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# Gun Control: The Gun Violence Epidemic in the U.S.

ANNA KODURU  
ajk162@zips.uakron.edu

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Gun Control: The Gun Violence Epidemic in the U.S.

Anna J. Koduru

University of Akron

### Abstract

While holding almost half of all civilian-owned guns around the globe and yet only 4.4 percent of the world's population, the United States of America is heavily centered around gun rights due to the 2nd amendment in the U.S. Constitution. But gun violence is on the rise as deaths due to gun violence are at its highest rate in nearly 40 years. Americans are divided amongst themselves when it comes to how we must approach this issue. In order to reduce gun violence in the U.S., both Republican and Democrat leaders must come together and make bipartisan moves to implement stricter gun control regulation at the federal level. This paper explores the level of urgency gun control regulation calls for as well as the many ways gun violence is tolerated. By using previous studies and a survey poll conducted by myself, statistical data will be used to support arguments for better gun control regulation at the federal level. These research sources include quantitative methods. Since gun violence is heavily credited to the gun purchasing system itself, federal changes must be made in the process to legally obtain a gun. From extending background check wait periods to instilling limitations on age and types of weapon purchased, the reduction of America's high gun violence rates is certainly possible if Congress would pave a pathway and actively pass new gun control laws.

## Introduction

There is a gun violence epidemic in the United States that has caused division amongst the American people. The rate of gun deaths has risen to America's highest rate in more than 40 years. Gun violence is one of the most controversial topics within the U.S. The controversy is due to several factors, including 2nd amendment rights, legislators opposed to change, and the tragic effects from gun violence due to broken gun systems. With a divide between political parties, U.S. citizens have yet to agree on what should be done to eliminate gun violence and what causes its prevalence in the country. The research that this project will summarize investigates three concerns; why the U.S. has such high gun violence rates, what changes can be done to reduce U.S. gun violence rates; and how the outcomes of the potential remedies will affect the country. In addition to this research, the information gained in this investigation will help provide educated suggestions for what solutions can be implemented to reduce gun violence. While the majority of information in this project shall be used from previous studies, a poll had been personally conducted asking a random sample of 107 participants what their relationship with gun violence is like. The previous studies alongside the poll will be used to support any arguments in this paper about gun regulation necessity in the U.S. A detailed discussion shall be written throughout this project about why this issue has grown into a massive problem that refuses to be solved because of strong beliefs that differ with one another. Many of the issues with the subject that will be implemented in this project involve our current broken system which is in need of a change. While there are ongoing pieces of legislation that are currently under consideration by Congress to implement better gun control, we will not see gun control laws' effect until they have a consistency when it comes to carrying out the rules and regulations in the buying, background checking, and selling of guns. The purpose of this specific study is to

know whether gun violence can be eliminated with better gun control regulation and to determine what the best strategies are to reduce the prevalence of gun violence in the U.S.

### **Literature Review**

It is important to have a general knowledge of current gun violence prevalence before arguing for better gun control regulation. Statistical facts and studies have proven the amount of gun violence existent in the U.S. to be problematic. America only holds 4.4% of the world's population but owns almost half of all civilian-owned guns around the world. The U.S. has the highest gun ownership rate in the world—an average of 88 guns per 100 people. Though not the highest in gun violence around the world, these numbers puts the U.S. first in the world for gun ownership (Chalabi, 2012). There have been more than 1,600 mass shootings since the school shooting at Sandy Hook in 2012, which would average to about one mass shooting event per day in America between 2012 and today (Lopez, 2018a). Counting murders and suicides, nearly 40,000 people died of gun-related violence in the U.S. in 2017, the highest annual total in decades. The nearly 40,000 Americans who died of gun-related injuries in 2017 marked a 19% increase from 2012 and the highest annual total since the mid-1990s. The increase in gun deaths over five years included a 15% rise in suicides involving a gun and a 25% rise in murders involving a firearm (Gramlich, 2018). An average of almost 40 people were murdered every day with a firearm and 107,002 nonfatal gunshot injuries involved firearm assaults in 2017, or about 293 injuries per day (Xu, 2019).

With the rate of people dying to guns on the rise, Congress and state legislators struggle to come to an agreement regarding what must be done. “Around nine-in-ten Republicans and Democrats (both 89%) say people with mental illnesses should be prevented from buying guns. Nearly as many in both parties (86% of Democrats and 83% of Republicans) say people on

federal no-fly or watch lists should be barred from purchasing firearms. And majorities of both Democrats (91%) and Republicans (79%) favor background checks for private gun sales and sales at gun shows.” But there are certain ideas suggested in Congress that have sparked division between the two political parties. Republicans are far more likely than Democrats to favor allowing teachers and school officials to carry guns in elementary and high schools (69% vs. 22%) and allowing people to carry concealed weapons in more places (68% vs. 26%), according to a study conducted by John Gramlich. Democrats are much more likely than Republicans to favor banning assault-style weapons (81% vs. 50%) and high-capacity magazines (81% vs. 51%). Under current law background checks are conducted by licensed gun dealers only. Unlicensed sellers do not have to conduct a background check, even if the seller sells a large number of guns. Only 13 states require a background check to be performed no matter how a gun is sold or what kind of gun it is, according to the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. This article also found that unlicensed sellers “...can’t sell handguns to anyone under the age of 18, but can ‘sell, deliver, or otherwise transfer a long gun or long gun (a rifle or shotgun) ammunition to a person of any age,’ according to the Law Center.” These 13 states require a background check at the point of transfer, with Nevada in the process of getting this law enforced. In a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, about 42% of adults in the U.S. live in a household with a gun. Of this 42%, about 30% of American adults own a gun while 11% live in a gun-owning household but do not own the gun themselves. A significant share of Americans (44%) say they personally know someone who has been shot, either accidentally or intentionally, according to the spring 2017 survey. Approximately 57% of black adults say this, compared with 43% of whites and 42% of Hispanics. Gun owners are more likely than non-gun owners to know someone who has been shot (51% vs. 40%) (Gramlich, 2018). Since not all

states have strict crackdowns to prevent buyers from easily purchasing guns, several states are stuck with problematic gun systems that will not improve any time soon. These broken gun systems lead to death rates that have the capability to decline if more legislation would be enacted to govern safer lives for the American people. With bipartisanship, politicians have the power to create a modernized, better environment for a changing nation that is always evolving with time.

Pro-gun legislators and citizens are known to argue that purchasing a gun should not be made any more difficult than it is since the right to bear arms should not be infringed. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment in the U.S. 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.” To make it harder for citizens to access guns seems like a threat to take away the security of a free state for those who wish to bear arms. Protection is another reason why people wish to keep how easy it currently is to buy a gun in addition to protecting the U.S. Constitution. Approximately two-thirds of gun owners say protection is a major reason why they own a firearm. Considerably smaller shares say hunting (38%), sport shooting (30%), gun collecting (13%) or their job (8%) are major reasons (Gramlich, 2018). When it comes to the two political parties in general, the statistics become much more drastic and apparent. “Eight-in-ten Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents (80%) say gun laws should be stricter while 28% of Republicans and GOP leaders say the same. For their part, Republicans are much more likely than Democrats to say gun laws are about right (52% vs. 15%) or should be less strict than they are today (20% vs. 4%).” Around 76% of Republicans say it is more important to protect the right of Americans to own guns than it is to control gun ownership, while just 19% of Democrats agree. That 57-percentage-point partisan gap is up from a 29-point gap in 2008 (Gramlich, 2018). One area of

gun control that both parties remain almost equal in opinion on is the debate of whether mentally ill people should be restricted from purchasing guns. Both Republicans and Democrats are on the same page in agreement that citizens on watch lists should not be able to purchase guns and also favor background checks at private gun sales and gun show sales. The federal *Gun Control Act of 1968* prohibited firearm acquisitions by minors, illegal aliens, adults with felony convictions, and those confined by court order due to mental illness yet failed to make any solid requirements for how federally licensed firearm dealers conclude whether a buyer is eligible or not.

An area of division between Republicans and Democrats on gun control is what the best means to go about determining a purchaser's eligibility. Because there is vagueness in gun laws and rules, guns and ammunition are being sold at an unnecessary rate. An example of our broken gun purchasing system is seen in the event of tragic church shooting in Charleston, South Carolina a few years ago. Under law, if a federally-licensed firearms dealer who has initiated a background check has not been notified within three business days that the sale would violate federal or state laws, the dealer may proceed with the sale by default. Because of this dangerous loophole in federal law, mentally unstable Dylann Roof was able to legally buy his murder weapon despite having a disturbing history of qualities that would deem him unfit to own a gun. He should have failed a background check because of his history involving unlawful controlled substance use. But because his background check was not processed within the three-day legal business wait period, the gun seller in whom Roof sought to buy his weapon from had dealt the future murderer a gun that would go on to kill nine members of a black church during their bible studies. This exemption from waiting to see criminal status liability is often referred to as default proceeding. "Many default proceed cases require extra time and attention precisely because the firearm purchaser has a long record of dangerous red flags; according to data compiled by

Mayors Against Illegal Guns, default proceed sales are eight times more likely to involve a prohibited purchaser than other background checks.” (“Universal Background Checks,” n.d.). Federal law allows individuals who hold certain firearms-related permits issued by state or local governments (such as concealed weapon permits) to bypass the federally required background check under certain specifications. “The permits must have been issued 1) within the previous five years in the state in which the transfer is to take place and 2) after an authorized government official has conducted a background investigation to verify that possession of a firearm would not be unlawful. Permits issued after November 30, 1998 qualify as exempt only if the approval process included a NICS check.” This means that if the state-issued permit qualifies for the exemption, the permit-holder is not required by federal law to undergo a background check before purchasing a gun. Unfortunately, this exemption can allow a person of criminal background, or other qualities that would deem them insufficient to hold a gun, to acquire a firearm even after he or she becomes prohibited from doing so “...if the state does not immediately revoke the permit when the person becomes prohibited.” There are 26 states in the U.S. that currently abide by this hazardous exemption, including the state of Ohio, with their own specifics regarding what kind of permits are exempted. This exemption to certain permits enabled 4,864 prohibited purchasers to buy guns in 2017 before a background check was completed (“Universal Background Checks,” n.d.). Another issue with the process of determining who is qualified to purchase a gun is the verification of identification documents itself. “While each gun purchaser must present proof of identity when applying to purchase a firearm, federal law does not provide a mechanism for dealers to ensure that these identification documents are valid.” This gap in the federal background check system allows prohibited individuals to purchase firearms without effective background checks using fake or forged

identification documents. Researchers suggest that all dealers should be linked to state motor vehicle databases so that they can verify the validity of driver's licenses offered by potential gun purchasers. ("Universal Background Checks," n.d.).

However, some states have made modern adjustments to improve their state laws in terms of background checks and ammunition legislation. For example, 7 states (California, Colorado, Florida, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Utah, and Washington) prohibit a dealer from transferring a firearm to a purchaser until a background check clears or a certain period of time elapses, whichever occurs first. Connecticut, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and North Carolina have state laws that require a person to obtain a license or certificate before purchasing a firearm, which can also provide law enforcement with longer periods of time to conduct a background check on the applicant ("Universal Background Checks," n.d.). As for the lack of federal laws regulating ammunition purchase, six states have enacted their own local laws regulating ammunition sales and requiring purchasers to pass a background check in order to buy ammunition. California, District of Columbia, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, and Washington are all jurisdictions that impose licensing or other requirements on sellers of ammunition ("Ammunition Regulation," n.d.).

Ammunition is an underestimated area of gun violence that should be paid more attention to since it is the fuel behind what guns can do. While firearm sales are subject to various federal restrictions, ammunition sales are not. Unlicensed sellers can sell, deliver, or otherwise transfer a long gun or long gun ammunition to a person of any age ("Ammunition Regulation," n.d.). "Federal law does not require ammunition sellers to verify that a prospective purchaser is of legal age to purchase or possess ammunition." Also, federal law does not require a license to sell,

purchase, or possess ammunition (“Ammunition Regulation,” n.d.). Granted, the actual gun is not so carelessly offered to any age. Considering how easy it is to gain access to a gun, however, is reason enough to eliminate the allowing of ammunition to peoples of any age. Children can steal their parents’ guns at home and predestine a tragic event, even if unintentional. After all, nearly half of U.S. adults (48%) grew up in a household with guns, nearly six-in-ten (59%) have friends who own guns and around seven-in-ten (72%) have fired a gun at some point in their lives—including 55% of those who have never personally owned a gun (Gramlich, 2018). The lack of federal ammunition regulations in the U.S. was a major contributor to the mass shooting inside a movie theater in Colorado during 2012. The horrifying murder left 12 people dead and 58 injured. James Holmes, the convicted shooter, purchased his firearms at local gun stores while separately ordering a total of 3,000 rounds each of handgun and rifle ammunition and 350 shotgun shells, as well as a 100-round magazine from online sources (“Ammunition Regulation,” n.d.). A gun magazine is a device or chamber for holding a supply of cartridges to be fed automatically to breech of a gun. It is the area from where ammunition is pulled and put into the firing chamber (“Clip vs. Magazine,” n.d.). The movie theater mass shooting is just one example of how the absence of proper firearm ammunition federal laws allows gun violence. Moreover, certain types of ammunition, such as armor-piercing handgun ammunition, 50 caliber rounds, and Black Talon bullets, pose as a danger to the public and to law enforcement, and serve no legitimate sporting purpose. “Strict controls on the manufacture, transfer, and possession of these types of ammunition can help promote public safety.” (“Ammunition Regulation,” n.d.).

Another issue that gun violence causes other than mere death is the racial disparity in who is victimized by it. There are several people who have been impacted by gun violence or at least know someone who has. But the people who are targeted by gun violence overall is racially

discriminatory. “Roughly a third of blacks (32%) say someone has used a gun to threaten or intimidate them or their family, compared with 20% of whites. About a quarter of Hispanics (24%) say this has happened to them or their family members.” (Gramlich, 2018). Black children and teens are 14 times more likely than white children and teens of the same age to die by gun homicide. Firearms are the leading cause of death for Black children and teens (“The Impact of Gun Violence,” 2019). According to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, roughly 50% of gun-related deaths in the U.S. during 2015 were African American men, even though they only make up 6% of the U.S. population. “The leading cause of death among African American teens, ages 15 to 19 in 2008 and 2009 was gun-related homicide. African American children and teens were less than 15% of the total child population in 2008 and 2009 but accounted for 45% of all child-and teen-related gun deaths.” (“Preventing Gun Violence,” 2018). Being a witness to a shooting, whether at school, in the community, or at home, has a major influence on children, including increased risk of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, difficulty in school, engagement in criminal activity, and abuse of drugs and alcohol in the United States (Bromfield & Mitchell, 2019). Therefore, it is understandable that most black communities are more prone to gun violence than white communities since society targets them and then go on to victimize the humane reaction they are forced by society to do; it is a scientific aftermath to which black people are subject to against their will. It is very apparent that gun violence for white people is a social problem, and yet for communities of color, it is seen as a separate, individualized matter. Media outlets perpetuate stereotypes of communities of color by rarely showing minorities in the role of victim. “Often, the news fails to include coverage of Black Americans and overidentifies other groups of color as criminals.” False portrayals in the news and social media outlets negatively affect communities of color by “...insinuating that the

violence occurs only in low-income and racial/ethnic minority communities and perpetuates the myth that gun violence is mainly the result of stereotypes...” including the notion of black-on-black crime. But statistically, white people typically commit crimes against other white people just like other ethnicities commit crimes against people of their own ethnical background due to segregated communities that place ethnicities in their own grouped areas. “The narrative of Black-on-Black crime is rooted in systemic oppression, racism, and implicit bias, and it leaves Black people and other minorities to fix ‘their’ problems on their own.” A source reaffirmed the fact that state gun prevalence is strongly tied to firearm suicide for both black and white men, and firearms are the most lethal means of attempted suicide. In addition, states with the lowest risk for firearm suicide also had the most restrictive gun laws (Bromfield & Mitchell, 2019). If gun laws were made to be stricter, the racial disparities would not disappear but would be given a step forward towards saving a few lives oppressed by the racism within gun violence.

In comparison to other countries, the United States is rather slow on making changes to gun regulation after fatal mass shootings occur in the country. After there was a terrible attack on two mosques in Christchurch in New Zealand, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern immediately took action in making the first steps of what would be a globally supported move to ban military-style semi-automatic weapons and assault rifles. This was an important decision that would affect nations around the world as it put into perspective what would happen if such a ban occurred in the U.S. Two-thirds of gun owners say protection is a major reason they own a gun (Brown, Horowitz, Oliphant, & Parker, 2017). Since the ultimate reason for carrying guns is protection, New Zealand’s choice of ban would certainly abide by Americans’ preference to continue having guns for protection. This is to say that Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern’s choice to ban only semi-automatic weapons and assault rifles would still allow citizens to own guns for protection so long

as they are not semi-automatic. An entire gun ban would be unreasonable and, in fact, impossible. As it is a right in the U.S. Constitution for citizens of the United States to bear arms, a gun ban involving all guns is unconstitutional and would wreak havoc across the country. If it is so easy today to illegally buy a gun with all the current laws and constitutions involving gun purchase, one can imagine how very little impact an entire gun ban would cause on reducing the rate of illegal gun ownership. However, banning only certain weapons that have been known to cause massive numbers of deaths in the U.S.—semi-automatic weapons and assault rifles, in this case—should be deemed reasonable and possible. A study was conducted in 2018 about Australian gun control laws and how they have been proven to prevent mass shootings. After specific regulation on semi-automatic weapons and pump-action shotguns, no incidents of mass killing occurred in Australia since a historic shooting of 35 individuals (Fox, 2018). The results of Australia’s regulatory actions can aid the argument in favor of better gun control laws in the U.S. The buyback law was enacted in 1996 after a mass shooting in which 35 people were shot and killed and 23 injured at a cafe in Port Arthur, Tasmania. This buyback law is an Australian program to buy back firearms and tighten rules on gun ownership which has prevented an estimate of 16 mass shootings in two decades, according to the studies. “Before 1996, there were approximately three mass shootings in Australia every four years. ‘Had they continued at this rate, approximately 16 incidents would have been expected since then by February 2018,’ they wrote.” (Fox, 2018). The attack disgusted Australians “...who supported the new laws and turned in more than 1 million illicit firearms, the researchers, who include pro-gun control activists, said.” Two buyback programs and 26 uncompensated amnesties between 1996 and 2015 resulted in the surrender of 1,038,089 illicit firearms. “In the 18 years before and including the Port Arthur massacre, the new analysis showed that 13 mass shootings happened between

1979 and 2013.” None had occurred in the 22 years since, the report observed (Fox, 2018).

Because of this dramatic decrease in mass gun shootings, it can be reasonably argued that extensive gun control approaches involving the removal of certain guns is positively effective in reducing gun violence. Granted, the U.S. is higher in population and has a much higher rate of gun violence than Australia. But even if the U.S. would only reap the benefit of a small reduction in mass gun shootings, Congress must take action to achieve that small reduction if it means human lives are saved.

### **Hypotheses**

In order to find solutions to reduce gun violence, there must be existing evidence that a correlation between two variables, such as strict gun control laws and gun deaths, will help aide educated ideas for reduction suggestions. Does gun violence decrease when strict gun control is better implemented? In this paper, I argue that stricter gun control legislation will effectively eliminate gun violence at both the national and local level. Statistical evidence shows that areas in which strict gun laws are better implemented had lower rates of gun violence than areas without strict gun law implementation. Because strict gun control influences that rate to which an area is contaminated with gun violence, the independent variable is strict gun control and the dependent variable is gun violence rates. Therefore, I suggest that strict gun control negatively affects gun violence and, in doing so, creates a positive result. The effect this correlation has is negative but does not mean the hypothesis question failed. Rather, the answer to the hypothesis was successfully proven to be true: gun violence decreases when strict gun control is better implemented. It is reasonable to believe that the best solution Congress could adapt for the U.S. is implement better gun control and create new gun laws that pertain to strict regulations within the gun purchasing process.

### Research Design

To determine whether gun violence decrease where strict gun control regulation is implemented, I used previous studies on the subject by reliable and educated sources. The U.S. must take action to implement stricter gun control regulation because it has been proven to be successful in reducing gun violence. U.S. gun violence is so prevalent that it is a major problem the government must see as a crisis in need of immediate action. “Firearm-related deaths are the third leading cause of death overall among U.S. children aged 1 to 17 years, the CDC has found. That’s more than the number of deaths from pediatric congenital anomalies, heart disease, influenza and/or pneumonia, chronic lower respiratory disease, and cerebrovascular causes.” (Fox, 2018). This article also found that police officers are most likely to be killed in states where the most people own guns, that mass killings inspire copycats, and that states with the strictest gun laws have the fewest gun deaths. This means that the number of police deaths is the dependent variable while the number of gun owners in a state is the independent variable, since police deaths are affected by states where most people own guns. “By scoring individual states simply by the sheer volume of gun laws they have on the books, the researchers noted that in states with the highest number of firearms measures, their rate of gun deaths is collectively 42 percent lower when compared to states that have passed the fewest number of gun rules. The study was published online in the journal JAMA Internal Medicine.” (“Fewer gun deaths,” 2013). In this study, gun deaths are the dependent variables and numbers of firearms measures in individual states are the independent variables. The vice president of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Jill Harkavy-Friedman, explained how important reducing access to guns is within the realm of suicide prevention. “Time is really key to preventing suicide in a suicidal person,” explained Harkavy-Friedman. “First, the crisis won’t last, so it will seem less dire and

less hopeless with time. Second, it opens the opportunity for someone to help or for the suicidal person to reach out to someone to help. That's why limiting access to lethal means is so powerful." When countries reduced access to guns, they saw a drop in the number of firearm suicides. Research shows that suicides dropped dramatically after the Australian government set up their mandatory gun buyback program that "...reduced the number of firearms in the country by about one-fifth." The statistical evidence of correlation between reduced gun access and reduced gun suicides is not limited to one country. "A study from Israeli researchers found that suicides among Israeli soldiers dropped by 40 percent when the military stopped letting soldiers take their guns home over the weekend," wrote German Lopez in an article studying gun statistics (Lopez, 2018a). If statistics in reliable research sources give such information, people arguing that there is a need for better gun control regulation should be considered valid and accurate. One should not be confused as to whether there is a gun violence crisis in the U.S. as the staggering numbers of U.S. gun violence rates and the brokenness in our firearm purchasing system is evident as shown above.

Strict regulation has been proven to show significant decreases in gun deaths. For example, the state of California has very strict gun laws compared to other states. Californians who wish to purchase guns must be 21 years of age, pass an exam administered by a local law enforcement agency, wait 10 executive days between purchasing and receiving a gun, and can only purchase one handgun per month. There is a lifetime ban on gun purchasing for certain types of people. For those who cannot own a gun, many violent felons and various domestic violence perpetrators with misdemeanors are included as well as those involuntarily placed into mental health treatment twice in the same year. Also included in those who cannot buy a gun are those subject to restraining orders. A court can temporarily remove firearms from anyone in the

state charged with domestic violence (Christopher, 2019). Researchers have noted that it is possible comprehensive background checks could be made more effective if they were simply implemented and enforced better than they are today, or at least at the time of the studies (Lopez, 2019b). In his article about ways to reduce gun violence, Jens Ludwig argues that the adoption of mandatory waiting periods for handgun purchases reduces gun homicides by about 17%. “Most remarkable of all is that the policy intervention that leads to these reductions in gun violence would seem to impose so few costs on society...waiting periods reduce gun homicides by about 17%, with similar results if they focus just on the changes in state requirements created by the federal Brady Act.” The Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act required background checks and 5 day waiting periods for handgun sales in those states that had not already adopted these requirements on their own.” (Ludwig, 2017). There are conflicting opinions on this notion from legislators and the American people. Nearly six-in-ten U.S. adults (57%) say gun laws should be stricter, while smaller shares say they are about right (31%) or should be less strict (11%) (Gramlich, 2018).

A reason why gun control legislation does not seem to be getting anywhere in the U.S. is because the way America goes about dealing with the subject. Many believe that gun violence in America is tragic but not an apparent issue that Congress needs to focus on over other issues. But when lives are at stake, others believe that it is the highest issue that needs the attention of Congress. While gun violence does have the attention of Congress, passing legislation of drastic measures is not the priority congressmen and congresswomen. Rather, the argument for whether gun violence is a crucial issue seems to be what Congress is currently determining. “With every mass shooting, Congress racks up an even longer list of gun control idea.” Both political parties have, to an extent, seen eye to eye when it comes to the problem of how agencies consistently

fail to report criminal records to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System. The *Fix NICS Act*, having bipartisan support, would increase enforcement, step up requirements for federal and state agencies to update records, give states financial incentives to report to NICS, and penalize agencies that don't upload their records (Golshan & Nilsen, 2018). But despite this successful bipartisanship, the Senate and current president, President Donald Trump, are barriers in between the piece of legislation and its passing into acting law. Journalists Tara Golshan and Ella Nilsen wrote in an article, "...White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders announced that Trump is supportive of the bill, which is a notable change from his position last year. However, Sanders also noted that discussions about the bill are ongoing and the text may be revised." President Trump also took the measure of ridding a regulation aimed at keeping guns out of the hands of some severely mentally ill people—a regulation founded during the Obama administration. "The regulation required the Social Security Administration to disclose information about some of its beneficiaries with mental illness to the national gun background check system." (Golshan & Nilsen, 2018). Republican Senator Jeff Flake and Democrat Senator Dianne Feinstein had worked in the past on a Senate bill that would raise the minimum age to buy an AR-15 rifle to 21 for buyers who are not in the military, as the current age is 18 years old. President Trump had both said that he was willing to support raising the minimum age until the National Rifle Association (NRA) opposed the legislation. NRA spokesperson Jennifer Baker stated that legislative proposals preventing law-abiding adults aged between 18-20 years old from acquiring rifles and shotguns effectively prohibits them from purchasing any firearm, thus depriving them of their constitutional right to self-protection. Therefore, the Trump administration concluded that they were not going to speak of potential legislation that does not exist (Golshan & Nilsen, 2018). It seems that every time a piece of legislation promoting gun

control is processed amongst legislatures, the Senate shuts it down for various reasons. Some of the more frequent causes for delay in action include the fact that the Senate tends to focus on discussions about bills that make the process ongoing instead of finalizing them. Many senators are fearful of change as they are not guaranteed a positive result upon finalizing legislation that would make great improvements in gun laws. In the low chance that gun violence would not be reduced upon passing certain federal gun control laws, senators might feel as though they've wasted time, power, and judgement on failed legislation.

Others may just dislike change in general as they've grown so accustomed to the way things are in government and society. This position that Congress is in regarding how they go about updating gun control legislation is not helpful in the fight against gun violence as it only allows more deaths to guns occur. "Around three-quarters of Republicans (76%) say it's more important to protect the right of Americans to own guns than it is to control gun ownership, while just 19% of Democrats agree." (Gramlich, 2018). Many citizens in America believe that gun violence is a dire problem in need of addressing while others disagree. "Nearly six-in-ten U.S. adults (57%) say gun laws should be more strict, while smaller shares say they are about right (31%) or should be less strict (11%)... Yet these views differ sharply by party: Eight-in-ten Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents (80%) say gun laws should be stricter while 28% of Republicans and GOP leaners say the same. For their part, Republicans are much more likely than Democrats to say gun laws are about right (52% vs. 15%) or should be less strict than they are today (20% vs. 4%)." (Gramlich, 2018). The fact that people believe protecting gun ownership is more important than keeping gun ownership under control is proof that both citizens and Congress are focused on the wrong motives involving how to approach gun violence. Because many do not keep gun control regulation at the center of attention and focus

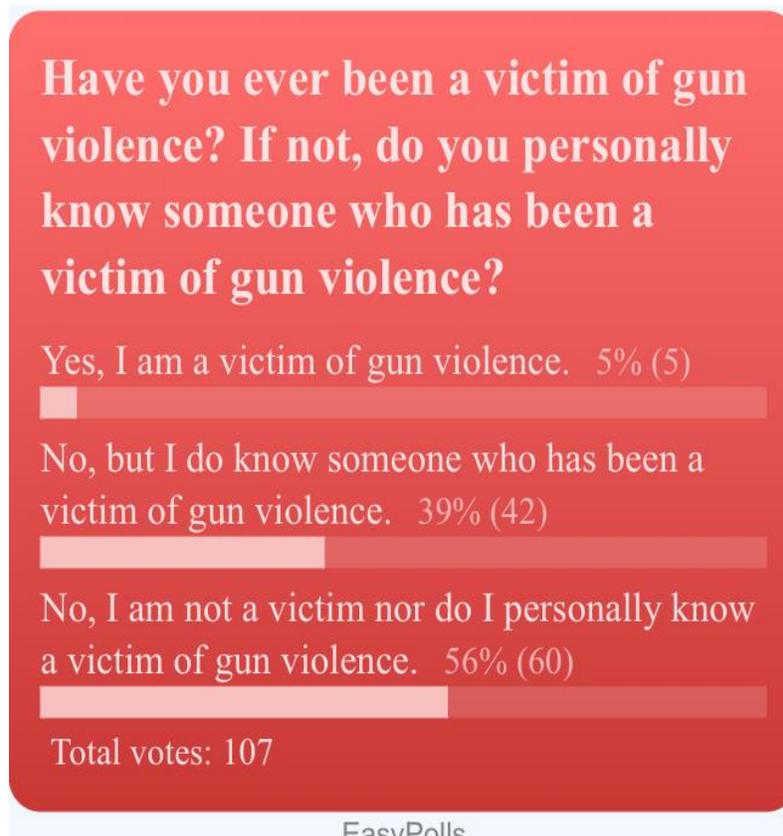
on things that distract from making change is, therefore, a major reason why gun violence remains an issue today.

As for how Americans are affected by gun violence, polls conducted by both me and other researchers show that gun violence affects several Americans. I took the liberty of conducting a poll to see how many of my Facebook friends related to gun violence. Because of I have a wide range of both conservative and liberal Facebook friends, I believe that my sample is representative of the American population. While I have several Facebook friends from different countries around the world, I was careful to avoid errors and made sure international friends and family were not included in the poll since I was interested in studying gun violence statistics within the U.S. After posting my poll online and having several people share it on their social media, my results achieved results that I had somewhat expected before creating the poll.

My poll question was “Have you ever been a victim of gun violence? If not, do you personally know someone who has been a victim of gun violence?” with three options to select from: a) Yes, I am a victim of gun violence, b) No, but I do know someone who has been a victim of gun violence, and c) No, I am not a victim nor do I personally know a victim of gun violence.

Because of what I previously knew about gun statistics, my expectation was to see most of my sample participants personally know someone who has been a direct victim of gun violence. As shown in the results below, very little people are actual victims of gun violence. I have concluded that this is not affected by limited ranges of location since my Facebook friends are spread across the states, not confining the data to one area. I had expected the first option of answers to be the least amount of selections and it was. However, my expectations as to which option of answer would be the most selected were incorrect since I thought most participants

would choose the second option of choice, being that they knew a victim of gun violence. With a sample of 107, the ending results are as below:



As the poll above shows, the highest percentage people were not victims of gun violence nor did they know anybody. I do not believe that anyone lied about their true statuses since I made it known to all participants that the results would be anonymous to both viewers and me, giving them no reason to lie if they are embarrassed about their answers or even concerned about their privacy. The percentage of people who said they know a victim of gun violence is consistent to prior study results from another researcher who found that 44% of Americans know someone who has been intentionally or unintentionally shot (Gramlich, 2018). Though the percentages are not exactly the same, both results are close in number. However, I do believe that it is possible

the results are inaccurate due to limitations such as participants may not know that certain acquaintances are gun violence victims. It is the reality of surveys, including my own, that data can never be completely accurate for several limitations.

### **Limitations**

When collecting data through surveys or polls, researchers can commonly find certain disadvantages to their chosen method. Four specific disadvantages are limiting to the chosen methods in this project.

The first is missing data. In almost all survey research, people do not report their circumstances. The FBI Uniform Crime Report (UCR) is a perfect example of how missing data skews the results. The UCR is a nationwide report that holds statistical data of all crime in the U.S. It is a very resourceful database that is used in various ways. The problem with the UCR, however, is that the information is based on police crime reports. There is a massive amount of possible underreporting from the American people since several victims keep secretive lives to themselves. They could be threatened by their perpetrator into secrecy, scared about involving law enforcement in their circumstances, reliant on staying within their situation as it's the only way they know how to live, or multiple other reasons to not report to police.

The second reason for why survey research could never be truly representative of the population is that people may lie to skew the results into what they want the researcher to believe. For example, if someone who is pro-gun control regulation looked at my poll above and knew what I was researching, he or she might have been tempted to choose an option of answer that would make my research in favor of gun control regulation. Someone might have chosen the first option, saying they are a victim of gun violence when they are not.

The third reason for the inaccuracy of survey research is that not all the subject of interest can be entirely surveyed which means that the percentages are not exact. My sample size was 107 people, but my population of interest is over 300 million people. If I wanted to know the true nature of who is affected by gun violence, I would need every single person in the U.S. to take my poll. That alternative, unfortunately, is impossible for me to conduct.

The final limitation is that this particular poll gathered information on the status of Americans' relationship to gun violence based on one particular point in time, limiting the range of gun violence effect in the U.S. Individual surveys are not good at following trends in real time and rather insufficient in studying long periods of time. Though the poll does give representative insight in estimates, the facts may or may not have changed over time prior to when I conducted the poll. Therefore, the results of my poll are not entirely applicable to Americans over the past few years.

But in the end, a sample size of over a hundred is a decent number of participants to determine an estimate of how Americans are affected by gun violence. This was a quantitative method approach. "58 percent of American adults or someone they care for have experienced gun violence in their lifetime," according to the *Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund's* website ("Gun Violence in America," 2019). A different study found, "A significant share of Americans (44%) say they personally know someone who has been shot, either accidentally or intentionally..." (Gramlich, 2018). While this information does not match my results exactly, it is quite like what my poll found. I concluded that a significant number of Americans are connected to gun violence in some aspect.

The only way that the U.S. will ever reduce national gun violence is to actively change at the federal level. It is up to Congress to begin passing laws into activeness rather than coming up

with new ideas and then prolonging them. There have been several past suggestions by legislatures that have the potential to create a better environment for the country. As it was mentioned above, both Democrats and Republicans have countlessly shown their willingness to collaborate in bipartisanship through past acts that had never made it into law, such as the *Fix NICS Act*. Federal law must see how states are creating their own local laws to change their gun control approaches and follow their examples. Also, ammunition must be sold to persons above a certain age limit. It is ridiculous that a people of any age can buy ammunition and so easily steal or borrow guns. Children do not have fully developed minds and therefore do not have a mature understanding on how to handle guns and ammunition. Many parents teach their children at a young age how to use guns and ammunition which is good because they must learn from experienced adults. But they should not be able to purchase their own means of firearms ammunitions until they are adults themselves. Since the legal age of adulthood is 18 years of age for the most part, ammunition should only be sold to Americans who are 18 years old and above. In addition, improvements must be made about the loophole in federal firearm dealers' giving buyers their guns before their background checks are cleared. Extending the wait period in between background checks and purchases would be ideal, but restriction of gun purchases entirely until FBI background checks are completed would be even more ideal. This would eliminate several risks in giving guns to people with bad intentions. If these changes are made and put into action by Congress, we would see massive results in the reduction of gun violence in the U.S. The nation recently observed the changes that the state of California underwent in terms of state gun laws. California continued to strengthen its already strong gun laws in 2018 by, among other things, raising the minimum age to purchase and manufacture guns and broadening its domestic violence laws.

One area that raises a question amongst researchers is whether suicide by guns should be considered gun violence. Depending on how one interprets gun violence, suicide data within research could be a limitation to studies. It is fair to say that gun suicides are not the same type of violence that involve two or more people as perpetrator and victim. "Suicides account for 60 percent of the country's gun deaths." (Sullivan, 2018). The significance of suicide in gun death statistics deems suicide as a major area we must take into consideration when looking at gun violence in the U.S. With how fast and easy it is to get a gun, people in the wrong mental state who wish to kill themselves are almost given the opportunity since there is a lack of gun control regulation. If only it were harder to purchase a gun so that people considering killing themselves would be restricted. Suicide is unfortunate and must be reduced just like all other circumstances in gun violence.

In today's day and age, the media plays a huge influential factor was to where the American people get their basis behind their opinions on gun violence. The way gun violence is portrayed in social media has been a revolutionary instigator amongst citizens as it tells people how to think what they do, almost controlling their opinions. The aftermath of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting was captured in different perspectives by contrasting media outlets. To gain the public's attention, liberal and conservative news reports had different titles and approaches to make an appeal to their audiences. At first, all social media was focused on general knowledge of the tragic shooting. The main concern was to find out what the facts were. For example, all media coverage was discussing the timing of the shooting, the updated count of shot victims as well as updated count of deaths, and the identity of the shooter. At this time, there were no political opinions on topics such as gun control or mental illness. The priority was to know the facts of the situation. The facts, such as who the shooter was and how many died,

were confirmed and finalized promptly after the day passed. After the general information was received, media outlets began to report the response of the shooting. The reports especially focused on President Trump and all victims who were affected by the shooting. From Marjory Stonewall Douglas High School students to the victims' families, reactions to the mass murder erupted on every social network. After a few days, the opinions of liberal and conservative news began to show. There was a distinct differentiation between conservative Fox News and liberal CNN. Fox News had different titles and opinionated articles on the feelings of the high school students than CNN's titles and opinionated articles. When one searched "Florida Shooting" during the week of the shooting, for example, titles of articles chose to capture Parkland shooting survivors who advocated for gun control. One title of an article specifically stated, "Parkland shooting survivor Emma González has more Twitter followers than the NRA." (Williams, 2018). This is referring to one of the survivors who publicly advocates for gun control. Another article had a blaming tone toward the policing of the shooting with a title of "Sheriff says he got 23 calls about shooter's family, but records show more." (Devine, 2018). When one searched, "Fox News shooting," during the week of the shooting, however, titles of articles had not publicized the gun control advocate survivors. Instead, titles like "School shooting survivor refuses to stick to CNN 'script'; Trump to speak at CPAC" and "Florida school shooting survivor: Media using tragedy to push gun control" were present ("School shooting survivor refuses," 2018; "Florida school shooting survivor," 2018). Eventually, controversy was sparked when there were conspiracy theories on certain survivors calling out the National Rifle Association were "crisis actors". To cover this story, liberal news outlet The Washington Post had a bold title of an article that stated, "Trump just retweeted a fringe radio host who has attacked the Florida school shooting survivors." (Selk, 2018). Therefore, the differences between how liberal and

conservative media outlets are prominent. Reporting of the shooting will most likely be forgotten in the midst of other events. While it has not reached that point quite yet, media coverage continues to develop as new facts unfold and controversial conversations occur.

By using statistical research that includes surveys, all these risks mentioned above are possible limitations in the accuracy of pro-control validity. The foundation of which this paper sought information for support was through survey and statistical data. Because the true numbers of gun violence in the U.S. can never be exactly discovered, however, survey and statistical data supporting better gun control is still representative of the nation's true state. Despite data's incapability to be precise to the exact measure, it is still crucial to give studies insight on the population as well as make educated estimates for what the exact numbers are.

### **Conclusion**

The evidence shows that gun violence decreases when gun control regulation is stricter. The notion that gun violence decreases when strict gun laws are implemented is reason enough to support better gun control initiatives. From Australia to the state of California, proof is shown in the progress made when both international countries and local states took action and regulated strict gun laws. Change is a fearsome thing for most people, especially for political leaders since they control changes for an entire country. However, when American lives are constantly taken away by guns for reasons that can be dealt with, change should not be a question in consideration. Through extensive research, it is concluded that the rise of gun violence be prevented through three reasonable initiatives:

**Extension or Elimination of Default Proceedings After Waiting Deadlines End.** Extending the default proceed wait period for background checks or eliminating default proceedings

otherwise is a reasonable notion in the fight against gun violence. If purchasers waited for their background checks to clear no matter how many days it takes, illegal gun ownership would decrease my massive sizes. Those who conduct background checks must be given extra staff if the process takes an unnecessary amount of time. Capable citizens wishing to buy guns would eventually receive their constitutionally protected gun while incapable citizens would eventually be denied, saving several lives from gun deaths caused by default proceedings to potential criminals.

**Citizen-owned Semi-automatic Weapons and Assault Rifles Ban.** Semi-automatic weapons and assault rifles are not necessary for protection, which is the main reason why Americans want to own guns. While protecting Americans constitutional right to bear arms, creating a safer environment for Americans is a moral obligation that political leaders should concern themselves with. This can easily be done without infringing citizens' 2nd amendment right. Therefore, banning citizen-ownership of semi-automatic weapons and assault rifles would not only ensure Americans' 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment right to bear arms, but avoid several mass murders. After all, one does not need to own such an extensively dangerous gun for protection. With the several other options one can choose from, guns will still be able to protect the homes of loved ones and defend the American people.

**Age Minimum of 18 Years Old to Purchase Ammunition.** Creating an age limit to a minimum of 18 years old for American citizens to purchase ammunition is a step that causes no attack on citizens' constitutional rights since children do not apply to most criminal laws. 18 years of age is when children become adults and gain most of the legal aspects in law that would hold them subject to punishments criminal adults receive. As an 18-year old citizen, one can be fully developed to make free decisions with the ammunition he or he purchases, avoiding many

instances where children who are not fully development in their mentality go on to make foolish decisions with ammunition use.

Updated versions of gun control legislation are crucial to instilling progress in the U.S. “Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s... a vigorous and active social movement arose that breathed new life into the Second Amendment. In an era of rising crime rates and growing disenchantment with government’s ability to solve social problems, many Americans began to view access to guns for self-defense as a fundamental right.” (Winkler, 2018, p. 262). The old interpretation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment seems destined to continue to dictate the gun laws in most of America because many do not wish to stray from tradition. While history is crucial to be preserved, it does not relate to everything that occurs in society today. To use laws that were applicable in the past is only prolonging success in achieving decreased gun violence. The U.S. Constitution was written during a time where certain acts considered a crime today were accepted. For example, hate crimes were not legally prohibited during the early age of American history. It was normal for two people in disagreement to settle matters by conducting duels in which they would both be able to take a simultaneous shot with a pistol at the other. These gun deaths were acceptable in society until steps were made to rid of such practices. Duels are only one of the many attributes that made up old gun culture to which does not occur in today’s gun culture. The point being made is that old gun laws do not have a relating significance today as they did in the past. Because the modern laws were made that forbid certain acts which were not crimes in the past, the present is in need of a new gun control approach to meet the modern needs that we currently deal with, to which the Founding Fathers did not have to deal with. Therefore, politicians must learn from past congressmen and rid of any legislation that is irrelevant today. “Today, dueling is not specifically covered by criminal statutes or penal codes in several states, so it is not

technically illegal in those states; however, dueling could be covered under other crimes, such as assault with a deadly weapon; manslaughter; murder; or other criminal acts with which a prosecutor could be creative with.” (Lemons, 2018). If changes were made by past politicians that eliminated duels, then changes can certainly be made today to intentionally eliminate further gun violence. After all, death by pistol duels is no longer a leading issue in the modern era since initiatives were acted upon to rid of it. If something that was so common had the capability to be rid of by Congress by implementing strict regulation against it, it should not be a matter of question that federal gun laws should be made stricter. Older Americans seem to be more attached to traditionalistic views while young Americans are more accepting to change. “Younger voters, who’ve endured a string of bloody mass killings unprecedented in U.S. history, have different views on gun control than their parents, polls conducted by gun control groups show.” (Bresnahan & Everett, 2019). It seems fair that younger people should be better listened to because the nation is becoming theirs to live in. If older politicians refused to change laws that would benefit the generations to come, those politicians are setting up a government for future politicians that makes it harder for change to come about.

Congress has the means to decrease gun violence. Their problem is that they focus too much on what the right thing to do is when the solution is right before their eyes. The statistics show that the odds of gun violence reduction are high in the aftermath of changing gun laws. The chances of lowering gun deaths after increasing background check wait periods, banning citizen-owned semi-automatic weapons and assault rifles, and implementing an age minimum for ammunition purchase are incredibly high. We need only take action and make changes in order to save American lives. The gun violence crisis would not disappear overnight, but reduction of gun deaths would be on the rise of a new beginning for generations to come.

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