

# Policy Brief

## US Gun Violence

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### Executive Summary

The following policy brief will try to give insights about current gun violence and culture in the United States. The major goal of this brief is to explain the gun violence and rising number of gun-related crimes that occur every year. This article will also explore the possibility whether gun culture is beneficial or detrimental to society. Finally, this article will make some policy recommendations and frameworks to address the problem of homicides caused by firearms.

### Introduction

The United States has the greatest rate of gun ownership worldwide, according to Forbes magazine. Additionally, the US has the most guns (393 million) and the laxest gun laws of any similar country. With 45,222 fatalities from guns in just one year in 2020, gun mortality hit its greatest level in at least 40 years. In comparison to other high-income countries, the US has the most gun-related fatalities. The same visualization is shown in Figure 1, and it reveals that the US has an average of 12 gun-related deaths per 100,000 people, compared to the second-highest country i.e Switzerland in terms of gun violence, which has 3 deaths per 100,000 people, or about 4 times less. Surprisingly, compared to other nations, South Korea and Japan have virtually no gun-related violence. The stringent restrictions, which prevent such incidents from happening in the first place, are the reason that countries like Japan have such low rates of gun violence.

America Leads High-Income Nations in Gun Violence

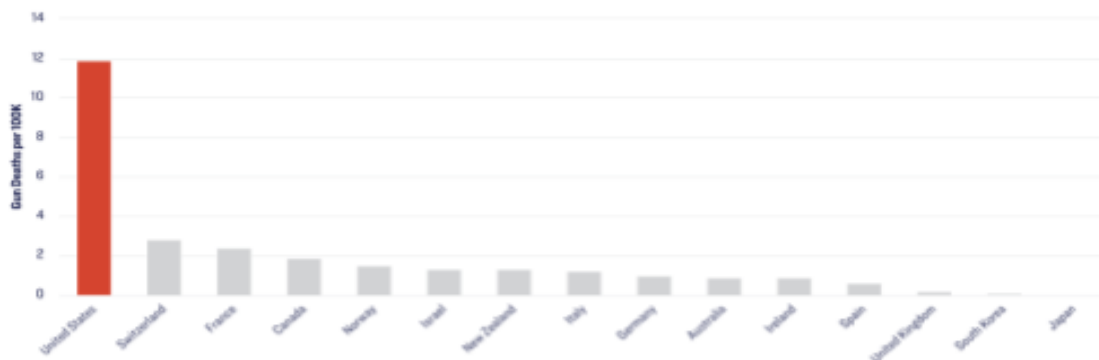


Figure 1. Comparison of High Income Countries in terms of Gun Violence

## Visualization Insights

In order to first assess the distribution of gun violence statistics by state, Figure 2 depicts the same on a geospatial graph. The scale for this graph is based on color, with the deeper the green color shade representing less gun violence and the darker the red color shade representing more violence. From the graphic, we can infer that the states with the largest number of crimes are California, Illinois, Texas, Florida, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, while the states with the lowest number of gun-related crimes are Montana, the Dakotas, Idaho, Wyoming, Maine, and New Hampshire.

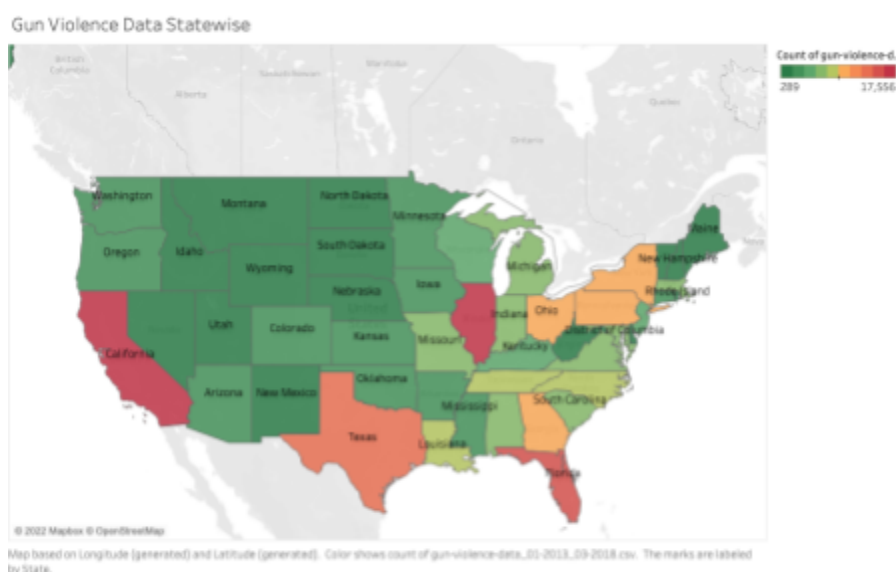


Figure 2. Gun Violence State Wise Data

The strictness of gun laws are ranked by state in Figure 3, with lighter states having the toughest legislation and darker ones having the laxest. When we try to connect the two graphs (Figures 2 and 3), we can see that, in certain ways, the state with the laxest gun laws has a direct correlation with the state's gun crimes. For instance, when there are lax gun restrictions, Texas, Louisiana, and other southern states have the greatest rate of gun crimes. However, this isn't always the case. The Rocky Mountain States have the laxest gun regulations yet have low crime rates, whereas New York and California, which have the toughest regulations, also have the highest rates of crime, according to the same reference figures 2 and 3. Therefore, judging the scenario just based on how tight the regulations are won't be helpful. We need to take into account the population factor as well. Hence, Figure 4 helps us to understand the situation further.



Figure 3. Gun Law Strictness Ranking State Wise

Figure 4 makes it clear that the population of the state plays a significant part in crimes using firearms. Because California, Texas, New York have the biggest population and hence the highest levels of gun violence and vice versa for Rocky Mountain States. The red dot on the map indicates that the state has a greater level of gun violence. We may thus conclude from all the geographical data that the population and laws of the state are tied to gun violence.

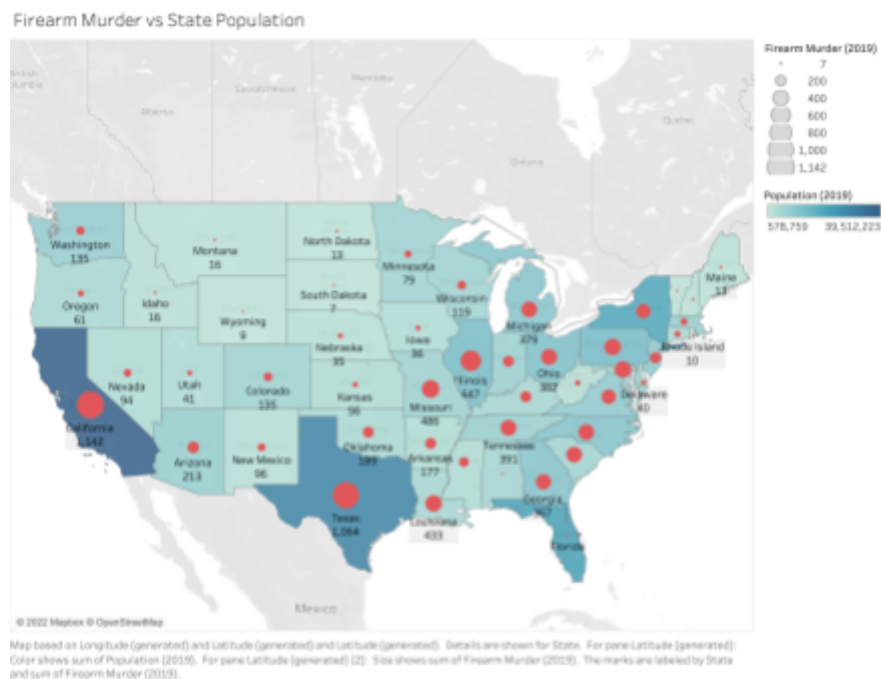


Figure 4. Firearm Murders vs State Population

According to one research study done by Professor Emerita Joyce Lee Malcolm of George Mason University, she argues that states with the highest rate of ownership do not correlate with gun homicides. "Gun ownership is higher in states with fewer restrictions, and homicide rates in these states are lower. People can protect themselves," Prof. Malcolm pointed to a study on burglars from 1986 that found 34% of burglars interviewed reported "to having been scared off, shot at, wounded or captured by an armed victim." Therefore, the article's thesis presents a compelling case for supporting gun ownership. This raises problems on both sides, including the topic of whether we should outright outlaw weapons. It puts us readers in a difficult position about gun culture and legislation in general. Or should we back the pro-gun lobby since it also serves to safeguard the populace?

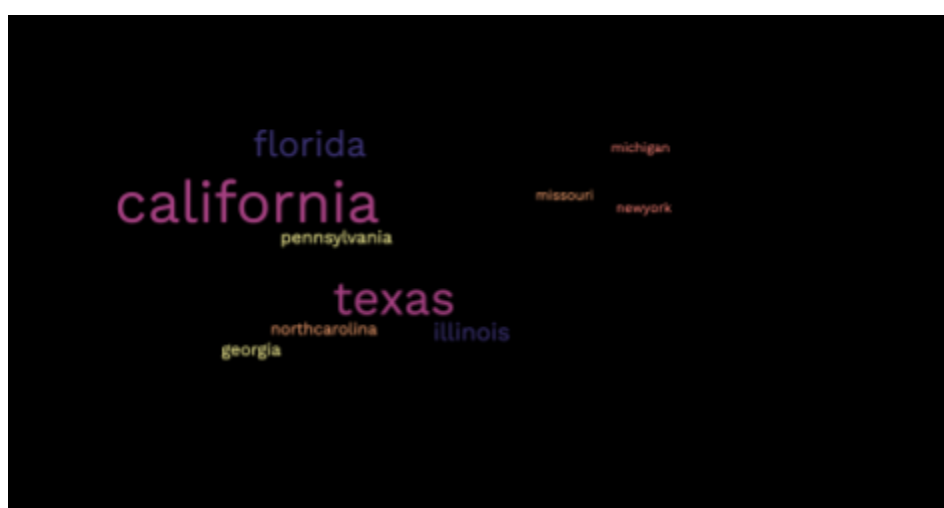


Figure 5. Word Cloud of Top 10 States for Gun Related Homicide

## Case Study

To find out the solution for the open ended question above, I have taken into consideration the infamous Port Arthur incident in Australia which happened in 1996. The perpetrator killed 35 people and wounded 23 others in the incident. Following the incident, the Government of Australia amended the so-called National Firearms Agreement (NFA) which ensured total prohibition on the ownership, possession, sale and importation of all automatic and semi-automatic weapons. A gun buy-back clause in the law allowed Australia's government to seize and destroy roughly 700,000 weapons, cutting the number of homes with guns in half. There has only been one gun related massacre incident in the last 26 years since their gun regulations were imposed when the law was first adopted in 1996–1997. In addition, 60% fewer murders with guns occurred in Australia after the incident.

## Policy Interventions and Plausible Solutions

After considering all the data points, visualizations and past policy amendments in other countries, there can be four plausible solutions that can be frameworked and implemented for curbing gun related violence in the US.

- Limit Access to Handguns and restrict AR guns for commercial use.
  - Handguns are the most common choice of weapon for gun crime because of the mobility it provides and hence limiting the sale of the same might curb the violence.
- Stringent Background Checks during Gun Sales.
  - Criminal records, Health records should be assessed before the sale of weapons to the person.
- Proper Counseling of People Possessing Firearms with Mental Health Issues.
  - A study by Alfred University has found out that most of the school shootings in the US take place by some individual who has some mental issues and has faced some kind of bullying experience by peers.
  - Hence it becomes of utmost importance to give some mental guidance and counseling to the individual who might be going through the same.
- More uniform and Comprehensive Laws for all States.
  - As we have seen, some states like California and New York have some of the strictest gun laws whereas states like Texas, Florida have laxest laws.
  - Hence this creates coordination and compliance issues at national level and can fuel up to gun violence.

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