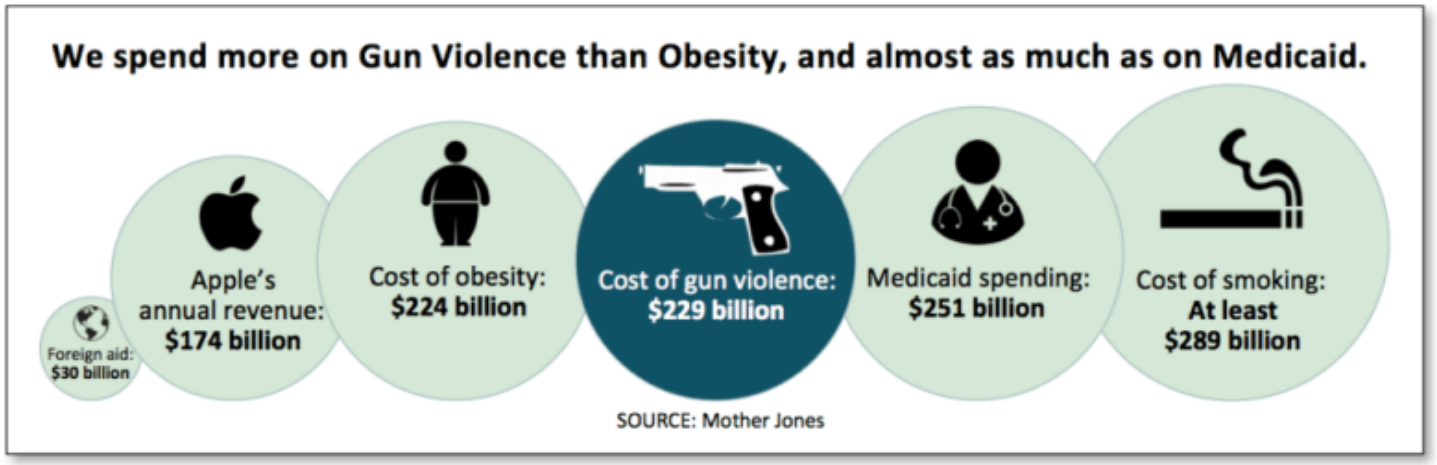
Gun Violence reframed as a Public Health issue

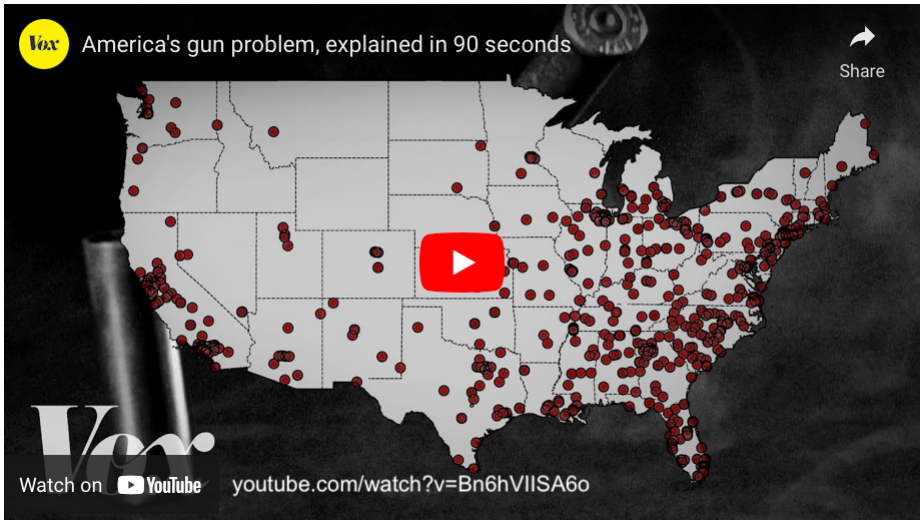


Published March 2018 by Wayne Caswell, Founding Editor, Modern Health Talk (mHealthTalk.com/guns/)
Updated several times since.

Public Health officials have a legitimate interest in preventing gun violence. It costs more than $700 per American a year, or $229 billion in total. That's according to a Mother Jones report that the NRA doesn't want you to see, The True Cost of Gun Violence in America. Mother Jones got its data from the US Congress Joint Economic Committee, which includes a collection of state-by-state infographics.

I'm not sure the medical industrial complex (hospitals, insurers, drug companies, testing companies, and equipment providers) wants you to see the report or fix the problem either, because they profit from treating gun injuries and long-term disabilities. As with the NRA, preventing gun violence would go against their profit motive.

We can't feel safe going to work or to school, church, a concert, a mosque, a synagogue, or the movies. But we **CAN** get involved politically at the Federal and State levels through organizations like **Texas Gun Sense, which says:**
* 3,350 people die from gun violence in Texas annually.
* 62% of all suicides are by firearm in Texas.
* $16.6 Billion/year is the cost of gun violence in Texas.



But what does gun violence, suicide and accidental injury cost us? The Mother Jones report digs into the long-term costs of serious injury and disability, where we spend more on the results of gun violence than on obesity, and almost as much as we spend on Medicaid. I'll use those costs in this article to justify sensible solutions that have worked elsewhere, starting with this 2-min video claiming the cost is $229B/year:



In the 3.5-min video below, Jennifer Longdon tells us how she faced financial ruin after being shot in the spine years ago. Her all-too-common story tells of the hidden costs that "must" be included in debates over gun safety reform.



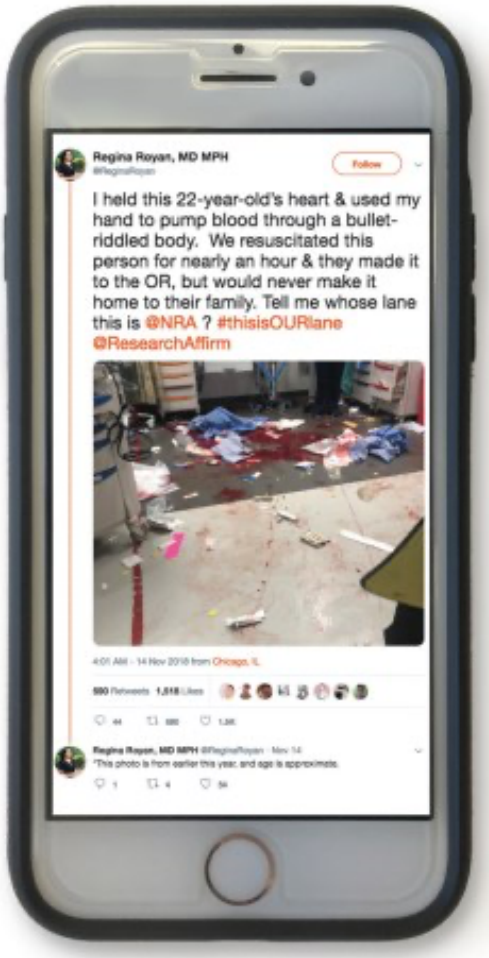
Jennifer was among the 750,000 Americans injured by gunshots over the last decade. She's lucky not to be one of the 320,000 killed. The Mother Jones report says that each year more than 11,000 people are murdered with firearms, and another 22,000 others commit suicide with a gun. That's about 60/day, but they don't all get media attention; in fact, most don't.

Skip to the RIDICULE VIDEO at the end.

Beyond the mass shootings, each week brings news of another accidental shooting with an unsecured gun as hundreds of children die from firearms. Sadly, even as violent crime has declined in recent years, gun deaths and injuries are up since 2011, at 11% and 4% respectively. That's largely because of mass shootings, yet much of the cost inflicted on victims, their employers, and the nation go unreported.

Nobody doubts that gun violence is a serious problem, except maybe the NRA and gun lobbyists. But it doesn't seem to matter whether we believe that "guns kill people" or "people kill people," the result is the same: a public health crisis.

Solving this Public Health Crisis begins with Data.



On November 6, 2018, in response to a position paper on firearm injuries and death from the American College of Physicians, the NRA fired off a tweet admonishing "self-important anti-gun doctors to stay in their lane." (https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp1815462)

The US government has spent hundreds of billions researching other public health problems. The Department of Transportation (DOT), for example, studied deadly car crashes and then took measures to reduce the causes and the number of deaths and injuries per million miles driven went down significantly. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) studied the health impact of pollution, and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) studied the costs of domestic violence. But thanks to intense NRA lobbying, Congress amended a bill designed to fund the CDC and National Institutes of Health (NIH) but then preventing them from studying the medical and lost-work cost of gun violence. It was called the Dickie Amendment. [**UPDATE:** "From 1996 to 2013, CDC funding for gun research dropped by 96 percent, but this week the CDC committed to study the issue again and seek solutions."]



To address this gun-related public health crisis, Congress must overcome NRA objections and get the facts straight. They need to better understand the scope, scale, and cost of the gun violence problem. But not only do politicians fear reprisal from the NRA for actions taken against the powerful gun lobby; so do the researchers. Academic researchers fear personal attacks that could result in funding cuts for other important research, such as heart disease and obesity.

Every drop of blood that stains the floors of our schools and places of worship is another dollar sign in the reelection fund of President Trump and his Republican Congress. Trump won't even discuss gun law reform out of fear of angering his NRA donors and gun-worshipping base.

11/15/2019 UPDATE: While CDC and NIH studies of gun violence have been limited, I did find two new studies in the American Journal of Public Health. One is on the effect of Right-to-Carry laws, and the other studied bans on Large Capacity Magazines. Both had significant effects on public health.

- "The 25 states that passed an RTC law from 1992 to 2017, on average, experienced 24% greater rates in firearm WPH incidence after law implementation."
- "Between 1990 and 2017, there were 69 high-fatality mass shootings. Attacks involving LCMs resulted in a 62% higher mean average death toll. The incidence of high-fatality mass shootings in non–LCM ban states was more than double the rate in LCM ban states; the annual number of deaths was more than 3 times higher."

What Statistics do we Have So Far, and why we Need More?

Admitting that you have a problem, and measuring its size and impact is the first step toward fixing it. We've fixed other public health problems and should be able to fix gun violence too – if we can agree on the data.

1967 – Jane Mansfield was killed when her car ran under the rear end of a tractor-trailer. Since then, all trailers have a DOT bar at the rear to keep cars from going under.

1982 – Seven people died when Tylenol packaging was tampered with. Since then, it takes a Ph.D., channel locks, and a sharp object to get into a bottle of pills.

1973-2012 DISEASE RESEARCH COMPARISONS

DISEASE	# CASES	NIH RESEARCH GRANTS
Rabies	65	56
Polio	266	212
Cholera	400	129
Diphtheria	1,337	56
Gun Injuries	**4 million**	**3**

1995 – When bomb using ammonium nitrate fertilizer killed 168 people, the government imposed severe restrictions on the purchase of that fertilizer.

2001 – Ever since one person tried to blow up a plane with a shoe bomb, we must take off our shoes for scanning to get through security.

Since 1968 – Well over 1.5 million people have died from guns on U.S. soil, which is well over 100 a day. But our only government reaction so far has been to send "Thoughts and Prayers."

Our unforgivable gun problem is largely because of the lack of agreed upon facts and the willful ignorance of gun enthusiasts. The table above is another example, comparing willingness to do disease research but not study gun violence.



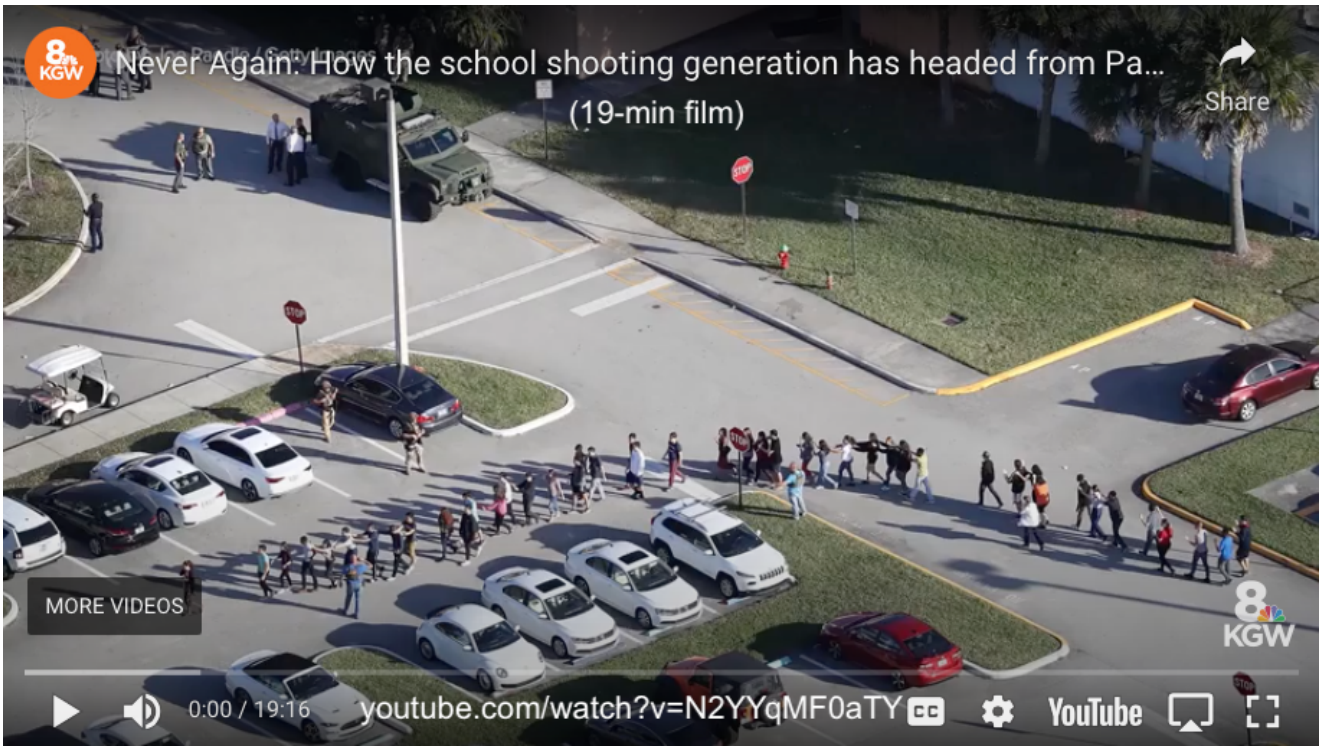
"Violent Death Rates: The US Compared with Other High-income OECD Countries, 2010," American Journal of Medicine, 2015

Statistics from Varied Sources

Federally funded research on gun violence is extremely limited, but here are some stats from other sources. Any discrepancy between data shown here and other sources is likely the result of working with different base data, and that highlights the need for federally funded research so we can all work from the same facts.

- With more than 350,000,000 guns in the U.S., there are now **more guns than people**, but most don't own guns.
- 78% of Americans do not own a gun, and just 3% own more than half of all U.S. guns. That 3%, and the NRA representing them and gun manufacturers, is holding the rest of us hostage.
- Americans own nearly half of all the guns in the world, but that's nothing to brag about when you consider the consequences.
- 300 Americans are shot **every DAY**, and 100 of them die as a result.
- 38,000 US gun deaths were reported by the CDC in 2016, which is slightly more than the number of people who died from car wrecks.
- In US, 11,000 murdered each year plus 22,000 suicides.
- In Europe, which has twice the population, just 18 die per day from gun violence.
- Japan has only about 10 gun deaths **per YEAR**.
- 320,000 Americans were killed by guns in that last 10 years, and over 1.5 million were killed since 1968. About half of those deaths were from suicide.
- Access to firearms increases the risk of suicide by three times.
- The rate of firearm suicide deaths for children and teens is up 61% over the past decade, primarily because of wider availability and easier access to guns.

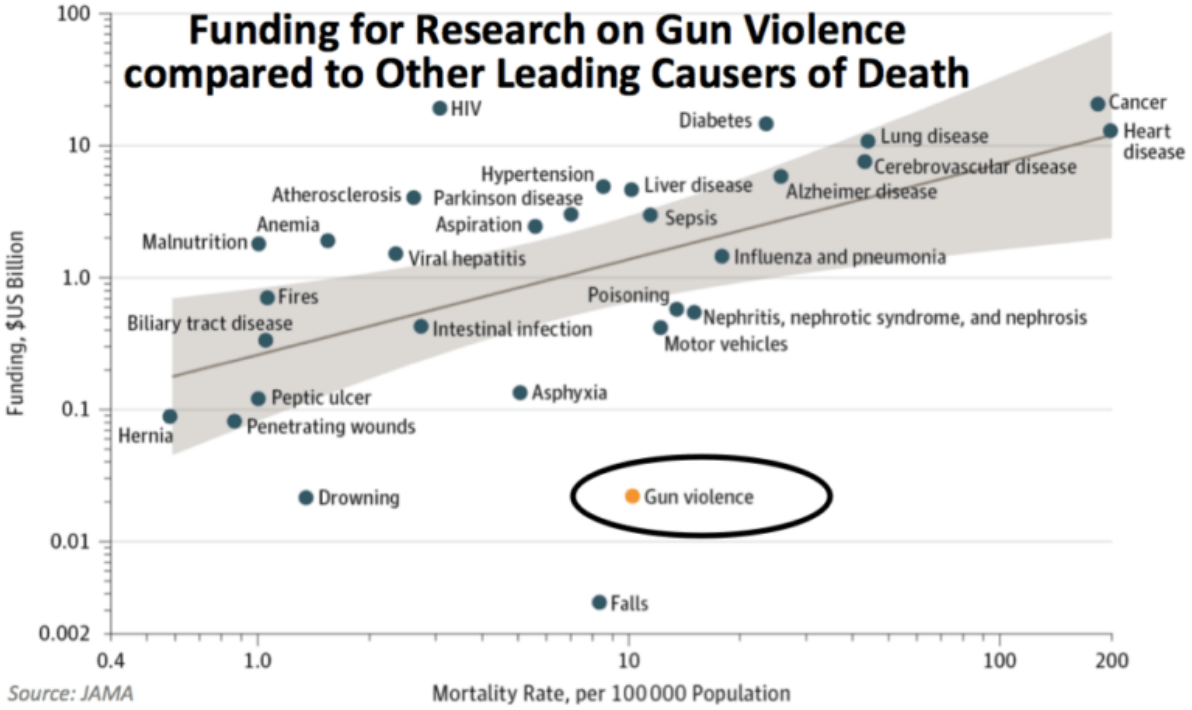
- Mass shootings may only account for about 2% of all gun deaths nationally, but still there were 385 U.S. mass shootings in 2016, resulting in 257 deaths and 1546 injuries, according to MassShootingTracker.org.
- **427 mass shootings in 2017** resulted in 594 deaths and 1981 injuries, which is a 28% increase in deaths and well over one mass shooting per day.
- The profile of a mass shooter is young men who display anti-social behavior or domestic violence before committing their act. Most of them obtained their weapons legally.
- 64% of the victims of mass shootings are women and children, and 67% are black.
- Only 3% to 5% of all violence, including firearm violence, is attributable to serious mental illness. People with serious mental illness are rarely violent, and they're far more likely to be victims of violence than the perpetrators (12 times higher).
- More than 30 studies in the U.S. and abroad have shown that more guns increase gun violence and homicides.



Mass Shooting Tracker

MassShootingTracker.org is an excellent reference, because it accounts for ALL mass shooting incidents, including those that don't get reported in the mainstream media or match the FBI's "mass gun violence" definition as three or more people **murdered** in one event. That definition unfortunately ignores those who **survive** a shooting but may be left with lifelong disabilities and trauma. Those costs are too often ignored and would be substantially higher if all gun victims and their families could afford and seek counseling and treatment.

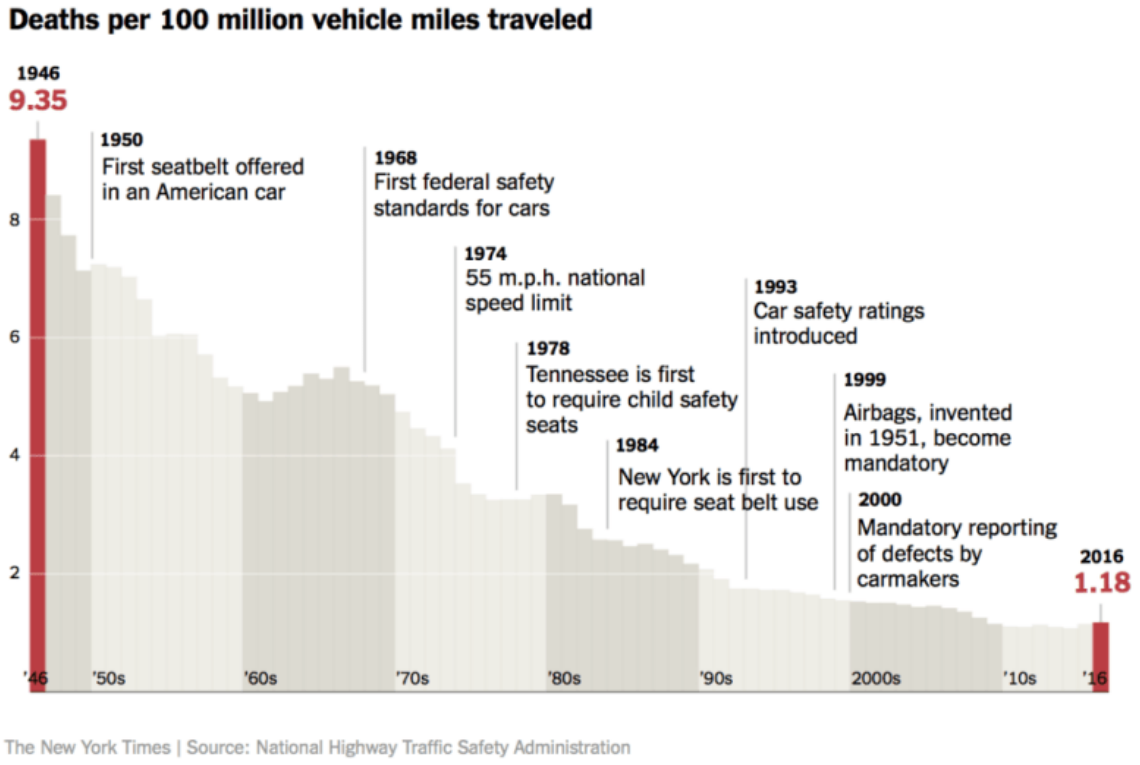
Costs like these are what keep big city mayors awake at night, but they are hardly studied at all. We tend to not account for the legal fees, and the fear that stunts neighborhood growth or prompts schools to harden their campus and deploy armed guards. These are just some of the hidden costs of gun violence that the Mother Jones report touches upon.



Automobiles as a Model for Regulating Guns

Gun enthusiasts, who fear that Liberals want to ban guns and confiscate them, will often say cars kill about as many people as guns, and we don't ban cars. No, but how we regulate motor vehicles presents a good model for how we might regulate guns, improve gun safety, and reduce deaths and injury from gun violence.

As the following chart shows, deaths per 100 million vehicle miles driven dropped 95% through regulation, operator licensing, registration, and required liability insurance.



16 THOUGHTS FOR REGULATING GUNS LIKE CARS:

1. License gun owners like we license drivers, with age limits and periodic renewal. A driver's license gives you "permission" to drive and own a car; it does not grant you a "right" to do so. And just as with driving, a judge can revoke your license if the privilege is abused, or laws are broken.

2. Test knowledge of laws and gun safety and require a proficiency exam before granting a license.

3. Consider different proficiency levels and uses like we do with a driver's license, starting with a Learner's Permit and progressing to something the equivalent of a Commercial Driver's License to show the increased responsibility and skill to use more powerful weapons. Concealed carry and open carry permits, for example, could require stricter licensure than guns purchased and stored for sport and hunting. It could also apply to different classes of weapons.

4. Require criminal background checks (22% of guns are obtained without one) and at least a 3-day waiting period as a condition of obtaining a license and purchasing a gun. Prohibit gun sales to anyone with a felony criminal conviction, history of mental illness or domestic abuse, or listed on the FAA's No Fly list.

5. Close the gun show loophole. Watch this 13-year-old boy try to buy beer, cigarettes, adult magazines and lottery tickets with no luck, and then see how he just walked into a gun show and walk out with a gun. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fB7MwvqCtlk)

6. Allow protection orders (red flag laws) with due process that would authorize authorities to intervene when a person becomes a threat to others, and temporarily confiscate guns they can use to cause harm. When a driver is charged with reckless driving, most states allow local police to impound the car until a judge determines that it's safe to return it.

7. Require Liability Insurance covering gun owners, as we do for drivers. Insurance companies, through free-market competition would set rates through the actuarial process, and gun owners could then decide when and if they want to move up to more firepower, including higher caliber and semi-automatic weapons, or higher quantities of ammunition, knowing that more stringent testing, storage, inspection, and insurance would be required.

8. Register each gun to make it easier to return them if lost or stolen, require periodic inspection to make sure safety features are in working order, and ensure safe storage requirements are followed. Charge an annual registration tax as we do for motor vehicles, to help pay the cost administrative costs of gun regulations, like we do with car registration. And require proof of insurance to register each year, as we do with cars.

9. Consider bans on the most dangerous firearms, such as those designed for military purposes to kill the most people in the shortest time possible, or at least restrict how they are used and who gets to use them. Certain types of cars, such as those designed for racing, are not "street legal," but we don't prohibit them. On the other hand, we don't allow private ownership of tanks and fighter jets. The same concept could apply to guns too if approached with commonsense and real data rather than emotion. Add-on accessories, such as bump stocks, that turn consumer weapons into the equivalent of weapons of war could be included in such bans.

10. Require updates to registration and insurance when a gun is disposed of in a private sale, like we do with cars. That would end the gun show loophole that now is used to avoid background checks.

11. Require safe storage, locks and security measures designed to prevent unintentional access to guns and ammo by unlicensed people, including children. This is like cars having ignition locks, so they aren't stollen.

12. Limit quantities of guns and ammo except under tightly restricted and regulated circumstances, such as with collectors and shooting ranges that rent weapons for use there. There's no justification for people to amass private arsenals. We don't limit the number of cars one can own, and Jay Leno is an example of that, but the higher cost of cars discourages such collection naturally.

13. Research and encourage the development of "smart gun" technologies that prevent accidental discharge except by the owner, through a PIN number or biometric sensor like a fingerprint. If someone steals my iPhone, it's useless for example, and if the same were true for guns, it would reduce the number of guns stolen each year, now about 200,000, which are then available to criminals. It would also prevent a child from firing dad's gun or a criminal from using a policeman's gun against him.

14. Repeal the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (PLCAA), which prevents the gun manufacturing industry from being held liable in civil court for crimes "resulting from the criminal or unlawful misuse of firearms or ammunition." We don't give the auto industry such immunity.

15. Allow lawsuits against manufacturers for selling products that are knowingly defective or promoted irresponsibly, such as targeting teens.

16. Explore buy-back options to help cut the total number of guns on the street, since studies worldwide show that fewer guns result in fewer deaths.

Note that auto manufacturers complained each time government imposed new rules like seat belts and air bags, but the result has greatly improved safety. Did any of these "restrictions" slow car sales or impose undue restrictions on car ownership? Of course not, and the government hasn't used registration to confiscate cars either. So, make politicians opposing these new rules justify their position on each of them and ask if they'd support removing the matching car safety rules.

What if we Regulated Guns like Abortions?

Gloria Steinem suggested this alternative: "**How about we treat every young man who wants to buy a gun like every woman who wants to get an abortion** —

- Mandatory 48-hour waiting period.
- Parental permission.
- A note from his doctor proving he understands what he's about to do; and
- A video he must watch about the effects of gun violence.
- Let's close all but one gun shop in every state and make him travel hundreds of miles, take time off work, and stay overnight in a strange town to get a gun.
- Make him walk through a gauntlet of people holding photos of loved ones who were shot to death, people who call him a murderer and beg him not to buy a gun."

75% of Americans want Congress to do more to reduce gun violence.

American voters support stricter gun laws by a 2:1 margin (66% v. 31%), including most gun owners, according to a new Quinnipiac University poll. These results are up considerably from a negative 47:50 percent measure

of support in 2015. 97% support universal background checks, 83% support a mandatory waiting period, and 70% favor registering all guns with the police.

According to this Michael Moore interview, 78% of Americans do not own a gun. That's why Beto O'Rourke's comment during the 2020 Presidential debates got such a roaring response from the audience, even as Democrat politicians cringed. But the scary thought is that just 3% of Americans own half of the nation's guns. I went to a gun show to understand the culture of that 3% and wrote about it here: **Gun Smoke Culture**.

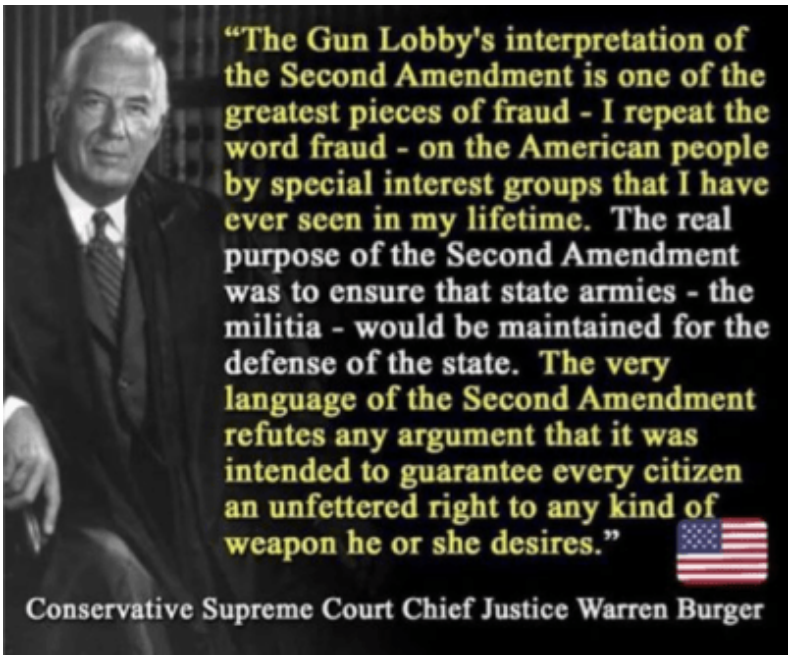
Won't Gun Registration Lead to Confiscation?

Bring up the topic of gun registration, and die-hard gun enthusiasts, including some of the 5 million NRA members, will likely tell you about Adolf Hitler, Nazi gun laws, gun confiscation, and the Holocaust. The NRA has used this argument for decades: one of the first things Hitler did when he seized power was to impose gun registration laws to make it easier for his troops to disarm his opponents. But PolitiFact.com rates that claim as FALSE and a misrepresentation of history on two levels.

"First, German citizens were not disarmed by the Nazis. Jews and other supposed enemies of the state were subject to having their weapons seized. But for most German citizens, the Nazi period was one in which gun regulations were loosened, not tightened. Second, a lack of guns was not the issue. If most Germans had wanted to use these guns to fight the Nazis, they could have. But they didn't."

Fear and distrust of government are central to NRA's strategy, and this tactic ignores the fact that the Nazis enjoyed significant popular support, or at least, broad acquiescence; and that, not gun control, is what really led to the Holocaust. The NRA argument against gun control or registration attempts not to clarify history but to protect their hardline interpretation of the 2nd Amendment, and the profits of gun manufacturers.

> *"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."*



Alexander Hamilton, in The Federalist Papers, described what the Founding Fathers meant by a "well-regulated militia," and it was essentially the National Guard. It has nothing at all to do with granting citizens unfettered access to guns, according to analysis by Brett Trends in this essay in Market Watch.

Conservative Supreme Court justices Warren Burger and Antonin Scalia both said that any claim otherwise is based on a lie. So, who is promoting that false narrative? It's gun manufacturers who profit from each mass shooting or "gun control" threat, because when people think someone wants to confiscate their guns, market demand increases. The industry also profits from gun show loopholes and a black-market that drives up demand and prices.

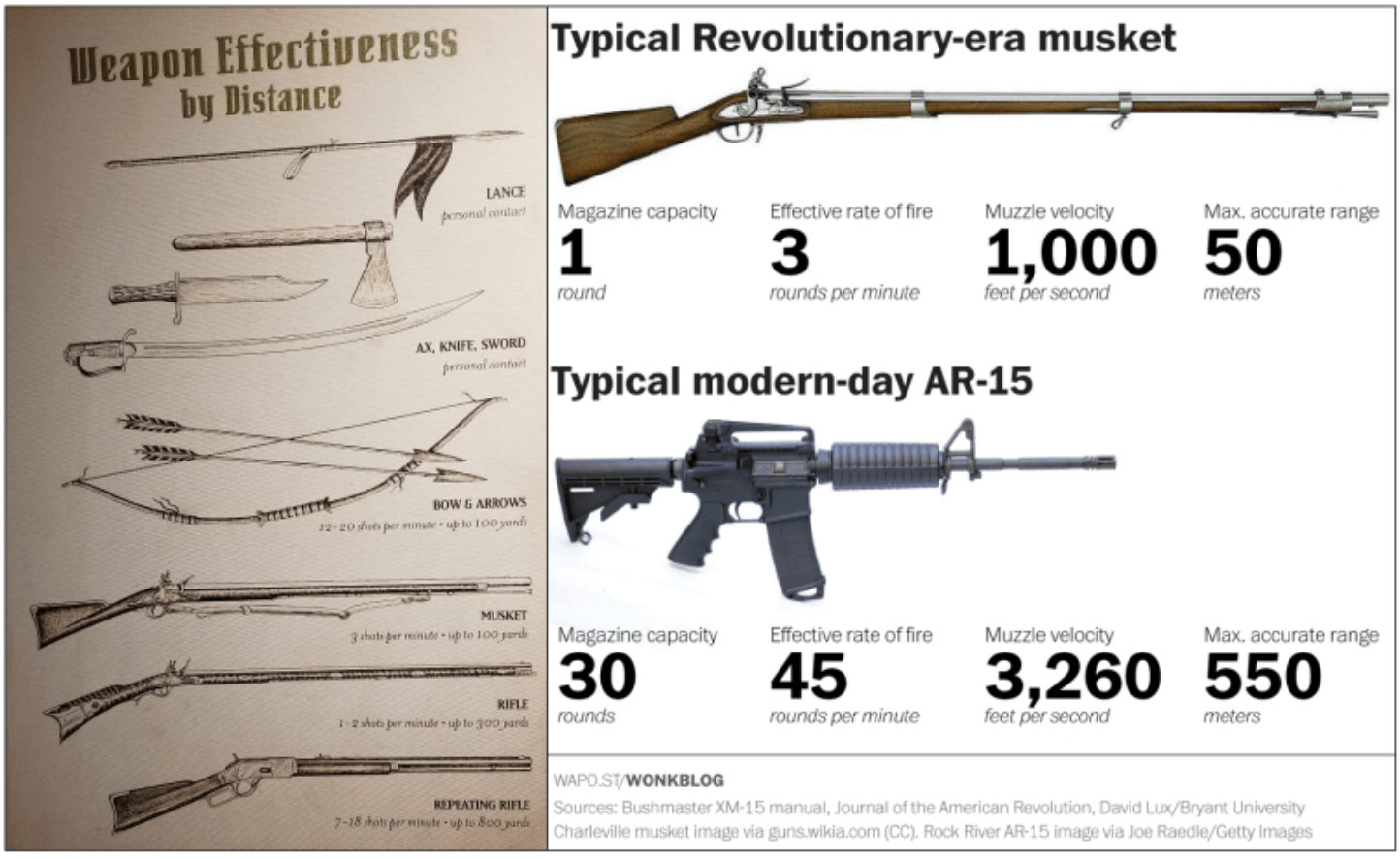
Times have changed, and guns have changed.

The 2nd Amendment language is clear, but willful ignorance keeps some people from even reading it. Others just refuse to accept its purpose. According to Supreme Court Justice Ruth Ginsburg…

"The 2nd Amendment was written when the new government had no money to pay for an army, so they relied on the state militias. And the states required men to have certain weapons. They specified in the law what weapons these people had to keep in their home so that when they were called to do service as militiamen, they would have them."

The 2nd Amendment was never meant to apply to private militias or individual ownership of military style assault rifles, high-capacity magazines, silencers, or bullet-proof vests. When it was written, the common weapon of the time was the mussel-loaded musket. It could only fire 1-2 rounds per minute.

A visit to Colonial Williamsburg is very educational and enlightening. You'll be able to visit the gun shop to learn how they made muskets and later added rifling to the barrel for greater range and accuracy. You'll also see how this colony kept their weapons in a locked and guarded armory with ammo stored separately.



It seems that history could be used to strike down the 2nd Amendment as no longer necessary and counterproductive. BUT that's not the purpose of the current debate over how to reduce gun violence. With the goal of saving lives, Democrats call for sensible gun reform, including a ban on assault rifles and high-capacity magazines, universal background checks and red flag laws, and possibly licensing gun owners and registering guns like we do cars. In 2017, a federal appeals court concluded that assault weapons are NOT protected by the 2nd Amendment. It was a 10-4 decision.

When Congress banned assault weapons in 1994, mass shootings plummeted – but after the ban expired in 2004, the NRA bought off politicians to protect their profits and stop Congress from passing the ban again. (Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence)



If our nation didn't already spend $trillions/year to fund powerful military and local police, we might want to extend the 2nd Amendment to include modern weapons of war, including RPGs, grenades, tanks, and even military aircraft or nuclear weapons. But since we don't need or want that, unregulated private militias seem unnecessary and even dangerous. If anything, the 1/6/2020 Capitol insurrection taught us to worry more about a future coup made possible by the rise of extremists on the far right. At least I hope we learned that.

So, with such a historically strong legal argument against the 2nd Amendment, if Dems wanted to dig in and fight hard against the NRA, they might win. But again, that's not their objective.



High Velocity

What follows are links to two video clips from a CBS 60 MINUTES Special, November 2018.

What makes the AR-15 style rifle the weapon of choice for mass shooters? (13:38 min video) — Some of the worst massacres in recent memory have had something in common: the AR-15 style rifle. Scott Pelley reports on why the high-velocity rounds used in the gun makes it so deadly.

Learning how to "Stop the Bleed" (5:39 min video) — Ballistics tests show how lethal a wound from an AR-15 style rifle can be. Now there's a campaign to teach civilians how to be first responders in mass shootings. A doctor who has treated too many wounds of this kind now sends his own child to school with a "Stop the Bleed" kit. The kit includes a tourniquet and gauze bandages to pack the wound with, and the child has been trained in how to use it. It's a sad day when all Americans must now always have quick access to such a kit.

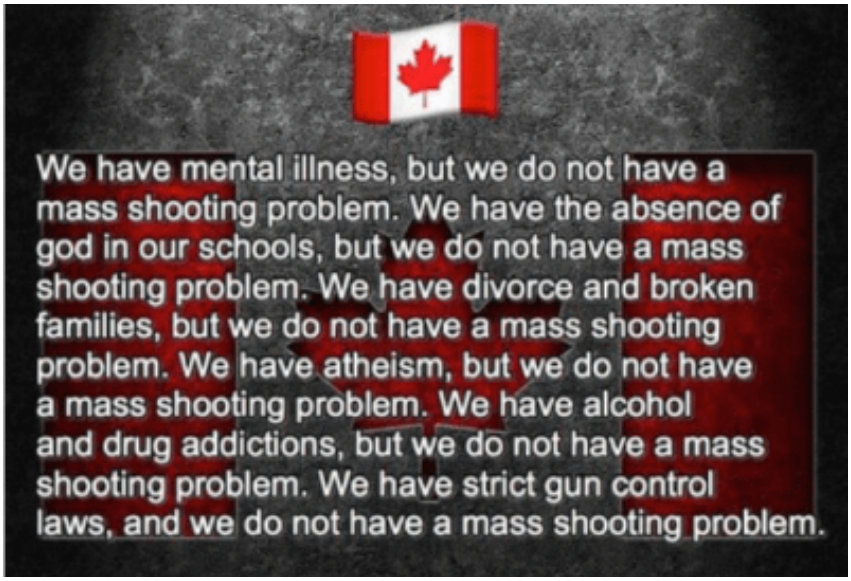
The idea that our Constitution grants us a right to have firearms appeals disproportionately to white, working class, and mostly rural men who are sometimes called “the Bubba vote,” “NASCAR dads,” or just “guys with Confederate flags in their pickup trucks.”

In contrast, the anti-guns group is largely “urban, eastern, Catholic or Jewish, female, and African-American,” according to the well-researched paper, On Gun Registration, the NRA, Adolf Hitler, and Nazi Gun Laws: Exploding the Gun Culture Wars. The paper argues that to avoid a pitched culture war between sharply divided viewpoints, we need more research, scholarship, and critical thought.

I’d add that Public Health could center that conversation and help us to review our priorities.

Which do we value most: the lives of our children, or the fun we have shooting lots of rounds with a high-powered weapon of war at a gun range? Can we still justify public ownership of weapons not well suited for hunting or personal protection? Maybe a well-regulated firing range can just rent the guns for that purpose.

What about Mental Health?



Mental illness refers to a lot of conditions or disorders that negatively affect your mood, thinking and behavior. Examples include depression, schizophrenia, addictive behaviors, and anxiety and eating disorders.

We seem to all agree that someone diagnosed with a serious mental illness, or a criminal history, should not be able to get their hands on a gun, especially not one designed to kill the most people in the least time possible. But People can display mental health concerns intermittently from time to time and never be diagnosed or reported.

To use mental illness to avoid debating common sense gun control measures is dangerous and does little for families of victims, or to prevent future deaths.

We know that those suffering from diagnosed mental illness are far more likely to be victims of violent crime than perpetrators, and only 4% of violence in the US can be traced to mental illness.

Obviously, mental illness itself is not the cause of our nation’s gun violence problem. Other nations have just as many mental health problems, but they don’t have nearly the number of gun deaths as we do. So is this why the CDC and NIH can’t study the problem? Does Congress not want you to know the truth?

No matter how you define it, if you think that mental illness is the cause of our gun violence problem, then why did President Trump repeal the Obama-era order designed to prevent the mentally ill from buying a gun? And why did Republicans spend a year working to gut Medicaid, the biggest payer of mental health care in this nation? This makes no sense from a public health and safety perspective.

If mentally ill people aren't committing mass murder, who is?

Here are the **Top 10 Reasons why one person kills another with a gun**, according to one source:

10. Mercy killing
9. Road rage
8. Greed
7. Anger
6. Self-defense
5. Religion arguments
4. Alcohol & drugs
3. Revenge
2. Money
1. Domestic violence

According to psychiatrist Michael H. Stone, "Mass murder is an almost **exclusively male phenomenon** (male - female ratio is 24:1)." This reflects our genetic evolution, where men are naturally more aggressive than women. They tend to define themselves and their masculinity by their job, sport and firepower. (He who dies with the most toys wins.) Women, on the other hand, define themselves by family and relationships. So one might ask if guns substitute for feeling less relevant as women gain influence and power.

> [Former-President] Trump appears to appeal more to men who are secretly insecure about their manhood. (*Washington Post* on **Fragile Masculinity**)
>
> Stone says most mass murders are planned well in advance, usually as acts of revenge or retribution for perceived slights and wrongs. Overwhelming hopelessness is often present, and this helps explain how nearly half of the perpetrators either commit suicide or are killed by police in the immediate aftermath of the event.

A 2003 study in the journal World Psychiatry said, "the major determinants of violence continue to be socio-demographic and socio-economic factors such as being young, male, and of lower socio-economic status." About 85% of those committing mass murder are working class and under age 44.

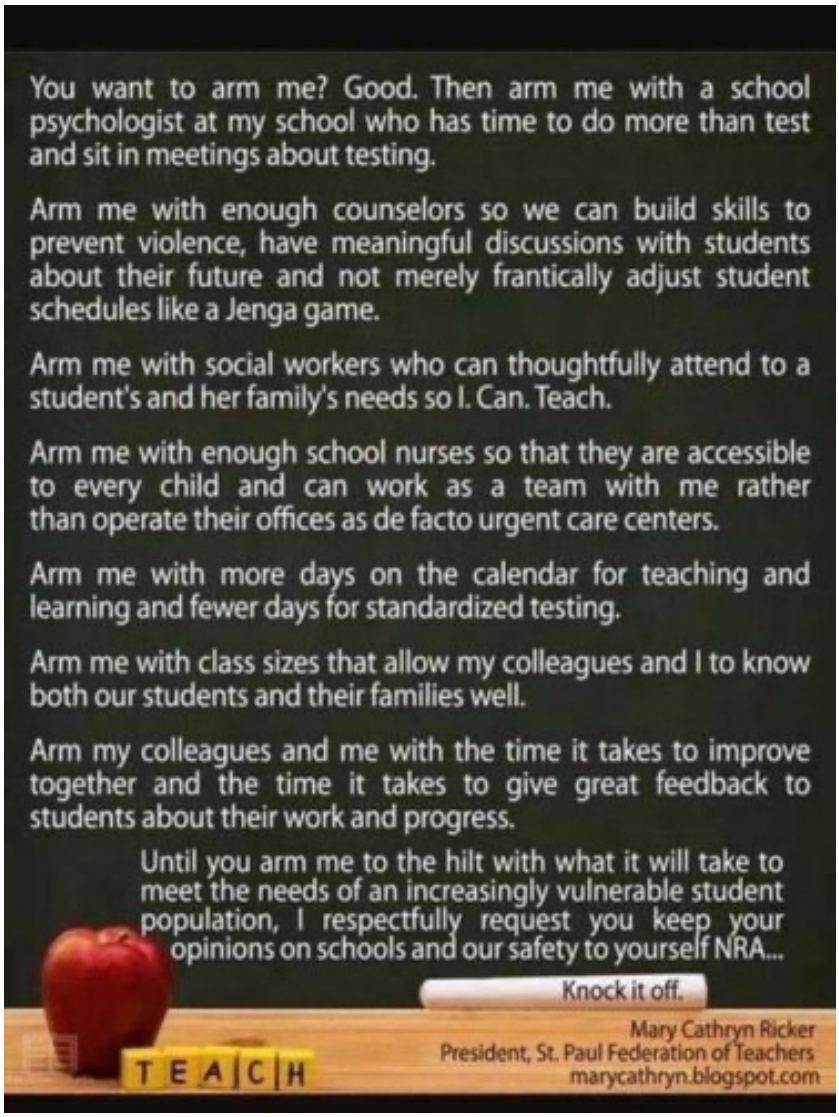
I expect gun violence and mass murder incidents will get worse with the widening wealth gap, divisive politics, and Trump administration. That's because more and more people are feeling depressed and hopeless, and because of our broken healthcare system that makes getting mental health treatment in our nation difficult and expensive. The economic incentives work against the field of psychiatry, which is far less lucrative than other medical specialties.

What about Arming Teachers?

A Washington Post editorial responded by saying, *"In gunfights, trained officers have just 18 percent hit rate. Yet, we want to arm teachers?"*

In 46 weeks this year (2019), there have been 45 school shootings. That's basically one a week.

On his MSNBC program, Laurence O'Donnell told us why arming teachers is a stupid idea. President Trump hinted that a well-trained military veteran like General Kelly would have had no trouble stepping up to oppose a school shooter. But even Kelly would not order troops armed with handguns to attack an enemy with the superior firepower of military style weapons, much less go into that situation himself.



Hardening the physical structure of schools and employing school marshals may help in some cases, but we've already seen how easy it was for the Parkland shooter to time his attack to coincide with the end of school and set off the fire alarm to make sure everyone started leaving at once. We also learned that an armed and well-trained deputy sheriff stayed safely outside of the school rather than engage the shooter inside.

If we are to rely on teachers, who will train them, provide their weapons, and pay to harden the schools when so many teachers are already paying for pencils and school supplies themselves? How will first responders know if the teacher with a gun is a good guy and not the perpetrator? Who will pay to settle the wrongful death lawsuits that will certainly occur when students are shot by mistake in the crossfire? And what do the teachers say about this? Have you asked?

And what about our churches (Sutherland Springs, TX – 2017), movie theaters (Aurora, CO – 2012), shopping malls (Cascade Mall, Burlington, WA – 2016), restaurants (Luby's, Killeen, TX – 1991), offices (San Bernardino, CA – 2015), and universities (Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA – 2007)? It's incredibly difficult to stop an angry and revengeful person with suicidal thoughts, as we saw in 2009 when an Army major killed 13 people in Ft. Hood, TX with a concealed semi-automatic pistol.

What about the Students?

Here's one teacher's sarcastic post showing how crazy it sounds to put the responsibility on students:

> "I have a student in my class that keeps hitting other kids with a hammer over and over. I can't get anything done, and the other kids are hurt and hate it!" "Have you tried taking the hammer away from the student," another asked. "No, no, it's not the hammer's fault. Everyone knows that kids have the right to have hammers! I want to buy a bunch of hammers and give them to all the other students, and then no one will ever have problems with hammers again!" Oh yeah, more hammers will fix everything, for sure.

An open letter to all the people crying "Arm the teachers"

1. **Yes, my students are very important to me. No, I should not be expected to take a bullet for your kid, nor am I willing to kill what usually ends up being another student in the event of a school shooting scenario. This does not make me a bad teacher, nor does it mean I'm a crappy, selfish human being.**
2. **I did not sign up for what you're proposing. I have my own family and my own child to come home to, and yes, I definitely love them more than your student.**
3. **You seem unaware of the constant time and training RESPONSIBLE and EFFECTIVE law enforcement officers put in to make sure their skills are up to par and they will hit what they're trying to hit instead of an innocent when/if the time comes. I already work 10+ unpaid off-hours per week for my students; I'm not about to be saddled with yet another responsibility.**
4. **If I shoot and miss, I'm liable. If a shooting happens and I don't react by using my gun against the assailant, I'm liable. I'm not protected from liability for failure to act like police are. I will be blamed for whatever ends up happening because I didn't "do my duty."**
5. **The political party the majority of you seem to support doesn't even trust me to assign appropriate books to your student or teach the inconvenient truths of history to your student. But you have the audacity to trust me with a firearm around them?**

"Arm the teachers" is a way for lawmakers and ammo-sexuals to pass the buck. We will not become your scapegoats for yet another issue.

Signed,

A high school English teacher who's fed up with hearing this bullshit

I find it disgusting and sad that children must now participate in active shooter drills, even as young as those in kindergarten. It has a significant effect on their mental health, as shown in the following short video.



What about the Morality Movement?



Just as the first women who came forward in the *#MeToo* movement showed immense courage, so too have the survivors of the Parkland school shooting. They are showing the adults that they've had enough, with their own *#NeverAgain* and *#WhatIf* campaigns. They've challenged the NRA directly. And they've demanded that politicians no longer take NRA campaign contributions.

It looks like this "morality movement" is gaining momentum and is having an effect in Hollywood, business, and (increasingly) in politics. A long list of powerful men in the entertainment and sports industries have been shamed, lost their jobs, and were jailed, including Harvey Weinstein, Kevin Spacey, Matt Lauer, and Dr. Larry Nassar, former USA Gymnastics team doctor.

Likewise, corporations are turning against the NRA, including United and Delta Airlines; Hertz, Avis, National, Alamo, and Enterprise Rent-A-Car; and MetLife. Wal-Mart and Dick's Sporting Goods said they will no longer sell a gun to anyone under the age of 21, and they stopped selling assault-style guns altogether. Companies sticking with the NRA are being shamed in social media with posts like, "Hey @LifeLock why do you support the NRA? *#NeverForget.*"

It's too soon to see how the morality movement will affect politics and the mid-term elections, but Roy Moore, Al Franken, and Trump Campaign Manager Corey Lewandowski already lost their jobs over sexual abuse or harassment. This could be a big opportunity for Democrats, given President Trump's own behavior and history – 19 women accused him of sexual misconduct – and how the Republican Congress has turned a blind eye.

What about our Cultural Problem?



We have a Gun problem, not a culture problem. Other countries have secular religious freedom but don't have a gun violence problem, so it's not a lack of God in our lives. Other countries watch violent movies and play violent video games but don't have a gun violence problem. People in other countries get angry and want to hurt people too, and they have alcoholism and substance abuse, but what they don't have is easy access to guns. So, to anyone who claims that we have a unique cultural problem, I call "B.S." So do the surviving students of the Florida school massacre.

It gives me hope for the future of our nation when student survivors like Delaney Tarr, David Hogg, Emma Gonzalez, Cameron Hasky, and Sarah Chadwick show more courage and leadership than the leaders who act

like children and cower to NRA bullies. But it makes me angry when gun enthusiasts label them as “paid crisis actors” and send them death threats.

WFAA’s Dale Hansen, a Dallas-area sports reporter, recorded the following video editorial about the most recent school shooting in Florida, where the adults only sent “thoughts and prayers”. The have more in mind, and that’s a good thing.



During a PBS News Hour in 2016, a gentleman asked President Barak Obama why he wants to restrict gun access for all owners, and not just the bad guys. His answer is worth watching, as it hits all the various actions our nation took to reduce auto fatalities.



If, after reading this article and watching these videos, you still think assault weapons are a human right, but healthcare is not, then YOU are what’s wrong with America today. Maybe you can tell me why people with pre-existing mental health conditions have easy access to Firearms but not Healthcare.

From the US Congress Joint Economic Committee report, **A State-by-State Examination of the Economic Costs of Gun Violence** (https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/b2ee3158-aff4-4563-8c3b-0183ba4a8135/economic-costs-of-gun-violence.pdf):

https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/b2ee3158-aff4-4563-8c3b-0183ba4a8135/economic-costs-of-gun-violence.pdf

GUN VIOLENCE IN TEXAS

Annual Cost of Gun Violence:

$16.6 BILLION

$632 PER RESIDENT



EVERY 3 HOURS

3,139 Texans a year die from gun violence—one every 3 hours.

Gun Suicide:

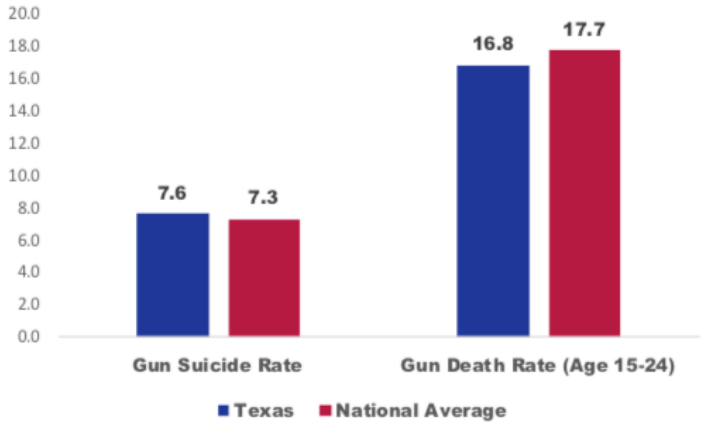
- **Upwards of 62% of gun deaths in Texas are suicides, and more than 57% of all suicide deaths in Texas involve firearms.**
- **From 2013 to 2017, 9,737 people in Texas died by gun-related suicide—one every 5 hours.**

Young People and Guns:

- **Exposure to gun violence can cause lasting trauma in young people, leading to PTSD, chronic stress, and decreased future earnings.**
- **From 2013 to 2017, 3,137 people under age 25 were killed with a gun in Texas.**
- **Guns are the third leading cause of death for Texas children ages 1-17.**

Rates of Gun Violence

(per 100,000 residents)



27th **Texas has the 27th highest gun death rate of all 50 states**

1.4% **Cost of gun violence as percent of national GDP**

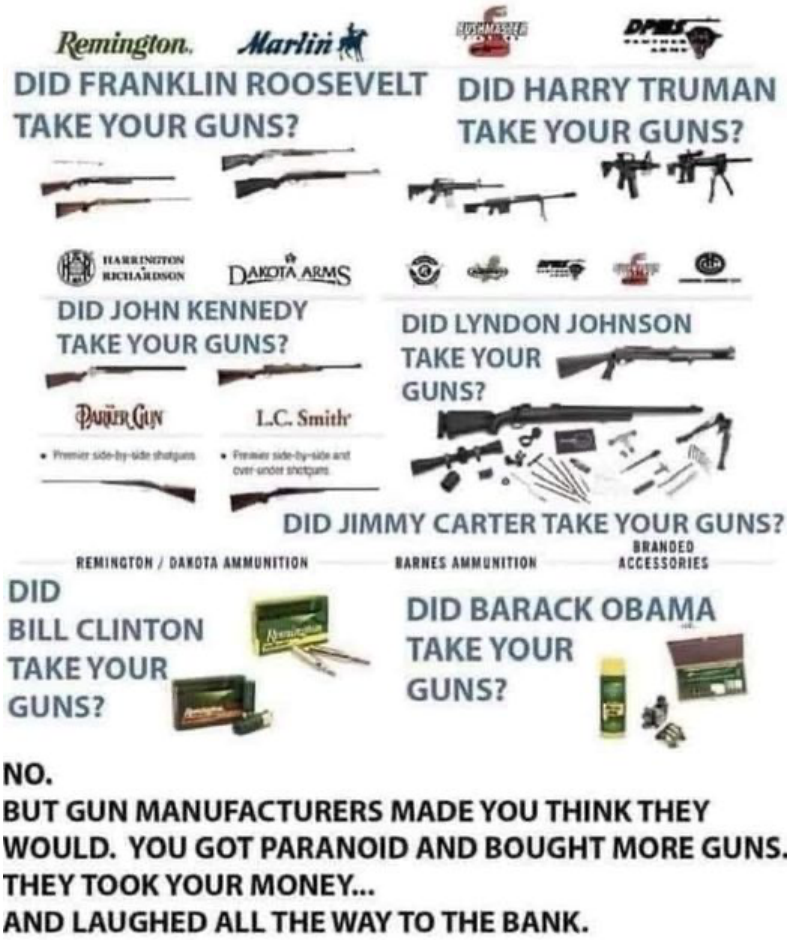
Cost of gun violence as percent of Texas GDP **0.9%**

Source: Giffords Law Center, US Bureau of Economic Analysis, CDC WISQARS, World Bank

Follow the Money

Gun manufacturers got rich promoting fear of Democrats and the myth that they'd take away your guns.

So, to frame the issue properly, focus on gun safety and the public health impact of gun violence. Avoid the term gun Control, because that reinforces their false framing.



About the Author

Wayne Caswell is a retired IBM technologist, market strategist, futurist, consumer advocate, and founding editor of Modern Health Talk (www.mhealthtalk.com). He brings a unique Big Picture perspective and Holistic approach to his articles on healthcare policy, future directions, and solutions for independent living. That perspective caused him to become a strong advocate of progressive policies and candidates.

Check out Wayne's related article, "America's Gun Culture and its connection to Public Health." If you've never been to a gun show and want to understand our gun culture, this article is for you.



Related Articles & Videos

- **US Gun Deaths** includes many charts and "Government data from over 70 sources organized to show how the money flows, the impact, and who 'the people' are."
- **The U.S. Culture of Firearms and the New Normal** (presentation slides by Dr. Warren J. Blumenfeld)
- **How the NRA Rewrote the Second Amendment.** In this legal and historical brief, published by the Brennan Center for Justice, Michael Waldman argues that The Founders never intended to create an unregulated individual right to a gun. Today, millions believe they did. Here's how it happened. This article is based on his book, The Second Amendment: A Biography.
- **The Return of the Machine Gun** (March 2022) For decades, fully automatic weapons were expensive, collectable, and rarely used in crimes. Auto sears, kits that can cost less than $20 online, have changed that. Not only are gangs kitting up their semiautomatic guns into full blown machine guns, but so are extremist militia groups. And that's what scares me. Maybe it is time to revisit the gun show, but I don't expect to find any for sale there. They're all on the black market. *"There is a worldview that there will be a coming moment in which they have to take up arms against the government and to do that they will need heavy weaponry. It's the ultimate symbol of personal freedom and individual rights; to the extreme."*
- **In America, a child is shot every hour, and hundreds die. Here are 13 young lives lost in 2021.** (Washington Post, 1/12/2022) The country's gun violence epidemic is killing more children than ever. Who they were matters just as much as how they died.
- **Why is there so much gun violence in America and what do we do about it?** (Apple News, October 2021. Gun data shows mass shootings are an anomaly compared with suicides.
- **America has a gun violence problem. What do we do about it?** (ABC News, 10/25/21) This report is a part of "Rethinking Gun Violence," an ABC News series examining the level of gun violence in the U.S..
- **GUNFIGHT: My Battle Against the Industry That Radicalized** (Book by Bryan Busse) A former firearms executive pulls back the curtain on America's multibillion-dollar gun industry, exposing how it fostered extremism and racism, radicalizing the nation and bringing cultural division to a boiling point. As an avid hunter, outdoorsman, and conservationist – all things that the firearms industry was built on – Ryan Busse chased a childhood dream and built a successful career selling millions of firearms for one of America's most popular gun companies.
- **How to Reduce Shootings** (NYTimes, 3/23/2021) "America has been shaken by new mass shootings, in Georgia and Colorado, with at least 18 people killed. This essay originally ran in 2017, after a shooter killed 26 people in a Texas church, but the issue is still tragically relevant — and will remain so until America tightens its gun safety policies."
- **Maria Butina, explained: the accused Russian spy who tried to sway US politics through the NRA** (7/19/2018) She met with Donald Trump Jr. and lived with a Republican consultant. Where will this investigation lead?
- **Everytown for Gun Safety** is a movement of Americans working together to end gun violence and build safer communities. Gun violence touches every town in America. For too long, change has been thwarted by the Washington gun lobby and by leaders who refuse to take common-sense steps that will save lives. But something is changing. More than 4 million mayors, moms, cops, teachers, survivors, gun owners, and everyday Americans have come together to make their own communities safer. Together, we are fighting for the changes that we know will save lives.
- **The True Cost of Gun Violence in America** (Mother Jones, 4/15/2015) features charts and videos that the NRA doesn't want you to see.
- **What I Saw Treating the Victims From Parkland Should Change the Debate on Guns** (The Atlantic, 2/22/2018) They weren't the first mass-shooting victims the Florida radiologist saw—but their wounds were radically different.

- **There are now more guns than people in the United States** (Washington Post, 10/5/2015).
- **Mass Shooting Tracker** accounts for all mass shooting incidents, including those that don't get reported in the mainstream media.
- **Gun Violence as a Public Health Issue** (Science-Based Medicine, 2/21/2018) "Gun violence is a serious public health issue in America but is not getting the research that it deserves. This needs to change."
- **We aren't having an evidence-based debate about guns** (Vox, 2/28/2018) "Guns kill 35,000 Americans a year. They're a threat to public health. Let's act like it."
- **America's gun laws are already weak — and a growing loophole is making them even weaker** (Vox, 2/28/2018) When federal background checks aren't completed in 3 days, the sale can close without one.
- **Disrupting Access: Addressing Firearm Suicide in the U.S.** (EveryTownResearch) "The conversation around gun violence in the U.S. tends to focus on homicides … but nearly two-thirds of all gun deaths in the U.S. are suicides."
- **Australia's gun laws stopped mass shootings and reduced homicides, study finds** (The Guardian, 6/22/2016) The gun laws even reduced non-gun-related homicide and suicide.
- **Association between Connecticut's permit-to-purchase handgun law and homicides** (4/6/2015) "Consistent with prior research, this [academic] study demonstrates that Connecticut's handgun purchaser licensing law is associated with a subsequent [40%] reduction in homicide rates."
- **Effects of Missouri's Repeal of Its Handgun Purchaser Licensing Law on Homicides** (Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, 12/17/2013) "The repeal of Missouri's PTP [permit-to-purchase] handgun law was associated with an increase in annual increase in firearm homicides rates of 1.09 per 100,000 (+23%)." That translates to increases of between 55 and 63 homicides per year in Missouri.
- **On Gun Registration, the NRA, Adolf Hitler, and Nazi Gun Laws: Exploding the Gun Culture Wars** (Fordham Law Review, June 2004) This exceptionally well-researched paper concludes that we need more historical research of gun violence and serious scholarship to find out what proposals can have the most success in reducing gun violence and deaths in America.
- **HISTORY: Why the NRA Was Founded** (TIME Magazine, 11/17/2015) "The N.R.A. was founded in 1871 by a group of former Union Army officers dismayed that so many Northern soldiers, often poorly trained, had been scarcely capable of using their weapons." For a century the NRA focused on hunting, conservation and marksmanship, even teaching Boy Scouts how to shoot safely. But in 1977 their mission changed from education to political lobbying on behalf of gun manufacturers.

The NRA supported Gun Control when Black Panthers had guns.



1967: Black Panthers Call to Arms 2020: White Nationalists storm KY Capital

View the article at history.com/news/black-panthers-gun-control-nra-support-mulford-act.

- **How NRA's true believers converted a marksmanship group into a mighty gun lobby** (Washington Post, 1/12/2013)

- **New York attorney general seeks to dissolve NRA in suit accusing gun rights group of wide-ranging fraud and self-dealing** (Washington Post, 8/6/2020)
- **Republicans plan to keep restrictions on gun research in place** (MSNBC, 3/2/2018)
- **Do Money, Social Status Woes Fuel the U.S. Gun Culture?** (Scientific American, 12/13/2017) Of U.S. gun owners, white males hit by economic setbacks were most likely to feel empowered by weapons.
- **America's Complex Relationship With Guns** (PEW Research, 2/22/2017) is an in-depth look at public attitudes and experiences. The represented survey of almost 4,000 U.S. adults found that 44% of them personally know someone who has been shot, either accidentally or intentionally. 23% said someone with a gun has intimidated them or someone in their family. And half saw gun violence as a very big problem needing solutions. The report found that gun owners and non-owners have divergent views on different policy proposals, even though there was general agreement on the need for some restrictions, such as preventing access for those with mental illness or on the federal watch list.
- **Mass Murder, Mental Illness, and Men** (psychiatrist Michael Stone MD)
- **Trump Signs Bill Revoking Obama-Era Gun Checks for People With Mental Illnesses** (NBC News, 2/26/2017) This was just one year before another mass school shooting in Parkland, Florida.
- **An NRA spokeswoman blamed an 'insane monster' for the mass shooting in Florida** (Business Insider, 2/22/2018) Here's the truth about mental illness and guns.
- **The real reason the NRA's money matters in elections** (Vox, 2/27/2018) This well-written article provides important insight into how big money corrupts the political process in ways that go unnoticed, and how the NRA uses its rating system to threaten lawmakers with promises to support competitors if they don't maintain an A-rating. It adds to the message of my own article on **Political Investments with High ROI**.
- **Moral movement against guns already having major impact** (Robert Reich, San Francisco Chronicle, 2/28/2018)
- **VIDEO: The state of gun violence in the US, explained in 18 charts** (7 min. by VOX, 2/22/2016)
- **VIDEO: No, there's no 2nd Amendment right to AR-15s** (5:29 min by Ari Melber, MSNBC)
- **VIDEO: Why Arming Teachers Is A Fantasy War Game** (16:31 min by Lawrence O'Donnell on MSNBC, 2/21/2018)
- **VIDEO: Everyone should have guns. That's right. EVERYONE.** (2:38 min of sarcasm aimed at the NRA, 2/14/2018)
- **VIDEO: Showdown Over The Concealed Carry Reciprocity Act** (13:38 min 60 Minutes episode, 2/11/2018) If passed, this bill would make Concealed Carry work like a Driver's License across state lines. It's already passed through the House, has Trump's support, and is now heading to the Senate.
- **VIDEOS: Sandy Hook Promise** is a national non-profit organization based in Newtown, Connecticut. It was founded and is led by several family members whose loved ones were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012. The intent of their activism and short PSA videos is to honor all victims of gun violence by turning our tragedy into a moment of transformation by providing programs and practices that protect children and prevent the senseless, tragic loss of life.

Related Quotes

The need for research – "There's evidence [that] arming more people is typically good for the gun industry and bad for society. And there's some evidence that certain types of gun laws, like universal background checks, may be useful. [But] There's no evidence at all about raising the age to 21, and certainly no evidence about arming teachers." (David Hemenway, a Harvard professor who has written extensively about gun safety)

Defunded research – "The CDC researches all threats to the health of Americans, and being shot dead is a significant risk to health. The CDC also researches deaths from car crashes, and how to mitigate those deaths, for example." (Steven Novella, Science Based Medicine)

Incomplete data – "We have to extrapolate from what limited data we have, from different states or countries with different laws. Generalizing from this data is difficult, but we can still craft thoughtful policy based upon the data we have and plausibility. Then track the results of those policies and adjust them as necessary." (Dr. Steven Novella, a Yale Medical School professor and executive editor at Science-Based Medicine)

Thanks to NRA opposition – "CDC research funding for gun violence fell by 96 percent between 1996 and 2012. Major public research funding for gun violence prevention is estimated at $2 million annually. By contrast, in 2011, the National Institutes of Health devoted $21 million to the study of headaches." (Everytown for Gun Safety, a group that backs gun control)

School Shootings – "Are we prepared to say that such [gun] violence visited on our children year after year after year is somehow the price of our freedom? (President Obama in 2012 after 20 first-graders were massacred at Sandy Hook Elementary.

Horrific damage – "Even for those who manage to survive gun violence involving these weapons [assault rifles], the severity and lasting impact of their wounds, disabilities and treatment leads to devastating consequences." (David Barbe, AMA President, in essay after Parkland, Florida)

Challenging the powerbrokers – "We get out there and make sure everybody knows how much money their politician took from the NRA." (David Hogg, one of the surviving students of Marjory Stoneman Douglass High School in Parkland, FL.

Morality movement – "Make no mistake. This is all about power — a powerful political lobby that has bullied America for too long, powerful men who haven't been held accountable for their behavior, police who for too long have been unconstrained. A moral movement is growing against the violence perpetrated by all of them, making it necessary for both government and business to take action. It is being led [not by politicians, but] by people whose moral authority cannot be denied: students whose friends have been murdered, women who have been abused, the parents and partners of black men who have been slain. It is already having a profound impact on America." (Robert Reich)

My rights versus yours – "Why was my son's rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness not as important as your right to bear arms?" (A mother whose son died during the Parkland shooting posed this question to an NRA representative.)

AR15 as a right – "If someone tells you that we have to live with these weapons because of the 2nd Amendment, either they don't know what they're talking about, or they think you don't." (Ari Melber, MSNBC)

Mental health – "If you're talking [about] people with mental health issues or mental illness, you're talking 1 in 5 Americans, and to equate mental illness with violence is to say that 1 in 5 [20%] of people are violent, and that's not the truth." (Patricia Woods, outgoing president of the Mental Health Association)

Male phenomenon – "Mass murder is an almost exclusively male phenomenon (male-female ratio is 24:1) — a reflection of evolutionarily driven tendency for males to be more aggressive than females. Most mass murders are planned well in advance of the outburst, usually as acts of revenge or retribution for perceived slights and wrongs. Overwhelming hopelessness is often present: this may help explain how nearly half the persons committing mass murder either commit suicide or are killed by the police in the immediate aftermath of the event." (Psychiatrist Michael H. Stone, MD)