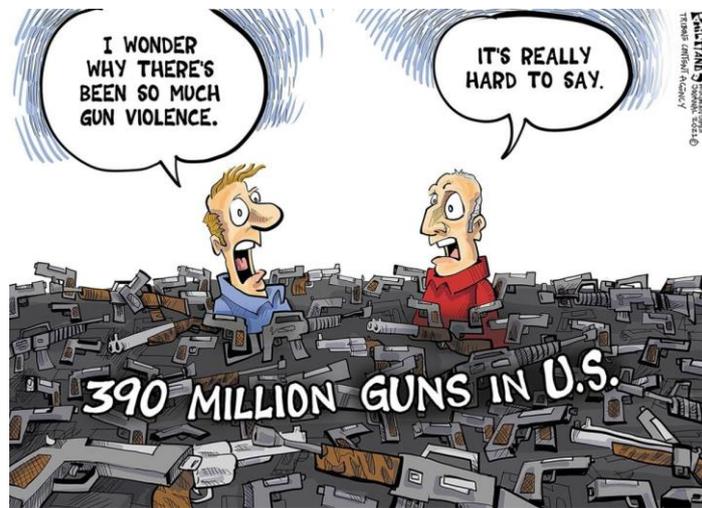


Check what you know:

The Second Amendment
“Stand your ground” law
Background checks
Red flag laws
Conceal carry
Open carry
Bump stock
NRA
Gun control
Gun rights
Gun laws
Mass shooting
Starbucks’ gun policy
Federal Assault Weapons Ban
Brady Bill
Gabrielle Giffords
Columbine
Sandy Hook

A few video documents

- PBS News Hour, May 2022
Bipartisan group of lawmakers look for solutions on gun violence
<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/bipartisan-group-of-lawmakers-look-for-solutions-on-gun-violence>
- Channel News, Will anything ever change? America's history of gun control explained
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g1_kMdqw-ew&ab_channel=Channel4News
- VOX, How the NRA hijacks the gun control debate
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcJeOphUtek&ab_channel=Vox
- VOX, The gun solution we're not talking about
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ENw2y0ek1Jg&ab_channel=Vox
- NPR, “Teens On Guns in America”, (URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxGrspcqeA>), February 7, 2019.
- CBS, “The New Pro-Gun Generation”, (URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBUOQIhslDU>), October 28, 2023.
- PBS, “What you need to know about the new federal gun violence prevention office”, (URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odQqVFWZ47g>), September 23, 2023.
- PBS, “2024 brings new gun restrictions in several states”, (URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_UUyB6Svcl), January 4, 2024.
- CBS, “A history of guns in America”, (URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ul6sv7fqKKA>), July 31, 2016.
- CNBC, “How Guns Are Advertised In The U.S.”, (URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ks2_wY7f-MM), July 26, 2022.



Document 1 - America's Gun Problem

More guns in the U.S. mean more deaths.

By German Lopez, The Morning Newsletter, *New York Times*, May 26, 2022

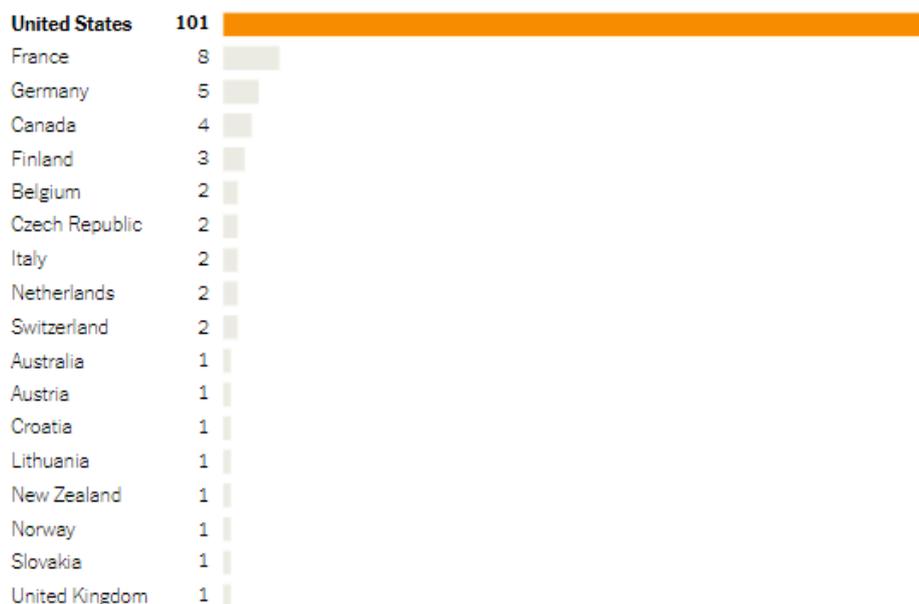
In every country, people get into arguments, hold racist views or suffer from mental health issues. But in the U.S., it is easier for those people to pick up a gun and shoot someone.

That reality is what allowed an 18-year-old to obtain an assault rifle and kill 19 children and two teachers at an elementary school classroom in Uvalde, Texas, on Tuesday. And it is what makes the U.S. a global outlier when it comes to gun violence, with more gun deaths than any of its peers.

This chart, looking at public shootings in which four or more people were killed, shows how much the U.S. stands out:

Number of mass shootings

Developed countries, 1998-2019



Source: Jason R. Silva, William Paterson University

In today's newsletter, I want to walk through three ways to think about America's gun problem.

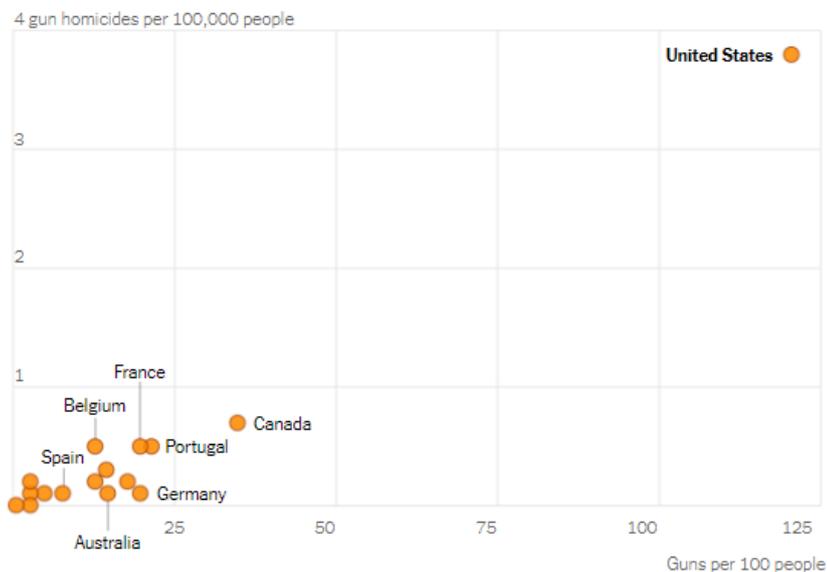
The number of guns

Where there are more guns, there are more gun deaths. Studies have found this to be true at the state and national level. It is true for homicides, suicides, mass shootings and even police shootings.

It is an intuitive idea: If guns are more available, people will use them more often. If you replaced “guns” in that sentence with another noun, it would be so obvious as to be banal.

Stricter gun laws appear to help. They are associated with fewer gun deaths, in both a domestic and global context, while looser gun laws are linked with more gun deaths.

Gun ownership and homicide rates in developed countries



Ownership rates are for 2017 and homicide rates are for 2018.

Source: Small Arms Survey

But federal laws are lax. Other developed countries typically require at least a license to own a gun, if they allow someone to get a firearm at all. In the U.S., even a background check is not always required to buy a gun — a result of poor enforcement and legal loopholes.

Reducing mass shootings

The U.S. is always going to have more guns, and consequently more deaths, than other rich countries. Given the Second Amendment, mixed public opinion and a closely divided federal government, lawmakers face sharp limits on how far they can go.

But since America’s gun laws are so weak, there is a lot of room to improve — and at least cut some gun deaths.

To reduce mass shootings, experts have several ideas:

More thorough background checks might stop some gunmen, like those in the church shootings in Charleston, S.C., in 2015 and in Sutherland Springs, Texas, in 2017.

“Red flag” laws allow law enforcement officials to confiscate guns from people who display warning signs of violence, like threatening their peers or family members. The laws might have applied to the gunman in the Parkland, Fla., school shooting in 2018.

Assault weapon bans would restrict or prohibit access to the kinds of rifles shooters often use. A ban could at least make mass shootings less deadly by pushing gunmen toward less effective weapons, some experts argue.

But it is hard to say exactly how much impact these measures would have, because little good research exists on the effects of gun policies on mass shootings. One unanswered question is whether a determined gunman would find a way to bypass the laws: If he can’t use an assault rifle, would he resort to a handgun or shotgun? That could make the shooting less deadly, but not stop it altogether.

The bigger problem

Most shootings in America never appear in national headlines. The majority of gun deaths in 2021 were suicides. Nearly half were homicides that occurred outside mass shootings; they are more typical acts of violence on streets and in homes (and most involve handguns). Mass shootings were responsible for less than 2 percent of last year’s gun deaths.

Stricter gun laws could also reduce the more common gun deaths. It all comes down to the same problem: More guns equal more gun deaths, whether a gang shootout in California, a suicide in Wyoming or a school shooting in Texas.

Document 2 - Gun-ownership in America is diversifying, because of safety fears

Concerns over safety lead more women and minorities to arm themselves



The Economist, Jan 22nd 2022

Picture a gunslinger and Annette Evans probably does not spring to mind. She is Chinese-American, lives in the suburbs of Philadelphia and identifies herself as socially liberal—not the archetypal conservative, rural white man. Yet she owns over a dozen rifles, pistols and shotguns (“one for every occasion, like purses or shoes”) and teaches self-defence courses to women. Her race and gender put her at risk, she says. “It may be a low chance that I’ll run into someone who will kill me, but without a gun, I’ll die.”

More gun-owners, especially new ones, look like Ms Evans. Of the 7.5m Americans who bought firearms for the first time between January 2019 and April 2021—as gun-buying surged nationwide—half were female, a fifth black and a fifth Hispanic, according to a recent study by Matthew Miller of Northeastern University and his co-authors. The share of black adults who joined the gun-owning ranks, 5.3%, was more than twice that of white adults. That is new: in a previous survey, in 2015, new buyers skewed white and male, though they were more politically liberal than long-standing ones. Overall, today’s gun-owners are still largely white (73%) and male (63%). But they are diversifying.

Gun culture has broadened its appeal. Decades ago most people bought guns for hunting and recreational shooting. Now they mostly do so for self-defence, which is a universal concern. People who feel vulnerable to crime or hold less faith in the police are more likely to arm themselves.

Rising murder rates in 2020 and 2021 heightened those anxieties (blacks are the likeliest victims). Membership of the National African American Gun Association grew in 2020 by more than 25%, to 40,000. Blacks have a long history of owning guns: Harriet Tubman toted them, Martin Luther King kept them at home. But this tradition was long “surreptitious”, says Aqil Qadir, a third-generation shooter who runs a firearms-training centre in Tennessee.

Many of the newer gun-owners see firearms as an equaliser—a remedy for the vulnerability they feel. The Pink Pistols, an LGBT group, proclaims “armed queers don’t get bashed”. “God made man and woman, but Sam Colt made them equal,” goes a markswoman’s maxim. Women’s gun-ownership has always trailed that among men: women tended to shoot because men in the family did. But Robyn Sandoval, boss of A Girl and a Gun, a shooting group, increasingly sees women buying guns on their own initiative: a third of new joiners to her organisation in 2021 said they were the only shooter in their family.

The broadening tent is good for manufacturers and bad for gun-control advocates. Owners are more politically active around gun issues than non-owners. Already it may have had an effect. According to polling by Gallup, in 2021 support for stricter laws dropped by five percentage points, to its lowest in seven years. ■

Document 3 - Gun Control, Explained

A quick guide to the debate over gun legislation in the United States.

By *The New York Times* Jan. 26, 2023

As the number of mass shootings in America continues to rise, gun control — a term used to describe a wide range of restrictions and measures aimed at controlling the use of firearms — remains at the center of heated discussions among proponents and opponents of stricter gun laws.

To help understand the debate and its political and social implications, we addressed some key questions on the subject.

Is gun control effective?

Throughout the world, mass shootings have frequently been met with a common response: Officials impose new restrictions on gun ownership. Mass shootings become rarer. Homicides and suicides tend to decrease, too.

After a British gunman killed 16 people in 1987, the country banned semiautomatic weapons like the ones he

had used. It did the same with most handguns after a school shooting in 1996. It now has one of the lowest gun-related death rates in the developed world.

In Australia, a 1996 massacre prompted mandatory gun buybacks in which, by some estimates, as many as one million firearms were then melted into slag. The rate of mass shootings plummeted.

Only the United States, whose rate and severity of mass shootings is without parallel outside conflict zones, has so consistently refused to respond to those events with tightened gun laws.

Several theories to explain the number of shootings in the United States — like its unusually violent societal, class and racial divides, or its shortcomings in providing mental health care — have been debunked by research. But one variable remains: the astronomical number of guns in the country.

America's gun homicide rate was 33 per one million people in 2009, far exceeding the average among developed countries. In Canada and Britain, it was 5 per million and 0.7 per million, respectively, which also corresponds with differences in gun ownership.

Americans sometimes see this as an expression of its deeper problems with crime, a notion ingrained, in part, by a series of films portraying urban gang violence in the early 1990s. But the United States is not actually more prone to crime than other developed countries, according to a landmark 1999 study by Franklin E. Zimring and Gordon Hawkins of the University of California, Berkeley.

Rather, they found, in data that has since been repeatedly confirmed, that American crime is simply more lethal. A New Yorker is just as likely to be robbed as a Londoner, for instance, but the New Yorker is 54 times more likely to be killed in the process.

They concluded that the discrepancy, like so many other anomalies of American violence, came down to guns.

More gun ownership corresponds with more gun murders across virtually every axis: among developed countries, among American states, among American towns and cities and when controlling for crime rates. And gun control legislation tends to reduce gun murders, according to a recent analysis of 130 studies from 10 countries.

This suggests that the guns themselves cause the violence. — Max Fisher and Josh Keller, Why Does the U.S. Have So Many Mass Shootings? Research Is Clear: Guns.

Every mass shooting is, in some sense, a fringe event, driven by one-off factors like the ideology or personal circumstances of the assailant. The risk is impossible to fully erase.

Still, the record is confirmed by reams of studies that have analyzed the effects of policies like Britain's and Australia's: When countries tighten gun control laws, it leads to fewer guns in private citizens' hands, which leads to less gun violence.

What gun control measures exist at the federal level?

Much of current federal gun control legislation is a baseline, governing who can buy, sell and use certain classes of firearms, with states left free to enact additional restrictions.

Dealers must be licensed, and run background checks to ensure their buyers are not "prohibited persons," including felons or people with a history of domestic violence — though private sellers at gun shows or online marketplaces are not required to run background checks. Federal law also highly restricts the sale of certain firearms, such as fully automatic rifles.

The most recent federal legislation, a bipartisan effort passed last year after a gunman killed 19 children and two teachers at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, expanded background checks for buyers under 21 and closed what is known as the boyfriend loophole. It also strengthened existing bans on gun trafficking and straw purchasing.

— Aishvarya Kavi

What are gun buyback programs and do they work?

Gun buyback programs are short-term initiatives that provide incentives, such as money or gift cards, to convince people to surrender firearms to law enforcement, typically with no questions asked. These events are often held by governments or private groups at police stations, houses of worship and community centers. Guns that are collected are either destroyed or stored.

Most programs strive to take guns off the streets, provide a safe place for firearm disposal and stir cultural changes in a community, according to Gun by Gun, a nonprofit dedicated to preventing gun violence.

The first formal gun buyback program was held in Baltimore in 1974 after three police officers were shot and killed, according to the authors of the book "Why We Are Losing the War on Gun Violence in the United States." The initiative collected more than 13,000 firearms, but failed to reduce gun violence in the city.

Hundreds of other buyback programs have since unfolded across the United States.

In 1999, President Bill Clinton announced the nation's first federal gun buyback program. The \$15 million program provided grants of up to \$500,000 to police departments to buy and destroy firearms. Two years later, the Senate defeated efforts to extend financing for the program after the Bush administration called for it to end.

Despite the popularity of gun buyback programs among certain anti-violence and anti-gun advocates, there is little data to suggest that they work. A study by the National Bureau of Economic Research, a private nonprofit, found that buyback programs adopted in U.S. cities were ineffective in deterring gun crime, firearm-related homicides or firearm-related suicides. . Evidence showed that cities set the sale price of a firearm too low to considerably reduce the supply of weapons; most who participated in such initiatives came from low-crime areas and firearms that were typically collected were either older or not in good working order. Dr. Brendan Campbell, a pediatric surgeon at Connecticut Children's Medical Center and an author of one chapter in "Why We Are Losing the War on Gun Violence in the United States," said that buyback programs should collect significantly more firearms than they currently do in order to be more effective.

Dr. Campbell said they should also offer higher prices for handguns and assault rifles. "Those are the ones that are most likely to be used in crime," and by people attempting suicide, he said. "If you just give \$100 for whatever gun, that's when you'll end up with all these old, rusted guns that are a low risk of causing harm in the community."

Mandatory buyback programs have been enacted elsewhere around the world. After a mass shooting in 1996, Australia put in place a nationwide buyback program, collecting somewhere between one in five and one in three privately held guns. The initiative mostly targeted semiautomatic rifles and many shotguns that, under new laws, were no longer permitted. New Zealand banned military-style semiautomatic weapons, assault rifles and some gun parts and began its own large-scale buyback program in 2019, after a terrorist attack on mosques in Christchurch. The authorities said that more than 56,000 prohibited firearms had been collected from about 32,000 people through the initiative.

Where does the U.S. public stand on the issue?

Expanded background checks for guns purchased routinely receive more than 80 or 90 percent support in polling.

Nationally, a majority of Americans have supported stricter gun laws for decades. A Gallup poll conducted in June found that 55 percent of participants were in favor of a ban on the manufacture, possession and sale of semiautomatic guns. A majority of respondents also supported other measures, including raising the legal age at which people can purchase certain firearms, and enacting a 30-day waiting period for gun sales.

But the jumps in demand for gun control that occur after mass shootings also tend to revert to the partisan mean as time passes. Gallup poll data shows that the percentage of participants who supported stricter gun laws receded to 57 percent in October from 66 percent in June, which was just weeks after mass shootings in Uvalde, Texas, and Buffalo. A PDK poll conducted after the shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde found that 72 percent of Republicans supported arming teachers, in contrast with 24 percent of Democrats.

What do opponents of gun control argue?

Opponents of gun control, including most Republican members of Congress, argue that proposals to limit access to firearms infringe on the right of citizens to bear arms enshrined in the Second Amendment to the Constitution. And they contend that mass shootings are not the result of easily accessible guns, but of criminals and mentally ill people bent on waging violence.

— Annie Karni

Why is it so hard to push for legislation?

Polling suggests that Americans broadly support gun control measures, yet legislation is often stymied in Washington, and Republicans rarely seem to pay a political price for their opposition.

The calculation behind Republicans' steadfast stonewalling of any new gun regulations — even in the face of the kind unthinkable massacres like in Uvalde, Texas — is a fairly simple one for Senator Kevin Cramer of North Dakota.

Asked what the reaction would be from voters back home if he were to support any significant form of gun control, the first-term Republican had a straightforward answer: "Most would probably throw me out of office," he said.

His response helps explain why Republicans have resisted proposals such as the one for universal background checks for gun buyers, despite remarkably broad support from the public for such plans — support that can reach up to 90 percent nationwide in some cases.

Republicans like Mr. Cramer understand that they would receive little political reward for joining the push

for laws to limit access to guns, including assault-style weapons. But they know for certain that they would be pounded — and most likely left facing a primary opponent who could cost them their job — for voting for gun safety laws or even voicing support for them.

Most Republicans in the Senate represent deeply conservative states where gun ownership is treated as a sacred privilege enshrined in the Constitution, a privilege not to be infringed upon no matter how much blood is spilled in classrooms and school hallways around the country.

Though the National Rifle Association has recently been diminished by scandal and financial turmoil, Democrats say that the organization still has a strong hold on Republicans through its financial contributions and support, hardening the party's resistance to any new gun laws. — Carl Hulse, "Why Republicans Won't Budge on Guns."

Yet while the power of the gun lobby, the outsize influence of rural states in the Senate and single-voter issues offer some explanation, there is another possibility: voters.

When voters in four Democratic-leaning states got the opportunity to enact expanded gun or ammunition background checks into law, the overwhelming support suggested by national surveys was nowhere to be found.

For Democrats, the story is both unsettling and familiar. Progressives have long been emboldened by national survey results that show overwhelming support for their policy priorities, only to find they don't necessarily translate to Washington legislation and to popularity on Election Day or beyond. President Biden's major policy initiatives are popular, for example, yet voters say he has not accomplished much and his approval ratings have sunk into the low 40s. The apparent progressive political majority in the polls might just be illusory.

Public support for new gun restrictions tends to rise in the wake of mass shootings. There is already evidence that public support for stricter gun laws has surged again in the aftermath of the killings in Buffalo and Uvalde, Texas. While the public's support for new restrictions tends to subside thereafter, these shootings or another could still produce a lasting shift in public opinion.

But the poor results for background checks suggest that public opinion may not be the unequivocal ally of gun control that the polling makes it seem. — Nate Cohn, "Voters Say They Want Gun Control. Their Votes Say Something Different."

Document 4 - Kamala Harris Visits Parkland and Urges States to Adopt Red-Flag Gun Laws

At the site of the 2018 school shooting in Florida, the vice president announced federal help for states to limit weapon access for people deemed to be threats.

By Michael D. Shear, *The New York Times*, March 23, 2024

Vice President Kamala Harris on Saturday toured the still-bloody and bullet-pocked classroom building in Parkland, Fla., where a gunman killed 14 students and three staff members in 2018, using the grim backdrop to announce a new federal resource center and to call for stricter enforcement of gun laws.

The freshman building at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School had been preserved as evidence for criminal trials and is set to be demolished this summer. For now, it remains a memorial to one of the most shocking mass shootings in the history of the United States.

In remarks after taking her tour and meeting for more than an hour with family members of victims of the attack, Ms. Harris said the experience had been a compelling one. "Let us, through the courage and the call to action of these families, find it in ourselves to consider what they've been through as some level of motivation and inspiration for all of us," she said. "This school is soon going to be torn down," the vice president added. "But the memory of it will never be erased."

Ms. Harris said the attack, carried out by a former student with a history of mental health and behavior problems, should prompt officials around the country to embrace local red-flag laws. These allow courts to temporarily seize firearms and other dangerous weapons when they believe a person may be a threat to themselves or others. The Parkland shooter had purchased his gun legally.

In her remarks, Ms. Harris announced the creation of the National Extreme Risk Protection Order Resource Center, which White House officials said would provide training and technical assistance to states as they work to implement their red-flag laws.

“Red-flag laws are simply designed to allow communities a vehicle through which they can share, and have somewhere to share it, information about the concern about the potential danger or the crying out for help of an individual,” she said.

In her brief remarks, Ms. Harris said that only 21 states had passed red-flag laws and that only six of those had accepted the Biden administration’s offer of financial resources to help implement them.

“I challenge the others: ‘Come on over. We’ve got some resources for you to help you implement the work that you have done,’” she said.

The visit by Ms. Harris to the school is part of the administration’s broader effort to increase gun control measures as the United States continues to suffer regular episodes of devastating gun violence, sometimes targeting young people in schools.

In 2022, President Biden signed into law [the first significant federal gun control measure in decades](#). The law expanded the background check system for prospective gun buyers under the age of 21, gave authorities up to 10 business days to examine juvenile and mental health records and set aside millions of dollars so states can fund intervention programs.

But shootings have continued at a horrific pace since then. Scores of people have been killed in mass shootings in Lewiston, Maine; Monterey Park, Calif.; Louisville, Ky.; Hollywood, Fla.; and many other cities across the country.

Ms. Harris said that must change. But she expressed determination to continue fighting the political gridlock in Washington, where Republicans and some Democrats on Capitol Hill have long blocked more aggressive measures, like a ban on assault-style weapons that are often used in the deadliest mass shootings.

Document 5 - The Ineluctable Logic of Gun Ownership

Daniel Levitin, *The Atlantic*, April 22, 2023 (abridged)

When we were in our 20s, my friend Jim Ferguson would say that if you find yourself living someplace where you need to own a gun, you should move. That made sense to me then; it’s not so easy now to find safe places. If you live in a remote area, it can take the sheriff an hour or more to get to you, so if there’s a deadly threat from an intruder, you are on your own. And the past few years have shown us that gun violence knows no boundaries of geography, socioeconomic status, or age. This reality has pushed me toward a moral dilemma: I wish no one were armed, but because practically everyone else is, I have a gun myself.

My education as a liberal gun owner began when my 70-year-old mother felt that she needed to get a pistol. My sister and I were against it, figuring that if she ever tried to use it, the most likely outcome would be that she would shoot my father. Despite our objections, she bought herself a

Smith & Wesson .357 Magnum. That same day, my father bought himself a Remington 870 12-gauge shotgun (I assumed to defend himself from intruders, not from my mother).

Neither of my parents ever ended up using their gun, so far as I know, in any real-life situation. But the sort of home invasion they feared happened to my wife, Heather, and me, at our house in Hollywood. After that traumatic experience, we made the wrenching decision to keep a firearm in our home.

Two years later, another intruder entered our property. I was sitting at my desk one morning, looking out at the garden, and I saw a man peering into the windows and doors, trying each of them to see if they were unlocked. I called the police and told them what was going on. I didn’t know if the man was armed, if he had lock-picking tools, or

even if I had remembered to lock all the doors and windows.

I got out my mother's gun, took a deep breath, and started to run through different scenarios. If the intruder was armed, I might have to shoot him. I would have to live knowing that I had killed a man—justifiably, according to the law—but I'd spend the rest of my life wondering if there had been other options.

I snuck out through the garage with the .357 in my waistband and waited on the corner for the police. When the patrol car arrived, I held my hands out in front of me, palms facing them, and told them I was the one who'd called, and that I had a gun in my waistband. "Thanks for telling us," the lead officer said. "Just don't reach for it." They went to the house and found the man still trying to get in; they arrested him without violent incident.

Since then, we have not had another burglary or forced entry. But a couple of harrowing incidents did occur because of a "destination stalker" who slept in her car for a month in our neighborhood in hopes of finding me. When she did, she told me that

the world was going to end in 2035 because of something involving music and the brain, and that I, as a neuroscientist who had written on that subject, was the only person in the world who could help her warn people. The LAPD got involved.

The police detective knew from the state registry that I had firearms—and he was glad to hear that I did. When the police are happy you have a gun, you know there is more violent crime than they can handle. (I am keenly aware that if I were a person of color, my conversation with the police could have been very different.)

I hope I never need to use my guns. My wife and I would like to live in a country where everyone feels that way. But how can we hope to remove the guns from American society, the firearms in so many homes like ours? We can't. That is the conundrum we face: The individual's decision to be armed feels rational, maybe *is* rational, but the societal sum of all those individual decisions is madness. That is the country, the place, we live in now.

Document 6 - **I'm a Black gun owner. I have mixed feelings about gun control**

Akin Olla, *The Guardian*, 8 June 2022 (abridged)

The mass murder of elementary school students in Uvalde, Texas, and a white supremacist attack on Black residents of Buffalo, New York, have reignited the American gun control debate. Both atrocities have left me feeling more broken than I thought possible. As a Black, leftwing gun owner, however, I'm also struck by a feeling of unease.

I believe in many forms of gun control, but the conversation about guns on the left often lacks complexity as we scramble for a simple answer to an extremely complicated problem. I don't have much faith that the government will protect me or other minority Americans from the kind of violence that the police ostensibly exist to combat, and I know that gun control laws have historically been used to target Black people, particularly Black socialists like myself.

I'm also not convinced that most current gun control proposals will even solve the problem. Consider the country's deadliest school shooting, the Virginia Tech murders of 2007. The perpetrator passed his background check and used weapons that most gun control bans wouldn't affect. A waiting period might have delayed his attack but his level of premeditation implies it was nearly inevitable. I feel sorrow for what happened. Yet I feel that as a society we tend to fight over specific gun control policies while ignoring the violent nature of the country we live in.

I never thought I'd be a gun owner. I'm not particularly fond of guns. If anything, they terrify me. I've generally hoped my charming personality and acumen at fisticuffs would be enough to deter would-be aggressors; it wasn't until the terror that I experienced during the George Floyd uprising that I, like many Black Americans, was moved to become a first-time gun owner.

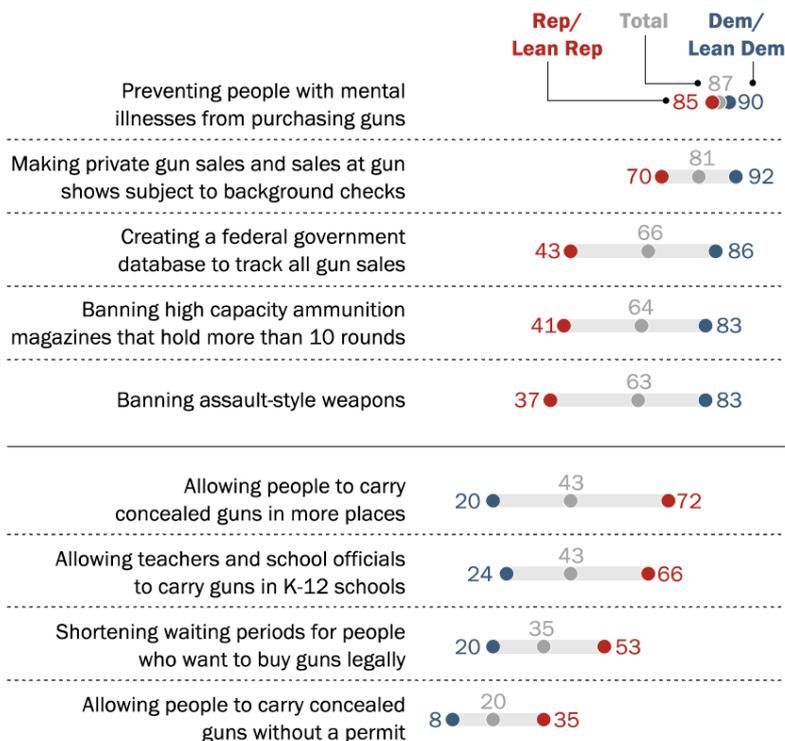
I'd participated in protests and witnessed the sheer brutality of the Philadelphia police as they attacked my partner, threatened an elderly woman, and enveloped the entirety of my neighborhood in teargas. I watched Black parents flee their homes, eyes red, small children in tow. When I and others working as medical volunteers tried to evacuate the injured and elderly, we were met with pepper spray, rubber bullets, and batons. On the other side of the city, police officers let white vigilantes with baseball bats patrol the streets. None of this buttressed my belief that the police existed to protect me from violence.

Around this time I received written threats. After a series of them, as well as a direct, in-person threat to my life made in front of my home, I buckled and decided I needed a weapon, and soon. Even without the specific threats, I was wrestling with a sense that society was on the brink. It may sound paranoid now, but to be Black in the midst of the George Floyd uprising and the tail end of the Trump presidency was a time to be paranoid. Guns and ammunition were sold out across the country. More than 5 million new gun owners purchased weapons in 2020, a more than 100% increase from the previous year. After a background check and a few days for the order to be processed, I picked up a gun from a store.

Despite owning a gun, I do think gun control is overdue and necessary. But I also can't ignore the history of American gun control. Much of the modern debate around gun control began in the 1960s, after the state of California – with support, ironically enough, from the NRA – pushed through legislation in response to the Black Panther party and other armed militant groups. We must ensure that any new gun control laws do not disproportionately limit minority communities' ability to own arms for reasons of legitimate self-defense.

There are moments in US history when the right to own weapons made the difference between life and death for communities of color. And despite the common perception of the civil rights movement, many activists kept guns in their homes or were protected by those who did.

% who strongly or somewhat favor ...



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 5-11, 2021.