

# Improving Gun Safety in the US

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## Top Line

**The US has an extremely high rate of gun violence compared to all other advanced countries. We can take effective action to reduce gun deaths, while still protecting Second Amendment rights.**

1. The US has an extremely high rate of gun violence – more than eight times higher than other advanced countries.
2. Gun violence especially affects young adults (age 15 – 24) and children. Guns are now the number one cause of death of children and teens.
3. There are many **specific actions that can reduce gun violence while still respecting Second Amendment rights. Effective policies include:**
  - a. Support CDC research on gun violence and solutions
  - b. Expand background checks to keep guns out of the wrong hands.
  - c. Implement “Extreme Risk” orders (aka “Red Flag Laws”) in all states
  - d. Ban the sale of assault weapons and high-capacity magazines
4. Public opinion strongly supports stronger gun restrictions, especially after recent highly visible mass shootings.

**We can protect our children and reduce gun violence while respecting the Second Amendment, by taking reasonable actions that most Americans support.**

## Backup

1. **The US has an extremely high rate of gun violence compared to other advanced countries**
  - a. The US gun death rate in 2019 was 12.2 per 100,000 people (see chart below)

- b. The CDC reports that 39,707 people were killed by guns in 2019 (1). That is more than 100 Americans every day. This has increased to 45,222 in 2020. (4)
- c. Most firearm deaths are from suicide – 2019 deaths included 23,941 suicides and 14,861 murders. (2)
- d. Firearms are used in approximately 1/2 of suicides in the US and 75% of homicides. (2)
- e. As shown in the table below, **the US firearm death rate is more than four times higher than any other large, advanced country.** Because most homicides are by guns, our homicide rate is also far higher than other advanced countries.

**Total Homicides and Firearm Death Rate by Country - 2019**

(per 100,000 people)

Country	Total Homicide Rate	Total Firearm Death Rate
<b>United States</b>	<b>4.46</b>	<b>12.21</b>
Australia	0.18	1.04
Austria	0.12	2.90
Belgium	0.14	1.24
Canada	0.61	2.05
Czechia	0.15	2.01
France	0.21	2.83
Germany	1.01	0.99
Israel	1.04	2.09
Italy	0.35	1.31
Japan	0.00	0.06
Korea (Republic of)	0.02	0.08
Netherlands	0.29	0.58
Spain	0.15	0.62
Sweden	0.32	1.60
Switzerland	0.15	3.01
United Kingdom	0.06	0.23
<b>Average of 16 large, advanced countries (excluding the US)</b>	<b>0.30</b>	<b>1.42</b>
<b>Multiple of US to the 16 country average</b>	<b>14.9</b>	<b>8.6</b>

Source: World Population Review, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/gun-deaths-by-country>

## 2. Gun violence especially affects young adults and children

- a. For people in the 15 – 24 and 25 – 34 age ranges, the three most common causes of death are unintentional accidents, suicide, and homicide. Guns play a role in all of these. (3)
- b. In 2020, guns became the leading cause of death for children and adolescents (age 1 – 19), according to researchers reporting in the New England Journal of Medicine. (4)
  - For the first time, gun deaths passed motor vehicle accidents as a cause of death for children and adolescents
  - In the early 2000’s motor vehicles killed more than twice as many children and adolescents as guns. Since then, motor vehicle death rates have fallen dramatically, and gun death rates have increased.
  - The researchers state **“the increasing firearm-related mortality reflects a longer-term trend and shows that we continue to fail to protect our youth from a preventable cause of death.”**
- c. Gun death rates vary widely by state (see Appendix). For example, states with tighter gun laws such as New York and New Jersey have gun death rates less than ¼ as high as more “gun friendly” states such as Mississippi and Alabama.

## 3. There are many specific actions that can reduce gun violence while still respecting legitimate 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment rights

### a. Support CDC research on gun violence and solutions

- i. **The Dickey Amendment, passed by Congress in 1996, reduced CDC research into gun violence.** “The actual amendment sponsored by Jay Dickey, a congressman from Arkansas, did not explicitly forbid research into gun-related deaths, just advocacy. But the Congress also lowered the CDC’s budget by the exact amount it spent on such research. Message received. It’s had a chilling effect on the entire field for decades.” (5)
- ii. **Medical organizations have urged Congress to reverse the Dickey Amendment.** In April 2016, a coalition of over 100 medical organizations sent a letter requesting that Congress “end the dramatic chilling effect of the current rider language restricting gun violence research and to fund this

critical work”. They pointed out that this change would enable the CDC to study ways to reduce accidental shootings by children and study the effects of the various state-level laws already on the books. The organizations include American Medical Association and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. (6)

- iii. In 2019 Congress began to restore some funding for CDC research (7)
  - However, the Dickey amendment is still in place
  - The lack of funding for 20 years has resulted in a gap in research, and a lack of researchers with experience in this area.
- iv. Research makes a difference.
  - The Director of the Harvard Injury Control Research Center points out that federal funding of research was key in helping reduce the nation’s motor vehicle fatality rate from 5.5% per 100 million miles in 1966 to 1.2% in 2017. He concludes that data and research matter. (8)
  - During this period the motor vehicle death rate declined by 78%, while the gun death rate (both murders and suicides) has increased. (9)
- v. **Congress should repeal the Dickey Amendment, and fully support and fund CDC research into gun violence causes and solutions.**

## **b. Expand background checks to keep guns out of the wrong hands**

- i. The Brady Bill (named for Jim Brady, who was permanently disabled by gun violence during an assassination attempt on Ronald Reagan in 1981) was signed into law by President Clinton in 1993. (10)
  - The Brady Bill put in place criminal background checks at federally licensed dealers designed to prevent dangerous people from purchasing guns.
  - Background checks work. Since 1994, background checks have **blocked approximately 4 million purchases to prohibited purchasers** including felons, domestic abusers, and other dangerous individuals.

- ii. However, about **1 in 5 gun purchases are not subjected to background checks.** (10) According to the Brady campaign, over 42,000 firearms have been sold to prohibited buyers – people who should not have access to a gun, but were able to buy one because of gaps in background checks.

*(Note: most sales without background checks are not from gun shows, so the term “gun show loophole” is not accurate. Sales without background checks can occur between individuals, where the seller is not federally licensed, and over the internet. A better term is “comprehensive background checks” or “universal background checks”).*

- iii. **Background checks can help to reduce gun violence.** This is often hard to measure, because most existing background check laws have significant loopholes, and because people can often go to another state to buy a gun if their state makes it difficult. As a result, not all research to date shows that background checks directly reduce gun violence. But there is strong reason to believe that comprehensive nationwide background checks are an important step in reducing gun violence.
- An extensive analysis from the UC Davis School of Medicine (11) found:
    1. Identifying prohibited persons through background checks and denying their firearm acquisitions has been shown to reduce their risk of committing new firearm-related or violent crimes by approximately 25%.
    2. Comprehensive background check policies have been shown to disrupt firearm trafficking and to yield more accurate, up-to-date firearm tracing information for law enforcement.
  - Researchers have found that state-level laws have made a difference (12):
    1. A Connecticut law requiring background checks was associated with a 40% reduction in gun homicides between 1996 and 2005.
    2. Missouri’s 2007 repeal of its handgun license law was associated with about a 23% increase in its firearm homicide rates.
- iv. **A large majority of Americans support universal background checks.** A Morning Consult/Politico poll in March 2021 found that 84% of American voters support background checks for all gun purchases. This includes 77% of Republicans. Only 11% of American voters oppose background checks for all gun purchases (13).

### c. Implement “Extreme Risk” orders (aka “Red Flag Laws”) in all states

- i. Extreme risk orders, also known as Red Flag Laws, allow police or family members to request that a judge temporarily remove guns from a person who may be a danger to others or themselves
  - a. Currently, 19 states have some form of red flag laws. (14)
- ii. **Extreme risk orders can help to reduce gun violence.** A study by NYU found that these laws can have a positive effect. The lead author stated “Research shows that prior to an attempted suicide or homicide, there are warning signs that a shooter intends to act. Removing firearms during crisis situations allows for mental health intervention or law enforcement investigation and can prevent tragedies from occurring.” (15)
- iii. Some who oppose these laws claim they are unconstitutional. However, there are many precedents for laws to protect people, with appropriate due process. For example, red flag laws are similar to other civil laws that protect people from harming themselves or others, including laws for involuntary commitment and removing children from unfit parents. (15)
- iv. The US Department of Justice has developed model legislation for extreme risk orders, to make it easier for states to develop and implement these important protections. (16)
- v. **Americans strongly support extreme risk orders.** A September 2019 NPR/Marist poll found that 72% of respondents believe congress should “pass legislation to create a national red flag law, that is, a gun control law that allows police or family members to request that a judge temporarily remove guns from a person who may be a danger to others or themselves.” Only 23% of respondents believe congress should not pass such a law. (17)

#### d. Ban the sale of assault weapons and high-capacity magazines

- i. The Brady Campaign defines assault weapons and high-capacity magazines as (18):
  - o An “assault weapon” refers to a semi-automatic gun designed for military use and quick, efficient killing. Assault weapons are uniquely lethal because of their rapid rate of fire and high muzzle velocity — coupled with high-capacity magazines, which attach to an assault weapon to allow dozens of gunshots without needing to reload.
  - o A high-capacity magazine is typically defined as any magazine or drum that is capable of holding more than either 10 or 15 rounds of ammunition.
  
- ii. Because of their increased lethality, assault weapons and high-capacity magazines are often used in mass shootings.
  - o The Brady Campaign points out that 155% more people are shot when an assault weapon or high-capacity magazine is used in a shooting (18).
  - o The Giffords Law Center states “**large capacity magazines have been used in all ten of the deadliest mass shootings in the last decade.** Large capacity magazines significantly increase a shooter’s ability to injure and kill large numbers of people quickly because they enable the individual to fire repeatedly without needing to reload.” (19)
  
- iii. The US had a Federal Assault Weapons ban from 1994 to 2004.
  - o Many studies have examined the law’s effect. Many find little results – possible reasons include the fact that there were so many assault weapons already in circulation, and that assault weapons account for a small percentage of gun deaths.
  - o However, an analysis of mass shootings (in which six or more people were shot and killed) found a decrease during the ban, and a significant increase after the ban expired (20):
    - 1984 – 1994 (before the ban): 19 mass shooting incidents
    - 1994 – 2004 (during the ban): 12 incidents
    - 2004 – 2014 (after the ban expired): 34 incidents
  
- iv. Medical and Police organizations support banning assault weapons and high-capacity magazines:

- The American Academy of Pediatricians position is “Recognizing the deadly consequences of firearms to children, adolescents, and young adults, the AAP supports firearm regulation, including a ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazine sales, as an effective strategy to reduce firearm-related injuries.” (21)
- The International Association of Chiefs of Police, which describes itself as the largest organization of police leadership, points out: (22)
  - “Semi-Automatic assault weapons are routinely the weapons of choice for gang members and drug dealers. They are regularly encountered in drug busts and are all too often used against police officers.
  - **The IACP has been a strong supporter of the assault weapons ban since 1992**, and our membership has approved several reauthorizations of support in the years since.
  - The membership took this action because we, as law enforcement executives, understand that the criminal use of semiautomatic assault weapons pose a grave risk to our officers and the communities they are sworn to protect.”
- v. The American public also strongly supports a ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. (17, pages 9 and 10)
  - 61% of Americans believe congress should pass legislation to “ban the purchase of high-capacity ammunition magazines”
  - 57% believe congress should pass legislation to “ban the sale of semi-automatic assault guns such as the AK-47 or the AR-15”
- vi. **Since many of the most tragic, highly visible shootings (including Parkland in Florida in 2018 and the Buffalo shooting in 2022) involve young shooters and assault-type weapons, restoring the ban on assault-type weapons and high-capacity magazines would make it much harder for these young people to obtain these lethal weapons, and would make shootings less lethal when they occur.**

#### **4. Public opinion strongly supports stronger gun restrictions**

- i. A 2021 poll by Pew found that 53% of Americans believe gun laws should be more strict than they are today, while only 14% believe they should be less strict. (23)



- ii. This varies widely by party, with 81% of Democrats supporting stricter laws compared to only 20% of Republicans.
- iii. Support is stronger for specific gun violence reduction measures. According to the Pew poll,
  - a. 87% support preventing people with mental illnesses from buying guns
  - b. 81% support more complete background checks
  - c. 64% support banning high-capacity magazines
  - d. 63% support banning assault weapons

## More Information

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  - b. John Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions, <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/departments/health-policy-and-management/research-and-practice/center-for-gun-violence-solutions>
  - c. Brady United – propose a comprehensive plan to reduce gun violence - <https://www.bradyunited.org/the-brady-plan>
  - d. Gifford Law Center, <https://giffords.org/>
3. International Association of Chiefs of Police, “Taking a Stand – Reducing Gun Violence in Our Communities” - <https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/ACF1875.pdf> Outlines recommendations for reducing gun violence (summarized on pages 6 and 7 of the report). Recommendations include comprehensive background checks, extreme risk orders, and banning assault-type weapons,

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12. Politifact, “Do background checks work”, January 2, 2020, <https://www.politifact.com/article/2020/jan/02/gun-background-checks-what-research-shows/>
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## Appendix – Firearm Death Rates by State – 2019

State	Firearms Death Rate per 100,000	Rank
<b>United States</b>	<b>11.9</b>	
Alaska	24.4	1
Mississippi	24.2	2
New Mexico	22.3	3
Wyoming	22.3	4
Alabama	22.2	5
Louisiana	22.1	6
Missouri	20.6	7
South Carolina	19.9	8
Arkansas	19.3	9
Montana	19.0	10
Oklahoma	18.6	11
Tennessee	18.4	12
West Virginia	16.6	13
Georgia	15.8	14
Nevada	15.3	15
Arizona	15.1	16
Kentucky	14.9	17
Colorado	14.2	18
Idaho	14.2	19
Indiana	14.1	20
Kansas	13.7	21
Ohio	13.3	22
North Carolina	13.1	23
South Dakota	13.1	24
Utah	12.8	25
Florida	12.7	26
Maryland	12.6	27
Oregon	12.6	28
Texas	12.6	29
North Dakota	12.4	30
Michigan	12.1	31
Pennsylvania	11.7	32
Virginia	11.7	33
Maine	11.5	34
Illinois	10.8	35
New Hampshire	10.7	36
Washington	10.7	37
Nebraska	10.4	38
Wisconsin	10.0	39
Delaware	9.9	40
Vermont	9.3	41
Iowa	9.1	42
Minnesota	8.1	43
California	7.2	44
Connecticut	5.3	45
Rhode Island	4.6	46
Hawaii	4.4	47
New Jersey	4.1	48
New York	3.9	49
Massachusetts	3.4	50

Source: Kaufman Family Foundation, <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/firearms-death-rate-per-100000/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colld%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>