



Americans Against Gun Violence
7862 Winding Way #151
Fair Oaks, CA 95628
(916) 668-4160
www.aagunv.org • info@aagunv.org

Preventing Firearm Related Deaths and Injuries in the United States of America

Mission Statement of Americans Against Gun Violence

Revised, April 19, 2023

Firearm related deaths and injuries are a serious public health problem in the United States of America, and the rate of gun related deaths in our country is currently at least ten times higher than the average rate for the other high income democratic countries of the world.¹ Since 2020, gunshot wounds have become the leading cause of death for U.S. children and adolescents.² It is the position of Americans Against Gun Violence that we have not only the ability, but also the moral responsibility to reduce rates of firearm related deaths and injuries in the United States to levels that are at or below the rates in other economically advanced democratic countries.

Like other gun violence prevention organizations, we support common sense firearm regulations. We believe, however, that common sense dictates that in order to reduce rates of gun violence in the United States to levels comparable to the rates in other high income democratic countries, we must adopt comparably stringent gun control laws – laws that go far beyond the limited measures currently being advocated by other U.S. gun violence prevention organizations. Specifically, we believe that we should follow the examples of Great Britain and Australia, both of which reacted swiftly and definitively following mass shootings in their countries over two decades ago. We advocate banning civilian ownership of all automatic and semi-automatic rifles, including all so-called “assault rifles,” as Britain did after the 1987 Hungerford mass shooting,³ and as Australia did after the 1996 Port Arthur mass shooting.⁴ And in light of the fact that that handguns are the weapons used in the vast majority of U.S. firearm related deaths,⁵ including in most mass shootings,⁶ we also advocate banning civilian ownership of all handguns, as Britain did after the 1996 Dunblane Primary School mass shooting.⁷

We also believe that we should follow the example of every other high income democratic country in requiring registration of all firearms and licensing of all firearm owners;⁸ and that in the United States, as in those other countries, the burden of proof should be on any person seeking to acquire a gun to show convincing evidence that he or she needs one and can handle one safely, not on the government to show evidence that he or she should not be allowed to have a firearm.⁹ Finally, given the overwhelming evidence showing that there is no net protective value from owning or carrying a gun in a democratic society,¹⁰ “self defense” should not be automatically accepted as a reason for having a gun in the United States, just as it is not accepted as a legitimate reason for gun ownership in most other high income democratic countries.¹¹

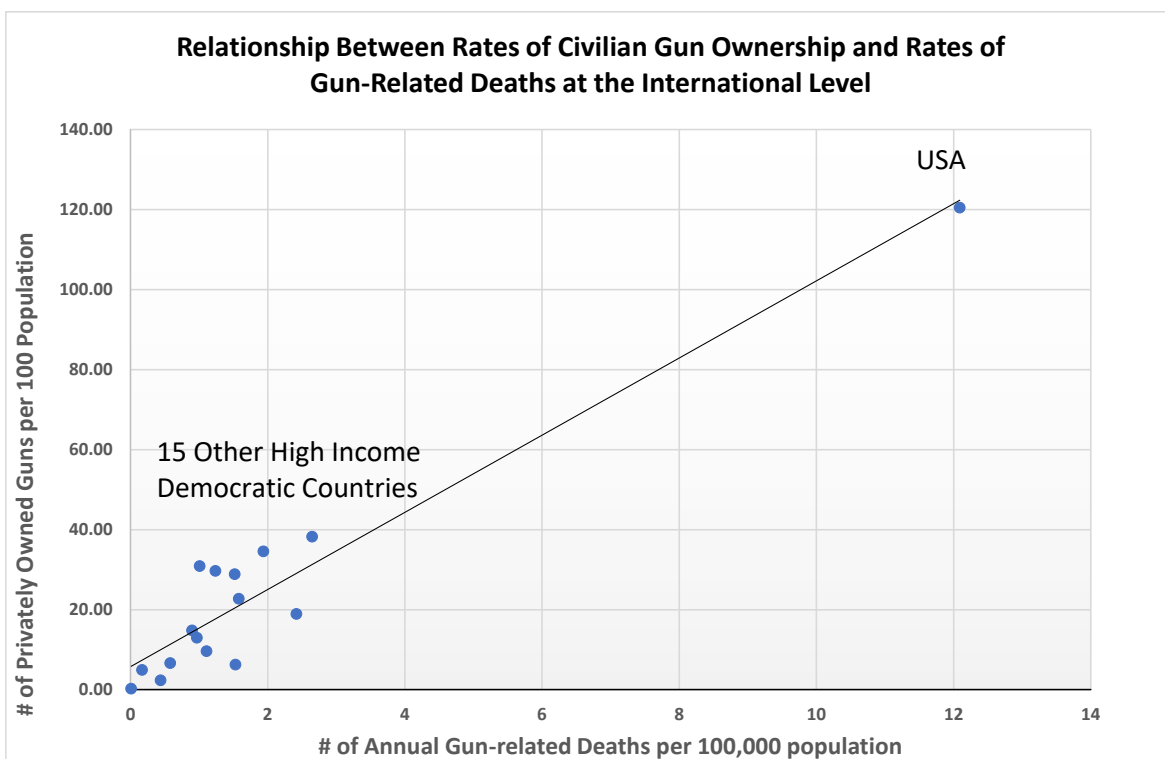
In the United States, like in most other economically advanced democratic countries, stringent gun control laws need not prevent legitimate hunters and target shooters from pursuing their sports. As in those other countries, though, stringent regulation of civilian gun ownership should be accompanied by stringent regulation of the use of lethal force by law enforcement officers.

The Second Amendment, as it was interpreted repeatedly by the Supreme Court and almost every lower court for the first 217 years that the Bill of Rights was in effect,¹² is no obstacle to the adoption of the stringent gun control laws advocated by Americans Against Gun Violence. The 2008 *Heller* decision, however, in which a narrow five to four majority of Supreme Court justices ruled that the District of Columbia's partial ban on handgun ownership violated the Second Amendment,¹³ and the progeny of *Heller*, which now includes the Court's 2022 *Bruen* decision, in which a majority of justices ruled that New York's requirement for a special permit to carry a concealed handgun was also unconstitutional,¹⁴ are significant obstacles.

In the *Heller* and *Bruen* decisions, the justices in the majority endorsed an interpretation of the Second Amendment that the late Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger had called "...one of the biggest pieces of fraud – I repeat the word, 'fraud' - on the American public by special interest groups that I have ever seen in my lifetime."¹⁵ In fact, however, the *Heller* decision and its progeny are worse than a fraud. In creating constitutional obstacles, where none previously existed, to the adoption of stringent gun control laws in the United States comparable to the laws in other high income democratic countries, the Supreme Court's 2008 *Heller* decision and its progeny are literally death sentences for tens of thousands of Americans annually. In the short term, *Heller* and its progeny must be overturned. In the long term, Americans Against Gun Violence advocates the adoption of a new constitutional amendment that clarifies the Second Amendment in a manner consistent with the following statement in the majority opinion in the Supreme Court's 1980 *Lewis* decision, in which Justice Blackmun quoted from the Court's earlier 1939 *Miller* decision:¹⁶

The Second Amendment guarantees no right to keep and bear a firearm that does not have "some reasonable relationship to the preservation or efficiency of a well regulated militia."¹⁷

The adoption of the kinds of definitive gun control laws advocated by Americans Against Gun Violence will require a large percentage of current gun owners to surrender their guns to be destroyed, just as the governments of Great Britain and Australia enacted laws that required the surrender and destruction of a large portion of the privately owned guns in their countries. The direct relationship at the international level between the number of privately owned guns *per capita* and the rate of gun related deaths, coupled with the fact that the United States is an extreme outlier in both categories, demonstrates that it is unrealistic to believe that we can significantly reduce rates of gun violence in our country without significantly reducing our country's vast pool of privately owned guns (see graph below).



Legend: The computer generated best fit line demonstrates the direct, linear relationship between rates of *per capita* gun ownership and rates of gun related deaths at the international level, with the United States being an extreme outlier in both categories. The 15 other high income democratic countries represented by points on the graph are, in order from the lowest to highest rates of gun-related deaths, Japan, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Spain, Australia, Italy, Germany, Denmark, New Zealand, Norway, Belgium, Sweden, Canada, France, and Finland. Data used to construct this graph were taken from the website GunPolicy.org,¹⁸ which is affiliated with the University of Sydney school of public health.

While we believe that it is not unreasonable to pursue more modest gun control measures in the short term at the same time that we work toward definitive measures in the long term, we believe that other gun violence prevention organizations may be doing more to prolong our country's epidemic of gun violence than to stop it when they either ignore the need to overturn the *Heller* decision and its progeny, or worse, endorse *Heller* as legitimate binding precedent; when they endorse the myth that the average law-abiding U.S. resident derives net protective value from owning or carrying a gun; when they grossly overstate the effectiveness of limited measures that do not reduce the pool of privately owned guns; and/or when they argue that it is not necessary or not possible to substantially reduce our nation's vast pool of privately owned guns.

We are confident that one day, the United States will adopt stringent gun control laws comparable to the laws that have long been in effect in every other high income democratic country of the world. The only question is how many more innocent Americans, including innocent children and youth, will be killed and maimed by guns before that day arrives. It is our mission to make the day that we take definitive measures to stop our country's shameful epidemic of gun violence come sooner rather than later.

References

-
- ¹ Erin Grinshteyn and David Hemenway, "Violent Death Rates: The US Compared with Other High-Income OECD Countries, 2010," *The American Journal of Medicine* 129, no. 3 (March 1, 2016): 266–73, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amjmed.2015.10.025>.
- ² Jason E. Goldstick, Rebecca M. Cunningham, and Patrick M. Carter, "Current Causes of Death in Children and Adolescents in the United States," *New England Journal of Medicine* 386, no. 20 (May 19, 2022): 1955–56, <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMc2201761>.
- ³ Michael J. North, "Gun Control in Great Britain after the Dunblane Shootings," in *Reducing Gun Violence in America: Informing Policy with Evidence and Analysis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 185–93.
- ⁴ Rebecca Peters, "Rational Firearm Regulation: Evidence-Based Gun Laws in Australia," in *Reducing Gun Violence in America: Informing Policy with Evidence and Analysis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 195–204; Philip Alpers, "The Big Melt: How One Democracy Changed after Scrapping a Third of Its Firearms," in *Reducing Gun Violence in America: Informing Policy with Evidence and Analysis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 205–11.
- ⁵ Joshua Sugarmann, *Every Handgun Is Aimed at You: The Case for Banning Handguns* (New Press, 2001).
- ⁶ Mark Follman, Gavin Aronsen, and Deanna Pan, "US Mass Shootings, 1982-2020: Data from Mother Jones' Investigation," *Mother Jones* (blog), accessed October 11, 2020, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/12/mass-shootings-mother-jones-full-data/>.
- ⁷ North, "Gun Control in Great Britain after the Dunblane Shootings."
- ⁸ "Gun Law and Policy: Firearms and Armed Violence, Country by Country," GunPolicy.org, accessed April 19, 2023, <http://www.gunpolicy.org/>.
- ⁹ "Gun Law and Policy: Firearms and Armed Violence, Country by Country."
- ¹⁰ See, for example: Arthur L. Kellermann and Donald T. Reay, "Protection or Peril? An Analysis of Firearm-Related Deaths in the Home," *New England Journal of Medicine* 314, no. 24 (June 12, 1986): 1557–60, <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJM198606123142406>; Arthur L. Kellermann et al., "Injuries and Deaths Due to Firearms in the Home," *Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery* 45, no. 2 (1998): 263–67; Arthur L. Kellermann et al., "Gun Ownership as a Risk Factor for Homicide in the Home," *New England Journal of Medicine* 329, no. 15 (1993): 1084–91; David A. Brent et al., "Risk Factors for Adolescent Suicide," *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 45, no. 6 (1988): 581–88; Michael R. Rand, "Guns and Crime: Handgun Victimization, Firearm Self-Defense, and Firearm Theft," Bureau of Justice Statistics Crime Data Brief (U.S. Department of Justice, April 1994); Charles C. Branas et al., "Investigating the Link Between Gun Possession and Gun Assault," *American Journal of Public Health* 99, no. 11 (November 1, 2009): 2034–40, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2008.143099>. Also see the post, "Should law-abiding people own guns for self-protection," on the Facts and FAQ's page for additional discussion and references on this point.
- ¹¹ "Gun Law and Policy: Firearms and Armed Violence, Country by Country."
- ¹² *United States v. Cruikshank*, 92 US 542 (Supreme Court 1876); *Presser v. Illinois*, 116 US (Supreme Court 1886); *U.S. v. Miller*, 307 U.S. 174 (1939) (n.d.); *Lewis v. United States*, No. 55 (U.S. 1980).
- ¹³ *District of Columbia v. Heller*, 554 US (Supreme Court 2008).
- ¹⁴ *New York State Rifle and Pistol Association, Inc. et al v. Bruen, et al*, 142 S. Ct. 2111 (Supreme Court 2022).
- ¹⁵ Warren Burger, PBS News Hour, December 16, 1991.
- ¹⁶ *Miller* at 178.
- ¹⁷ *Lewis*, 445 at 65, footnote 8.
- ¹⁸ "Gun Law and Policy: Firearms and Armed Violence, Country by Country."