

Theory and Evidence Driven Firearms Policy

How do we stop mass shootings?

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Why we're here ...

- **We all want to save lives.** No one should suffer what these victims (or their loved ones) suffered:



Alexandra Vernier, Arielle Anderson
and Brian Fraser (***MSU Students***)



Hanna St. Juliana, Justin Shilling,
Tate Myre and Madisyn Baldwin
(***Oxford High School Students***)

The Goal(s)

- **Reduce gun violence and save lives!**
 - Bad policy can be **counter productive!**
- **Evidence based practice:** reducing gun violence shouldn't be a matter of feelings or politics.
 - The **National Academy of Sciences (NAS)** twice reviewed the evidence (2005 & 2013).
 - They reached a consensus about **what doesn't work (e.g. gun buybacks)**.
 - It's harder to determine **what does**, but there are common threads ...

Firearms facts we should know before discussing policy ...

- Any discussion of policy must be mindful of **practical and legal realities**:
 - **The right to bear arms is protected by the Constitution.**
 - **Effective “treatments” need an accurate “diagnosis”.**
 - **Americans own between 300 – 600 million firearms!**
 - **The overwhelming majority of gun owners are law abiding.**
 - **Firearms have many legitimate uses.**
 - **Self-defense:** studies suggest that resisting violent crime with a firearm reduces fatalities.
 - **Hunting / sport:** some households rely on hunting for sustenance.
 - **Over 375,000 jobs, \$70 billion annual economic impact.**

Firearms facts we should know before discussing policy ...

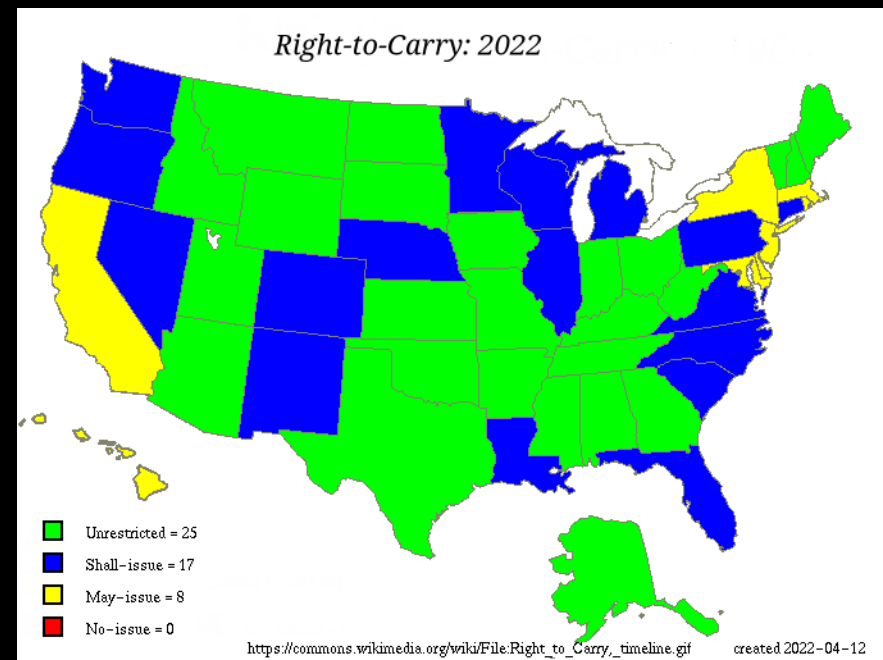
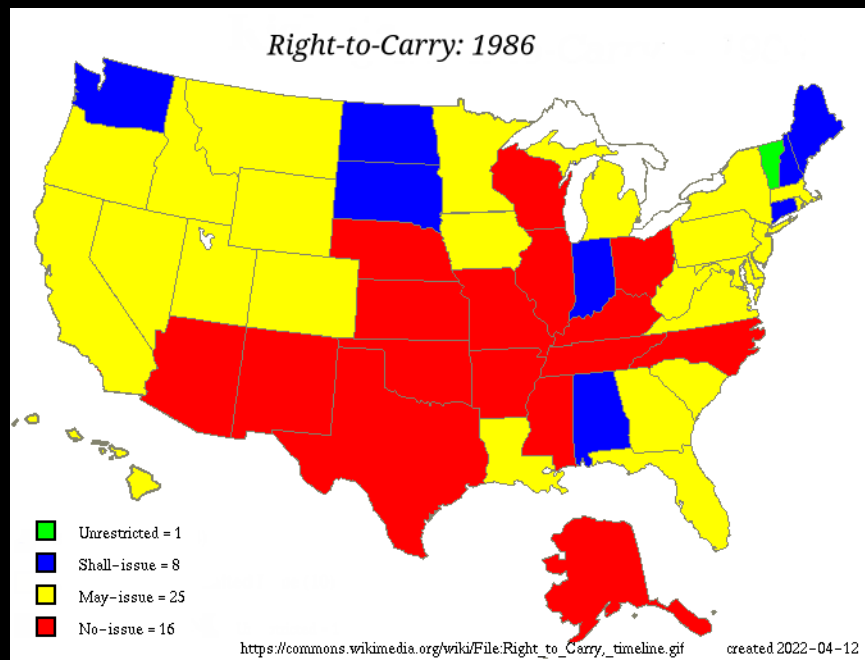
- **“Gun violence” is not one dimensional!**
 - Most gun deaths (~ 55-65%) are **suicides**: typically **older white men**.
 - **Firearm homicides: young people of color** are overrepresented (offenders and victims).
 - Many associated with other crimes (e.g. drug deals, robberies or relationship violence).
 - **“Mass shootings”** have increased recently.
 - **Remain rare**: between ~ 0.2% and 3% of gun homicide victims.
 - **Handguns** are the weapon of choice for both suicide and homicide.
 - **“Assault rifles” < 5% of gun homicides.**

Firearms facts we should know before discussing policy ...

- The **number** of firearms in the U.S. has **increased** over time.
- Since 1990, most **violent crime declined**.
- A **disturbing uptick** in violence commenced in ~ 2014 (accelerated during COVID):
 - Causes are hotly debated, and complex (isolation, substance abuse, mental illness, bigotry, drug cartels, “soft on crime” policies etc.)
- The rate of accidental (negligent) firearms deaths **dropped sharply** since 1980.

Firearms facts we should know before discussing policy ...

- It's become **easier** for people in the U.S. to **legally carry guns** over the past few decades:



So, what does it mean?

- No clear, consistent relationship between the number of firearms and rates of firearm violence!
- Key policy goal: “Increase the ratio of ‘good guy guns’ to ‘bad guy guns’!”



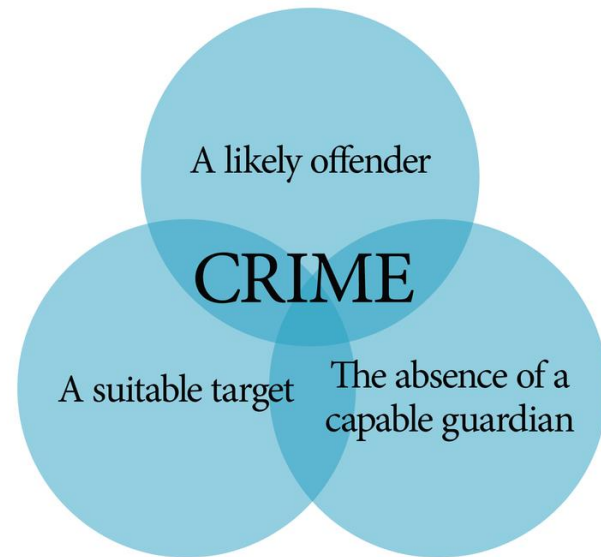
To sum up ...

- The **2nd Amendment** and **SCOTUS precedents** limit what can be done legislatively.
- The “**critical mass**” of firearms limits the impact of legal interventions (“a drop in the ocean”).
- “**Gun violence**” is **multifaceted**: what works in one area is unlikely to help with others.
 - Generally, more effective to **focus on high risk people** than **weapons**.
- Effective policy should be grounded in:
 - **Theory**: “Why should this work?”
 - **Evidence**: “Does research show it has worked?”

Routine Activities Theory

- **Routine Activities Theory** (Cohen and Felson, 1979)
- Suggests that crime requires the intersection of **motivated offenders**, **suitable targets**, and a **lack of capable guardianship**.
- If **just one** of these things is removed, crime will **not** occur!

ROUTINE ACTIVITY THEORY



Physical convergence in time and space

Routine Activities Theory as applied to mass shootings

- **Motivated offenders:** mass shooters are usually angry, isolated individuals, perceive selves as **victims of “injustice”**. Want to extract **revenge** and/or **make a statement**. Many are **mentally ill**.
 - Tough to predict because cases are unique (e.g. different sources of “injustice”): **High false positive rate**.
- **Suitable targets:** the number of **soft targets** is nearly infinite.
 - Many shooters simply target location (e.g. a school, mall), or a socio-demographic group (e.g. women, immigrants, etc.)
 - The availability of firearms in the U.S. makes most targets “suitable” (happens in other countries too!)
 - Other weapons (vehicles, explosives, knives) have been substituted.

Routine Activities Theory as applied to gun violence (particularly mass shootings)

- **Capable Guardianship: “Run, hide, fight” = FBI active shooter protocol:**
 - **Run: Good tactic!** Difficult to hit a moving target + wounded victims can get medical help.
 - **Hide: Dangerous!!!** Creates easy targets. Wounded wait hours : *Sandy Hook, Uvalde* and the *Pulse Night Club shooting*. **Need a secure location!**
 - **Fight: Potential for significant improvement!**
 - Many institutions advise victims to throw books, backpacks, rocks etc.
 - **Why?! Far more effective weapons exist!**
 - **Rely on law enforcement / professional security?** Police can't be everywhere and most private security is unarmed. Even when armed police are on scene, they may not engage shooters (e.g. *Parkland, Uvalde*).

Armed Citizens as a means of providing Capable Guardianship

- Michigan has **close to 900,000 people licensed to carry concealed firearms (CPLs)** (vs. roughly 1 million police in the U.S.)!
 - **Mandatory training / background check** + many have additional training / experience.
 - **Extraordinarily law abiding:** Lower rates of offending than sworn officers!
 - CPLs are **less likely** to shoot bystanders than police.
 - Record of successful defenses (*Greenwood Park Mall, Indiana; West Freeway Christian Church, Texas; Clackamas Mall, Oregon* + many other examples!)
 - Some data suggest that as many as **10 lives per mass shooting** may be saved by an immediate, on scene, armed response.

The Bottom Line

- Mass shootings are **rare and unpredictable**.
- Predicting **motivated offenders or suitable targets** is virtually impossible.
- However, **we can increase capable guardianship!**
- **Make it personal:** Think about your workplace, school, place of worship, etc.
 - What if the unthinkable happened **right here, right now?!**
 - Which approach will **save your life?**