



# Why Gun Control Doesn't Work

The Second Amendment guarantees law-abiding Americans the Right to Keep and Bear Arms. But over time, gun control laws have placed limits on that freedom.

Some politicians and gun control proponents argue that these laws are necessary — even at the cost of infringing upon a fundamental American right. But the fact is, **gun control doesn't work the way advocates argue it does.**

## What is Gun Control?

**Gun control is an umbrella term that refers to laws and ordinances that restrict how law-abiding citizens can buy, own, or use firearms. These vary at the federal, state, and local levels.**

This means that while the Second Amendment protects your Right to Keep and Bear Arms, there may be different restrictions placed upon that right depending on where you live.

Gun control at the local level ranges widely. For example, in some towns, citizens who are licensed to carry concealed firearms cannot do so in public parks. And in Chicago, it's unlawful to own most semi-automatic firearms.

Federal gun control legislation like the Gun Control Act of 1968 and the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (1993) **created nationwide requirements that make it more difficult to obtain a firearm.**

These laws have been in place for decades, and by now, the evidence is crystal clear. **Gun control doesn't work. Some of the key reasons are detailed below.**

### **Criminals Don't Obey Gun Control Laws**

**Criminals, by definition, do not obey the law. Gun control laws only affect law-abiding people who go through legal avenues to obtain firearms.**

Criminals overwhelmingly obtain their firearms through illegal channels and will never be deterred by state and federal laws. **That's why background checks have virtually no impact on criminals.**

A 2016 Obama administration study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics examined how prison inmates obtained the firearms they used during crimes — and the results weren't surprising. The study found that only about 10.1% obtained their firearms through a retail source.

**The vast majority of criminals obtained their firearms through other means, including:** [1]

- Illegal underground sales
- Bought, borrowed, traded, or rented from friends or family
- Gifts
- Purchased by another individual for them
- Theft
- From their victims
- From the scene of a crime

Criminals who go through illegal avenues to obtain firearms aren't going to submit to background checks while doing so. Ultimately, only law-abiding citizens would be impacted by expanded background checks.

### **Background Checks Aren't Effective**

**Even if criminals did submit to background checks, we've seen that these checks aren't effective at stopping those who intend to use guns to commit crimes.**

Consider the following scenarios.

A person with no criminal history walks into a store to buy a gun they'll use to commit a crime. A background check most likely won't stop them.

A drug addict lies about their addiction on a federal background check form. Although this individual is committing a federal crime, a background check most likely won't stop them.

A person with serious mental health issues but no history of treatment or institutionalization goes to buy a gun. A background check most likely won't stop them.

It makes sense then that background checks have no impact on violent crime.

Just take a look at California, a state that's had background checks in place for decades. In 2018, a study was released that examined the effect of comprehensive background checks on the state. The study examined nearly two decades (1981-2000) of data and found that background checks had no effect on homicide rates in California. [2]

Again and again, firearm background checks have proven to be ineffective. What we do know is that they simply make the gun buying process more difficult for law-abiding citizens.

### **Crime Goes Down When Good Guys Have Guns**

**On the other hand, allowing law-abiding citizens to more easily access firearms does help reduce violent crime.**

Gun control advocates have long promoted the idea that making firearms more accessible would increase crime. But time has told a different story. **Gun ownership is up, and violent crime is down overall.**

**Let's look over some quick facts:**

- Over the past three decades (1991-2019), violent crime rates have dropped by more than half. The number of privately-owned firearms in the United States doubled in that same period. [3][4]
- The number of people carrying a firearm for protection outside the home has also risen to all-time highs as violent crime dropped. [5]
- Mass murderers have repeatedly been deterred or stopped by citizens carrying lawfully concealed firearms. [6]
- Concealed carry laws help reduce the number of rapes and robberies overall. [7]

It makes sense that criminals would be far less likely to commit a crime if they believed their victim might be armed. In fact, a major study of 2,000 felons in state and federal prisons across the United States showed that criminals actually fear armed citizens *more than they fear the police*. [8]

### **Cities with the Strictest Gun Control Have the Highest Crime Rates**

**Does gun control reduce crime? The evidence says no.**

In fact, cities with some of the most stringent gun laws, like New York and Chicago, suffer from some of the highest violent crime rates.

Shooting and murder rates in Chicago surged 50% in 2020, and that city recorded the highest number of gun-related homicides on record. [9] Gun-controlled Chicago became the most murderous city in the country.

New York City saw similarly alarming statistics. In 2020, homicides increased 41%, and shootings increased an astounding 95%. [10]

Studies have shown that homicide rates tend to rise when law-abiding citizens are unable to own and carry firearms for self-defense. [11] And the recent statistics from some of the country's most anti-gun cities confirm this conclusion.

Gun control doesn't work, so what does?

### **The Solution: Crime Control**

**The simplest solution is crime control — enforcing existing laws aimed at criminals who carry and use firearms to commit their crimes.**

We know that homicides in cities trend down when elected officials encourage solid police work and harsh penalties for gun criminals. We've seen it work in past years in Chicago when the city gave additional resources to law enforcement.

We've known for decades that crime control works. A good example is "Project Exile," a program launched in Richmond, Virginia in 1997. Faced with a sky-high homicide rate, Richmond prosecutors began enforcing existing gun laws to the fullest, imposing lengthy sentences against drug dealers and other criminals who were carrying firearms illegally.

The project was an enormous success. Law enforcement took hundreds of illegal guns off the street, and Richmond's homicide rate plummeted. [12] Other cities implemented the program with similar success.

In short, "Project Exile" demonstrated beyond a doubt that focusing on gun criminals, not placing undue burden on law-abiding citizens, is the best way to curb violent crime and make the American people safe.

## **Additional Resources**

**Learn More About Gun Laws in Your State**

**Stay Up to Date with Gun Legislation**

**Facts on Gun Ownership and Crime Trends**

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## **Notes**

[1] Alper, Mariel, and Lauren Glaze. "Source and Use of Firearms Involved in Crimes: Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016." *Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS)*, 9 Jan. 2019, [www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=6486](http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=6486)

[2] Castillo-Carniglia, Alvaro, et al. "California's Comprehensive Background Check and Misdemeanor Violence Prohibition Policies and Firearm Mortality." *Annals of Epidemiology*, Elsevier, 11 Oct. 2018, [www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1047279718306161](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1047279718306161)

[3] Cook, Philip J., and Jens Ludwig. "Guns in America: Results of a Comprehensive National Survey on Firearms Ownership and Use," *Police Foundation*, 1996, [www.policefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Cook-et-al.-1996-Guns-in-America.pdf](http://www.policefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Cook-et-al.-1996-Guns-in-America.pdf)

[4] Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. "Firearms Commerce in the United States, Annual Statistical Update 2019," *ATF*, 2019, [www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/2019-firearms-commerce-report/download](http://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/2019-firearms-commerce-report/download)

[5] Lott, John R. "Concealed Carry Permit Holders Across the United States: 2020." *Prevention Research Center*. 2 Oct. 2020, [https://ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3703977](https://ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3703977).

[6] Lott, John R., and William M. Landes, "Multiple Victim Public Shootings," 19 Oct. 2000, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=272929> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.272929>

[7] Lott, John R., et al. "Confirming More Guns, Less Crime." 9 Dec. 2002, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=372361> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.37236>

[8] Wright, James D., and Peter H. Rossi. *ARMED AND CONSIDERED DANGEROUS: A Survey of Felons and Their Firearms*, Routledge, 1994.

[9] D'Onofrio, Jessica, and Craig Wall. "2020 Cook County Deaths Break Records Due to Gun Violence, Opioid Overdoses, COVID-19, ME Says." *ABC7 Chicago*, WLS-TV, 2 Jan. 2021, <https://abc7chicago.com/chicago-shootings-2020-shooting-crime-stats-statistics/9250374/#:~:text=Chicago%20police%20also%20released%20the,495%20murders%20tallied%20in%202019>

[10] Stieb, Matt. "Homicides Surged in NYC in 2020." *Intelligencer*, 29 Dec. 2020, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/12/homicides-surged-in-nyc-in-2020.html>

[11] Lott, John R., *More Guns, Less Crime*, University of Chicago Press, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2010.

[12] U.S. Attorney's Office — Eastern District of Virginia, "Project Exile," *OJJDP*, [https://ojdp.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh176/files/pubs/gun\\_violence/profile38.html](https://ojdp.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh176/files/pubs/gun_violence/profile38.html)