

LOS ANGELES COUNTY OFFICE OF VIOLENCE PREVENTION COUNTERING MYTHS ABOUT GUN VIOLENCE

Following every major incident of gun violence, we hear a now-familiar set of arguments from organizations that oppose gun regulation in any form. Up to now, these arguments have left many people confused about facts related to gun violence and gun deaths, making it hard even for those who favor prevention to make the case. Listed below are responses to some of the most common – and misleading – myths about gun violence:

MYTH

The best way to stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun. We need to expand rather than restrict gun ownership to protect ourselves and our children.

FACT

Many people believe the myth that guns offer protection – but all the numbers indicate they do not. Whether it is a “good” guy with a gun or a “bad” guy with a gun, research shows us that having a gun in the home results in almost 5 times the risk of suicide and almost 3 times the risk of homicide.^{1,2}



A study conducted by the Boston University School of Public Health indicated that in the US, gun ownership was a significant predictor of homicide.³ These findings suggest that expanding gun ownership, even among law-abiding gun owners, would lead to a proportional increase in gun homicides.

The U.S. has a much higher rate of gun ownership than other countries,⁴ yet we have exceptionally high rates of firearm homicides, suicides, and mass shootings.^{5,6} If firearms made us safer, we would have the lowest rates in the world.



MYTH

Gun deaths and crime have increased in the U.S. because liberal district attorneys and liberal reforms have weakened law enforcement.

FACT

There is no evidence that shows that prosecutors lead to increased gun violence. Opponents of gun regulation have capitalized on public fears around crime to advance this myth.

A comprehensive 2015 to 2019 study by The Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the University of Toronto found that murder rates were actually 18% less likely to increase in cities with progressive prosecutors (56%) than in cities with traditional prosecutors (68%), or prosecutors who fell in the middle (62%).⁷

The same study showed that in cities where homicide rates increased, those with progressive prosecutors experienced smaller increases than those with traditional or middle-of-the-road prosecutors.

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MYTH

Mass shootings are caused by people with mental illness. Why do we focus on gun control laws that affect all gun owners when our problem is the subset of gun owners with mental illness?

FACT

Mental illness is not the primary cause of gun violence. The vast majority of gun violence is perpetrated by people who do not have a mental health diagnosis. And the overwhelming majority of people with mental illness are not, and never will become, violent.

Most common risk factors for all forms of gun violence are:

- economic & social inequality
- marginalization of communities
- involvement with drugs and drug markets
- access to guns
- early life trauma exposure
- ambient neighborhood crime ⁹

Focusing on mental illness as the cause of gun violence stigmatizes millions of Americans without getting at the root causes of gun violence. Policies to reduce gun violence should focus on risk factors for violence, not on mental health diagnoses.



In fact, studies show that mental illness is a factor in less than

5%

of firearm violence perpetrated against others.⁸

MYTH

Most gun deaths, including mass shootings, are caused by people who don't know their victims. Gun deaths are the work of violent or deranged strangers.

FACT

All domestic violence deaths and more than

68%

of mass shootings involve a current or former intimate partner as the primary target.



Among homicides for which the relationship between victim and suspect was known, the victim and suspect were strangers just 13.7% of the time.¹¹



A study released in 2021 by the Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence indicated that in more than 68% of mass shootings, the perpetrator killed at least one person who was a partner or family member or had a history of domestic violence.¹⁰ And research shows that having a gun in the home increases the risk of homicide by a partner/other family member.

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MYTH

We can't take steps to address gun violence because America is such a divided country and the people on one side of that divide are gun owners who adamantly oppose any form of regulation.

FACT

A majority of Americans, including gun owners, favor gun safety reforms. The latest (June 2023) findings from the Pew Research Center indicate:

58% of Americans say gun laws in the country should be stricter.

26% say gun laws are about right.

15% say gun laws should be less strict.

In the same survey,

68% favored banning high-capacity magazines

64% favored banning assault-style weapons

79% favored raising the minimum age of legal gun purchases to 21-years-old ¹²

Most Californians, and at least half of all California gun owners, support two firearms policy proposals:

- 1 Prohibiting people with multiple DUIs within the past five years from buying gun.
- 2 An amnesty program allowing gun owners to turn in high-capacity magazines, no questions asked.¹³

MYTH

No one has found a good way to prevent gun violence. Gun controls in place in many parts of the U.S. haven't done it. Violence is just part of human nature.

FACT

The argument that prevention is a lost cause may be the most dangerous myth of all. The facts tell a different story.

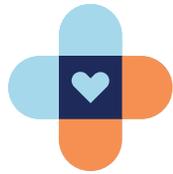
In the 1990s, California began instituting some of the toughest gun safety laws in the country. The rate of gun violence began an extraordinary decline.

As a direct result of these laws, California's firearm mortality rate declined by 55% from 1993 to 2017, almost four times the decrease in the rest of the nation.¹⁴ Additionally, evidence shows that community driven gun violence prevention programs are an important complement to laws and regulations, mobilizing people at the local level to build a culture of peace.¹⁵





Evidence shows that investing in community violence intervention programs saves lives and reduces the enormous economic burdens of violence:



Violently injured patients who receive Hospital-based Violence Intervention Program (HVIP) services are four times less likely to be convicted of a violent crime after hospitalization and four times less likely to be subsequently reinjured than people with comparable injuries who have not received services.¹⁶



The City of Oakland, CA cut its annual shootings and homicides nearly in half over six years by incorporating group violence intervention into its city-wide response to crime.¹⁶



The City of Richmond, CA successfully implemented a hybrid approach to gun violence prevention. Richmond drastically cut homicide rates in recent years by applying a version of the Gun Violence Intervention (GVI) strategy along with elements of the Cure Violence and HVIP models.¹⁶ Richmond combined elements of three evidence-based prevention strategies to cut homicides from 40 per year in 2010 to 16 per year in 2013. The trend continued in 2014 as the number fell to 11, the lowest figure since 1971.¹⁷



Since 2007, the City of Los Angeles Office Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD) has implemented a coordinated, city-funded gang reduction strategy that takes a comprehensive approach to gang violence. GRYD has been associated with an estimated 27 fewer retaliatory gang homicides and fewer retaliatory gang aggravated assaults per year. Even after increases in violence in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Los Angeles homicides are still down more than 20% from their average level in the years prior to the implementation of GRYD.^{18,19,20,21}



Between 2016, when the Los Angeles County Trauma Prevention Initiative (TPI) was implemented in four South LA communities, and 2022, the rates of aggravated assaults involving guns decreased by 15% in those communities. In comparison, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department reported an increase of 21% in the rates of aggravated assaults involving guns during those same years in the county as a whole.²²

Strong gun laws and community antiviolence programs indicate there is a lot we can do to end gun violence. Debunking the myths is step 1; step 2 is taking action.

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Citations

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