

State Legislation to Reduce Firearm Homicide

A Roadmap for Policymakers

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While the public mass shootings in Newtown, Charleston, Orlando, Las Vegas, Sutherland Springs, Pittsburgh, and Parkland have brought the issue of firearm violence to the forefront, less than one percent of all firearm-related homicides are due to mass shootings.

A set of laws that will have the greatest impact in reducing firearm homicide across the board, not just mass shootings, needs to be identified and implemented.

Types of Laws Regulating Firearms: The WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHY

Our approach to preventing firearm-related homicides should be guided by a more nuanced policy analysis than merely classifying laws as those that “work” or “do not work”. Assessing the impact of multiple laws simultaneously provides a sense of which laws – or combination of laws – are *most effective* at lowering rates of firearm-related homicides. In this case, the effectiveness of ten laws was evaluated:

WHO may purchase or possess a firearm

- Universal background checks
- Prohibition of gun possession by people convicted of a violent crime
- “May issue” laws that give police discretion in issuing concealed carry permits

WHAT types of firearms and ammunition are allowed and HOW MANY guns may be purchased

- Assault weapon bans
- Bans on large capacity ammunition magazines
- Bans on the purchase of more than one gun per month

WHEN firearms may be used

- Stand Your Ground laws

WHY firearms may be purchased

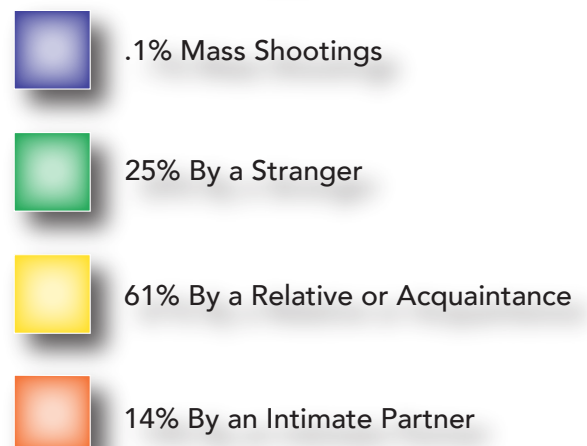
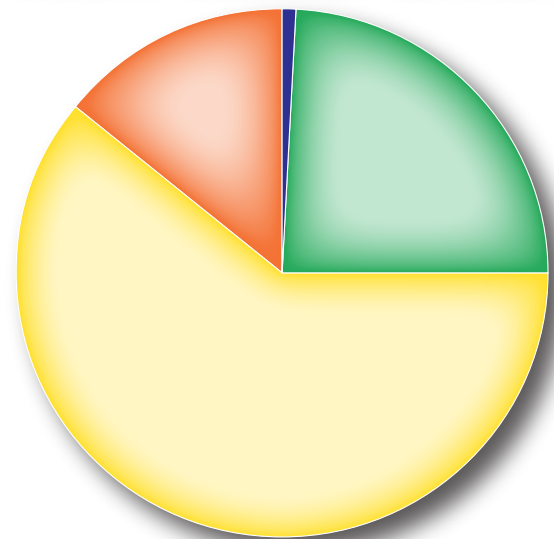
- Bans on gun trafficking (i.e., buying a gun with the intent to sell to another person)

From 2000 – 2014 there were 468,753 firearm-related deaths in the US. This is almost the population of Atlanta, GA.

Approximately 38% were homicides

Only .1% of homicides were from mass shootings

Commission of Firearm-Related Homicides



Three laws are significantly associated with lower homicide rates:

- 19.3% drop with Violent Misdemeanor laws
- 11.1 % drop with May issue laws
- 9.6% drop with Universal background checks

Although laws banning assault weapons or large capacity ammunition magazines may seem like an appropriate response, especially in the context of mass shooting events, there is no significant relationship between these laws and homicide rates. The same is true for stand your ground laws, one gun per month laws, and prohibitions on gun trafficking.

Compared to states without violent misdemeanor, may issue, and universal background check laws in effect, states with **just one** of these laws experienced 6.2% lower homicide rates, states with **two** of the laws experienced 13.5% lower homicide rates, and states with **all three** of the laws in effect experienced 36.1% lower homicide rates.

States with universal background checks, may issue, and violent misdemeanor laws experienced 36.1% lower homicide rates.

It appears that laws that regulate the “what” (i.e., what guns/products are allowed) do not have much of an impact on overall population homicide. In contrast, laws that regulate the “who” (i.e., who has legal access to firearms) may have an appreciable impact on firearm homicide, especially if access is restricted specifically to the people who are at the greatest risk of violence: namely, people who have a history of violence or represent an imminent threat of violence.

The Policy Landscape

The number and type of laws around firearms vary quite a bit by state, with some states having as few as two laws and some states having more than 100. As of 2016, there are three states (Colorado, Illinois, Oregon) with one of the three laws that have been

shown to significantly reduce homicide rates, six states with two of the laws (Delaware, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and Maryland), and three states with all three laws (California, Connecticut, and Hawaii).

Public acceptability of types of gun laws also varies. Policies that regulate who can access firearms have much greater public support than those which ban certain types of firearms, so therefore may be easier to enact. For example, the overwhelming majority of the public, including 97% of people in gun-owning households, support universal background checks, while only 67% of the public and just over half of people in gun-owning households support assault weapons bans.

Evidence suggests that three priority policies would have the greatest impact in reducing overall firearm homicide rates:

- Universal background checks;
- Prohibition of gun possession by people with a history of any violent misdemeanor, threatened violence, or serious alcohol-related crime or subject to a domestic violence restraining order.
 - This must be accompanied by:
 - (1) a requirement that firearms already in their possession be surrendered;
 - (2) a procedure for confiscating guns if they are not relinquished voluntarily; and
 - (3) procedures for confiscating guns in situations where a person becomes prohibited from owning firearms after having passed an earlier background check;
- Extreme risk protection order laws that allow removal of firearms from an individual who, after due process, is deemed to represent a threat to themselves or others.

For more information on firearm laws in specific states, visit www.statefirearmlaws.org. For more information about the information contained in this brief contact Michael Siegel at mbsiegel@bu.edu.