

Pro and Con:

Should Congress Pass Stronger Gun-control Laws?

I. THE FACTS

A. Numbers of gun owners and guns in the United States

- About 30% of adult Americans own a gun. In the past, more than 50% of Americans owned a gun. Most of the gun owners are men. Some people collect guns and own a hundred or more guns. People use guns for hunting, sport, competitions, and protection.
- There are between 270 million to 310 million guns in the United States. (Source: *The Guardian*, November 15, 2017)
- According to a February 2013 Pew Research report, 32% of gun owners owned guns for hunting and 7% owned guns for target or sport shooting. In 2011, there were 13.7 million hunters 16 years old or older in the United States. Hunters and target shooters use high-powered semiautomatic rifles and shotguns shooting tournaments each year.
- The rifles most used for marksmanship competitions in the U.S. are the Colt AR-15 and Springfield M1A. Their cartridges are standard hunting calibers, useful for game such as deer."
- Three million Americans carry a gun with them every day. Nine million Americans carry guns with them sometimes. Most gun owners live in suburban or rural areas.
- The Centers for Disease Control listed firearms as the 12th cause of all deaths between 1999 and 2013, representing 1.3% of total deaths.
- Guns were also the #1 method of death by homicide (66.6% of all homicides) and by suicide (52.2% of all suicides).
- Since 1998, the number of gun-related accidental deaths per year has decreased by 50%.

B. Gun violence and its costs

- In 2017, 15,549 people were killed by guns in the United States. (Gun Violence Archive). There were 31,157 people injured.
- There were 22,018 suicides with a gun.
- Death by gun is the 12th most common way to die. The United States is number 28 in international homicide rates. There were 2.97 gun murders per 100,000 people in 2012.
- Hundreds of small children were killed in accidents by friends or brothers or sisters (Centers for Disease Control).
- The states with the most guns report the most suicides.
- Gun violence costs American society a great deal of money. Some of the costs are:
 - Lost taxes \$5.5 billion; court costs \$4.7 billion
 - Medicare and Medicaid costs for victims \$1.4 billion

- Mental health care for victims: \$180 million. Processing insurance claims: \$224 million
- Law enforcement: \$133
- Eighty-four percent of people who are injured by guns do not have health insurance. Taxpayers pay for their medical care through Medicaid.
- Other costs of gun violence are policing, jailing, foster care for children, lost earnings and time, productivity, tourism, and psychological costs (pain and suffering), among others.
- Property values go down in a community where there is repeated gun violence.

C. Where do the guns come from?

- There are 147 gun manufacturers in the U.S.. The top 10 gun manufacturers are:
- Sturm Ruger, Remington Arms, Smith and Wesson, Glock, Sig Saur. O.F. Mossburg and sons, Savage Arms, Springfield Armory, Beretta, Taurus.
- Together, the top 10 companies produce more than 8 million firearms every year for buyers in the United States. Some of their top managers have each donated more than a million dollars to the National Rifle Association (*Mother Jones*).
- When there were news reports of mass shootings, the sales of guns increased. People wanted to buy guns before there might be laws to make them illegal. Gun manufacturers' profits were multiplied 30 times compared to the previous year.
- Cheap guns flow into the "Black Market." This is the sale of guns between persons who are not regulated and no background checks are done.

II. GUN LAWS IN THE UNITED STATES

A. The Second Amendment

- During the early years of the country, men used guns to hunt for food for their families. They protected the family against Indians, wild animals, and robbers. In England, it was the law that every man had to have a gun to help protect the country against invaders.
- The American colonies fought for independence against the British King in 1775. American soldiers used a type of rifle that could shoot only one bullet at a time. The rifles were not accurate farther than 100 feet. It took 30 seconds to two minutes to reload the rifle.
- After the war for Independence, leaders met in Philadelphia to write a Constitution. These leaders did not want the new country to have an army. They expected citizens to protect the new country against any enemies.
- They also didn't want anyone to become a tyrant as King George III had been. They wanted citizens to be able to protect the democracy against a tyrant or dictator (*The Federalist Papers*).
- The founders added ten amendments to the new Constitution. The Second Amendment was to protect people from enemies and from a government that might become tyrannical. "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."

That means: *A free country needs citizens to be ready to defend it against enemies. For that reason, the people have the right to keep and carry guns. The government shall not make any laws to change this.*

B. Today's laws about guns

- Federal laws regulate the way guns are made. There are laws to regulate the trade, possession, sale, and transport of guns. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) has the job of enforcing these laws.
- Each state may have its own gun laws to regulate firearms. However, they may not take away the right to keep and bear arms. This is protected by the Second Amendment to the United States Constitution.
- **These are federal laws about guns:**
 - The government may tax the making and selling of guns.
 - Owners of certain weapons must register them: machine guns, short barreled rifles, shotguns, silencers.
 - Gun manufacturers must have a federal firearms license.
 - It is against the law to sell guns to convicted criminals, mentally disabled, or dishonorably discharged soldiers.
- The minimum age for buying a hand gun is 21.
- 18 is the legal age for buying a rifle or shotgun.
- Only licensed gun dealers may bring guns to other states to sell.
- Automatic firearms are against the law.
- Semi-automatic guns are legal in most states.
- Guns may not be taken into a school zone.
- Licensed sellers must do background checks on people who want to buy a gun.
- From 1994 to 2004, there was a federal ban on assault weapons. The law expired in 2004.
- Congress passed a law that said that people could not sue firearms manufacturers and licensed dealers if their guns were used in committing a crime.
- Most states require a person to get a permit to carry a handgun.

C. Why is it hard to make laws about guns?

- Gun companies employ a lot of people. They can move their factories out of a state that passes strong gun laws. For example, in 2013, New York state passed stricter gun laws. Remington, a large gun manufacturer, moved its factory to Huntsville, Alabama. Many people lost their jobs.
- There is a group that lobbies lawmakers about gun laws. The National Rifle Association has five million members. The group advertises about the right to carry guns. It donates money to people running for Congress to help elect candidates who will vote against more gun control

III. THE ARGUMENTS, Pro and Con

A. PRO: We need MORE gun control

- The writers of the Constitution did not know about the kinds of guns we have today. The guns in 1787 were able to shoot only one bullet at a time. The guns have changed, so the laws should change.

Guns that can shoot repeatedly without loading should be banned. They can turn murder into mass murder.

Honest citizens should have no need for a military weapon such as an AK-15 semi-automatic rifle. It should be banned.

- The Second Amendment was intended for militias (state armies), not for individuals.
- Gun control laws try to save lives and prevent crime. This makes it OK to infringe on the Second Amendment.
- Between 2001 and 2012, 6,410 women were killed with a gun by a husband or boyfriend in the U.S. That's more than the number of all the soldiers that were killed in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars from 2001 to 2015.
- The country should ban the sale of guns to people who are convicted of being stalkers.
- The government should take guns away from people who were convicted of abusing a wife or husband.
- Federal background checks for all people who want to buy a gun would reduce gun deaths by 56%.
- Background checks for people who want to buy ammunition would reduce firearm deaths by 80% (*March 10, 2016 Lancet study*).
- Criminals can steal guns from people who own guns legally.

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B. CON: We need LESS gun control

- Gun owners are responsible hunters, sportsmen, and target shooters.
- The Second Amendment was intended to give citizens the ability to defend themselves against harm from others. The government is not able to prevent a crime that is happening.
- The right to self-defense is a basic natural right that grows out of the right to life.
- Police only come after the crime has been done. They can't come fast enough to stop a person from being raped, robbed, or killed.
- The most vulnerable people—women, the elderly, and those who live in high crime neighborhoods—need a way to protect themselves.
- The president, vice president, movie stars, and others have body guards with guns to protect them. People who are not wealthy need protection, too.
- There could be a threat from a leader in the government who becomes a tyrant.
- Many countries that have taken guns away from people are governed by dictators.
- Criminals don't pay attention to gun control regulations, just as they don't pay attention to laws against murder, rape, and robbery.
- Armed citizens prevent many crimes and have saved many lives.
- "States that have laws against carrying a concealed weapon had higher gun-related murders."

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III. THE ARGUMENTS, Pro and Con (continued)

A. PRO: We need MORE gun control

- A majority of adults, including gun owners, support common sense gun control such as background checks, bans on assault weapons, and bans on high-capacity magazines:
- 97% of American voters and 97% of gun owners support universal background checks. 67% support a nationwide ban on assault weapons, and 83% support mandatory waiting periods for gun purchases (*Quinnipiac Poll*)
- There would be fewer suicides if there were fewer guns.
- When people carry guns, they are not likely to stop crimes. They are more likely to make dangerous situations, including mass shootings, more deadly.
- If there are guns in a home, or carried, a person is likely to use them if they are in an emotional argument and very angry.
- Children are killed accidentally in homes with guns.

B. CON: We need LESS gun control

- Gun ownership doubled in the twentieth century, but the murder rate decreased.
- Guns prevent violence. A home owner with a gun can announce, "I've got a gun" and a criminal will not continue.
- When fewer people have guns, criminals who have guns have a much easier job.
- According to the National Rifle Association (NRA), guns are used for self-defense 2.5 million times a year.
- "The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun." (Wayne LaPierre, Executive Vice President of the NRA)
- Laws only stop honest people.
- Background checks would require government to keep personal individual information on gun owners.
- Gun control laws and lower gun ownership rates do not prevent suicides The United States has the 26th highest suicide rate (12.3 suicides per 100,000 people in 2011) and the highest gun ownership rate (88.8 guns per 100 people).
- We don't need more gun control. We need education about guns and gun safety to prevent accidental gun deaths.
- Guns don't kill people; people kill people.