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# THE VIOLENCE PROJECT

## Gun **Violence** in America

James A. Densley & Jillian K. Peterson

Issue Brief 2017-01

## About The **Violence** Project

The Violence Project LLC provides consulting, research, evaluation, and training on criminal justice issues. We also provide white papers such as this that provide analyses of pressing social or policy issues. Our aim is to reduce crime and violence in our communities. On behalf of cities, counties, states, federal agencies, private and non-profit organizations, we develop new programming, design and conduct evaluations, and analyze the effectiveness of programs and policies. Visit us at [www.theviolenceproject.org](http://www.theviolenceproject.org).

## About *This* **Violence** Project

*Gun Violence in America* was produced to enhance an October 2017 public forum at Hamline University titled, “Making Sense of the Violence in Las Vegas.” It extends work from a March 2013 “Deliberative Dialogue on Gun Violence in America,” hosted by Metropolitan State University.

## About the Authors

**James A. Densley** is Associate Professor of Criminal Justice at Metropolitan State University. Since completion of his PhD in sociology at the University of Oxford, Densley has quickly established himself as one of the world's leading experts on street gangs and youth violence, and a prominent voice locally on issues of peace officer education and training. He is the author of the award-winning *How Gangs Work* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), and co-author of the textbook, *Minnesota's Criminal Justice System* (Carolina academic Press, 2016). In addition, he has published more than 30 refereed articles and book chapters in leading social science outlets, and op-eds for *CNN*, *MinnPost*, *StarTribune*, *The Sun*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. His work has attracted local, national, and international media attention, most recently for being a co-signatory on a letter to the media urging them to stop publishing the names and photographs of mass killers.

**Jillian K. Peterson** is Assistant Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Hamline University. Jill launched her career as a special investigator in New York City, investigating the bio-psycho-social life histories of men facing the death penalty, which were used in their sentencing hearings. Jill has a Master's Degree in social ecology and a PhD in psychology and social behavior from the University of California, Irvine. She has led large-scale research studies on mental illness and crime, school shooting prevention strategies, and mass violence, which have received national media attention. She is a sought-after trainer and speaker on issues related to mental illness and violence, trauma, cyber-violence, the development of crime and violence, and forensic psychology. Jill is trained in restorative justice, violence mediation, crisis intervention, de-escalation, and suicide prevention.



# Gun Violence in America

James A. Densley, Ph.D.  
Jillian K. Peterson, Ph.D.

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## **Executive Summary**

On October 1, 2017 at 22:05 local time, a gunman opened fire on concertgoers below his 32nd floor hotel room in Las Vegas, killing at least 58 people and injuring almost 500. The attack is considered the deadliest mass shooting in recent US history. It has renewed debate about gun violence and gun control. This issue brief adds context to potential policy proposals. Key takeaways include:

- Owing to the Second Amendment, the United States has a long history of private gun ownership both for common defense and self-defense
- The US has by far the highest rates of gun ownership in the world
- Attitudes to gun rights and gun control are strictly partisan
- The mere presence of guns underlies tensions between law enforcement and the community
- The US has the highest rate of gun homicides among advanced countries
- Even as gun ownership increases, gun violence (in the long term) is declining
- Gun violence concentrates not just spatially, but also socially
- The vast majority of people with mental illness are not violent
- Ex post facto explanations and an excess of false positives make predicting mass shooters difficult
- Performance violence enacted in the pursuit of fame or notoriety is an important factor in public mass shootings
- 40 percent of gun sales occur in the “secondary market” where federal law does not require transaction records or criminal background checks
- Reducing criminals’ access to firearms can reduce the level of criminal violence with firearms.

## Part I: The Nature and Extent of the Problem

### A Brief History of Guns in America

Adopted on December 15, 1791, as part of the first ten amendments contained in the Bill of Rights, the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution reads:

A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.

Sir William Blackstone, author of the seminal *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765), described this right as an “auxiliary right,” that is, a mechanism to protect the natural or inherent rights of self-defense, resistance to oppression, and the civic duty to act in concert in defense of the state. At this time, “arms” were military weapons and those used by a “well-regulated militia” when the Second Amendment was first proposed in 1789 were mostly long arms that could discharge only once before they had to be reloaded; very different from the arms of today (Lepore, 2012).

During the Revolutionary War (1775–83), militiamen were largely dependent on publicly supplied muskets with bayonets. The Second Amendment was ratified post-war in case the federal government should neglect to sufficiently arm and discipline the citizen militia. The danger was not a tyrannical federal government bent on disarming the people, but rather the people disarmed because of federal inaction (Sweeny & Saul, 2013). In 1792, federal law mandated every eligible man to purchase a military-style gun and ammunition for his service in the newly established Uniform Militia. The intent was “National Defense,” but most state militias still



lacked the firepower common in regular military service, to the extent that their arsenal was better suited to “birding, hunting, and pest control” (Sweeny & Saul, 2013).

Owing to public opposition to standing armies, the Continental Army formed by the Second Continental Congress in 1775 was disbanded after the 13 colonies won independence (per Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution). As a result, the War of 1812, the Mexican–American War (1846–48), the Civil War (1861–65), and the 1898 Spanish-American War were fought primarily by state militias called into temporary federal service. By the middle of the Nineteenth Century, the United States had a standing army but it took mobilization of National Guard units coupled with a massive conscription effort to create a force large enough to fight World War I (1914–18) and World War II (1939–45) overseas.

Only after WWII did a large (and well-funded) standing army become a permanent fixture of the American landscape. An active-duty army swelled with over 2 million conscripts fought The Vietnam War (1955–75) because the National Guard was too busy fighting insurrection at home. And a standing army blended with state militia forces (e.g., National Guard and Army Reserve) fought the Persian Gulf War (1990–91) and more recent conflicts in Afghanistan (2001–present) and Iraq (2003–11).

When the American Civil War ended in 1865, demobilized Union and Confederate troops were permitted to take home their arms. This establishes a base for the modern culture of personal weapons. The National Rifle Association (NRA) was founded in 1871, in part to promote firearms safety education and marksmanship training for this new generation of gun owners. For most of its history, the NRA was chiefly a sporting and hunting association (Winkler, 2013).

The NRA endorsed both the 1934 National Firearms Act—the first major federal gun law—and the 1938 Federal Firearms Act, which together created a licensing system for dealers and imposed tax and registration requirements on “gangster guns” (e.g., machine guns and sawed-off shotguns) used by prohibition-era organized criminals. The National Firearms Act also effectively banned the sale and possession of silencers, something that Congress is currently revisiting. When President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963 and the gun responsible was found to have been purchased via a mail-order advertisement in the NRA’s *American Rifleman* magazine, the organization’s Executive Vice President even testified in favor of banning mail-order rifle sales, noting “We do not think that any sane American, who calls himself an American, can object to placing into this bill the instrument which killed the president of the United States” (as cited in Winkler, 2013). However, the 1968 Federal Gun Control Act, enacted after the assassinations of Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. that same year, which banned mail-order sales, prohibited gun dealers from selling to “dangerous” categories of persons (e.g., juveniles, convicted felons, drug users, former mental patients), and restricted the importation of military-surplus firearms, divided the NRA.

Gun ownership was specifically preserved by the founding fathers in the interest of the *common defense* against a tyrannical government. By the 1960s, however, establishing a constitutional right to carry a gun for the purpose of *self-defense* was slowly becoming central to the mission of the Black Panther Party. Inspired by Malcolm X’s call for self-defense “by whatever means necessary”, Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and other young African Americans very publicly tested a California law that allowed people to carry guns in public providing they were visible and not pointed at anyone in a threatening way (Winkler, 2013). In doing so, the

Black Panther Party took the instrument that once enforced Jim Crow and white supremacy and turned it into a symbol of black empowerment. Subsequent law-and-order legislation that disarmed black radicals under the auspices of fighting crime and controlling civil unrest was last straw for the NRA (Densley, 2016). Following a *coup d'état* at the NRA's annual membership meeting in 1977, the NRA began advancing the argument that the Second Amendment guarantees an individual's right to carry a gun as a means of *self-defense*, rather than the people's right to form armed militias to provide for the *common defense*.

The idea that owning and carrying a gun is both a fundamental American freedom and an act of citizenship has only gained wide acceptance in the decades since. In 1986, the NRA's interpretation of the Second Amendment achieved new legal authority with the passage of the Firearms Owners Protection Act, which repealed parts of the 1968 Gun Control Act by invoking "the rights of citizens ... to keep and bear arms under the Second Amendment." Individual states, in turn, widely adopted "concealed carry" and "stand your ground" legislation, the latter pertaining to an extension of the so-called castle doctrine, exonerating from prosecution citizens who use deadly force when confronted by an assailant, even if they could have retreated safely.

Finally, in 2008, in *District of Columbia v. Heller*, the Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional, Washington D.C.'s Firearms Control Regulations Act of 1975; specifically, a ban on handguns and prohibition of long guns for self-defense. The Heller decision expanded the scope of Second Amendment to the possession of firearms for the purpose of personal self-defense. However, the majority opinion, written by conservative Justice Antonin Scalia, states:

Like most rights, the right secured by the Second Amendment is not unlimited. ... It is not a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever in any manner whatsoever and for whatever purpose. ... Nothing in our opinion should be taken to cast doubt on longstanding prohibitions on the possession of firearms by felons and the mentally ill, or laws forbidding the carrying of firearms in sensitive places such as schools and government buildings, or laws imposing conditions and qualifications on the commercial sale of arms.

In other words, Justice Scalia, the champion of originalism, embraced a living Constitution (Winkler, 2013).

## **The Politics of Gun Control**

A Gallup (2016) poll found that 58 percent of Americans had a very or mostly favorable opinion of the NRA; whereas 35 percent have a mostly or very unfavorable view. Attitudes were partisan: in 2015, 68 percent of Democrats maintained that the NRA has too much influence over gun debates; compared to 13 percent of Republicans (Pew Research Center, 2016). There are certainly two sides to the gun debate. The NRA generally advocates for Second Amendment rights and freedoms, including gun ownership for self-defense; American heritage and culture, thereby normalizing the use of firearms in society; and safety and law, predicated on the idea of responsible gun ownership. The Brady Campaign, the leading gun control lobby, promotes public health and safety (i.e., the notion that gun violence is preventable); crime control (i.e., regulating guns will reduce criminal activity); and the rights of municipal governments to regulate guns and hold gun manufacturers accountable for violence perpetrated with their products. It is worth

noting that the 2005 Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (PLCAA), effectively shields gun manufacturers and sellers from civil claims brought by victims of gun violence.

A significant majority of the American public opposes an outright ban on guns, according to polling by Gallup. The “gun control paradox” (Goss, 2006), however, is that a similar majority do favor some restrictions on firearms, but policy proposals to this effect appear dead on arrival in Congress. One Gallup (2016) poll found that 55 percent of Americans favored stricter gun laws, compared to 33 percent who felt laws should remain the same, and 11 percent who wanted laxer laws. In another survey from Pew Research Center (Oliphant, 2017), some specific controls were widely supported by people across the political divide, including restricting the sale of guns to people who are mentally ill, or on “no-fly” or “watch” lists, and universal background checks. But Republicans and Democrats are much more divided over other policy proposals, such as whether to allow ordinary citizens increased rights to carry concealed weapons.

## **Gun Ownership in America**

The United States has by far the highest rate of gun ownership in the world. There are an estimated 270 million civilian-owned firearms in the United States (up from 230 million in 2001), which translates to 89 guns for every 100 people (Small Arms Survey, 2007). Yemen has the second highest rate of gun ownership with 55 guns per 100 people, followed by Switzerland—which requires military service—at 46 guns per 100 people, or approximately half the gun ownership rate of the US. More guns, however, doesn’t necessarily translate into more gun owners. According to General Social Survey data, three-quarters of people with guns own two or more and about 3 percent of households own half of all the guns in America. The

prevalence of gun ownership has declined steadily in the past few decades. In 2010, for example, one in five Americans owned a gun compared to one in three in 1980. Today, guns are owned by about 30 percent of the American population. Men are far more likely to own guns than women are. Legal gun ownership is higher among whites than among blacks, higher in rural areas than in urban areas, and higher among older people than among younger people.

Gun ownership numbers are based on public opinion surveys, gun registration records, and expert testimony; hence the reliability of numbers can vary widely from country to country. The Small Arms Survey (2007) gives high and low estimates in addition to the averages presented above. According to Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives data, American gun *manufacturing* increased 64 percent from 3.7 million in 2007 to 6.1 million in 2011 and gun sales typically go up in the aftermath of a mass shooting. Background-checks increased from 11 million in 2007 to 16.8 million in 2012. But background checks are not an indication of sales because they're not always required (e.g., for personal sales at gun shows in some states) and one purchaser can buy more than one firearm.

Among law-abiding citizens, sport and self-defense are primary motives for gun ownership, although the actual frequency of self-defense incidents is unknown and available evidence that self-defense deters gun crime or reduces harm to victims is ambiguous (NRC, 2005). The concept of self-defense particularly resonates with women, who are often sold guns under the pretense that they are the “great equalizer” with male strength. However, the risks of a gun in the home typically far outweigh the benefits (Hemenway, 2011).

By contrast, criminals use guns for protection, to expedite the commission of an offense (e.g., scare or kill the victim), escape, or a combination thereof (Wright & Rossi, 1985). Thankfully the symbolism of firearms typically exceeds their

frequency of use. A gun is a ranged weapon that can project violence even when unused—showing the ‘bulge’ is often enough to gain the respect of rivals, while in robberies, brandishing a weapon typically suffices because people do not wait for proof that it works (Hemenway & Azrael, 2000). Most felons who use a gun during an offense, however, claim no prior intent to fire a gun, suggesting the presence of a gun alone greatly increases the chances of using it (Wright & Rossi, 1985). In other words, when guns are around, pushing and shoving quickly escalate into shooting. Moreover, adolescents substantially overestimate the percentage of their peers who carry guns thus are more likely to carry for “protection” against other adolescents supposedly carrying guns (Hemenway et al., 2011).

## **Policing Gun Violence**

There is some truth to the adage, “Guns don’t kill people; people kill people.” The mere presence of guns, however, underlies tensions between law enforcement and the community. Since the 1960s, social-psychologists have documented a “weapons effect,” whereby having a weapon on hand increases aggression in people, particularly people already aroused (Berkowitz, & LePage, 1967; Carlson, Marcus-Newhall, & Miller, 1990); which is expected when police are on the scene. Research even shows that drivers with guns in their cars are more likely to drive aggressively—something to consider during a routine traffic stop (Hemenway, Vrinotis, & Miller, 2006). Police in America are conditioned to expect firearms at every turn; which of course is true because police are themselves armed. But this assumed presence of guns makes it far harder for officers to retreat once they have engaged and creates an implicit or explicit barrier to enactment of Sir Robert Peel’s foundational principle of “policing by consent”—the notion that law enforcement owes its primary duty to the public, rather than to the state. It explains in part why

British citizens, who are generally unarmed, are around 100 times less likely to be shot by a police officer, who too are unarmed, than Americans.

According to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, the number of police officers shot and killed in the line of duty went up 56% from 41 in 2015 to 64 in 2016. This translates to about 0.007 percent of all police officers. Twenty-one officers were killed in ambush-style shootings in 2016, including eight who died in two assaults in 10 days in July 2016, in Dallas, Texas and Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Both assaults occurred in the context of protests against police killings of African-Americans. Ironically, the likelihood of a police officer being shot dead is far higher than that of a member of the public being killed by the police. While there is no centralized tracking system (*The Washington Post* and *Guardian* newspapers are leading sources of information), an estimated 1,000 people per year are shot dead by police, or 0.00003 percent of the general population. However, blacks are being shot at a rate that is 2.5 times higher than whites, with 0.0005 percent of the black population shot dead by police in 2016.

For every black male killed by a (white) police officer there are hundreds more killed by other black males. Violent crime is largely intra-racial for all groups, but the rate of black-on-black gun homicide has led some commentators to argue, “Some Black Lives Don’t Matter” (Lowry, 2015). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data show blacks routinely constitute 50–60 percent of shooting homicide victims, despite constituting only 13 percent of the general US population. A young black man is about five times more likely to be killed by a gun than a young white man. And these numbers, dramatic as they are, understate the problem because most gun deaths are ruled accidental or the result of suicide, but in 82 percent of cases where a black person is killed by a gun, it is judged a homicide.



## **Gun Deaths in America**

In 2014, there were 33,594 firearm deaths in the United States, a number comparable to both motor vehicle traffic deaths and opioid deaths. Politicians often talk about an opioid “crisis” or “epidemic” in America and by that logic, gun violence should qualify for equal treatment. More than 90 Americans a day die by gunfire. It breaks down to 21,386 suicides, 11,008 homicides, and 1,200 accidental deaths or other. Americans are 10 times more likely to be killed by guns than people in other high-income OECD countries (Grinshteyn & Hemenway, 2016). The rate of gun violence in the United States is not the highest in the world—approximately 30 countries in Central America, Africa, and the Middle East, rank much higher. However, those countries with high levels of gun violence (e.g., El Salvador, The Philippines, Iraq) are not like the United States in terms of G.D.P., life expectancy, and education. For this reason, America’s rate of gun homicides (3.5 per 100,000 people) is an outlier.

## **More Guns, More Gun Violence?**

Guns and homicides are statistically associated. Areas with a higher prevalence of guns have a higher prevalence of gun homicides. The question is whether the relationship is causal or not. We simply don’t know because of a lack of robust data (Foran, 2016). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is essentially prohibited from studying the public health effects of guns, for example, even since NRA lobbyists convinced Congress to cut into its funding (retribution for a series of studies in the mid-1990s perceived by the NRA as advocating for gun control).

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2010), the firearms homicide rate, and homicide rate overall, is higher in the US than other

advanced countries (e.g., Australia, Canada, and those in Europe). But country-to-country comparisons are difficult and often provide contradictory evidence. For instance, Latin American countries with high levels of firearm homicide show low levels of gun ownership. Honduras has a gun ownership rate of 6.2 per 100 people and a gun homicide rate of 68.43 per 100,000 people. Colombia has a gun rate of 5.9 per 100 people and firearm homicide rate of 27.09 per 100,000.

Gun violence is not evenly distributed across America, with Southern regions having a higher risk of both gun suicide and gun homicide (Parsons & Weigend, 2016). Using a validated proxy for firearm ownership, Miller et al. (2002) analyzed the relationship between firearm availability and homicide across 50 states over a ten-year period (1988–97). After controlling for poverty and urbanization, for every age group, people in states with many guns have elevated rates of homicide, particularly firearm homicide. The FBI's Uniform Crime Report shows that California had the highest number of gun murders in 2012—1,790, which is 68 percent of all murders that year and equivalent to 3.25 per 100,000 people in the state. If you examine the *per capita* gun murder rate, however, District of Columbia comes out top, with 12 gun murders per 100,000 people; followed by Louisiana (10.16 per 100,000) and Mississippi (7.46 per 100,000).

Gun violence concentrates not just spatially but also socially. Gun violence victims and offenders tend to be criminally active and generally know one another. One study of a high-crime Boston community, for instance, found that 85 percent of all fatal and nonfatal gunshot injuries occurred in a single social network of people with criminal records that comprised less than 5 percent of the community's total population (Papachristos, Braga, & Hureau, 2012). Another study found that 70 percent of all nonfatal shootings in the entire city of Chicago occurred in a co-offending network composed of less than 6 percent of the city's population

(Papachristos, Wildeman, & Roberto, 2015). In Chicago, just being *in network* with another gunshot victim increased an individual's probability of victimization by 900 percent (Papachristos et al., 2015). Many *in network* people are gang members. National figures from large cities indicate that while gang members comprise less than one percent of the general population, over 20 percent of homicides in large cities are gang related (Pyrooz, 2012). This is explained by the cyclical, reciprocal, and retaliatory nature of gang violence (Decker, 1996). Hence why gang membership “strongly and significantly increases the likelihood of carrying a gun” (Thornberry et al., 2003, p. 131).

Gangs aside, how do we explain American exceptionalism among advanced nations? Eric Monkkonen (2006) blames the legacy of mobility (which breaks social ties), Federalism (a weak form of government), slavery (which rationalized a culture of violence among white Southerners, where the murder rate is disproportionately high), and tolerance (particularly with regard racial murders and killings by jealous spouses). Given the crime rate correlates, inversely, with public faith in government and trust in elected officials, Gary LaFree (1998) blames the decline of social institutions in America. Essentially, if people feel society is unfair they are less inclined to play by the rules (see also, Roth, 2009). Mark Kleiman (2009) blames the severity of punishments in America (e.g., state execution, three strikes laws), which contrary to popular belief do little to deter crime. Cesare Beccaria (1963) was in fact the first to argue punishments, to be effective, must be swift and certain but not necessarily severe, noting: “The countries and times most notorious for severity of punishment have always been those in which the bloodiest and most inhumane of deeds were committed” (p. 42).

To account for higher rates of gun violence in southern states, Richard Nisbett and Dov Cohen (1996) identify a “culture of honor” in which southern

residents place an extraordinary value on personal reputation, family, and property and frequently see violence as a way to solve personal problems. To account for high rates of gun violence among the urban poor, scholars describe “subcultures of violence” (i.e., gangs) in which the norms, values, and attitudes of its members legitimize the use of violence to resolve conflicts (Wolfgang & Ferracuti, 1967), and “honor subcultures” in which young men without legitimate means to earn respect become hypersensitive to insult and rush to defend their reputation in dominance contests (Gilligan, 1997). The disproportionate involvement of men as both victims and perpetrators of gun violence may also reflect notions of “hegemonic masculinity” (Messerschmidt, 1993).

The above are all interesting theories but it is difficult to draw causal inferences. There’s also a chicken-and-egg question when it comes to gun violence in America. On the one hand, rising crime leads to a perception of increased threat and, therefore, an increase in the prevalence of gun ownership. On the other hand, making firearms more available is followed by an increase in gun crime. Likewise, the states with the strongest gun laws typically see the lowest gun death rates. But it’s also easier to pass gun control laws in areas with low gun ownership, and harder to pass them in areas with more gun owners.

### **Is Gun Violence Increasing?**

In the short term, yes. The national gun homicide rate is rising at its fastest pace since the early 1970s. However, gun homicide trends in a few big cities are responsible for this rise. Chicago, the nation’s third-biggest city, for example, accounts for about 20 percent of the year-on-year increase nationwide.

In the long term, however, the answer is no (see Pinker, 2011). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data show that gun homicides are down from

12,791 in 2006 to 11,008 in 2014. Gun homicides are down even as the nation's population grows. The gun homicide rate in 2014 was the lowest since CDC records began in 1981. However, there are still about 30 gun homicides per day in the United States and the gun homicide rate remains about eight times higher than the rate in neighboring Canada, 18 times higher than in the United Kingdom, and 20-30 times higher than in Scandinavian Europe (Grinshteyn & Hemenway, 2016, p. 269).

CDC data are derived from the National Vital Statistics System, which collects death certificates that every state must file. The CDC offer a more accurate measure of gun murders than the FBI's Uniform Crime Report, which relies on voluntary reporting of law enforcement agencies. By comparison, FBI data show 10,177 gun murders in 2006 and 9,616 in 2015—about 26 per day. Given there were 13,455 murders total in 2015, firearms were implicated in 71 percent of them.

CDC data includes 400 or so “justifiable homicides” including the use of deadly force by a law enforcement officer, which are not murders. Either way, the number of gun murders is down from all-time highs in the early 1990s. The number of violent gun crimes (e.g., aggravated assaults or robberies committed with guns) is also down. But the number of reported gun injuries is rising. There were 55,544 non-fatal injuries in 2011 resulting from assaults involving guns—up from 44,466 in 2009, according to CDC data. It appears improvements in modern medicine—emergency response, trauma surgery, antibiotics, and wound care—result in people surviving today from injuries that 20 years ago would have killed them. Nevertheless, stab wounds are typically less likely to kill the victim than gunshot wounds, in part because of reduced hydrostatic shock to internal organs (Adelson, 1974). Hence why the case-fatality rate for suicide attempts with guns is higher than other methods, including drug overdoses, cutting, and piercing (Miller et al., 2004).

## More Guns, More Gun Accidents and Suicides?

Across states, both firearm prevalence *and* unsafe storage practices (i.e., storing firearms loaded and unlocked) are associated with higher rates of unintentional firearm deaths (Miller et al., 2005). The majority of people killed in firearm accidents are under age 24, and the shooter is typically a friend or family member, often an older brother (Hemenway et al., 2010). According to a database of accidental child-involved shootings maintained by Everytown, a gun violence prevention group, at least 50 people per year get shot by a child under the age of four. In many of these cases, a toddler finds a gun and accidentally shoots him- or herself with it. However, there is one object parents should fear a hundred times more than the gun in the house but don't and that is a swimming pool. If a child spends a day at a house that has both a gun and a swimming pool, the likelihood the child dies is a hundred times greater from the swimming pool than it is from the gun (Levitt & Dubner, 2005).

Beyond accidents, more than 60 percent of gun deaths are suicides. Given that most suicides are impulsive, access to firearms becomes an important factor in suicide prevention. Availability of firearms certainly determines whether suicide attempts prove fatal (Miller, 2012). Gun availability is also a risk factor for youth suicide in the United States, but the evidence gun availability increases adult suicide rates is less compelling. Most of the disaggregate findings of particular studies (e.g., handguns are more of a risk factor than long guns, guns stored unlocked pose a greater risk than guns stored locked) are suggestive but not yet well established (Miller & Hemenway, 1999, 2001). Adolescents who commit suicide with a gun typically use the family gun (Johnson et al., 2010). Perhaps reflecting overconfidence, gun training is counter-intuitively associated with an *increased* likelihood of storing firearms guns loaded and unlocked (Hemenway et al., 1995).

## More Guns, Less Crime?

In the words of National Rifle Association CEO and Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre: “The best way to stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun” (as cited in Lichblau & Rich, 2012). The NRA’s position is gun availability deters potential criminals. Critics argue more concealed guns equal more disputes resolved with guns, which results in more violent crime. Who is correct?

Four generic types of “concealed carry” laws currently exist: (a) concealed carry prohibited; (b) “may issue” (police have some discretion over who receives a permit); (c) “shall issue” (police must provide a permit to anyone who is not expressly prohibited by statute, as in Minnesota); and (d) unrestricted. According to economist John Lott (2010), “Allowing citizens to carry concealed handguns reduces violent crimes, and the reductions coincide very closely with the number of concealed-handgun permits issued” (p. 20). Lott contends, “When state concealed-handgun laws went into effect in a county, murders fell by about 8 percent, rapes fell by 5 percent, and aggravated assaults fell by 7 percent” (p. 59). Colleague David Mustard (2001) also found, “allowing law abiding citizens to carry concealed weapons does not endanger the lives of [police] officers and may help reduce their risk of being killed” (p. 635).

Gun rights advocates often champion Lott and Mustard’s (1997) work but their findings are strongly disputed. The National Research Council (2005), for example, criticized the short time series, small number of jurisdictions, and sensitivity of the data, arguing it was “impossible to draw strong conclusions from the existing literature on the causal impact of these laws” (p. 121). For instance, crime is down dramatically even in states that have not passed concealed-carry laws. To prove causation would require researchers to discern what would have happened if not for the law, which is almost impossible to model. One of the 17-

member committee (the late James Q. Wilson of “broken windows” fame), however, wrote a dissenting opinion arguing the panel treated the Lott-Mustard studies too harshly (NRC, 2005, Appendix A).

Ian Ayres and John Donohue (2003) are perhaps Lott and Mustard’s greatest detractors. Based on an additional five years of county data, seven years of state data, and tests in 14 more jurisdictions, they concluded that while shall-issue laws did not increase violence, “the statistical evidence that these laws have reduced crime is limited, sporadic, and extraordinarily fragile” (p. 1201). In a later study, Ayres and Donohue (2009) argue, “the one consistent finding ... is that right to carry laws increase aggravated assault” (p. 229). A literature review on firearm availability and homicide likewise concluded, “changes have neither been highly beneficial nor highly detrimental” (Hepburn & Hemenway, 2008). There are two explanations why: (a) Only a tiny percentage of the population seeks to obtain a concealed weapon permit; and (b) those who do tend to be old, affluent, rural, white males, who are at relatively low risk for either crime perpetration or victimization.

About a third of American public schools already have armed security. Armed teachers are a logical extension of the growing “homeroom security” movement: metal detectors, random searches, drug-sniffing dogs, radio frequency monitors, surveillance cameras, private security, “school resource officers” (Kupchik, 2010). There is no clear evidence that such measures make public schools safer. Some studies have found a decrease in violence in schools with in-house police officers, while others have found no relationship at all. Based on fieldwork conducted in New York City public schools, Kupchik (2010) finds “the presence of police in schools is unlikely to prevent another school shooting and the potential



for oppression of students—especially poor and racial/ethnic minority youth—is a more realistic and common threat than Columbine” (p. 82).

Law enforcement can’t do much to prevent a school shooting, although they can, in a few instances, reduce its severity. But many people in life-or-death situations freeze or shut down entirely. It takes months if not years to learn to circumvent the confrontational tension and fear police officers experience in a gunfight, say firearms instructors (see Ripley, 2013). In other words, teachers are ill-prepared to take down body-armor wearing bad guys. The chances that an armed officer or educator will shoot a child by accident are high. The chances of arriving officers’ mistakenly shooting a teacher because he or she is seen with a weapon in the aftermath of a shooting incident are higher.

Public safety departments have developed a number of techniques for communicating and responding to critical incidents on school and college campuses including mass notifications systems, firearm bands, and developing working relationships with local law enforcement (Schafer, et al., 2010). One controversial strategy is to go beyond training and preparing public safety personnel, and actually train students to respond to an active shooter. This can be accomplished through live action trainings, some which include using students as actors, even using pretend gun shots and fake blood (Fox & Savage, 2009). One recent randomized study examined student responses to a live shooter training video, finding that students who watched the video felt more prepared, but also more afraid that a shooting would take place (Peterson, et al., 2015). When weighing the costs and benefits of these approaches, it is important to consider that the odds of a student being killed at school are about 1 in 3 million, lower than the odds of being struck by lightning. Schools are safer now than they have been in 20 years (Ripley, 2013).

## How Do Criminals Get Guns?

Purchases from Federal Firearms Licensees account for only about 60 percent of gun sales. The 1994 Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act mandates background investigations (via the National Instant Criminal Background Check System maintained by the FBI) and prohibits retail sales of guns to juveniles, convicted felons, fugitives, illegal aliens, drug users, former mental patients, and dishonorably discharged veterans. Under the common-law concept of “negligent entrustment,” moreover, a gun cannot be sold to a person if the seller knows, or reasonably should know, that the buyer poses an unusually high risk of misusing it.

But a privately-owned gun can be transferred legally in ways that bypass Federal Firearms Licensees. The issue, therefore, is the 40 percent of gun transactions that occur in the “secondary market” (Cook & Ludwig, 2000), where federal law does not require transaction records or criminal background checks of prospective gun buyers (NRC, 2005). The secondary market includes gun brokers who a) sell guns directly; b) find customers for gun dealers who sell off the books; and c) match sellers with gun buyers in gun shows (which include both licensed and unlicensed gun dealers).

On the streets, everybody knows somebody from whom they can beg, borrow or steal a gun. But the good news is it costs more and takes longer to get guns in the underground market compared to the legitimate market, which suggests gun regulations do make a difference (Cook, Ludwig, Venkatesh & Braga, 2007). Still, thousands of guns stolen from manufacturers, importers, distributors, licensed dealers, and private citizens each year make their way into the hands of prohibited persons (Cook & Ludwig, 2000). Prohibited persons also acquire firearms from licensees without theft via straw purchases (i.e., when the actual buyer uses another person to complete the purchase and fill out the paperwork), “lying and buying”

(i.e., showing false identification and lying about their status), or buying from a dealer knowingly involved and willing to disguise the illegal transaction by falsifying the record of sale or reporting the gun as stolen (Braga et al., 2002). Corrupt Federal Firearms Licensees account for less than 10 percent of gun trafficking investigations conducted by the ATF but more than half of all guns diverted to prohibited users (NRC, 2005).

## **Mental Illness and Gun Violence**

The current focus on policies limiting gun sales to individuals with a psychiatric history results from a clear link in the public's mind between serious mental illnesses and dangerousness (Thoits & Link, 2014; Link, Phelan, Bresnahan, Stueve, & Pescosolido, 1999). The belief that mental illness causes unpredictable violence is pervasive (Markowitz, 2010), and this perception has been particularly perpetuated by the media coverage of mass shootings. However, the vast majority of people with mental illness are not violent. In fact, large studies have found that people with mental illness are actually *less* likely to be violent than similar individuals without mental illness (Monahan, et al. 2001), and people with serious mental illness are more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators (Hughes et al., 2012). Creating laws focused on individual with mental illness may perpetuate the stigma surrounding mental illness (Beck, 2016) and impact whether or not someone seeks needed treatment. Moreover, individuals with mental illness are often undiagnosed, meaning there is no record of their illness that could be reviewed prior to purchasing a gun.

## **Gun Laws in Minnesota**

In Minnesota, a permit to purchase is required to transfer/purchase “military-style assault weapons” and handguns through Federal Firearms License dealers (Minnesota Statutes § 624.7131). A permit to carry also acts as a permit to purchase for Minnesota residents. Traditional rifles and shotguns (primarily used in hunting) may be purchased without a permit, but Minnesota is a “shall issue” state, meaning a permit to carry a pistol is required to carry handguns. Minnesota Statutes § 624.714 observe “a person, other than a peace officer...who carries, holds, or possesses a pistol in a motor vehicle, snowmobile, or boat, or on or about the person's clothes or the person, or otherwise in possession or control in a public place without first having obtained a permit to carry the pistol is guilty of a gross misdemeanor.” Concealment is permitted but not required, and only handguns may be carried concealed. To obtain a permit to carry, people must first complete authorized firearms training.

*Source: Bumgarner, Hilal, & Densley (2016).*

## Part II: Making Sense of Senseless Mass Shootings

### Is Mass Shooting Increasing?

Grant Duwe (2007), director of research and evaluation at the Minnesota Department of Corrections, used FBI Supplementary Homicide Reports and *The New York Times* to identify 116 mass public shootings in the United States during the Twentieth Century; over half of which took place after 1980 (Duwe, 2007). It is important to note these are raw figures; the US had far fewer people 50 or 100 years ago. Guns killed an average of 4.92 victims per mass murder, marginally more than knives, blunt objects, and bare hands at 4.52 people per incident, but significantly less than explosives at 20.32 people (Duwe, 2007). Assault weapons were used in only 4 percent of mass shootings, but they do result in more wounded victims (Duwe, 2007).

Mass shootings are “rare” but “focusing” events (Fleming et al., 2016; Harding, Fox, & Mehta, 2002). How rare depends upon how mass shooting is defined. The FBI’s tracks “active shooter incidents,” of which there were 160 between 2000 and 2013, but not all of them resulted in mass casualties (Blair & Schweit, 2014). Some analysts count mass shootings in which multiple people are shot but survive. Others exclude events involving family members. These subtle differences result in conflicting accounts of the nature and extent of mass shooting. According to UCR data, however, there have been about 20 mass shootings every year since the 1970s (Fox & DeLateur, 2014). At this rate, people killed in mass shootings make up less than half of one percent of the people shot to death in the United States each year. Further, the trend is flat. “There has been no increase in mass shootings and certainly no epidemic” (Fox & DeLateur, 2014, p. 130).

Duwe (2007) defined a mass public shooting as an incident in which four or more victims were killed publicly with guns within 24 hours—in the workplace, schools, restaurants and other public places—excluding shootings in connection with crimes such as robbery, drugs, or gangs.

In collaboration with *Mother Jones* and *The Washington Post*, Duwe has developed a database of 131 events in which four or more people were killed by a lone shooter (or two shooters in three cases) since 1966—when a sniper murdered his wife and mother, then killed 14 others from atop a 27-story tower at the University of Texas. These data show an average of eight people died during each mass shooting event, often including the shooters. Perpetrators generally commit suicide after their attacks, either themselves or by provoking law enforcement to shoot them (known as “suicide by cop”). All but three of the mass shooters were male. The youngest was 11 years of age, the oldest was 66. The average age was mid-30s. 2012 was the second worst year for public shootings, seven, behind 1991 when eight incidents took place.

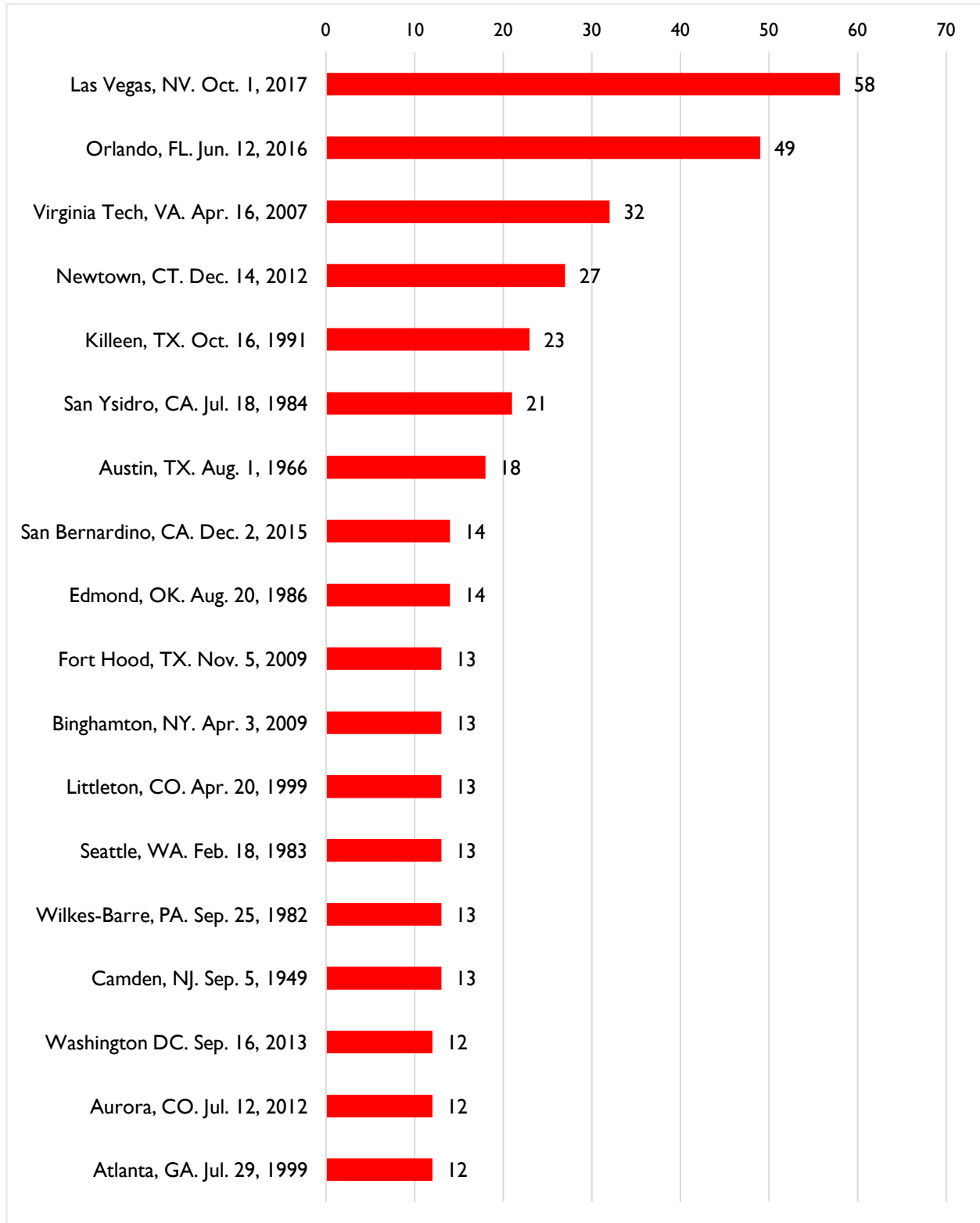
The frequency of mass public shootings has not increased in recent years, but they have become deadlier. The 2017 Las Vegas attack, with 58 confirmed dead, was the worst in recent US history and possibly the first to use a fully-automatic weapon. The next three shootings with the highest number of casualties all happened within the past 10 years—the 2016 Orlando nightclub shooting (49 dead), Virginia Tech in 2007 (32 dead), and Sandy Hook in 2012 (27 dead). Compared to public mass shooters in other countries, those in the United States are more likely to arm themselves with multiple weapons and attack at school and workplace settings, while offenders from other countries are more likely to strike at military sites (Lankford, 2015).

Owing to the severity and placement of some public mass shootings, people often ask why such events are not classified as acts of terrorism. The State Department defines terrorism as “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents.” By this definition, some shootings meet the criteria, such as the racially-motivated massacre in 2015 of nine black worshippers in South Carolina by a self-avowed white supremacist. When mass shootings are labeled terrorism, the public and political response is typically very different (DeFoster, 2017).

### **In Progress: The Mass Violence Project**

The Violence Project is currently working on building a database of mass shooters, extending the work done by Grant Duwe, *Mother Jones*, and *The Washington Post*, by coding shooters on 50 different psycho-social variables. We aim to use statistical modeling to look for patterns in the data that can better inform research and policy.

## Deadliest American Mass Shootings Ranked by Body Count





## Why Do Mass Shooters Shoot?

Among the biological factors implicated in mass shootings are significant brain pathology, XYY chromosome, blood levels of neurotransmitters, and types and levels of hormones. Psychological factors include psychoses, dissociative disorders, suicidality, personality disorders, and psychopathy. Among more sociologically inclined theories are those relating to strain, aggression, adverse childhood experiences (e.g., abuse, having a mentally ill parent, domestic violence against a parent, a household member in prison, divorced parents, or a household member with a drug or alcohol problem), neutralization, labeling, and self or social control (for a review, see Riedel & Welsh, 2015).

Fox and Levin (2012) propose a “motivational typology” of mass shooters that includes the incentives of power, revenge, loyalty, profit, and terror. Fox and DeLateur (2014, p. 126) observe, “mass murder rarely involves a sudden explosion of rage. To the contrary, mass killers typically plan their assaults for days, weeks, or months.” For example, the fact that the 1999 Columbine High School massacre landed on Adolf Hitler’s birthday was no coincidence. This has led some to study the “routine activities” of mass shooters (Hilal, Densley, Li, & Ma, 2014) or examine “warning behaviors” and “leakage” (i.e., communication of intent to a third party) in the context of threat assessment (Meloy & O’Toole, 2011; O’Toole, 2000). The vast majority of mass shooters signal their intentions in advance, though usually not directly to their intended targets.

Studies have found mass shootings may be socially contagious (Towers et al., 2015) or that copycat effects exist (Follman, 2015; Lankford & Tomek, 2017). So-called “fame-seeking” public mass shooters appear more common in recent decades and tend to be significantly younger and more likely to kill and wound more victims than other offenders (Lankford, 2016).

Social media may also play an important role in exacerbating mass violence (Peterson & Densley, 2017a). “Performance violence” is violence enacted for the purpose of engaging an audience. Perpetrators of mass violence are often celebrated in public, which feeds offenders’ “delusions of grandeur” (Lankford, 2016) and potentially encourages additional violent performances to gain notoriety. For this reason, researchers (including the first author; see Ziv, 2017) have called on mainstream media to stop publishing the names and photographs of mass killers (for a discussion see, Lankford, & Madfis, 2017). Still, social media cannot be so easily controlled. Mass shootings always go viral and bring the perpetrator a status in death that they did not have in life; hence why the 2016 Pulse Nightclub shooter checked his Facebook account during his massacre (Peterson & Densley, 2017b).

But ex post facto explanations and an excess of false positives are two major problems with explanations of mass shooters. Case in point: since psychologist Albert Bandura (1977) first argued media in general, and television in particular, provide a power source of models for aggressive conduct, a large number of studies have shown how popular culture teaches aggressive and violent behavior (Murray, 2008). But violent media merely acts as a “facilitator” for people already prone to violence. As Peter Langman (2009), in his study of school shooters, explains: “These are not ordinary kids who played too many video games. ... These are simply not ordinary kids”.

## **The Performance of Violence**

An electronically-mediated world gives new meaning to William Shakespeare's observation that, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." Criminologist Ray Surette (2015) observes that violent performers in the age of social media are both willing and unwilling. The willing are those who "produce" violent content for consumption. They are fully aware of their lead or supporting role in violent performances, typically as perpetrators. They sometimes record or film violence themselves and at least tacitly support the distribution of violent content.

The unwilling, by contrast, play a lead or supporting role without informed consent. They are typically the victims of violence, "recorded in a production similar to a nature documentary," Surette explains. The unwilling are people filmed in secret or in captivity. People who are repeatedly victimized every time their initial victimization is replayed or repurposed.

Finally, there is the audience. Performers are oriented both to each other and to an audience "out there." Why do we watch these violent performances? For the very same reason why we cannot look away from a car crash. A perfectly normal combination of sadomasochism—the desire to think about or imagine hurting or being hurt—and an interest in what is hidden and secret, known as exhibitionism and voyeurism. Some enjoy the performance of violence. They find it thrilling, like a horror movie. Most are saddened by it, particularly if they identify with the victims as if they were themselves or their loved ones. Forced to watch unedited, unpredictable, and sometimes disturbing violent performances again and again, others experience the trauma that causes post-traumatic stress disorder vicariously.

## **Part III: Looking for Solutions**

### **What Can Be Done About Gun Violence?**

In the wake of the December 2012 Newtown shooting, which left 20 children and six teachers dead, President Barack Obama unveiled the most sweeping gun control proposals in a generation, including: a ban on new purchases of “military-style” assault weapons; a ban on the sale of high-capacity (more than 10 rounds) ammunition clips; a ban on possession and sale of armor-piercing bullets; background checks on all gun sales (including private purchases and transactions at gun shows—closing the “gun show loophole”); harsher penalties for gun-traffickers, especially unlicensed dealers who buy arms for criminals; and a new chief of the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. Many of these “solutions” are still on the table. The question is, will they work?

### **Regulating Gun Dealers**

In 2000, ATF conducted focused compliance inspections on dealers who had been uncooperative in response to trace requests and on Federal Firearms Licensees who had ten or more gun crimes traced to them the prior year. These selective inspections disclosed violations in about 75 percent of the 1,012 dealers inspected (Riedel & Welsh, 2015). This is promising.

### **Reducing the Lethality of Guns**

Evaluation evidence is lacking (NRC, 2005) but intuitively, designating certain firearms as “dangerous”, restricting access to certain types of weapons or ammunition by law, making weapons less dangerous by requiring trigger locks or

prohibiting modifications such as “bump fire stocks” that replaces a rifle’s standard stock (the part held against the shoulder), thus enabling the weapon to slide back and forth and fire at nearly the rate of a fully automatic firearm, should limit the number of casualties in a single event.

## **Altering Gun Uses or Storage**

New to the market are so-called “smart guns” that use biometrics and technology (e.g., RFID chips, fingerprint recognition, magnetic rings) to prevent use by unauthorized persons. Smart guns are intended to prevent accidental discharge and/or use and misuse of firearms by children. Further, the technology should in theory render lost and stolen guns impotent, thus curbing the secondary market, and create a “personal statement” (as Q from the James Bond movie *Skyfall* describes it) that will assist law enforcement investigations. However, smart guns have been criticized on the grounds that biometrics take time to process and are often inaccurate, which could result in failure at times when the gun is needed most. As a new technology, there is little evaluation data available.

## **Limiting Gun Sales by State**

To reduce straw purchases, some states have passed laws limiting the number of guns that an individual may purchase during a specific time period (e.g., one every 30 days). No controlled studies have shown harm reduced due to this intervention—indeed it may simply compel straw purchasers to travel to another nearby state or jurisdiction with less restrictive laws. If it is to work, therefore, it must be enacted at federal level.

## **Screening Gun Buyers**

Very few applicants are currently refused. Jens Ludwig and Philip Cook (2000) found no effects comparing 32 pre-Brady Act states with 19 (plus Washington DC) Brady Act-compliant states. The only effect was a reduction in gun suicides for people aged 55 or over.

## **Gun Buy-Back Programs**

The assumptions underlying gun buy-backs are badly flawed. First, guns typically recovered are the ones least likely to be used in criminal activities, including many old or inoperative guns. Second, because replacement guns are so easily obtained any decline in the number of guns on the street is likely to be smaller than the number of guns turned in. Available evidence suggests gun buy-backs have no effect on gun-related violence at all (NRC, 2005).

## **Banning Assault Rifles**

It is illegal for private citizens to possess fully automatic firearms manufactured after May 19, 1986 and ownership of earlier models requires a federal license. However, the 1994 assault weapons ban grandfathered in assault weapons and large-capacity magazines capable of holding more than ten rounds and was riddled with loopholes that allowed manufacturers to rename their weapons and make minor modifications on copycat models that could be sold legally. Perhaps for this reason (and the short time period available for analysis) the empirical evaluation revealed no clear impact on gun violence (NRC, 2005). Perhaps more importantly, URC data show about 70 percent of all gun murders are committed with a *handgun*. While banning high-capacity magazines would affect the number of bullets loaded

into a semi-automatic handgun, this (like an assault weapons ban) would have no direct effect on the availability of murderers' weapon of choice—the handgun.

### **What Works in Gun Violence Prevention and Intervention?**

Kleiman (2011, pp. 186-7) observes, reducing the number of firearms in private hands by 90 percent would no doubt reduce the homicide rate. But reducing the number by 10 percent would only have a small effect on crime as opposed to accident or suicide prevention. The experience with states passing “shall issue” laws provides no evidence of substantial criminal violence by holders of those permits. Thus, two of the major goals on gun control advocates—reducing the prevalence of firearm ownership and preventing the passage of “shall issue” laws—are largely irrelevant to the project of reducing victimization risk (Kleiman, 2011).

Kleiman (2011) clarifies, however, reducing criminals' access to firearms can reduce the level of criminal violence with firearms. As such, universal background checks (e.g., private sellers must verify eligibility through a licensed gun dealer) and limiting the number of firearms anyone other than a licensed dealer can purchase over the course of a month would be a step in reducing access to guns by those likely to use them criminally. Tracing guns used in crimes back to their most recent legal sale can equally help identify problem gun dealers. Requiring guns to be fired before sale and entering the ballistic signatures on the bullet and the cartridge entered into a database along with the serial number of the weapon would extend the capacity to trace guns used in the commission of a crime in which the bullet or the cartridge is left at the crime scene but the gun itself is not recovered. The gun's last legal purchaser could then be asked to account for what happened to it.

Intensive, intelligence-led, police patrols directed against illicit gun carrying in high-violence neighborhoods are the next step in dealing with the secondary

market. When homicide victims are found outdoors we can infer homicide offenders are carrying guns in public. But if criminals know their chances of getting caught red-handed are high, they will be forced to change their gun-carrying behaviors. Such is the logic behind Group Violence Intervention (GVI), a well-documented violence reduction strategy that began life as “Operation Ceasefire” in Boston in the 1990s and now is codified by the National Network for Safe Communities (2013).

There is “strong empirical evidence” for GVI’s effectiveness (Braga & Weisburd, 2012, p. 25). GVI begins with a problem analysis, such as a systematic review of all violent incidents and an audit or mapping of all violent groups in any given jurisdiction. Once the key players are identified, coordinated law enforcement action against the most violent group follows in an effort to demonstrate to other groups that violence will not be tolerated. Next, community moral voices and social service providers partner with law enforcement to engage directly with violent group members (and through them, their associates) in a “call-in,” or face-to-face meeting, at a venue of civic importance (Kennedy, 2011).

The call-in is perhaps the most famous GVI tactic, to the extent it is commonly misrepresented as the entire strategy. At each call-in, group members receive three direct, mutually reinforcing, messages. First, police and prosecutors communicate that future violence in furtherance of the group will be met with swift, severe, and certain consequences; in part because the entire group will be held accountable for violence perpetrated by any one member. In other words, if one group member violates the terms of the ceasefire, law enforcement will pull every civil and criminal lever available (e.g., outstanding warrants, probation and parole violations, open cases) to dismantle the entire group (Braga & Weisburd, 2012). Second, community representatives articulate why violence is morally



reprehensible and henceforth unacceptable. In doing so, they clarify and reinforce the community's standards, aspirations, frustrations, and expectations, but also reintegrate group members back into the community on the condition of nonviolence. The strong presence of police and community working together, heightens the perceived risk of apprehension and sanction (Braga & Weisburd, 2012, p. 349). Third, social service providers inform group members that genuine help is available for those who want it, thus facilitating an honorable exit from street life via counseling, employment, education, and training (National Network for Safe Communities 2013).

Further, buy-and-bust operations or incentives for arrestees to provide information about buyers and sellers in the illegal gun market may prove more effective than similar efforts directed at the illegal drug market. That is because guns, unlike drugs, are durable goods, which means market transactions are lower and the risks of exchange are higher (Densley, 2013).

At the same time, we need to change attitudes toward gun carrying. Criminals often procure guns from friends and family members. Just as we now accept that friends don't let friends drive drunk, we need a national public-health campaign that instills the message that friends who supply or store guns for others are equally culpable for the crimes committed with those guns (for more on guns and public health, see Hemenway, 2004). While research on the deterrent effects of sentencing enhancements for firearms is mixed (NRC, 2005), states could offer substantial rewards for information leading to the arrest of people carrying or possessing a gun illegally and institute a gun-emphasis policy in investigations and prosecutions of violent crimes.

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## Data Sources

- Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, *Annual Firearms Manufacturers and Export Report*
- Everytown for Gun Safety, *#NotAnAccident Index*
- Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Uniform Crime Reports*
- General Social Survey
- Mother Jones, *US Mass Shootings, 1982-2017*
- National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, *Injury Mortality Reports*
- National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, *Fatal Injury Reports*
- National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *UNODC Homicide Statistics*
- USA Today, *Nation Behind the Bloodshed: Every U.S. Mass Killing Since 2006*
- The Washington Post, *The Math of Mass Shootings*



## Want to Learn More?

Americans for Responsible Solutions

<http://americansforresponsiblesolutions.org/stand-with-gabby/>

Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence

<https://www.bradycampaign.org>

Coalition to Stop Gun Violence

<https://www.csgv.org>

Everytown for Gun Safety

<https://everytown.org>

Factcheck.org

<http://factcheck.org/2012/12/gun-rhetoric-vs-gun-facts/>

Harvard Injury Control Research Center

<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hicrc/firearms-research/>

National Network for Safe Communities

<https://nnscommunities.org>

Joyce Foundation

<http://www.joycefdn.org/programs/gun-violence>

Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence

<http://smartgunlaws.org/>

National Rifle Association

<http://home.nra.org/>

Protect Minnesota

<https://protectmn.org>

University of Chicago Crime Lab

<https://urbanlabs.uchicago.edu/labs/crime>

## **Stay Connected to The **Violence** Project**

Online: [www.theviolenceproject.org](http://www.theviolenceproject.org)

Twitter: @theviolencepro

### **Contact**

James@theviolenceproject.org

Jill@theviolenceproject.org

### **Future Violence Projects**

One-day crisis and conflict management (CCM) training

Comprehensive mass shooter database

The **Violence** Project LLC  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
[www.theviolenceproject.org](http://www.theviolenceproject.org)