

Fact Sheet: Gun Violence

In the wake of the tragic murder of 17 innocent students and teachers at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, students, educators, politicians, and activists are searching for solutions to prevent future school shootings. As emotions morph from grief to anger to resolve, it is vitally important to supply facts so that policymakers and professionals can fashion solutions based on objective data rather than well-intended but misguided emotional fixes. Are there ways to reduce gun violence and school shootings? Yes, but only after objectively assessing the facts and working collaboratively to fashion common-sense solutions.

Eight Stubborn Facts Regarding Gun Violence in America

1. Violent crime is down and has been on the decline for decades.
 2. The principal public safety concerns with respect to guns are suicides and illegally owned handguns, not mass shootings.
 3. A small number of factors significantly increase the likelihood that a person will be a victim of a gun-related homicide.
 4. Gun-related murders are carried out by a predictable pool of people.
 5. Higher rates of gun ownership are not associated with higher rates of violent crime.
 6. There is no clear relationship between strict gun control legislation and homicide or violent crime rates.
 7. Legally owned firearms are used for lawful purposes much more often than they are used to commit crimes or suicide.
 8. Concealed carry permit holders are not the problem, but they may be part of the solution.
- 1. America is relatively safe, and the trend is toward becoming safer.**
- According to the National Crime Victimization Survey, violent crime has been [declining steadily](#) since the early 1990s.
 - The 2011 homicide rate was [almost half](#) of the rate in 1991, and according to Pew Research, the 2013 gun-related death rate was [half](#) of the rate in 1993.
 - The number of non-fatal firearm crimes committed in 2011 was [one-sixth the number](#) committed in 1993.
 - In the past few years, there have been minor increases in certain types of violent crimes, mainly in large metropolitan areas. However, these increases are nowhere near [those seen in the 1990s](#) and are largely related to [gang activity](#).
 - It should be remembered that it takes at least three to five years of data to show true trend lines. It appears that the collective homicide toll for America's 50 largest cities [decreased modestly](#) in 2017 after two consecutive years of increases.

2. The principal public safety concerns are suicides and illegally owned handguns.

- According to the Pew Research Center, almost two-thirds of America’s annual gun deaths are [suicides](#). Since 1981, when the Centers for Disease Control began publishing data, gun suicides have outnumbered gun homicides. In 2010 alone, 19,392 Americans used guns to kill themselves.
- Most gun-related crimes are carried out with [illegally owned firearms](#)—as much as 80% according to some estimates.
- The FBI’s Uniform Crime Reports prove that the overwhelming majority of gun-related homicides are [perpetrated with handguns](#), with rifles of any kind accounting for less than 3% of gun-related homicides. In 2013, 5,782 murders were committed by killers who used a handgun, compared to 285 committed by killers who used a rifle. The same holds true for 2012 (6,404 to 298); 2011 (6,251 to 332); 2010 (6,115 to 367); and 2009 (6,501 to 351).
 - More people are stabbed to death every year than are murdered with rifles.
 - A person is more likely to be bludgeoned to death with a blunt object or beaten to death with hands and feet than to be murdered with a rifle.

3. A small number of factors significantly increase the likelihood that a person will be a victim of a gun-related homicide.

- Where do you live? Murders in the United States are very concentrated. According to the Crime Prevention Research Center, [over 50% of murders](#) occur in 2% of the nation’s 3,142 counties. Moreover, gun-related homicides are heavily concentrated in certain neighborhoods within those counties: 54% of U.S. counties had zero murders in 2014.
- Who is your partner? According to a recent scholarly article in the *Hastings Law Journal*, people recently or currently involved in an [abusive intimate relationship](#) are much more likely to be

victims of gun-related homicide than is the rest of the population, especially if the [abuser possesses firearms](#).

- Are you in a gang? According to the Department of Justice’s National Gang Center, particularly in urban areas, [significant percentages](#) of gun-related homicides (15%–33%) are [linked with gang](#) and drug activity. Gang-related homicides are [more likely to involve firearms](#) than non-gang-related homicides are.
- Are you a male between 15 and 34? The majority of standard gun murder victims are men between the ages of 15 and 34. Although black men make up roughly 7% of the population, they account for [almost two-thirds](#) of gun murder victims every year.
- [Women and children](#) are more likely to be the victims of mass shootings and homicide-suicide shootings than they are to be the victims of a “typical” gun-related homicide.

4. The perpetration of gun-related murders is often carried out by predictable people.

- According to studies, almost all mass public shooters have [extensive histories of mental health issues](#) (whether delusional/psychiatric or depression/anger), [disturbing behaviors, or interpersonal violence](#).
- Intimate partner conflict and domestic violence history [are major risk factors](#) for homicide-suicides, even for those not involving intimate partners.
- Especially in urban areas, [a small number of recidivist violent offenders](#) are typically responsible for the majority of gun violence.

5. Higher rates of gun ownership are not associated with higher rates of violent crime.

- Switzerland and Israel have [much higher gun ownership rates](#) than the United States but experience far fewer homicides and have much lower violent crime rates than many European nations with strict gun control laws.

- While some will argue that the guns carried by Swiss and Israeli citizens are technically “owned” by the government in most cases, this does little to negate the fact that many citizens in those countries have ready access to firearms.
- Canada is ranked 12th in the world for the number of civilian-owned guns per capita and reports one of the world’s lower homicide rates—but even then, some provinces have [higher homicide rates than U.S. states](#) with less restrictive laws and higher rates of gun ownership have.
- Although many gun control advocates have noted that “right-to-carry” states tend to experience slight increases in violent crime, other studies have noted the [opposite effect](#).
- [Higher rates of concealed carry permit holders](#) are even more strongly associated with reduction in violent crime than are “right-to-carry” states. The probable reason for this is that “right-to-carry” studies often include “open carry” states, which have not been shown to correlate with more people actually carrying or even owning firearms. Rates of concealed carry permit holders are better indicators of the number of people who actually possess and carry firearms within a given population.
- Further, as with most correlations, there are many other factors that can account for increases in concealed carry permits—including the fact that people who live in already dangerous neighborhoods seek out means of self-defense. The *Huffington Post* noted that the rate of concealed carry permit requests in Chicago [has soared](#) in recent years after the city loosened restrictions, in large part, according to the *Chicago Tribune*, because [law-abiding residents](#) are increasingly worried about rising rates of violent crime in the city.
- The rate of gun ownership is higher among whites than it is among African Americans, but the murder rate among African Americans is significantly higher than the rate among whites.
- Similarly, the rate of gun ownership is higher in rural areas than in urban areas, but urban areas experience higher murder rates.
- 6. There is no clear relationship between strict gun control legislation and homicide or violent crime rates.**
 - The Brady Campaign Against Gun Violence [ironically makes this clear with its ratings](#) for states based on gun laws. “Gun freedom” states that score poorly, like New Hampshire, Vermont, Idaho, and Oregon, have some of the lowest homicide rates. Conversely, “gun-control-loving” states that received high scores, like Maryland and Illinois, experience some of the nation’s highest homicide rates.
 - The Crime Prevention Research Center notes that, if anything, the data indicate that countries with high rates of gun ownership [tend to have lower homicide rates](#)—but this is only a correlation, and many factors do not necessarily support a conclusion that high rates of gun ownership cause the low rates of homicide.
 - Homicide and firearm homicide rates in Great Britain [spiked in the years](#) immediately following the imposition of severe gun control measures, despite the fact that most developed countries continued to experience a downward trend in these rates. This is also pointed out by noted criminologist John Lott in his book *The War on Guns*.
 - Similarly, Ireland’s homicide rates spiked in the years immediately following the country’s 1972 gun confiscation legislation.
 - Australia’s National Firearms Act appears to have had [little effect on suicide and homicide rates](#), which were falling before the law was enacted and continued to decline at a statistically unremarkable rate compared to worldwide trends.
 - According to research compiled by John Lott and highlighted in his book *The War on Guns*, Australia’s armed and unarmed robbery rates both increased markedly in the five years immediately following the National Firearms Act, despite the general downward trend experienced by other developed countries.
 - Great Britain has some of the strictest gun control laws in the developed world, but the violent crime

rate for homicide, rape, burglary, and aggravated assault is [much higher](#) than that in the U.S. Further, approximately [60% of burglaries](#) in Great Britain occur while residents are home, compared to just 13% in the U.S., and British burglars admit to targeting occupied residences because they are more likely to find wallets and purses.

- It is difficult to compare homicide and firearm-related murder rates across international borders because countries use different methods to determine which deaths “count” for purposes of violent crime. For example, since 1967, Great Britain has [excluded from its homicide counts](#) any case that does not result in a conviction, that was the result of dangerous driving, or in which the person was determined to have acted in self-defense. All of these factors are counted as “homicides” in the United States.

7. Legally owned firearms are used for lawful purposes much more often than they are used to commit crimes or suicide.

- In 2013, President Barack Obama ordered the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to assess existing research on gun violence. The report, compiled by the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council, [found](#) (among other things) that firearms are used defensively [hundreds of thousands](#) of times every year.
- According to the CDC, “self-defense can be an important crime deterrent.” Recent [CDC reports](#) acknowledge that studies directly assessing the effect of actual defensive uses of guns have found “consistently lower injury rates among gun-using crime victims compared with victims who used other self-protective strategies.”
- Semi-automatic rifles (such as the AR-15) are [commonly used as self-defense weapons](#) in the homes of law-abiding citizens because they are easier to control than handguns, are more versatile than handguns, and offer the advantage of up to 30 rounds of protection. Even Vox has [published stories](#) defending the use of the AR-15.
- AR-15s have been used to save lives on many occasions, including:

- [Oswego, Illinois \(2018\)](#) — A man with an AR-15 intervened to stop a neighbor’s knife attack and [cited](#) the larger weapon’s “intimidation factor” as a reason [why](#) the attacker dropped the knife.
- [Catawba County, North Carolina \(2018\)](#) — A 17-year-old successfully fought off three armed attackers with his AR-15.
- [Houston, Texas \(2017\)](#) — A homeowner survived a drive-by shooting by defending himself with his AR-15.
- [Broken Arrow, Oklahoma \(2017\)](#) — A homeowner’s son killed three would-be burglars with an AR-15 (the man was later deemed to have acted in [justifiable self-defense](#)).
- [Ferguson, Missouri \(2014\)](#) — African American men protected a white man’s store from rioters by standing outside armed with AR-15s.
- [Texas \(2013\)](#) — A 15-year-old boy used an AR-15 during a home invasion to save both his life and that of his 12-year-old sister.
- [Rochester, New York \(2013\)](#) — Home intruders fled after facing an AR-15.

8. Concealed carry permit holders are not the problem, but they may be part of the solution.

- Noted criminologist John Lott found that, as a group, concealed carry permit holders are [some of the most law-abiding people](#) in the United States. The rate at which they commit crimes generally and firearm crimes specifically is between one-sixth and one-tenth of that recorded for police officers, who are themselves committing crimes at a fraction of the rate of the general population.
- Between 2007 and 2015, murder rates dropped 16% and violent crime rates dropped 18%, even though the percentage of adults with concealed carry permits rose by 190%.
- Regression estimates show a significant association between increased permit ownership and a drop in murder and violent crime rates. [Each percentage point increase](#) in rates of permit-holding

is associated with a roughly 2.5% drop in the murder rate.

- Concealed carry permit holders are often “[the good guy with a gun](#),” even though they rarely receive the attention of the national media. Concealed carry permit holders were credited with saving multiple lives in:
 - Rockledge, Florida (2017);
 - Antioch, Tennessee (2017);
 - Arlington, Texas (2017);
 - Lyman, South Carolina (2016);
 - Winton, Ohio (2015);
 - Conyers, Georgia (2015);
 - New Holland, South Carolina (2015);
 - Chicago, Illinois (2015);
 - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (2015);
 - Darby, Pennsylvania (2015);
 - Chicago, Illinois (2014);
 - Portland, Oregon (2014); and
 - Spartanburg, South Carolina (2012).