

TheJoyceFoundation

SOLUTIONS TO AMERICA’S GUN VIOLENCE EPIDEMIC ACADEMIC RESEARCHERS WEIGH IN

More than 110,000 Americans are killed or injured by guns every year in community violence, mass shootings, domestic violence, suicides, and accidents. We know from rigorous scientific research that easy access to firearms is a key reason for this urgent threat to our public health and safety. That’s why the Joyce Foundation supports gun violence prevention strategies that limit the availability of firearms for those at risk of violence to themselves or others.

There are still gaps in knowledge about gun violence and its causes, with more to be learned from ongoing data collection and analysis. But if lawmakers were to act *now* based on research-informed strategies, we could significantly reduce deaths and injuries from gun violence. Just ask the gun violence researchers whose work helps shape prevention policy and practice. That’s what we did.

In anticipation of National Gun Violence Awareness Month 2019, the Foundation conducted an informal survey of leading academic researchers in violence prevention, public health and crime policy, to gather their best evidence-informed ideas about how the federal government can reduce gun violence.ⁱ

At a time when most Americans are demanding stronger measures to stop these senseless killings, the collective response of the researchers could stand as a comprehensive gun violence prevention policy agenda.

Nina Vinik, director of the Joyce Foundation’s Gun Violence Prevention & Justice Reform Program, said the survey results make two things clear:

“First, there’s no “silver bullet” that will end gun violence. We need a comprehensive approach that includes stronger gun laws, community-based solutions, and more attention to the root causes of violence,” Vinik said. ‘And second, the federal government has a long way to go to adopt research-informed solutions to this public health and safety crisis.’”

Because gun violence takes multiple forms, the Foundation asked these experts for their views on how to address six individual categories of gun violence: domestic violence, urban gun violence, mass shootings, suicides, accidental shootings, and officer-involved shootings.

Their recommended actions, in general, call for enactment of new federal laws, stronger enforcement of existing laws, and expansion of current firearm prohibitions to include more people considered a risk to themselves or others. They also include support for strategies and practices that can be implemented without legislation, such as public education campaigns, and, not surprisingly, more research about the impact of gun violence and potential strategies for addressing it.

The Foundation then asked the researchers to rank their overall top five solutions in terms of impact on America's gun violence crisis.

Here's what we learned:

TOP FIVE PREVENTION STRATEGIES AS RANKED BY GUN VIOLENCE RESEARCHERS

1. Enact federal Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPO), or Gun Violence Restraining Orders (GVRO), and support state adoption of these measures. Extreme risk protection laws allow families and law enforcement to petition a court to temporarily remove guns from those considered at high risk to themselves or others. An ERPO prohibits individuals in crisis from purchasing or accessing firearms and requires them to relinquish any guns they possess while the order is in effect.
2. Extend firearm restrictions and prohibitions to dating partners, ex-partners, and known domestic violence offenders; and to those guilty of violent misdemeanors.
3. Require universal background checks.
4. Enact permit-to-purchase laws, which require prospective gun buyers to apply directly to a state or local law enforcement agency to obtain a license or permit before purchasing a firearm. This also gives law enforcement more time to conduct thorough background checks.
5. (*Three-way tie*)
 - Research and expand community-based interventions to prevent violence.
 - Address larger social issues and root causes, such as poverty, early childhood education, and the climate of hate.
 - Reduce gun trafficking by providing more funding for ATF and increasing inspections of gun dealers.

As mentioned previously, we also asked the researchers to list up to three actions the federal government could take that would have the greatest impact on reducing gun violence in each of six categories: domestic violence, urban gun violence, mass shootings, suicide, accidental shootings, and officer-involved shootings. Following are top recommendations in each of the individual categories:

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INVOLVING GUNS

1. Require relinquishment of guns from prohibited persons, and step up removal of firearms when a gun owner becomes prohibited.
2. Extend gun prohibitions and relinquishment requirements to dating partners, ex-partners, misdemeanor stalkers, and to those subject to a temporary domestic violence restraining order.
3. Require universal background checks.
4. Enact federal Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) law and support adoption in states.
5. Expand prohibitions on purchase or possession of firearms, and relinquishment and removal of weapons, to those who have committed violent misdemeanors – whether or not domestic violence was involved.

Intimate partner violence increasingly occurs in the context of dating rather than marriage. Fifty-one percent of intimate partner homicides of women in 2015 were committed by a dating partner rather than a spouse. (FBI analysis, Supplemental Homicide Data, U.S. Dept. of Justice, 2015.)

MASS SHOOTINGS

1. Ban assault weapons, large capacity magazines, and bump stocks.
2. Expand enactment of Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) laws.
3. Improve and increase funding for threat assessments.
4. Require universal background checks.
5. Enact permit-to-purchase laws, which require prospective gun buyers to apply directly to a state or local law enforcement agency to obtain a license or permit before purchasing a firearm.
6. Repeal the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (PLCCA), which protects firearms manufacturers and dealers from being held liable when they act negligently.

Since the 2012 shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School, there have been 2,098 mass shootings in the United States – shootings in which four or more people, excluding the shooter, were shot in a single event. (Gun Violence Archive / As of June 12, 2019).

FIREARM SUICIDE

1. Establish federal Extreme Risk Protection (ERPO) law and support adoption in the states.
2. Require safe storage of firearms, such as child access prevention laws.
3. Support public awareness campaigns and community outreach to educate the public about the risk of gun availability for suicide.
4. Impose a mandatory waiting period between purchase of a weapon and taking possession of it.
5. Improve and increase funding for mental health services and research on suicide prevention.
6. Enact permit-to-purchase laws, which require prospective gun buyers to apply directly to a state or local law enforcement agency to obtain a license or permit before purchasing a firearm.

Nearly two-thirds of all U.S gun deaths are suicides. (U.S. Centers for Disease Control). And, firearms are the most lethal and common method of suicide in the U.S. More people who die by suicide use a gun than all other methods combined. (Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health, “Means Matter”)

URBAN GUN VIOLENCE

1. Reduce gun trafficking by providing more funding for ATF, increasing inspections and overall regulation of gun dealers, and rescinding harmful “budget riders” that prevent ATF from modernizing its data systems and sharing information with state and local law enforcement.
2. Address root causes of urban gun violence through initiatives to reduce poverty and income inequality, create jobs, support healthier communities, increase preschool funding, and reduce housing segregation.
3. Require universal background checks.
4. Increase funding for community-based intervention and violence interruption programs.
5. Enact permit-to-purchase laws, which require prospective gun buyers to apply directly to a state or local law enforcement agency to obtain a license or permit before purchasing a firearm.

African-American men make up 6 percent of the U.S. population, but account for 51 percent of all homicide victims. (CDC) Gun homicides are concentrated in cities—half of all gun homicides took place in just 127 cities, which represented nearly a quarter of the U.S. population (Source: Aufrichtig A, Beckett L, Diehm J, Lartey J. Want to fix gun violence in America? Go local. The Guardian. January 9, 2017). Black Americans are 10 times more likely than white Americans to die by gun homicide (Source: Everytown for Gun Safety analysis of CDC data).

OFFICER-INVOLVED SHOOTINGS

1. More and improved training to help officers handle risky situations, including training in crisis intervention, conflict resolution, and implicit bias.
2. Improve data collection and analysis to track officer-involved shootings.
3. Enact stronger gun laws so there will be fewer guns on the street.
4. Support research on best practices for police departments.
5. Promote stricter policies on use of force and expand training on de-escalation and use of non-lethal force.

Nearly 1,000 people have been shot and killed by police each year since 2015. (The Washington Post)

ACCIDENTAL SHOOTINGS

1. Require safe storage of firearms, such as child access prevention laws.
2. Promote development of smart guns (“personalized guns”) and gun safety devices.
3. Support public awareness campaigns promoting safe storage.

Since 2015, there have been at least 1,534 unintentional shootings by children in the U.S., an average of 355 per year (Everytown, 2019). An estimated 4.6 million children live in homes with at least one gun that is loaded and unlocked (Azrael D, Cohen J, Salhi C, Miller, M., Journal of Urban Health, 2018)

BONUS QUESTION

The academic researchers who responded to the Foundation survey clearly had a lot to say about how we can reduce gun violence. But just to make sure we hadn’t missed anything, we also asked this:

“Is there anything else you believe the federal government could do to prevent gun violence?”

The overwhelming answer was the need for federal funding to support research on the prevention of gun violence.

ⁱ The Foundation sent out 51 survey questionnaires and 29 researchers responded, a return rate of 57 percent.