

# The Who, What, And Why Of Gun Violence Prevention

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Gun violence has no easy cure, but with the help of targeted policies and bills, America may one day see an end to one of its most fatal epidemics.<sup>1</sup> While some politicians have steered away from these policies in favor of less polarizing issues, it is clear now more than ever that gun violence doesn't just affect one community, it affects the safety of our entire nation. With more than 33,000 people fatally shot each year, we must enact meaningful gun violence prevention solutions to create a better, safer future for our country.<sup>2</sup>

## WHY: Conditions That Lead to Gun Ownership

Guns are often spoken about in the context of hunting and southern heritage. However, this is no longer the main reason why people own firearms. The majority of gun owners purchase guns for protection, not for hunting or for recreational use.<sup>7</sup> Further, this protective justification is cyclical: the perception of widespread gun ownership compels more individuals to arm themselves for self-protection. If all of your neighbors own guns, you may naturally feel as though you have to own a gun as well.

Additionally, the majority of gun violence incidents occur in large cities, where low-income residents experience a lack of economic opportunities and community resources. The lack of alternatives in these communities often forces its members to arm themselves because they feel insecure and unprotected in their own neighborhoods. Therefore, while easy access to firearms is a major cause of gun violence, the root cause of it is the lack of economic and educational opportunities in these communities. In order to address these systemic inequalities, gun violence prevention advocates must not only push for legislation, but also for community reinvestment initiatives.



**Two-thirds of gun deaths are suicides.<sup>3</sup>**



**The total annual cost of gun violence in America is \$229 billion.<sup>4</sup>**



**Gun violence is the leading cause of death for black Americans ages 15-19.<sup>5</sup>**



**Victims of domestic violence are five times more likely to be killed by their abuser if their abuser owns a firearm.<sup>6</sup>**

## WHO: How Would Proposed Gun Violence Prevention Legislation Change Who Can Buy Firearms?

### WHO CAN BUY NOW

Under current federal law, licensed gun sellers must conduct a basic background check on all potential buyers prior to a sale. Unfortunately, private gun sellers are not held to the same restriction. While some states have passed more comprehensive gun laws, others have not, which leaves many dangerous loopholes open for buyers to exploit.

#### Here are just a few examples of who can buy a gun today:

- Individuals who cannot pass a basic background check can buy a firearm from a private gun seller.<sup>8</sup>
- Individuals who are prohibited from flying commercial flights and are on the federal government's "No Fly List."<sup>9</sup>
- Individuals who go to buy a gun from a licensed seller but whose background checks are not cleared within three days may return to the shop and then purchase a firearm, regardless of the pending background check.<sup>10</sup>
- Individuals convicted of a misdemeanor hate crime.<sup>11</sup>
- Convicted stalkers and domestic violence abusers in dating-relationships.<sup>12</sup>

### WHO COULD BUY AFTER

There are four major bills in Congress right now that would prevent guns from falling into the wrong hands.

#### Here is how these bills can change who can buy a firearm:

- **H.R. 1217, The Public Safety and Second Amendment Rights Protection Act.**<sup>13</sup> Would require all gun sellers (licensed and unlicensed) to conduct a background check. Restricts easy access to guns if individual cannot pass a background check.
- **H.R. 1076, Denying Firearms and Explosives to Dangerous Terrorists Act.**<sup>14</sup> Would prohibit individuals on the "No Fly List" from purchasing a firearm.
- **H.R. 3051, The Background Check Completion Act.**<sup>15</sup> Would prohibit individuals from purchasing a firearm before receiving official clearance from their background check.
- **H.R. 4603, Hate Crimes Prevention Act.**<sup>16</sup> Would prohibit individuals convicted of misdemeanor hate crimes from purchasing firearms.
- There is no current federal legislation addressing the loophole which allows convicted stalkers and domestic violence abusers in dating relationships to purchase firearms.

## Implications for Communities of Color

It should be noted that while these bills will undoubtedly change the overall landscape of gun ownership in America, communities of color stand to be the most affected. Therefore, it is important to consider the implications of proposed legislation on communities of color in particular.

Any expansion on background checks must take into account the disproportionate rates of incarceration amongst black and Latino communities<sup>17</sup>: one-third of black men in America can expect to go to prison in their lifetime.<sup>18</sup> Given this stark reality, conversations about gun violence prevention must consider the way in which black and Latino communities will be particularly impacted by proposed legislation. As we seek to protect our communities, we must ensure we are not disproportionately denying people of color access to a gun due to a criminal justice system that often criminalizes them at higher rates than white counterparts.<sup>19</sup>

Additionally, any bills seeking to prevent gun violence must ensure that their enforcement does not lead to racial profiling against people who are perceived as dangerous, based on factors such as skin color or religion.

## WHAT: How Would Proposed Legislation Change What Firearms We Can Buy?

### WHAT YOU CAN BUY NOW

The Federal Assault Weapons Ban, which banned the sale of assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, expired in 2004.

#### In addition to handguns and rifles, these may be purchased by a civilian buyer:

- Assault weapons: semi-automatic assault weapons allow the user to shoot several rounds of ammunition in a very short amount of time.<sup>20</sup>
- High-capacity magazines: these magazines allow multiple rounds of ammunition to be shot without needing to reload.<sup>21</sup>

### WHAT YOU COULD BUY AFTER

While there is no current federal legislation on this issue, there have been discussions in the past of renewing the Federal Assault Weapons Ban.

#### Here is how legislation could change what types of firearms are available to the public:

- Reinstating the Federal Assault Weapons Ban would restrict the public's access to assault weapons.
- Banning the sale of high-capacity magazines — which eight states and the District of Columbia currently do — would restrict the availability of dangerous weapons.<sup>22</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Common sense gun laws work. States that have passed laws that require background checks on all gun sales, private and public, saw dramatic decreases in the number of deaths caused by firearms.<sup>23</sup> With this in mind, we must remind our federal and local governments that taking these necessary steps towards common sense gun regulations will benefit every community in America, including their own. In addition to gun legislation, government officials must work hand-in-hand with their own communities to develop community-based initiatives that provide resources to high-risk, low-income communities. Reducing gun violence in America will only be possible when lawmakers and community leaders come together to make gun violence prevention a priority.

## END NOTES

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