**AP LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION**

**DEBATE TOPIC 6: SOURCES**

**Source A**

The United States Constitution

Amendment II

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.

**Source B**

(*The New York Times*, Jan. 16, 2013)

**What’s in Obama’s Gun Control Proposal**

The initiative to reduce gun violence announced by President Obama on Wednesday includes both legislative proposals that would need to be acted on by Congress and executive actions he can do on his own. Many of the executive actions involve the president directing agencies to do a better job of sharing information.

**Proposed Congressional Actions**

* Requiring criminal background checks for all gun sales, including those by private sellers that currently are exempt.
* Reinstating and strengthening the ban on assault weapons that was in place from 1994 to 2004.
* Limiting ammunition magazines to 10 rounds.
* Banning the possession of armor-piercing bullets by anyone other than members of the military and law enforcement.
* Increasing criminal penalties for "straw purchasers," people who pass the required background check to buy a gun on behalf of someone else.
* Acting on a $4 billion administration proposal to help keep 15,000 police officers on the street.
* Confirming President Obama's nominee for director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.
* Eliminating a restriction that requires the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives to allow the importation of weapons that are more than 50 years old.
* Financing programs to train more police officers, first responders and school officials on how to respond to active armed attacks.
* Provide additional $20 million to help expand the a system that tracks violent deaths across the nation from 18 states to 50 states.
* Providing $30 million in grants to states to help schools develop emergency response plans.
* Providing financing to expand mental health programs for young people.

**Executive actions**

* Issuing a presidential memorandum to require federal agencies to make relevant data available to the federal background check system.
* Addressing unnecessary legal barriers, particularly relating to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, that may prevent states from making information available to the background check system.
* Improving incentives for states to share information with the background check system.
* Directing the attorney general to review categories of individuals prohibited from having a gun to make sure dangerous people are not slipping through the cracks.
* Proposing a rule making to give law enforcement authorities the ability to run a full background check on an individual before returning a seized gun.
* Publishing a letter from the A.T.F. to federally licensed gun dealers providing guidance on how to run background checks for private sellers.
* Starting a national safe and responsible gun ownership campaign.
* Reviewing safety standards for gun locks and gun safes (Consumer Product Safety Commission).
* Issuing a presidential memorandum to require federal law enforcement to trace guns recovered in criminal investigations.
* Releasing a report analyzing information on lost and stolen guns and making it widely available to law enforcement authorities.
* Nominating an A.T.F. director.
* Providing law enforcement authorities, first responders and school officials with proper training for armed attacks situations.
* Maximizing enforcement efforts to prevent gun violence and prosecute gun crime.
* Issuing a presidential memorandum directing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to research gun violence.
* Directing the attorney general to issue a report on the availability and most effective use of new gun safety technologies and challenging the private sector to develop innovative technologies.
* Clarify that the Affordable Care Act does not prohibit doctors asking their patients about guns in their homes.
* Releasing a letter to health care providers clarifying that no federal law prohibits them from reporting threats of violence to law enforcement authorities.
* Providing incentives for schools to hire school resource officers.
* Developing model emergency response plans for schools, houses of worship and institutions of higher education.
* Releasing a letter to state health officials clarifying the scope of mental health services that Medicaid plans must cover.
* Finalizing regulations clarifying essential health benefits and parity requirements within insurance exchanges.
* Committing to finalizing mental health parity regulations.
* Starting a national dialogue on mental health led by Kathleen Sebelius, the secretary of health and human services, and Arne Duncan, the secretary of education.

**Source C**

(*The Huffington Post*, Dec. 20, 2012)

**US Guns: Statistics Show America an Outlier among Developed Nations**

by Joe Van Brussel

How freely do guns flow in the United States compared with the world's other industrialized countries?

According to [GunPolicy.org](http://www.gunpolicy.org/), run by Philip Alpers, a firearms analyst at The University of Sydney, the United States is unusual with what Alpers described as the "two pillars" of gun control: licensing gun owners and registering weapons.

"You are basically the only country in the developed world that doesn't license gun owners across the board and you are almost alone in not registering guns across the board," Alpers said. "It's very difficult to compare [the U.S.] with others, because you simply don't have those things." New Zealand and Canada are the other developed countries that don't register guns across the board, Alpers said. The two countries register handguns and military-style semi-automatics, but not rifles and shotguns.

[The Small Arms Survey](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/about-us/mission.html), an independent research project based in Geneva, noted that of the 28 countries it surveyed for its 2011 report on civilian firearm possession, only two consider civilian ownership of a firearm a basic right: the U.S. and Yemen. But even Yemen has begun [clamping down on civilian guns](http://www.irinnews.org/Report/88094/YEMEN-Small-arms-sales-heading-underground), Alpers said.

In the U.S., some often equate gun registration as government overreach. Joseph Olson, a law professor at Hamline University in Minnesota, sits on the board of directors of the National Rifle Association and is a proponent of this view. Governments can use "registration and licensing lists to go out and make sure there cannot be any resistance" Olson told The Huffington Post. He said the other problem with registration is that it focuses on "law-abiding people who aren't a problem."

In addition to lax gun regulation, the U.S. stands out in the sheer number of guns. According to the Small Arms Survey, the [estimated total number of guns held by U.S. civilians](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/H-Research_Notes/SAS-Research-Note-9.pdf) is 270 million -- 88.9 firearms per 100 people. The country with the second-most guns is India, with an estimated 46 million guns in private hands -- or about four firearms for every 100 people.

The U.S., with [4.5 percent](http://www.census.gov/main/www/popclock.html) of the world population, accounts for about 40 percent of the planet's civilian firearms, said Dr. Garen Wintemute, of the University of California, Davis, Medical Center.

Top of Form



Bottom of Form

The U.S. is not a uniquely violent society, said Wintemute, who practices emergency medicine and conducts research on the nature and prevention of gun violence. Our overall rates of violence are similar to Australia, Canada and Western Europe. Where the U.S. stands out, Wintemute said, is in the homicide rate.

"That's a weapon effect. It's not clear that guns cause violence, but it's absolutely clear that they change the outcome," said Wintemute.

Other countries have homicide rates comparable with the U.S. or worse, Alpers said. But they're not exactly models of public safety. [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/homicide.html) data shows 10,300 homicides by firearms in the U.S. 2009, compared with 8,804 in Mexico and 12,808 in Colombia.

Adjusting for population, the U.S. death rate by firearms -- which includes homicides, suicide and accidents -- was 10.2 per 100,000 people in 2009, according to the [Coalition for Gun Control](http://guncontrol.ca/overview-gun-control-us-canada-global/). The closest developed country was Finland, with a firearms death rate of 4.47 per 100,000 people in 2008, less than half that of the U.S. rate. In Canada, the rate was 2.5 per 100,000 people in 2009. In the United Kingdom, the 2011 rate was 0.25 per 100,000 people.

Olson argued that while everyone talks about gun violence, violence itself is the problem.

"People have been killing each other since Cain and Abel and they will continue to do so," Olson said. "Really bad guys who are willing to kill have no problem getting guns." Olson conceded, however, that gun-purchasing restrictions could be tougher, especially for violent offenders.

With the Connecticut school massacre and the revival of the U.S. gun control debate, Wintemute said the national conversation has mainly been "dominated by voices at the extremes" and that the rest of the country falls somewhere in the middle. The general population -- including gun owners -- overwhelmingly support stricter background check measures, according to a [poll conducted for the coalition Mayors Against Illegal Guns](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/01/18/poll-americans-gun-owners-stronger-laws_n_810069.html).

Wintemute said that expanding reasons to deny gun purchases, including a history of misdemeanor violence and alcohol abuse, may meaningfully reduce gun violence within a year or two.

"I think that it would be wonderful if we rethought our relationship with guns and took on some of the deep social thinking that people have talked about," Wintemute said. "But in the meantime, let's do some things that work."

*This post has been updated to include mention of Joseph Olson's involvement with the NRA.*

**Source D**

(*The Washington Times*, Aug. 6, 2004)

**Ban on Assault Weapons Didn’t Reduce Violence**

The federal assault-weapons ban, scheduled to expire in September, is not responsible for the nation’s steady decline in gun-related violence and its renewal likely will achieve little, according to an independent study commissioned by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ).

“We cannot clearly credit the ban with any of the nation’s recent drop in gun violence. And, indeed, there has been no discernible reduction in the lethality and injuriousness of gun violence,” said the unreleased NIJ report, written by Christopher Koper, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

“It is thus premature to make definitive assessments of the ban’s impact on gun violence. Should it be renewed, the ban’s effects on gun violence are likely to be small at best and perhaps too small for reliable measurement,” said the report, a copy of which was obtained by The Washington Times.

The report also noted that assault weapons were “rarely used in gun crimes even before the ban.”

NIJ is the Justice Department’s research, development and evaluation agency — assigned the job of providing objective, independent, evidence-based information to the department through independent studies and other data collection activities.

The assault-weapons ban is set to expire Sept. 13, and at least six bills reauthorizing it are pending in the Senate and House.

The issue has sparked nationwide debate: The National Rifle Association has called the ban ineffective in curbing crime and a violation of the Second Amendment, while gun-control advocates have said the nation’s streets will be filled with automatic weapons if the ban is not reauthorized.

The assault-weapons ban imposed a 10-year moratorium on the “manufacture, transfer and possession” of certain semiautomatic firearms designated as assault weapons. It banned 18 models and variations by name, as well as revolving-cylinder shotguns, and prohibited flash hiders, folding rifle stocks and threaded barrels for attaching silencers.

A number of the banned weapons were foreign semiautomatic rifles that have been barred from importation into the United States since 1989. The ban also prohibited most ammunition magazines holding more than 10 rounds.

According to recent surveys by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), firearms-related crime has declined to record levels. The violent crime rate has fallen 54 percent since 1993, and there were more than 980,000 fewer violent crimes in 2002 than in 2000.

But in the past three years, according to the BJS, federal gun prosecutions have increased by 68 percent, with the number of persons charged with federal firearms offenses rising by more than 22 percent in fiscal 2003, the largest single-year increase ever recorded.

The 102-page NIJ report said the assault-weapons ban was intended to “reduce gunshot victimizations by limiting the national stock of semiautomatic firearms with large ammunition capacities,” although it said the automatic-weapons provision of the bill targeted a “relatively small number of weapons” based on features that had little to do with the weapons’ operation.

The report said the removal of those features, such as detachable high-capacity magazines, was “sufficient to make the weapons legal.”

In 1994, when the ban was approved by Congress, 1.5 million privately owned assault weapons were thought to be in the United States. The report said assault weapons were used in 2 percent of gun crimes reported nationwide before enactment of the 1994 ban. It also said assault weapons and other guns equipped with large-capacity magazines accounted for a higher share of the guns used to kill police officers and in mass public shootings, although such incidents were “very rare.”

The report said the relatively rare use of assault weapons in crimes was attributable to a number of factors: Most assault weapons are rifles, which are used much less often than handguns, a number of the weapons were barred from importation before the ban was enacted, and the weapons are expensive and difficult to conceal.

“The ban’s success in reducing criminal use of the banned guns and magazines has been mixed,” the report said, noting that because the ban had not yet reduced the use of large-capacity magazines in crime, researchers could not “clearly credit the ban with any of the nation’s recent drop in gun violence.”

The report said although the ban’s reauthorization or expiration could affect gunshot victimizations, predictions were “tenuous.” It said restricting the flow of large-capacity magazines into the United States from abroad might be necessary to achieve the ban’s desired effects.

But it said it was not known whether mandating further design changes in the outward features of semiautomatic weapons — such as removing all military-style features — would produce measurable benefits beyond restricting ammunition capacity.

Past experience also suggests that congressional discussion of broadening the assault-weapons ban to new models or features would raise prices and production of the weapons being considered, the report said, adding that if the ban were lifted, gun and magazine manufacturers could reintroduce weapons and magazines in substantial numbers. But, the report said, any resulting increase in crimes with assault weapons and large-capacity magazines might increase gunshot victimizations, “though this effect could be difficult to measure.”

**Source E**

(Washington Post, Dec. 17, 2012)

**WONKBLOG: Everything You Need to Know about the Assault Weapons Ban, in one Post**

by Brad Plummer

When Adam Lanza shot 26 people in Sandy Hook Elementary School on Friday, police [say he largely relied on](http://www.theindychannel.com/home/connecticut-gov-dan-malloy-shooter-used-gun-to-force-way-into-sandy-hook-elementary12162012) a Bushmaster AR-15 “assault-type weapon,” a semiautomatic rifle that could rapidly fire multiple high-velocity rounds. He was also equipped with magazines that held 30 bullets each.

Advocates of stricter gun control argue that it shouldn’t be so easy to have access to weapons that powerful — or to magazines capable of holding so many bullets. And so, on Sunday, Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) [said](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2012/12/16/feinstein-will-introduce-assault-weapons-ban-in-senate/) she would introduce new legislation to ban assault weapons at the start of the next Congress. President Obama [has also said](http://www.cnn.com/2012/12/14/politics/obama-assault-weapons/index.html) that he’d support a federal ban.

But how much would this legislation do? Back in 1994, Congress passed a [federal assault-weapons ban](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2012/12/16/lieberman-restore-assault-weapons-ban-start-national-commission-on-mass-violence/) that lasted 10 years. Experts who have studied the law tend to agree that it was rife with loopholes and generally ineffective at curbing gun violence — though it might well have reduced mass shootings.

Here’s a look at what the 1994 law actually did, where it failed, and whether it could be reworked to significantly reduce gun violence.

**What counts as an “assault weapon”?**The trouble all starts here. There’s no technical definition of an “assault weapon.” There are *fully automatic* weapons, which fire continuously when the trigger is held down. Those have been strictly regulated since 1934. Then there are *semiautomatic* weapons that reload automatically but fire only once each time the trigger is depressed. Semiautomatic pistols and rifles come in all shapes and sizes and are extremely common in the United States.

Congress didn’t want to ban all semiautomatic weapons — that would ban most guns, period. So, in crafting the 1994 ban, lawmakers mainly focused on 18 specific firearms, as well as certain military-type features on guns. Complicated flow charts [laid it all out](http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c103:H.R.3355.ENR:). Certain models of AR-15s and AK-47s were banned. Any semiautomatic rifle with a pistol grip and a bayonet mount was an “assault weapon.” But a semiautomatic rifle with just a pistol grip might be okay. It was complicated. And its complexity made it easy to evade.

**What did the 1994 ban actually do?** For the 10 years that the ban was in effect, it was illegal to manufacture the assault weapons described above for use by private citizens. The law also set a limit on high-capacity magazines — these could now carry no more than 10 bullets.

There was, however, an important exception. Any assault weapon or magazine that was manufactured *before* the law went into effect in 1994 was perfectly legal to own or resell. That was a huge exception: At the time, there were roughly 1.5 million assault weapons and more than 24 million high-capacity magazines in private hands.

**Did the 1994 law have loopholes?** Yes, lots. Even after the ban took effect, it was not difficult for someone to get their hands on an assault weapon or high-capacity magazine.

A 2004 University of Pennsylvania [study](http://www.sas.upenn.edu/jerrylee/research/aw_final2004.pdf) commissioned by the National Institute of Justice explained why. For starters, only 18 firearm models were explicitly banned. But it was easy for gun manufacturers to modify weapons slightly so that they didn’t fall under the ban. One example: the Colt AR-15 that James Holmes used to shoot up a movie theater in Aurora, Colo., last summer [would have been outlawed](http://thinkprogress.org/justice/2012/07/20/557811/expired-assault-weapons-ban-would-have-covered-rifle-used-in-colorado-shooting/). Yet it would have been perfectly legal for Holmes to have purchased a very similar Colt Match Target rifle, which [didn’t fall under the ban](http://www.njsp.org/about/fire_ag1.html).

Meanwhile, here were already more than 24 million large-capacity magazines in existence before the federal ban took effect in 1994. Indeed, as soon as Congress began working on the law, manufacturers [boosted production](https://www.ncjrs.gov/txtfiles1/173405.txt) of weapons and magazines in anticipation of higher prices. Dangerous weapons were still plentiful.

**Did the law have an effect on crime or gun violence?** While gun violence did fall in the 1990s, this was likely due to other factors. Here’s the UPenn study again: “We cannot clearly credit the ban with any of the nation’s recent drop in gun violence. And, indeed, there has been no discernible reduction in the lethality and injuriousness of gun violence.”

One reason is that assault weapons were never a huge factor in gun violence to begin with. They were  used in only 2 percent to 8 percent of gun crimes. Large-capacity magazines were more important — used in as many as a quarter of gun crimes. But, again, the 1994 law left more than 24 million magazines untouched, so the impact was blunted.

**Did the law have an effect on mass shootings?**That’s possible, though not certain. As this chart from Princeton’s Sam Wang [shows](http://election.princeton.edu/2012/12/14/did-the-federal-ban-on-assault-weapons-matter/), the number of people killed in mass shootings did go down in the years the ban was in effect (save for a surge in 1999, a year that included Columbine):



Because mass shootings are relatively rare, it’s difficult to tell whether this was just a random blip or caused by the ban. Still, the number of mass shootings per year has doubled since the ban expired. That’s suggestive, at least.

**Why did the ban lift in 2004?**Theoriginal assault weapons law was written so that it would expire after ten years. When 2004 came around, some Democrats tried to renew it, but [there wasn’t much interest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Assault_Weapons_Ban#Efforts_to_renew_the_ban) in Congress. A few states, including New York, Massachusetts and New Jersey, still have their own versions of the law on the books.

**Could the ban have worked if it had lasted longer?**In his 2004 assessment of the law, the University of Pennsylvania’s Christopher Koper argued that any federal ban would likely take many years to have an effect, thanks to all the exemptions. If Congress actually managed to reduce the number of high-capacity magazines, that might slightly reduce the number of gunshot victims. But, Koper added, the research here was fairly thin and any predictions were “tenuous.”

**Would it be possible to tighten the law?** In theory, yes. Back in 1996, Australia imposed a much stricter version of the assault weapons ban after a mass shooting. The Australian version avoided many of the loopholes in the U.S. law: Not only did the country ban all types of semiautomatic rifles and shotguns, but it also spent $500 million buying up nearly 600,000 existing guns from private owners.

As Wonkblog’s [Sarah Kliff pointed out](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2012/12/15/what-would-meaningful-action-on-gun-control-look-like/), Australia’s law appears to have curbed gun violence. Researchers in the British Medical Journal[write that](http://injuryprevention.bmj.com/content/12/6/365.full) the ban was “followed by more than a decade free of fatal mass shootings, and accelerated declines in firearm deaths, particularly suicides.”

Still, an Australia-style ban would face much more difficult hurdles in this country. For starters, there are [more than 200 million guns](http://www.justfacts.com/guncontrol.asp) in circulation in the United States, making a buyback much more costly. And a full ban would likely face heavier resistance here, both from the courts and the public. Even Feinstein [has promised](http://www.politico.com/story/2012/12/feinstein-schumer-push-changes-on-gun-laws-85135.html?ml=po_r) that her new version of the assault weapons ban would still “exempt over 900 specific weapons.” Gun-control advocates aren’t quite ready to propose overly sweeping measures.

**Source F**

(*ABC World News: The Blotter*, Dec. 17, 2012)

**Newtown Massacre: What is a Bushmaster .223?**

by Lee Farran

Law enforcement officials said that Adam Lanza was armed with four firearms when he started his rampage at a Connecticut elementary school Friday that ended in the deaths of 20 children and seven adults, but nearly all the killing was done with just one of the guns: a .223 caliber Bushmaster semiautomatic rifle.

Lanza used the rifle, a modified civilian version of the military's M-16 similar to the popular AR-15, as he stalked through the school and opened fire on children as young as five. Dr. H. Wayne Carver, the medical examiner who investigated the massacre, told reporters over the weekend that all of Lanza's victims had been [shot more than once](http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/connecticut-shooter-adam-lanza-mothers-guns/story?id=17984499#.UM-gTuQqaAi).

The killing ended when Lanza took his own life, this time using a handgun, officials said.

Bushmaster, headquartered in North Carolina, bills itself [on its website](http://www.bushmaster.com/index.asp) as the leading supplier of AR-15-type rifles in the U.S. and offers more than a dozen different models in various calibers.

A February [report by Guns and Ammo](http://www.gunsandammo.com/2012/02/10/long-guns-short-yardage-is-223-the-best-home-defense-caliber/) magazine noted a growing demand in recent years for AR-15-type rifles – and specifically those loaded with .223 caliber bullets – for use in home defense. The .223 caliber load is popular, the article says, because it has better fragmentation upon impact, meaning it will deal a lot of damage with less chance of accidentally continuing through the target and endangering whoever's in the background.



The magazine reported that 1.5 million AR-15s were made in the last five years alone – one for every 209 Americans.

"This thing is just a killing machine," Josh Horwitz, Executive Director of the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, told ABC News today. "It's designed, like I said it was designed... very similar to the weapon that's used in the battlefield."

Sources told ABC News today that the guns used in the massacre, including the Bushmaster, were purchased by Lanza's mother, Nancy. She bought the Bushmaster in March 2010, a Sig Sauer handgun the next year and then a Glock handgun in January 2012.

Authorities say that Nancy and Adam Lanza went to the firing range together in the last six months. The director of one local firing range told ABC News that ATF agents had looked for the Lanzas' names in his firing logs for 2012, but the names did not appear.

"Unfortunately from his mother's standpoint, she thought it was a way to bond with him," said Brad Garrett, an ABC News consultant and former FBI profiler. "It's a terrible idea. You have a child that's obviously troubled, doesn't bond with people, doesn't want to bond with her, apparently, and then you introduce something that's so lethal and so violent, inappropriately used. It's just an extremely poor decision on her part."

Connecticut's gun laws are some of the toughest in the country, according to anti-gun groups, but they do not specifically ban the Bushmaster AR-15-type guns and the weapon can be easily modified to dodge other restrictions. On Bushmaster's website, the company offers to help customers make sure their assault-style rifles are "state compliant."

"But it's still just as deadly because what makes it dangerous is the ability to take almost unlimited amounts of ammunition and a pistol grip," said Horwitz. "That's what allows the shooter to keep the barrel down on the target."

On its website, the gun company says that "With a Bushmaster for security and home defense, you can sleep tight knowing that your loved ones are protected. Bushmaster offers everything you need to ensure the safety of you and your family. ... And with their intimidating looks, all Bushmasters make a serious impression. Any gun will make an intruder think. A Bushmaster will make them think twice."

Scott Ostrosky, a local shooting range owner in Connecticut, told ABC News that many of his customers are attracted to the gun because of its similarities to the military weapons, but they're generally responsible people who are just target shooting for fun.

"Yeah, it's fun," he said. "We shoot glass bottles. We shoot up old beer kegs, just garbage items. We get a kick out of shooting... Some people fancy high-dollar golf clubs for their chosen recreation, other people fancy a gun like that for their recreation."

But Brad Garrett said he thought the Bushmaster had "empowered" Lanza. "And once he had decided at some point he was going to commit this mass shooting," said Garrett, "he now has been trained with a piece of equipment that will accomplish that."

Lanza was not the first to take a Bushmaster outside the realm of home defense and recreation and into the bloody pages of a national tragedy.

In 2002 the men known as the Beltway snipers, John Muhammed and Lee Boyd Malvo, [used a Bushmaster .223](http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2007/october/snipers_102207) to shoot more than a dozen people. In that case, Bushmaster contributed $500,000 to a [multi-million-dollar settlement](http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2004/sep/9/20040909-095944-5026r/?page=all#pagebreak) with the victims' families, who claimed the gun manufacturer didn't do as much as it should to keep the guns out of the hands of criminals. Bushmaster said its contribution to the settlement did not amount to an admission of guilt.

Representatives for Bushmaster did not respond to an emailed request for comment for this report.

**Source G**

(*Factcheck.org*, Dec. 20, 2012)

**Gun Rhetoric vs. Gun Facts**

**Summary**

The mass shooting in Newtown, Conn., has reignited a national debate on gun control. As elected leaders begin the dialogue, some facts are clear — there has been a massive increase in gun sales. Some things are not so clear — such as whether there is causation between more guns and more violent crimes. And some are contrary to the general impression — for example, the rate of gun murders is down, not up.

We have decided to look at some of the rhetoric and how it squares with the facts, while offering some broader context to inform the debate.

* Rep. Louie Gohmert said that “every time … conceal-carry [gun laws] have been allowed the crime rate has gone down.” But that is far from a settled issue in academia.
* Dan Gross, head of the Brady Campaign used the number of daily gun murders as proof that “gun violence rates are not” going down. But the rate of gun murder is at its lowest point since at least 1981: 3.6 per 100,000 people in 2010. The high point was 7 in 1993. However, non-fatal gun injuries from assaults increased last year for the third straight year, and that rate is the highest since 2008.
* Federal data also show violent crimes committed with guns — including murders, aggravated assaults and robberies — have declined for three straight years.
* Rep. Donna Edwards said that “since Columbine, there have been 181 of these school shootings.” That’s an inflated figure. She used a list of “major school shootings” supplied by the Brady Campaign that included incidents that were neither shootings nor at schools. By our count, the list shows 130 school shootings since Columbine that resulted in at least one student or school official being killed or injured — still unacceptably high, but about a quarter fewer than claimed.

Here are some other facts. The United States has the highest rate of gun ownership in the world — by far. And it has the highest rate of homicides among advanced countries. And yet, gun crime has been declining in the U.S. Firearm murders are down, as is overall gun violence –  even as gun ownership increases. Read our Analysis for more insight on what these statistics mean.



**Analysis**

On Dec. 14, on the afternoon of the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., and after a spate of public mass shootings, President Obama [said](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/12/14/statement-president-school-shooting-newtown-ct) that “we’re going to have to come together and take meaningful action to prevent more tragedies like this, regardless of the politics.” He didn’t say “gun control,” but there was little doubt that’s what he meant.

Five days later, Obama announced in a press conference that he had tapped Vice President Joe Biden to lead a team to “come up with a set of concrete proposals” to “reduce the epidemic of gun violence that plagues this country.” Obama talked about the need to make it easier to access mental health care as well as the need to “look more closely at a culture that all too often glorifies guns and violence.” But Obama also talked about polls that show majority support for “banning the sale of military-style assault weapons,” “banning the sale of high-capacity ammunition clips” and “laws requiring background checks before all gun purchases.”

On cable news and other media outlets, gun rights advocates have begun to push back. Both sides offer statistics that appear to back their arguments, and so we have attempted to add some factual accuracy to the debate.

**Do Concealed-Carry Laws Reduce Violent Crime?**

Few gun rights advocates in Congress initially were willing to speak publicly in the wake of the mass shootings in Newtown, but Republican Rep. Louie Gohmert of Texas bucked that trend [on Fox News,](http://www.foxnews.com/on-air/fox-news-sunday-chris-wallace/2012/12/16/connecticut-school-shooting-reignites-gun-control-debate#p//v/2039381272001) providing an against-the-tide opinion that the answer to tragedies like that was not fewer guns, but more guns. Had the principal been armed, he said, she might have killed shooter Adam Lanza before the rampage developed.

**Gohmert, Dec. 16**: Hearing the heroic stories of the principal, lunging, trying to protect … I wish to God she had had an M-4 in her office, locked up so when she heard gunfire, she pulls it out and she didn’t have to lunge heroically with nothing in her hands, but she takes him out, takes his head off before he can kill those precious kids.

While some politicians talked about the need for tighter gun control, Gohmert argued that violence is lower in places more permissive of concealed weapons.

**Gohmert, Dec. 16**: The facts are that every time guns have been allowed — conceal-carry (gun laws) have been allowed — the crime rate has gone down.

We read a bit of the large body of academic research on the issue and spoke to some of the leading academic voices about the accuracy of Gohmert’s claim.

A sample:

“The answer is, the Congressman is factually correct,” said [Carlisle Moody](http://www.wm.edu/as/economics/faculty/directory/moody_c.php), economics professor at William & Mary.

“That [Gohmert's comment] is just completely wrong,” said [David Hemenway](https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/faculty/david-hemenway/), director of the Harvard Injury Control Research Center.

Suffice to say there is academic disagreement on this issue.

Crime is down dramatically right now — even in states that have not passed such laws. To prove causation, which Gohmert’s statement implies, would require that those doing the study discern what would have happened if not for the law, and that is almost impossible to model.

According to Gohmert’s office, the congressman bases his claim largely on the controversial and hotly contested research of economist John Lott.

In the most recent 2010 edition of Lott’s book, “[More Guns Less Crime](http://books.google.com/books/about/More_Guns_Less_Crime.html?id=j6cMYKRgqQ8C),” Lott concludes that “[a]llowing citizens to carry concealed handguns reduces violent crimes, and the reductions coincide very closely with the number of concealed-handgun permits issued.” (p. 20) Lott writes that the result of his research “clearly imply that nondiscretionary [concealed carry] laws coincide with fewer murders, aggravated assaults, and rapes” (p. 57). He contends that “[w]hen state concealed-handgun laws went into effect in a county, murders fell by about 8 percent, rapes fell by 5 percent, and aggravated assaults fell by 7 percent” (p. 59).

More directly related to the Newtown incident, Lott co-wrote a [1999 study](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=161637) that concluded, “Deaths and injuries from mass public shootings fall dramatically after right-to-carry concealed handgun laws are enacted. Between 1977 and 1995, the average death rate from mass shootings plummeted by up to 91 percent after such laws went into effect, and injuries dropped by over 80 percent.”

While Lott’s work is often cited by gun rights advocates, his findings are strongly disputed by numerous academics. Most notably, in 2004 a committee of the National Research Council of the National Academies analyzed Lott’s research and [took issue](http://www.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=10881&amp;page=R1) with his findings, concluding that “it is impossible to draw strong conclusions from the existing literature on the causal impact of these laws” (See Chapter 6).

**National Research Council, 2004:** The initial model specification, when extended to new data, does not show evidence that passage of right-to-carry laws reduces crime. The estimated effects are highly sensitive to seemingly minor changes in the model specification and control variables. No link between right-to-carry laws and changes in crime is apparent in the raw data, even in the initial sample; it is only once numerous covariates are included that the negative results in the early data emerge. While the trend models show a reduction in the crime growth rate following the adoption of right-to-carry laws, these trend reductions occur long after law adoption, casting serious doubt on the proposition that the trend models estimated in the literature reflect effects of the law change. Finally, some of the point estimates are imprecise. Thus, the committee concludes that with the current evidence it is not possible to determine that there is a causal link between the passage of right-to-carry laws and crime rates.

Lott adamantly defended his conclusions in a phone interview with FactCheck.org, and noted that there was one notable dissenter from 17 others on the committee, the late James Q. Wilson. Wilson argued (Appendix A) that he found Lott’s analysis supported the conclusion that concealed-carry laws reduced the murder rate.

However, critics of Lott’s work are many, perhaps none more vigorous than Stanford Law Professor John J. Donohue III. Together with Ian Ayres of Yale Law School, in 2003 the two authored a spirited rebuttal of Lott’s work titled, “[Shooting Down the More Guns, Less Crime](http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2240&amp;context=fss_papers&amp;sei-redir=1&amp;referer=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2Fsearch%3Fq%3D%25E2%2580%259CShooting%2BDown%2Bthe%2BMore%2BGuns%252C%2BLess%2BCrime%2BHypothesis%252C%25E2%2580%259D%2Bby%2BIan%2BAyres%2Band%2BJohn%2BJ.%2BDonohue%2BIII.%2BStanford%2BLaw%2BReview%252C%2BV%26oq%3D%25E2%2580%259CShooting%2BDown%2Bthe%2BMore%2BGuns%252C%2BLess%2BCrime%2BHypothesis%252C%25E2%2580%259D%2Bby%2BIan%2BAyres%2Band%2BJohn%2BJ.%2BDonohue%2BIII.%2BStanford%2BLaw%2BReview%252C%2BV%26sugexp%3Dchrome%2Cmod%3D4%26sourceid%3Dchrome%26ie%3DUTF-8#search=%22%E2%80%9CShooting%20Down%20More%20Guns%2C%20Less%20Crime%20Hypothesis%2C%E2%80%9D%20by%20Ian%20Ayres%20John%20J.%20Donohue%20III.%20Stanford%20Law%20Review%2C%20V%22).”

**Donohue and Ayres, 2003:** We conclude that Lott and Mustard have made an important scholarly contribution in establishing that these laws have not led to the massive bloodbath of death and injury that some of their opponents feared. On the other hand, we find that the statistical evidence that these laws have reduced crime is limited, sporadic, and extraordinarily fragile.

… [T]heir results have not withstood the test of time. When we added five years of county data and seven years of state data, allowing us to test an additional fourteen jurisdictions that adopted shall-issue laws, the previous Lott and Mustard findings proved not to be robust. Importantly, we showed that the Lott and Mustard results collapse when the more complete county data is subjected to less-constrained jurisdiction-specific specifications or when the more-complete state data is tweaked in plausible ways. No longer can any plausible case be made on statistical grounds that shall-issue laws are likely to reduce crime for all or even most states.

More recently, Donohue co-authored [a paper](http://www.nber.org/papers/w18294) in 2012 that concluded “aggravated assault rises when RTC (right to carry) laws are adopted. For every other crime category, there is little or no indication of any consistent RTC impact on crime.”

Indeed, a cottage industry of sorts has emerged to debate the issue. Some have found *some* benefit to concealed-carry laws, and other no benefit at all.

Gohmert’s comment — that “every time … conceal-carry (gun laws) have been allowed, the crime rate has gone down” — is somewhat a matter of semantics, said Moody, at William & Mary.

Gohmert is “factually correct,” Moody said, because crime has indeed gone down in states with conceal-carry laws. “On the other hand, if you are implying — and I think he is — that concealed carry laws reduce crime, that’s a more complicated question.”

In fact, crime is down in states that have not passed concealed-carry laws. The impact of such legislation is debatable.

“My personal opinion is that it probably does cause crime to decline somewhat,” Moody said. “Almost certainly, it does not harm on a net basis.”

In 2008, the Harvard Injury Control Research Center [reviewed](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/research/hicrc/files/bullet-ins_ccw_reissue.pdf) the reams of scientific research on concealed gun-carrying laws and broadly concluded “the changes have neither been highly beneficial nor highly detrimental.”

There are two reasons why the effects of CCW laws on crime are likely to be negligible, the authors wrote. First, only a tiny percentage of the population seeks to obtain a concealed weapon permit. And those who do tend to be from groups who are at relatively low risk for either crime perpetration or victimization. They are generally older, higher-income, rural whites.

Both sides accuse the other of personal bias on the issue. Indeed, there are two underlying schools of thought about concealed-carry laws. The first is that if there are more people carrying concealed weapons, criminals are less likely to commit crimes, because they fear someone may defend themselves with a gun. National Rifle Association CEO and Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre [sums up](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-20031399-503544.html) the philosophy this way: “The best way to stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun.”

The second is that more concealed guns mean more disputes resolved with guns, and that it leads to more violent crime.

Susan B. Sorenson, a professor of Social Policy at the University of Pennsylvania, is convinced the Lott data is weak (for example, she said, if you take the outlier Florida out of the mix, the results change remarkably). But more important, she said, is that there is simply a dearth of good data.

“We really don’t have answers to a lot of the questions that we should have answers to,” Sorenson.

In part, she said, that’s because the gold standard for scientists — a randomly assigned study in which you gave one group of people guns, and another none — is simply not possible.

There is work the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention could and should be doing, she said, but has not since the late 1990s. CDC has been [wary of studying gun issues](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/26/us/26guns.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0) after NRA lobbyists convinced Congress to cut into its funding after a series of studies in the mid-1990s were viewed by the NRA as advocating for gun control.

What kind of study is CDC not doing? “The kind of information we need at the policy-making tables,” Sorenson said.

The bottom line on Gohmert’s statement is that the issue is much too unsettled for such a definitive claim.

There is, of course, a larger implication to Gohmert’s statement: that more guns equals less crime. That is a different issue than simply concealed weapons laws.

**More Guns = More Gun Homicides, Statistically Speaking**

In 2008, we [explored](http://www.factcheck.org/2008/03/violent-crimes-and-handgun-ownership/) the issue of whether more gun ownership meant more or less gun violence. What we found, and it still holds true, was that some studies had shown a statistical relationship between those factors — areas with a higher prevalence of guns had higher prevalence of gun homicides and homicides in general. But studies haven’t been able to show a causal relationship — that the mere presence of guns, as opposed to other factors, caused the higher rates of gun violence. It’s doubtful, however, that a study could ever beyond-a-doubt prove a causal relationship.

As Sorenson explained, scientists can’t conduct a random experiment. So, instead, researchers are left with statistical models, which are “very fragile,” says Charles F. Wellford, who was chair of the committees that authored a lengthy [2004 report on this topic by the National Research Council of the National Academies](http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=10881&page=R1). These models are subject to what control variables researchers use. “Everyone knows there’s other things than guns that cause crime,” says Wellford, a professor in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Maryland. So these models become very complex and slight changes can cause very different results, he says.

The National Research Council review of the available research on guns and crime found that studies comparing similar geographic areas, such as urban areas to urban areas, known as “case-control studies,” showed that “violence is positively associated with firearms ownership.” But when looking at larger areas, such as countries, the National Research Council report found “contradictory evidence.” Both types of studies, said the report, failed to address factors involved in buying a gun — it’s not a random decision. And gun ownership data itself is lacking — it comes only from public opinion surveys.

Eighteen experts participated in the NRC report, including those in criminology, sociology, psychology, economics, public health and statistics. The NRC’s conclusion: “In summary, the committee concludes that existing research studies and data include a wealth of descriptive information on homicide, suicide, and firearms, but, because of the limitations of existing data and methods, do not credibly demonstrate a causal relationship between the ownership of firearms and the causes or prevention of criminal violence or suicide.”

Wellford says the new literature that has emerged since that 2004 review “doesn’t change in any way the conclusions from our report.”

Why can’t a statistical relationship prove a causal one? There are many other factors besides the presence of guns. Adam Lanza, the shooter in the elementary school killings in Newtown, “had lots of things going on in his life and one of them was access to multiple weapons,” says Wellford, himself a gun owner. “It’s hard to parse out what the effect is of having the gun, but there’s no question there’s some effect.” But is it 2 percent, 10 percent, 100 percent of the causal model? “We don’t know.”

Hemenway, director of the Harvard Injury Control Research Center, says he would “bet a lot of money” that the prevalence of guns increases homicide, all other things being equal. “I think the evidence is very consistent with the notion that more guns have made us less safe.” But it’s “almost impossible” to prove a causal relationship. “All the data are consistent with a causal relationship, but it’s very hard to say anything is causal,” he says.

Hemenway and coauthor Lisa M. Hepburn reviewed research from peer-reviewed journals and found that the evidence from studies of U.S. cities, states and regions “is quite consistent … where there are higher levels of gun prevalence, homicide rates are substantially higher, primarily due to higher firearm homicide rates.” But, again, the 2004 report said: “None of the studies can prove causation. They merely examine the statistical association between gun availability and homicide.”

There’s also a chicken-and-egg question when it comes to gun violence. Did the violence come first, and then the guns followed, or the other way around?

“I don’t think any of us believe the arrow points in one direction,” says Garen Wintemute, director of the Violence Prevention Research Program at the University of California-Davis and an emergency room doctor. It’s “probably true that rising crime leads to a perception of increased threat and, therefore, an increase in the prevalence of gun ownership.” And it’s “also the case that making firearms more available is followed by an increase in firearm crime.”

A [study](http://smartgunlaws.org/gun-laws-matter-2012-understanding-the-link-between-weak-laws-and-gun-violence/) by the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence found that seven of the 10 states with the strongest gun laws — by its own definition — also had the lowest gun death rates. Of course, there’s a chicken-and-egg issue with gun control laws, too — it’s easier to pass gun control laws in areas that already had low gun ownership, and harder to pass them in areas with more gun owners.

One thing that is clear: Guns are effective lethal weapons. “If there were no guns, the lethality of crimes would be less,” says Wellford. “You can’t have a drive-by knifing.”

In all cases of injury prevention, says Hemenway, the agent, or method, involved makes a difference. On Dec. 14, the day of the shooting in Newtown, another [attack occurred at an elementary school in China](http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2012/12/22-kids-slashed-in-china-elementary-school-knife-attack/). The attacker there had a knife, and injured 22 kids and one adult. But no one was killed. Why the stark difference in fatalities? “The answer is the type of weapon they had,” Hemenway says.

The NRC report, like Sorenson, said that more research was needed. “The federal government has to invest some money in doing research on what role guns play in violence,” Wellford says.

When we spoke with Wellford in 2008, he cautioned against drawing conclusions from statistics that didn’t prove causation. “Work that knowingly reports findings that do not meet a causal test knowing they will be used as if they do can only produce confusion especially in such contentious issues,” he said.

**Gun Ownership in the U.S.**

Moody, of William & Mary, makes a more general argument in favor of more guns tempering crime.

“We are awash in guns in the United States,” Moody said. “There are more every year and yet crime seems to be going down and down and down and down.”

It’s true that gun ownership is up. The [Small Arms Survey](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/H-Research_Notes/SAS-Research-Note-9.pdf), a project of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, estimated in 2007 that there were 270 million civilian-owned firearms in the U.S. In 2001, there were an estimated 230 million. So there are more guns, but are there more gun owners?

Nobody knows for sure, Hemenway said. Gun owners do not need to register simply to purchase a gun. And so, researchers are left to rely on surveys. According to yearly data from the [General Social Survey](http://publicdata.norc.org/webview/velocity?var1=http%3A%2F%2Fpublicdata.norc.org%3A80%2Fobj%2FfVariable%2F4697_V5076&op1=%3C%3E&cases2=5&stubs=http%3A%2F%2Fpublicdata.norc.org%3A80%2Fobj%2FfVariable%2F4697_V1&var2=http%3A%2F%2Fpublicdata.norc.org%3A80%2Fobj%2FfVariable%2F4697_V5076&op3=%3C%3E&analysismode=table&v=2&var3=http%3A%2F%2Fpublicdata.norc.org%3A80%2Fobj%2FfVariable%2F4697_V5076&ao2=and&weights=http%3A%2F%2Fpublicdata.norc.org%3A80%2Fobj%2FfVariable%2F4697_V5084&cases3=7&V1slice=1972&ao1=and&previousmode=table&study=http%3A%2F%2Fpublicdata.norc.org%3A80%2Fobj%2FfStudy%2F4697&headers=http%3A%2F%2Fpublicdata.norc.org%3A80%2Fobj%2FfVariable%2F4697_V648&op2=%3C%3E&mode=table&ao3=and&V4slice=0&tabcontenttype=row&count=2&cases1=4), the number of households with guns is declining.

Moody doesn’t buy that. He thinks it’s a cultural issue. People today are simply more likely to tell survey-takers they do not own a gun, he said, because it is less socially acceptable. Hemenway counters that the seemingly incongruous statistics — more guns, but fewer households reporting that they have a gun — is simply a reflection of fewer gun owners purchasing more guns.

Gun manufacturing has increased in recent years, most dramatically since Obama was elected. [Figures from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives](http://www.atf.gov/statistics/) show the total firearms produced in the U.S. (minus exports) at 3.5 million in 1998. That figure fluctuated, reaching 3.7 million in 2007. Then, it jumped drastically, rising 64 percent from 2007 to 2011, topping 6.1 million that year.

Background-check numbers show a similar trend. They went from 11 million background checks in 2007 to 16.8 million in 2012, with December’s numbers not yet part of that tally, [according to the FBI](http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/nics/reports/20121203_1998_2012_monthly_yearly_totals.pdf). Background checks are not an indication of sales, however, as they’re not always required, for instance for personal sales at gun shows in some states, and one purchaser can buy more than one firearm.

**Is Gun Violence Rising?**

On “[Face the Nation](http://www.cbsnews.com/2102-3460_162-57559465.html)” on Dec. 16, Dan Gross, president of the Brady Campaign, used the number of daily gun murders as proof that “gun violence rates are not” going down. But the rate of firearm homicides committed with the intent to kill or injure is at its lowest point since at least 1981: 3.6 per 100,000 people in 2010. The high point was 7 in 1993.

**Gross, Dec. 16**: … every day in our country, 32 people are murdered by guns. So while violence rates might be going down, gun violence rates are not.

There are two issues here: gun violence in general and gun murders in particular. Let’s first look at the number of murders committed with guns.

We called and emailed the Brady Campaign to ask about Gross’ statement on gun violence but we did not receive a response.

However, the group’s “[gun violence facts](http://www.bradycampaign.org/facts/gunviolence?s=1)” site lists “12,179 people murdered” as one of its facts — which would work out to 33 per day, supporting Gross’ claim. But that figure is from 2008, according to a footnote. It comes from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Center for Injury Prevention and Control [database](http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/mortrate10_us.html). (Check the boxes for “homicide” and “firearms” and select 2008, and you will get 12,179 “Homicide Firearm Deaths.”)

The CDC’s most current data show there were 11,078 homicides committed with guns in 2010 — or about 30 per day. The CDC data also show gun homicides have declined each year since 2007, falling from 12,791 in 2006 to 11,078 in 2010, even as the nation’s population grows. In fact, the homicide rate in 2010 (3.6 per 100,000 people) was the lowest since at least 1981 — which is as far back as the CDC’s online database goes.

The FBI collects murder data, too, but academic researchers we consulted said the CDC data is the more accurate measure of gun murders. CDC gets its data from the National Vital Statistics System, which collects death certificates that are required to be filed in every state. But the FBI relies on the voluntary reporting of law enforcement agencies that results in under-reporting. (For the record, the FBI’s [2011 Uniform Crime Report](http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2011/crime-in-the-u.s.-2011/tables/expanded-homicide-data-table-8) says there were 8,583 murders committed with firearms last year — that’s about 24 per day.)

Even so, the CDC homicide data is not a perfect measurement of murders in the U.S., which suggests the number of gun murders is somewhere between 24 and 30 per day.

CDC homicide data, by its definition, is supposed to include only “[injuries inflicted by another person with intent to injure or kill](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars/fatal/help/definitions.htm#top).” But Catherine Barber, at the Harvard School of Public Health’s Injury Control Research Center, said some local coroners and medical examiners “take a more literal definition of homicide,” so some accidental shootings are included in the CDC data. Also, the CDC data, by definition, includes “justifiable homicides,” which also are not murders. Barber said the CDC’s reporting issues may overstate U.S. murder statistics by “a couple of hundred” — but its data are still “more reliable” than the FBI’s voluntary system of reporting.

By either measure, the number of gun murders is going down.

The 2011 and [2006](http://www2.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2006/offenses/expanded_information/data/shrtable_07.html) FBI crime reports show that firearm murders have declined each year since 2006. There were 10,177 such murders in 2006 and 8,583 in 2011 — a drop of 1,594 or nearly 16 percent in five years, even as the nation’s population continued to rise.

As for overall gun violence, the FBI tracks the use of firearms in three types of violent crimes (murder, robbery and aggravated assault), and the use of guns has declined in all three cases. From [2006](http://www2.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2007/data/table_15.html) to [2011](http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2011/crime-in-the-u.s.-2011/tables/table_15_crime_trends_additional_information_about_selected_offenses_by_population_group_2010-2011.xls), robberies committed with guns declined 21 percent and aggravated assaults committed with guns declined 12.5 percent, according to the FBI reports. In both cases, the number of violent gun crimes dropped each year since [2008](http://www2.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2009/data/table_15.html).

The number of reported gun injuries, however, is on the rise.

There were 55,544 non-fatal injuries in 2011 resulting from assaults involving guns — up from 53,738 in 2010 and 44,466 in 2009, the CDC’s [database](http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/nfirates2001.html) shows. Since 2001, the rate of gun injuries is the second highest in 11 years when adjusted for population.

However, Barber said gun violence has “dropped precipitously” from the early 1990s — a trend criminologists chalked up to “changes in the crack cocaine market.” Her observation is supported by crime data and surveys.

As we said earlier, the homicide rate since 1981 peaked in 1993 at 7 per 100,000. In addition, the Census Bureau’s annual National Crime Victimization Survey collects data on nonfatal firearm-related violent crimes, including those not reported to police. [That data set shows a dramatic decline](http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/glance/tables/firearmnonfataltab.cfm) in gun violence since the early 1990s.

The Department of Justice, which commissions the Census Bureau’s victimization surveys, reports that there were more than 1 million firearm incidents and more than 1.2 million firearm victims in 1993 and again in 1994. But by 2009, the number of firearm incidents (326,090) and firearm victims (352,810) dropped by more than two-thirds.

**181 School Shootings Since Columbine?**

Rep. Donna Edwards on ABC’s “[This Week](http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/week-transcript-tragedy-elementary-school/story?id=17985934&singlePage=true#.UNIpEXeRY3o)” said “since Columbine, there have been 181 of these school shootings.” That’s an exaggeration.

Her office said the Democratic congresswoman got her information from the Brady Campaign — which has a [fact sheet on its website](http://www.bradycampaign.org/xshare/pdf/school-shootings.pdf) that lists 201 “major school shootings” since 1997 at colleges, universities, high schools and elementary schools. But that list is padded with incidents that could hardly be called “major school shootings” — including a dozen that didn’t happen on school grounds and 16 that weren’t shootings at all but either alleged plots to kill others or cases where a gun was brought to school but not fired.

By our count, there were 62 school shootings since [the Columbine High School massacre](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1528263/Columbine-High-School-shootings) on April 20, 1999, that resulted in more than one student, teacher or school employee being killed or injured — a description that could fit “major school shooting.” There were another 68 where one student, teacher or school employee was killed (not counting suicides) or injured.

That’s 130 school shootings since Columbine — a shocking high number, but about a quarter fewer than Edwards claimed.

**An International Comparison**

The United States has the highest rate of gun ownership in the world — by far. And it has the highest rate of homicides with guns among advanced countries. But, again, those are statistics and not demonstrative of a causal relationship. The National Research Council of the National Academies concluded in its report that studies comparing large geographic areas, what it called “ecological studies,” didn’t show a distinct trend, and instead “provide[d] contradictory evidence on violence and firearms.”

One problem in comparing various countries is the wealth of other factors, besides the mere presence of guns, that can affect whether a homicide occurs, such as the economy, general crime rates, and laws governing guns. Another issue is that the data isn’t all that great. Gun ownership numbers are largely based on public opinion surveys, and the reliability of numbers can vary widely from country to country. “We don’t have good data on the prevalence of ownership on all the countries we’d want to have it on,” says Wintemute.

The numbers in the chart above are from the [Small Arms Survey](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/A-Yearbook/2007/en/Small-Arms-Survey-2007-Chapter-02-annexe-4-EN.pdf). The project gives high and low estimates, along with an average. We used the average numbers. They show the U.S. with 88.8 guns for every 100 people. That’s No. 1 in the gun ownership rate in the world. Switzerland, with 45.7 guns per 100 people, is No. 3 in the world, with nearly half the rate of the U.S. Switzerland also requires military service. (Yemen is No. 2, with 54.8 guns per 100 people.)

Janet Rosenbaum, an assistant professor of epidemiology at the School of Public Health at the State University of New York Downstate Medical Center School, [told the *Washington Post*](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2012/12/14/mythbusting-israel-and-switzerland-are-not-gun-toting-utopias/) that “Switzerland has also been moving away from having widespread guns,” and moving away from having those in the army keep guns at home.

The Small Arms Survey acknowledges that its numbers are approximations and making these estimates is far from an exact science. In addition to surveys, it relies on gun registration, experts, other indicators such as firearm suicides, and comparisons to similar countries. It [says](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/H-Research_Notes/SAS-Research-Note-9.pdf): “All gun numbers—even those that seem most accurate—approximate reality or reveal only part of it. They should be used with caution.”

The firearms homicide rate, and homicide rate overall, is also higher in the U.S. than other advanced countries, such as Canada, Australia and those in Europe, according to [data from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/homicide.html). The U.S. gun homicide rate was 3.2 per every 100,000 people in 2010, according to UNODC figures. The UNODC measures “intentional homicide,” which is “an unlawful death purposefully inflicted on a person by another person.”

The international data show that country-to-country comparisons are inherently difficult to make — and, as the NRC said, provide “contradictory evidence.” For instance, Latin American countries with high levels of firearm homicide show low levels of gun ownership. Honduras has a gun ownership rate of 6.2 per 100 people and a gun homicide rate of 68.43 per 100,000 people, and Colombia has a gun rate of 5.9 and firearm homicide rate of 27.09, as shown in [this chart](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/nation/gun-homicides-ownership/table/) produced by the *Washington Post* using the same data we have cited here.

But among advanced countries, the U.S. homicide rate stands out. “We seem to be an average country in terms of violence and aggression,” says Harvard’s Hemenway. “What we have is huge homicide rates compared to anybody else.”

Says Wintemute: “The difference is that in this country violence involves firearms and firearms change the outcome.”

*Correction, Dec. 21: This article has been changed to say there have been 130 school shootings since Columbine that resulted in the death or injury of at least one student or school staffer — not including suicides — about a quarter fewer than claimed by Rep. Donna Edwards. The original story in some places contained a higher percentage and failed to note that the school shooting figures included those with gun injuries.*

*– by Robert Farley, Lori Robertson and Eugene Kiely*

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