

Research paper on gun control

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



The issue of gun control in the United States has long been an incredibly controversial one, with many unique and complex arguments both for and against it. Discussion on the issue has become even more heated and aggressive in the past few years, given the rise of school shootings, gun-related crime, and highly publicized shooting deaths due to gang violence in metropolitan areas. While many people believe that the Second Amendment is a fundamental attribute of our civil rights, this perspective is antiquated, outdated, and does not take into account the many different factors related to guns and gun violence today. Research indicates a strong correlation between stricter gun control legislation and lower rates of gun-related deaths. Therefore, increased gun control legislation should be implemented in a timely manner in order to facilitate these outcomes as quickly as possible. Given the increasing prevalence of gun-related deaths, the pervasiveness of gun culture, and a plethora of other factors, it is clear that increased gun control measures must be implemented in order to make our country a safer place to live.

Despite the objectively terrible outcomes of gang violence, crime and shooting deaths, there are those who argue that enacting strict gun control would take away from a vital Constitutional right to bear arms. The gun lobby in America is a powerful force, with tremendous political power through special interest groups, lobbyists, and organizations like the National Rifle Association (NRA) (Goss, 2010). In this argument, this would make crime increase more than it already has by taking guns from law-abiding citizens to defend themselves from criminals who acquire guns illegally. Furthermore, opponents argue that, if guns were taken away, criminals

would simply change their tactics to using other weapons, such as knives or other bladed weapons (Zimring, 1968). These kinds of hardline oppositions to gun control have allowed the anti-gun control movement to gain substantial political power, while gun control advocates are still largely operating from a grassroots position (Goss, 2010).

The difficult nature of this issue is that many of these anti-gun control arguments can still technically fall under the purview of ‘gun control,’ so it may be necessary to provide a clear definition of what exactly is meant by ‘stricter gun control.’ While many proposed sources will work on slightly different definitions of what constitutes gun control, stronger, more restrictive background checks, restraints on unlicensed sale of firearms at gun shows, restriction of concealed carry permits, and other related legislation would provide sufficient levels of gun control to lower crime and gun violence rate substantially.

Conversely, others believe the tenets of gun control would effectively deter crime by lowering the number of guns on the streets, and restricting gun access to those who should not have them. Gun control laws have the effect of reducing instances of criminal homicides; Zimring argues that the banning of firearms in major metropolitan areas would absolutely lower instances of homicide (Zimring, 1968). However, the existing laws with regards to gun control are ineffective and inefficient at actually lowering rates of gun violence. Research indicates that the best measures that have been taken thus far to reduce gun violence have been comprehensive, community-based initiatives like information, training, and storage campaigns, as well as gun buy-back programs, law enforcement campaigns and gun laws (Makarios &

Pratt 223). These measures, combined with stricter measures of gun control and restriction of firearms, may help to provide comprehensive help to communities, combining the immediate restriction of gun violence with the socio-economic interventions that could prevent impoverished and desperate individuals from entering into a life of crime and gun violence in the first place.

Gun violence is often inextricably linked to gang violence, particularly in major metropolitan areas. The Uniform Crime Reports group notes that Chicago, Illinois has an extremely high rate of crime, which increased with each year. In 2010 alone, 436 murders, 1, 359 criminal sexual assaults, 14, 205 robberies, 74, 561 thefts, nearly 20, 000 car thefts and more were all committed in Chicago (Chicago Police Crime Summary, 2010). While this is notably a lower set of numbers than the Chicago crime figures in 2009, the overall trend of crime is increasing. Violent crime is down on the whole, but murders have gone up, particularly as they relate to shooting deaths (Fig. 1). The West and South sides of Chicago, in particular, suffer from gang violence, due to the segregated nature of the city driven by systemic poverty and racial discrimination.

One of the biggest controversies related to gun control is the issue of mental illness, and how that fits into the regulation of gun purchases. In many highly publicized shootings and massacres (e. g. Virginia Tech, or the attempted political assassinations of Ronald Reagan or Gabby Giffords), the individuals involved suffered from mental illness (Gostin & Record 2108). However, the simple existence of mental illness should not be considered a prediction of dangerousness, as there are many kinds of mental illness; there is also the

issue of whether or not to release confidential medical data on a patient when it may come into play as a predictor of violence (Kellermann & Rivara 549). Furthermore, many “prohibited persons” such as those with mental illnesses, criminal records and the like, are often able to find ways around background checks as they are currently applied (2108). This is due to inefficient reporting of such individuals by state to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), which allows some people to buy firearms when they should not be allowed to (2108). These inefficiencies must be put to a stop, with the help of stricter gun control legislation.

In the absence of effective gun control legislation, social initiatives have begun to attempt to act as an alternative way to curb gun violence.

Neighborhood watch organizations and the Chicago Police coordinate to attempt to report and discourage gun violence in neighborhoods, as well as citywide public initiatives to lower gang violence like the CeaseFire Program, amongst other youth pilot programs. The chief goal of these organizations is to treat gun violence as if it were a disease, treating it where it comes from – individual gun violence environments and the people involved in them.

Through certain social initiatives, programs like CeaseFire seek to reduce risk to others by intervening and offering solutions to allow systemic socioeconomic factors to improve to the point where gun violence is less incentivized. Social support systems work with at-risk youth to prevent access to gangs, as well – with these programs and more, it may be possible to lower gun violence without dealing with the issue of restricting Constitutional rights. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives remains to be seen.

One of the most frequently cited arguments against gun control is that citizens need to be able to purchase guns to keep in the home for self-defense. While this is a nice sentiment, and perhaps the most sensible, reasonable reason to keep a gun in the home, the realities of its effectiveness are a different story. According to research data, “ for every self-defense homicide in the home, there were nearly five times as many domestic criminal homicides and 37 suicides,” making even successful instances of citizens defending their homes against intruders pale in comparison to the number of negative outcomes to firearms ownership (Brent et al. 33). Unlike America, many other countries have successfully placed firearms bans on their citizens in the wake of major shooting massacres; a 1996 Australian shooting of 35 people led to the nationwide passing of a ban on semi-automatic rifles and shotguns from the civilian population (Brent et al. 34). This proved successful, as there have been no shooting deaths in Australia in at least the past decade (34). If America were to follow the example of these other nations and institute substantial gun control measures, similar outcomes might occur.

The true solution to how to address gun violence without using gun control has yet to be found; however, some critics believe that stricter gun control would lead to more problems than it starts. For example, Wilson argues that stronger gun control legislation would just add more paperwork and complications to an already convoluted process, which would solve none of the real problems of getting guns in the hands of criminals: “ Legal restraints on the lawful purchase of guns will have little effect on the illegal use of guns” (Wilson, 1994). In essence, his argument is that gun control will simply

take the legal guns out of the hands of citizens who acquired them legally, while doing nothing to prevent criminals from getting guns through other means. In instances such as these, gun control opponents believe in offering greater control to the police – by allowing them to take unlicensed firearms, some argue, fewer people will be killed: " The most effective way to reduce illegal gun-carrying is to encourage the police to take guns away from people who carry them without a permit" (Wilson, 1994). However, this touches on some other issues about the ethics of profiling, and the difficulty of finding reasonable grounds for performing a pat-down on a suspect. While gun control is an important measure, the way in which it is implemented must be carefully considered – these initiatives should not go so far as to create a police state.

Gang violence, school shootings and crimes are not the only tragedies that would be prevented if gun control measures were passed. Suicide is one of the most commonplace kinds of preventable death in America, being the “ 8th leading cause of death for males, and the 19th leading cause for females” in the United States (Rodriguez-Andres and Hempstead 2). Nearly half of all suicides are committed with a firearm, with 46 Americans every day committing suicide with a gun in 2006 (2). Research indicates a significant correlation between the prevalence of firearms and suicide rates, with reductions in firearms availability being significantly linked to lower rates of suicide (2). One of the most effective ways of facilitating suicide prevention, therefore, is facilitating stricter gun control laws – many people who commit suicide are able to get access to firearms far too easily, and would be discouraged from killing themselves if they were not given access

to guns (16). Most specifically, research indicates that restricting access of firearms to minors and requiring permits are the most successful measures in suicide prevention; if suicide rates are to lower, these kinds of measures must be facilitated on a grander scale.

The need for gun control is absolutely paramount, given this argument; however, there is still the issue of the constitutionality of gun control, which people may be opposed to. While some may rankle at the violation of their Second Amendment rights, one could argue that the right to bear arms was created with the original intent of creating a well-armed militia that could theoretically defend themselves from a tyrannical government. As that is an impossibility in today's world (and is not often cited as a reason to curb gun control), it should not be a sufficient defense for allowing assault weapons to be readily available to the average citizen (Fig. 2).

In order to best facilitate the implementation of gun control, specific policies should be outlined to make a comprehensive series of laws that would dramatically reduce gun violence and deaths. Universal background checks for all purchases of firearms should be instituted, as well as a blanket ban on assault weapons and firearms with high-capacity magazines (Brent et al. 34). Firearm safety measures should be increased, including screenings by physicians and psychologists to ensure people's mental and physical acuity before being granted the ability to own a firearm. More preventive interventions such as creating interventions for at-risk youth (such as the aforementioned CeaseFire and other programs) will offer better socioeconomic conditions and alternatives for urban youth violence, curbing future violent behavior (Brent et al. 34). These initiatives may serve as a

good start to addressing the substantial problems of gun violence in America, and can be expanded or modified as needed if they prove to be ineffective or overbearing. The aforementioned issues with gaps in background check efficiency can also be addressed through legislation punishing states who do not provide complete reports of prohibited persons to the NICS(Gostin & Record 2109).

Given this evidence, it is clear that gun control is the most effective and substantive way to reduce gun violence and suicide in America. Gang violence and school shootings have become almost a daily occurrence in the United States, and so action must be taken as soon as possible to get as many guns as possible off the streets. At this point in American history, it is clear that the Second Amendment's protections should be modified and reinterpreted so as to prevent Americans from having access to an arsenal of increasingly-powerful assault weapons, as that would reduce gun violence and make the nation a safer place in which to live. To that end, restricting assault weapon access, prompting universal background checks, offering health screening and interventions for youth at risk of violence or suicide and addressing the systemic factors that lead to gun violence are the most sensible and effective measures that should be taken to improve the safety of the American people.

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