconnect to help prevent the gun from being fired unintentionally. They should also meet childproof standards that make it impossible for the average child to operate the gun, such as a higher trigger resistance making it difficult to fire the gun or requiring a series of multiple motions in order to fire the gun.

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SOLUTIONS

Prohibit Bump Stocks and Other Conversion Devices

Print

PROHIBIT BUMP STOCKS AND OTHER CONVERSION DEVICES
What is the problem?
How it Works

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Machine guns have been tightly regulated under federal law since the 1930s, but bump stocks and other conversion devices are designed to skirt the law and mimic automatic gunfire. Guns equipped with bump stocks were used in the largest and deadliest mass shooting in modern American history in 2017 in Las Vegas, in which 60 people were shot and killed and hundreds more were wounded.

In the years following the Las Vegas shooting, states across the country enacted laws prohibiting bump stocks, devices that harness the recoil of a semiautomatic firearm to fire several shots in succession to mimic automatic fire. The federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) generally prohibits bump stocks by classifying them as machine guns under the National Firearms Act (NFA).

HOW IT WORKS

Prohibiting bump stocks and other conversion devices would help prevent people from using them to mimic automatic gunfire.

On October 1, 2017, a shooter killed 60 people and wounded hundreds more at a country music concert in Las Vegas. By using several AR-type rifles with attached bump stock accessories, the shooter was able to effectively convert his rifles into machine guns, firing over one thousand rounds of ammunition in minutes.

Fully automatic weapons, more commonly known as machine guns, are highly regulated under federal law. The shooting in Las Vegas brought new attention to bump stocks, one type of widely available “conversion device” that allows for semiautomatic firearms to be effectively converted into machine guns.

In the year following the Las Vegas shooting, states across the country enacted laws that prohibit bump stocks. Several of the laws regulating bump stocks were signed by Republican governors (in Massachusetts, Florida, Maryland, and Vermont).

Since the shooting in Las Vegas, ATF took steps to prohibit the manufacture, sale, and possession of bump stocks through a rule that changed the NFA definition of “machine gun” to clearly be inclusive of bump stock type devices. The rule took effect in March of 2019.

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SOLUTIONS

Repeal Gun Industry Immunity

Print

REPEAL GUN INDUSTRY IMMUNITY
What is the problem?
How it Works
Myth & Fact
Featured Resources
All Resources

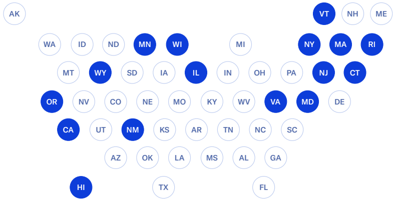
WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

The Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (PLCAA) blocks legal responsibility for gun manufacturers that have failed to innovate and make guns safer, and for manufacturers, distributors, and dealers with irresponsible, reckless and negligent sales practices that contribute to the flood of illegal firearms in our communities.

Since PLCAA passed in 2005, not a single gun manufacturer accused of negligence has gone to trial. The gun industry's broad immunity from legal accountability should be repealed.

Which states have rejected legal immunity for the gun industry?

16 states have rejected this policy



HOW IT WORKS

The gun industry should adhere to the same rules as every other industry and be held accountable when its actions result in harm.

An extraordinary law has provided gun manufacturers and sellers who skirt the law with a unique, broad immunity from legal accountability. The PLCAA gives gun industry members a shield from the lawsuits that are most often used in the United States to hold businesses accountable for products or practices that harm people. PLCAA blocks legal responsibility for gun manufacturers that have failed to innovate and make guns safer, and for manufacturers, distributors and dealers with irresponsible, reckless and negligent sales practices that contribute to the flood of illegal firearms in our communities.

In 2005, at the strong urging of the gun lobby, Congress passed PLCAA, one of the biggest giveaways to private industry in American history. It gives gun manufacturers and sellers more protection from litigation than makers of cars or tobacco products. While PLCAA has narrow exceptions, it bars the civil lawsuits that are most often used to hold industries accountable.

Myth

Criminals are responsible for their crimes, not the gun industry.

Fact

The gun industry is responsible for its choices in how it makes and sells its products but PLCAA provides a broad shield against most legal accountability.

FEATURED RESOURCES

Undeniable: How Long-Standing Loopholes in the Background Check System Have Been Exacerbated by COVID-19

Loopholes must be addressed to ensure that guns are not sold without a completed background check.

Report

Mass Shootings in America

Only through understanding the true nature of mass shootings can we begin to seek evidence-based solutions.

Data Tracker

Update Background Check Laws

Updating federal and state laws to require background checks on all gun sales is a common-sense way to keep guns out of the wrong hands.

Fact Sheet

REPEAL GUN INDUSTRY IMMUNITY

All Resources

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Clarification of Testimony

While we have not received an official transcript of the Hearing of June 8, 2022, we're aware of at least one exchange containing a factual error.
Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez asked, and Mr. Suplina responded:

> Q. Now let's put that into context. In 2020, again, more than 45,000 Americans died of gun fire, reflecting an almost three-fold increase from 2015, are those statistics correct?
>
> A. That's accurate.

According to the CDC, more than 45,000 Americans died by firearm (45,222) in 2020. That represents approximately a 24% increase over 2015 data (36,252).