

## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

With public debate of gun violence at an all-time high, this third edition of *The Gun Debate: An Encyclopedia of Gun Rights & Gun Control in the United States* combines history with current events. At issue are fundamental questions of constitutional law and the rights of individuals, opportunities for self-protection, and the control of violence and national security. An additional factor making this topic especially intriguing is that firearms are inherently interesting. Thousands of firearms fans flood gun shows, admiring the craftsmanship and technological expertise that goes into producing them.

The goal of this new edition is to present a balanced and unbiased approach to this controversial issue. With a total of 374 entries, 40 of which are brand new and the rest updated and revised, coverage includes recent gun laws and legislation, mass shootings and gun incidents, and new information from the groups who support gun rights and those who advocate for stricter gun control.

### Content and Format

The topics in this publication have been selected, formatted, and written with the needs of non-specialist readers in mind. Emphasis is on the clear representation of facts supported by tables, charts, graphics, and illustrations. Entries range in length from 500 to 3,000 words and are heavily cross-referenced to related topics within the work, and each entry includes a further reading list for additional study.

New entries discuss police shootings, hunting culture, gang violence, the Castle Doctrine, the New York SAFE Act, and recent shootings in Tucson, San Bernardino, and Orlando. Research for this new edition included consulting the many books, periodicals, organization literature, and personally expressed views of individuals with opinions on both sides of the issue.

### Special Features

Several features distinguish this title from other works on the topic, and include the following elements:

- Detailed **Introductory Essay** by the authors is a 10-page overview of the gun debate in America, complete with facts and statistics.
- A **Chronology** of the debate spans from the Minutemen's role in 1775 to 2016, when the gun debate loomed large in the U.S. presidential campaign, as gun violence escalated.
- The **Guide to Selected Topics** arranges all 374 entries into 16 major categories, including Court Cases, Firearms & Ammunition, and Individuals Supporting Gun Rights/Gun Control.
- **Primary Documents** includes 25 original documents, most reprinted in their entirety, that support both sides of the gun debate and span more than 200 years. From the *Federalist Papers* and excerpts from the Second Amendment to significant court cases, acts of law, and recent articles from national newspapers and magazines that showcase viewpoints on both sides of the issue, these documents are designed to offer an historical reference point and broader understanding of the complicated issues that surround the ongoing debate.

- Several **Appendices** provide valuable information, including State Constitutional Provisions, State Firearms Laws, and a list of relevant Organizations
- Finally, a comprehensive **Bibliography** and **Index** conclude the work.

### **Acknowledgments**

Grey House Publishing thanks authors Glenn H. Utter and Robert J. Spitzer for their thoroughness and thoughtfulness in making the third edition of *The Gun Debate: An Encyclopedia of Gun Rights & Gun Control in the United States* a substantially improved and much expanded work.

## INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

Perhaps with the exception of abortion, gun control is the most controversial issue in American politics, appealing strongly to the emotions of those who support, as well as to those who oppose, further regulation of firearms. Although people take many different positions on the issue, supporting some proposals for control and rejecting others, the more uncompromising on both sides tend to collapse pro- and anti-gun control categories into two. The pro-gun forces see themselves as the supporters of a vital constitutional right to keep and bear arms pitted against the “gun grabbers.” Strong advocates of gun control see themselves struggling for a more civilized society against the “gun nuts” and profit-hungry firearms manufacturers and dealers. Like many other subjects, the issue of gun control is preeminently a political question in that the competitors attempting to influence public policy have an intense interest in the ultimate outcome. Therefore, positions tend to harden and proponents of one position tend to deny any merit in the stand taken by others, each side attributing dishonest motives to those with whom they disagree. Scholars who otherwise are meticulous in presenting research results can become as impassioned in their argumentation as the most openly partisan supporter of a fervently held political position.

Supporters and opponents of gun control disagree over the significance of firearms as an independent variable in explaining the high level of violence in the United States. The term “gun culture” is used by both sides in explaining their respective views of the special role firearms have played in American history and continue to play in contemporary society. Gun rights advocates point with pride to the role that average Americans played in the Revolutionary War, especially because of the skill they reportedly demonstrated with firearms against an intimidated British force. Firearms are seen as an important ingredient in the unique ability of Americans to maintain their independence from a potentially oppressive government. Those less impressed with the gun tradition see that the American love affair with firearms has contributed to a violent past and a continuing belief that the presence and use of firearms promise to cut cleanly through a quagmire of social problems. While not denying this predilection for violence, gun supporters note that other cultures not having as extensive a supply of firearms also experience high levels of violence, that some societies with high concentrations of firearms have much lower levels of violence, and that the level of violent crime in the United States did not increase proportionately with a marked increase in the number of firearms available. Gun rights advocates express their position with the popular saying, “Guns don’t kill people, people kill people,” and claim that those advocating limitations on firearms suffer from hoplophobia, which is defined as an irrational and morbid fear of guns. However, Franklin Zimring and Gordon Hawkins have argued that firearms have had an independent influence on violence in the United States in that the number of violent crimes that lead to serious injury and death are significantly higher in the United States than in other countries. Table 1 indicates that the homicide rate is much higher in the United States, where firearms are easily obtainable, than in the United Kingdom, where firearms are far less available to the general public.

**Table 1**  
**Firearm Homicides, England and Wales and the United States, 2013**

	United Kingdom	United States
Population (in millions)	64.5	315.0
Firearm Homicides	23	11,208
Rate (per 100,000 population)	.04	3.56
England and Wales to U.S. Ratio	1 to 89	

*Source:* The table was derived from comparative data on homicides provided by the School of Public Health, University of Sidney, [www.gunpolicy.org](http://www.gunpolicy.org).

Supporters of an individual right to keep and bear arms rely on two basic arguments to make their case. First, they claim that the right can be defended as a basic natural, or human, right independent of any positive law, or has evolved through a long tradition of common law stretching back in English history and subsequently recognized and protected in the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The Second Amendment guarantee of the right to keep and bear arms, they insist, is the premier right that must be preserved to protect the remaining rights listed in the Bill of Rights. In recent years, scholars advocating the position that the Constitution protects an individual's right to possess and carry firearms, not just a corporate right of state governments to maintain a militia independent of the federal government, have published a large body of literature, primarily in law journals.

The second major defense of a right to keep and bear arms makes a utilitarian argument, relying on empirical claims that law-abiding citizens can use firearms effectively to protect themselves against law-breakers. Contrary to the gun control position that certain firearms such as handguns have no legitimate use outside their application to certain sports such as hunting and skeet shooting, gun supporters claim that such weapons have a definite defensive use. Researcher John R. Lott concludes that concealed carry laws give the law-abiding citizen a definite advantage over the potential criminal.

A majority of U.S. Supreme Court justices have accepted both of these arguments for an individual right to keep and bear arms in *District of Columbia v. Heller* (2008) and *McDonald v. Chicago* (2010), cases in which municipal ordinances severely restricting firearm ownership were declared to be violations of the Second Amendment right of individuals to keep and bear arms. These two decisions have significantly altered the playing field on which gun control supporters and gun rights advocates will contend for the foreseeable future. For instance, state and local restrictions on concealed carry have been challenged in court, and limits on where concealed weapons may be carried—college campuses, national parks, restaurants and bars, and churches—have in certain cases been lifted.

Although firearms supporters consider the Second Amendment the heart of their defense of gun rights and the most important protection in the Bill of Rights, they often cite other guarantees as important to their cause. The Fourth Amendment protection against unreasonable searches and seizures is considered important to protect gun owners against investigations conducted by government officials enforcing gun control laws. Gun rights advocates believe that such searches often are carried out according to unconstitutional laws and therefore represent inappropriate harassment. The Ninth Amendment, which guarantees individual rights not specifically stated in the Constitution, has been used by firearms supporters to argue for an additional protection for the right to keep and bear arms, which they consider a fundamental right established in natural law, common law, and the American political tradition. Gun rights supporters consider the Fourteenth Amendment important because of the tendency of the U.S. Supreme Court in recent decades to apply specific protections found in the Bill of Rights to the states. They have argued that the

Second Amendment should also be applied to the states, thus limiting state government power to restrict firearm ownership—a position the Supreme Court affirmed in *McDonald v. Chicago*.

Contrary to the gun rights position, gun control supporters argue that the Second Amendment, like any other freedom, is not absolute (a position that the Supreme Court also has supported in recent decisions). Some gun rights advocates agree that the government can institute reasonable firearms restrictions to maintain an ordered society. However, those more suspicious of the motives of gun control advocates hold that any gun control measure represents yet another step down a slippery slope toward banning firearms and in the direction of a national confiscation effort. If any consensus exists on the gun control issue, it is that guns should be kept from particular individuals, such as felons and those who are mentally unstable. However, conflict arises over where to draw the boundary. For instance, should those convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence charges lose their right to possess firearms? May those convicted of more serious crimes ever reclaim their right to possess firearms? The greatest controversy arises over existing laws and proposals that call for regulating and to some extent restricting firearms ownership in the general population rather than focusing primarily on punishing those who have misused firearms.

Beyond the arguments presented by different sides in the gun control debate, groups have made various efforts to influence the decisions of the national and state governments, and the contest among the various participants has been played out in legislative chambers as well as the courts. Modern efforts at gun control began in 1934 with passage of the National Firearms Act, which placed limitations on certain types of weapons, such as machine guns. The National Rifle Association (NRA), established in 1871, had a significant influence on the contents of the legislation. In 1938, Congress passed the Federal Firearms Act, the last major piece of gun control legislation to receive serious consideration for the next 30 years. Following the assassinations of President John Kennedy in 1963 and Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy in 1968, Congress passed the Gun Control Act (GCA) of 1968. However, pro-gun groups strongly criticized the legislation and fought for revisions. The 1986 Gun Owners Protection Act repealed those sections of the GCA that gun interests considered more objectionable. The passage of this act over the objections of police organizations and other opponents resulted in the mobilization of the gun control movement. Handgun Control, Inc., the most influential of the gun control organizations, captured two major allies in James and Sarah Brady. James Brady, President Ronald Reagan's press secretary, had been badly wounded in the assassination attempt on the president in 1981. The Reagan administration's strong opposition to gun control notwithstanding, the Bradys came to the forefront of the pro-regulation movement. After leaving office, Reagan became a supporter of the Brady Bill. In 2001, Handgun Control, Inc., became the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, the premier gun control organization.

Passage of the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act in 1994 represented a significant shift in the fortunes of the gun control movement. The act established a five-day waiting period so that local law enforcement agencies could conduct background checks on prospective handgun purchasers to determine if they fell into a class of those prohibited from owning a firearm. In 1997, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Printz v. United States* dealt a minor setback to the Brady Act when it ruled that the provision mandating that local law enforcement agencies run background checks was an unjustified federal intrusion into state affairs. However, the waiting period ended in November 1998, when the computerized National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) went into effect. Therefore, the *Printz* decision had minimal effect on the application of the Brady Act.

The effectiveness of the Brady Act has been a matter of debate. Supporters, including President Bill Clinton, have claimed that thousands of purchases have been prevented because of the background check requirement. However, others note that the act is a limited measure that requires enhancement through passage of additional provisions. Gun rights supporters doubt

the effectiveness of the legislation, questioning the accuracy of claims about the prevention of purchases and noting that few prosecutions have occurred under the law. However, gun advocates have perhaps neglected the potential deterrent effect of the law: Most of those who are disqualified from purchasing firearms may not try to make a legal purchase. Gun rights advocates respond that such people receive weapons from persons they enlist to purchase firearms for them (so-called straw purchasers) and from alternative illegal sources, thus nullifying any beneficial effect the legislation might achieve, while still inconveniencing law-abiding citizens. In 2007, due largely to concerns about mentally ill individuals who may be a threat to themselves and others, Congress passed the NICS Improvement Amendments Act, which encouraged states to submit relevant mental health records to the NICS, and also provided a procedure by which those legally determined to be mentally incompetent could have their right to purchase and possess firearms restored.

Some gun control organizations, such as the Violence Policy Center (VPC), are nearly as critical of the Brady Act as gun rights groups, claiming that the legislation is ineffective. They have argued that the best way to limit gun violence is to institute a general ban on handguns, an option that the U.S. Supreme Court in the *Heller* and *McDonald* decisions effectively eliminated. Paul Helmke, president of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, argued that these Supreme Court decisions eliminated the “slippery slope” claim of gun rights organizations that any compromise on gun control will lead inexorably to greater pressure to compromise still further. Therefore, Helmke claimed, the Court’s decisions open the door for more moderate gun control policies because gun rights supporters no longer need to fear more extreme proposals and the realization of their greatest nightmare, the confiscation of firearms. However, gun rights organizations, voicing a more general distrust of government, still sound the alarm that moderate measures, which they consider unnecessary, will lead to more extreme policies. Given that gun ownership is considered a basic constitutional right—and to many the premier right—any compromise appears unjustified. Gun rights advocates express concern about the increase in federal firearms legislation, beginning especially in the 1940s.

Gun control advocates have attempted to counter the ways that the law can be circumvented, and therefore concentrate their efforts on controlling the illegal gun trade. For instance, to restrict straw purchases, some gun control supporters have advocated limiting the purchase of handguns to one per month, arguing that no legitimate purchaser needs to buy more than twelve weapons in one year.

Gun control advocates have also focused on the issue of gun safety, particularly to prevent accidents involving unauthorized access to firearms by children. This issue of gun-related injuries and deaths among young people has inspired calls for the mandatory use of locks on handguns and the development and application of technology to produce so-called smart guns that would prevent the use of a handgun by anyone other than the owner. Although pro-gun groups have been somewhat suspicious of such calls for the mandatory sale of a gun lock with each new handgun, the industry has responded to this proposal by developing several types of locking devices. The more skeptical among gun rights supporters question whether the value of a handgun for self-defense can be maintained if they are kept locked, but some companies have advertised their safety products as compatible with keeping the weapon readily accessible in an emergency.

Gun rights groups have cautioned that an emphasis on gun locks and other technology to maintain the safety of firearms neglects the importance of educating the owners of firearms about safe handling and storage, and teaching young people to stay away from firearms when unsupervised. The NRA developed the Eddie Eagle program to teach gun safety to children. However, gun control organizations doubt the ultimate effectiveness of such a program, arguing that keeping firearms out of the home represents the surest way to avoid a tragic accident. Because children, even when instructed, tend to act irresponsibly, the best strategy involves keeping firearms completely

inaccessible. Some gun control groups even suspect that the Eddie Eagle program encourages a positive attitude toward firearms among children that promotes future ownership, a charge that the NRA and its supporters readily deny.

With a Republican Congress and the legislatures of several states passing preemption laws preventing local governments from passing gun control ordinances more stringent than state statutes, some gun control organizations and municipal governments shifted their focus to the courts, suing firearms manufacturers and retailers for compensation for the damage done by their products. Such lawsuits instituted by municipal governments in Chicago, Atlanta, New Orleans, and elsewhere resembled the state government lawsuits against the tobacco industry to recover the costs of medical care attributed to the ill effects of smoking. In February 1999, a federal jury in New York raised the concern of the firearms industry by awarding \$500,000 to a survivor of a shooting incident. The jury found that 15 of 25 manufacturers named in the lawsuit were responsible for injuries because they had negligently marketed a lethal product. Among the companies found liable were Beretta USA, Colt, and Jennings Firearms. The plaintiffs argued that the companies oversupplied firearms to states with more lenient gun control laws, mainly in the South, because they were aware that the excess guns would ultimately make their way through the black market into the hands of criminals in states such as New York that have instituted more stringent regulations. Firearms companies had argued that their responsibility ended with delivery to distributors. Tables 2 and 3 report domestic firearms production (1986-2012) and imports (2012-2013), respectively. The largest importers of handguns to the United States were Austria, Brazil, and Germany. The largest source of rifle imports were Canada and Brazil. Italy and Turkey led in imports of shotguns and unspecified firearms.

Gun rights supporters feared that lawsuits could bankrupt the firearms industry and claimed that gun control groups were pursuing that outcome as their ultimate goal. Effective lobbying by gun rights groups led to congressional passage of the 2005 Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act, which limited the liability of firearms manufacturers for the illegal use of their products. However, in 2016 parents of the young children shot and killed at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, began to sidestep the 2005 law by arguing that Bushmaster Arms International and Remington are liable under the “negligent entrustment” exception in the law. The judge in the case allowed the suit against the gun manufacturers to proceed.

Related to the lawsuit strategy, gun control advocates have called for regulating firearms as consumer products. The firearms industry is essentially self-regulating, setting its own safety standards. So-called Saturday night specials or junk guns, inexpensive handguns that are claimed to be less safe than higher quality firearms, became the focus for much of the concern for consumer protection. The 1968 Gun Control Act prohibited the importation of such weapons, but domestic production expanded greatly to fill the demand. Gun control supporters argued that by requiring high production standards, the manufacture of Saturday night specials could possibly come to an end.

Gun rights groups have attempted to counter the initiatives of gun control organizations, challenging gun laws in the courts and sponsoring legislative initiatives at the national and state levels. When Massachusetts passed a stringent gun control bill in 1998, the NRA quickly began a legal challenge to the law. Pro-gun organizations have supported the liberalization of concealed carry laws, backing “shall issue” provisions that require law enforcement agencies to issue a concealed carry license to anyone not specifically prohibited from owning a firearm. The NRA has also challenged the NICS, questioning the keeping of purchase records by the ATF even for a brief time. Since 2004, with passage of the Tiarht Amendment, background check records may not be kept longer than 24 hours. On the national level, gun groups, with the support of some law enforcement organizations, have lobbied for a reciprocity measure whereby each state would be required to recognize the concealed carry licenses of other states, just as

each state recognizes the drivers' licenses of other states. Bills have been introduced in Congress to establish reciprocity among all states, but so far the proposal has not gained approval.

**Table 2**  
**Domestic Production of Civilian Firearms, 1986-2012 (In Thousands)**

Year	Handguns	Rifles	Shotguns	Miscellaneous	Total Production
1986	1,424	971	641	5	3,041
1987	1,687	1,008	858	7	3,560
1988	1,856	1,145	928	35	3,964
1989	2,033	1,407	936	42	4,418
1990	1,842	1,212	849	57	3,960
1991	1,835	883	828	16	3,562
1992	2,139	1,002	1,018	17	4,176
1993	2,656	1,174	1,145	81	5,056
1994	2,591	1,317	1,255	11	5,174
1995	1,723	1,411	1,174	9	4,317
1996	1,486	1,424	926	18	3,854
1997	1,407	1,251	916	20	3,594
1998	1,285	1,536	1,037	25	3,883
1999	1,331	1,570	1,107	40	4,048
2000	1,282	1,583	898	30	3,793
2001	947	1,285	680	21	2,933
2002	1,089	1,515	741	22	3,367
2003	1,121	1,430	726	31	3,308
2004	1,023	1,325	732	20	3,100
2005	1,078	1,431	709	23	3,241
2006	1,406	1,497	715	36	3,654
2007	1,611	1,611	645	55	3,922
2008	2,041	1,735	631	93	4,500
2009	2,415	2,249	753	139	5,556
2010	2,817	1,831	743	68	5,459
2011	3,171	2,318	862	190	6,541
2012	4,155	3,168	949	306	8,578
<b>Totals</b>	<b>45,296</b>	<b>37,121</b>	<b>22,453</b>	<b>1,111</b>	<b>114,559</b>

Source: Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, [www.atf.gov/resource-center/docs/firearmscommerceannualstatisticalreport2014pdf/download](http://www.atf.gov/resource-center/docs/firearmscommerceannualstatisticalreport2014pdf/download)

**Table 3**  
**Firearm Imports, 2012-2013**

Firearm Type	2012	2013
Handguns	2,627,201	2,095,528
Rifles	1,243,924	1,507,776
Shotguns	973,465	936,235
<b>Total Imports</b>	<b>4,844,590</b>	<b>5,539,539</b>

Source: Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, [www.atf.gov/resource-center/docs/firearmscommerceannualstatisticalreport2014pdf/download](http://www.atf.gov/resource-center/docs/firearmscommerceannualstatisticalreport2014pdf/download)

The participation of health care professionals in firearms research has created a good deal of controversy. Health care researchers, concerned about the number of people killed and injured by firearms each year, employ the epidemiological model in their research on firearms, the same procedure used in studying the progression of a disease. The use of this methodology raised suspicions among some gun rights supporters that these researchers had prejudged firearms, like a disease, as something bad that deserves to be eliminated. Those more sympathetic to gun ownership claimed that this research fails to meet the standards of good social science methodology. Arthur Kellermann's finding that a firearm kept in the home is far more likely to be used to harm a family member or friend than to fend off an attack by an intruder has been challenged by those more sympathetic to gun ownership. They argue that the use of firearms to harm others is more likely to occur among those with criminal histories. For their part, health care researchers have criticized research indicating that carrying concealed weapons (CCW) laws at the state level have a measurable deterrent effect on crime, and question the methodology employed, the assumptions made, and the conclusions reached.

The controversy over appropriate research methodologies and objectives reached the political realm in 1997 when gun rights groups lobbied Congress successfully to cut the budget for the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC) in order to limit NCIPC-sponsored research on firearms, which was claimed to be politically motivated, biased, and, hence, "unscientific." Doctors for Integrity in Policy Research (DIPR), a pro-gun rights organization that was active in the 1990s, led the criticism leveled at the CDC.

In response to calls for additional gun control, gun rights advocates argue that existing legislation covers virtually any illegal action committed with a firearm. They recommend the more judicious application of existing statutes, but also raise doubts about the possibility of keeping firearms out of the hands of criminals. Some researchers have focused on the illegal gun trade, attempting to trace the typical routes of firearms from manufacturers to those who use them in illegal activities. Gun control advocates suggest that registration of firearms would assist in tracing firearms used in criminal activity back to their original purchasers. Such a plan would place greater legal responsibility on gun owners for the safe and secure storage of firearms. Some states already have instituted child access prevention (CAP) laws holding gun owners responsible if young people harm themselves or others with weapons to which they have gained access.

In 1994, responding to gun control advocates' contentions that semi-automatic weapons with large capacity ammunition clips were being used disproportionately in criminal activity, Congress passed an assault weapons ban. However, some gun researchers and gun rights advocates argued that the banning of specific weapons represented a distinctly ineffective way to limit firearms violence because other types of firearms could easily be substituted for the prohibited models. Firearms not classified as assault weapons could have as much, or more, destructive effect as the banned guns, and manufacturers modified proscribed models sufficiently to legally avoid the ban. In 2004, Congress failed to renew the assault weapons ban, a definite victory for gun rights groups. Following mass shootings in 2015 and 2016, gun control supporters in Congress introduced bills to reinstate an assault weapons ban and a restriction on the capacity of ammunition magazines, but the Republican majority in both the House and the Senate defeated the proposals.

In the political struggle over gun control, gun control groups are at a definite disadvantage, given the large membership in gun rights organizations and the many popular publications dealing with firearms. Table 4 provides circulation figures for these major periodicals. In the last decade, the print circulation of most of these publications has declined, as has that of magazines and newspapers, mainly due to the increased influence of the Internet. Such magazines as *Guns and Ammo*, *Guns Magazine*, *Women and Guns*, *American Handgunner*, *Shooting Times*, and the NRA's *American Rifleman* still provide colorful descriptions of new firearms along with articles highly critical of gun control measures and supportive of gun rights, but undoubtedly many people access

the magazines online rather than via the print medium. Each magazine hosts a Web site where they provide information about firearms and gun rights. *Soldier of Fortune* distributed the magazine's final print issue in April 2016 and now is available exclusively online. Gun control advocates have attempted to counteract this advantage by enlisting the support of public relations firms to produce public service advertisements that caution the public about the dangers of firearms in the home. In 2014 Michael Bloomberg, former mayor of New York, pledged \$50 million in support of the newly created Everytown for Gun Safety and other gun control organizations. Such campaigns have included television announcements, billboards, and special marches to raise concern about firearms-related violence, especially among youth. Michael Moore's movie, *Bowling for Columbine*, revolved around the 1999 shooting at the Littleton, Colorado, high school in which two students shot and killed 12 fellow students and one teacher and wounded several others before killing themselves.

**Table 4**  
**Major Commercial Gun Publications: Circulation, 2008**

<b>Publication</b>	<b>Circulation</b>
American Rifleman (National Rifle Association)	1,334,095
American Hunter (National Rifle Association)	910,291
North American Hunter (North American Hunting Club)	825,313
Guns and Ammo	456,943
America's First Freedom (National Rifle Association)	407,689
Barrett Tactical Weapons	180,000
Shooting Times	174,659
American Handgunner	115,063
Handguns	112,145
Shotgun News	104,523
Guns Magazine	89,278
Combat Handguns	83,000
Gun World	71,124
Gun Digest	66,779
Women and Guns	38,000

*Source: The Standard Periodical Directory, 31st edition (New York: Oxbridge Communications, 2008).*

The focus on guns and young people includes a concern for students who carry firearms to school. Estimates are that several thousand young people take a gun to school each year. Reasons for carrying a weapon include the desire to impress others and the belief that a weapon will guarantee personal safety. In 1994, Congress passed the Gun-Free Schools Act, a measure geared to deter such behavior. The highly publicized school shootings in 1997, 1998, and 1999 continued to raise concerns about firearms in schools. However, some more avid gun rights supporters argued that firearms in schools—in the hands of authorized persons—would likely deter such shooting incidents.

The emphasis that gun control campaigns have placed on youth is especially troubling for gun interests. They believe that discouraging youth interest in firearms threatens a tradition that has been passed from father to son for generations. The sporting industry is concerned that the demand for their products, which in the past depended on generational transfer, may be headed for a decline because the next generation may not become as firmly tied to the sporting tradition. When Charlton Heston began a public relations campaign for the NRA in 1997, he focused his attention

on transmitting positive attitudes about gun ownership to a new generation. Trade associations encourage such transfer, recommending that fathers take not only their sons but also their daughters on hunting trips. Gun control organizations disapprove of such attempts because they consider firearms a clear threat of injury and death to youth. Animal rights groups also oppose the continuation of the hunting culture.

Gun control advocates are especially critical of what they consider the efforts of the firearms industry to increase sales by manipulating the emotions of women. They claim that gun manufacturers, finding that the male market had been saturated, decided to develop a new market among women to maintain demand for their products. They charge that gun interests focus on women's fears of being attacked by a stranger to encourage them to become firearms owners. Gun rights supporters respond that women have the same rights as men to protect themselves and charge that the women's rights movement is inconsistent in demanding equal rights for women, but at the same time objecting to women's possession of firearms for self-protection. Gun control advocates note that the most probable threat of violence that women face is not from a stranger, but from people that women know, such as husbands and boyfriends. In any event, gun ownership among women lags considerably behind that for men.

The question of militia groups lies at the periphery of the gun control debate. Militia supporters argue that their organizations are protected by the Second Amendment and believe that the amendment provides the opportunity to defend individual freedom against a tyrannical government. This position involves what many consider the curious argument that the Constitution guarantees a right to revolt against the governmental structure that it established: The governing document plants the seeds of its own destruction. (At least one state constitution—that of New Hampshire, recognizes a right to revolt.) Supporters of the militia idea contend that the protection of liberties against a powerful government must include the possibility of violent resistance. Therefore, gun control legislation is viewed with special apprehension because it is seen as denying the ability to take the ultimate step to defend freedom against tyranny. Those less skeptical of the government respond that freedom ultimately depends on a legal order and a strong government that is able to defend citizens against the encroachment on the rights of some by others in society.

One of the more extreme arguments against gun control, made by such organizations as Jews for the Preservation of Firearms Ownership, involves the charge that restrictions on firearms ownership have often accompanied genocide. Examples such as the nineteenth-century attempt to disarm Native Americans, the effort to keep African Americans disarmed in the South following Reconstruction, and the Nazi gun control policies that preceded the Holocaust are often mentioned to emphasize the dangers of gun control. Such disarmament is thought to put the people at the mercy of an oppressive government. Stephen P. Halbrook's book, *Gun Control in the Third Reich* (2013), offers a detailed argument about the potential consequences of gun control and gun confiscation. Those more sympathetic to gun control conclude that such arguments are historically inaccurate and less than persuasive, especially given that black youth are particularly prone to suffer injury and death from firearms that appear to be readily available, a limited form of genocide in itself. Therefore, it is not surprising that groups representing minorities often support measures intended to limit minority youth access to firearms. For instance, the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) has taken positions in favor of various gun control legislation, as has African-American Representatives John Conyers, (D-MI) and John Lewis (D-GA).

Rather than limiting their activities to defending gun interests against additional gun control proposals, gun rights groups have pursued an aggressive strategy intended to weaken already existing firearm laws and to extend gun rights. Since 2003, Justice Department appropriations have included the so-called Tiahrt amendment (named for Representative Todd Tiahrt, who introduced the measure), which prohibits the use of appropriated funds to disclose information

contained in the Firearms Trace System database. This measure was intended in part to protect firearms manufacturers from litigation. In 2004, Congress failed to renew the Assault Weapons Ban law, thus allowing the sale once more of these previously prohibited weapons. In 2005, Congress approved the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act, which limited the liability of firearms manufacturers for the criminal use of their products. In 2008, a conservative majority on the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Second Amendment protects the right of individuals to possess firearms, and in 2010 the Court decided that the Second Amendment applies to state and local governments as well as to the federal government. By 2010, 37 states had passed laws permitting the carrying of concealed weapons with a permit (three additional states—Alaska, Arizona, and Vermont—allowed concealed weapons carrying without a license) and by 2016 all 50 states had adopted some form of concealed carry; 44 states had instituted firearms law preemption legislation (four additional states had instituted such a measure through judicial rulings) that prohibit local jurisdictions from passing firearms ordinances more restrictive than laws at the state level; and 34 states had enacted Castle Doctrine provisions, which allow citizens to defend themselves with deadly force in their homes and eliminate the “duty to retreat.” By 2016 at least 23 states had expanded the Castle Doctrine to public spaces. These so-called stand-your-ground laws provide greater immunity from prosecution for individuals who use deadly force in self-defense.

Given the successes of pro-gun individuals and organizations over the last decade, the probability of enacting additional gun control measures in the foreseeable future appears to be slight. Organizations advocating gun control have supported proposals to close the so-called gun show loophole (those without a federal firearms license may legally sell firearms at gun shows without purchasers having to pass a criminal background check) and to make more effective the system of tracking illegal firearms. In addition, these organizations have taken a defensive position by opposing, for instance, the adoption of the Thune amendment, proposed by Senators John Thune and David Vitter, that would establish national reciprocity among the states with regard to concealed carry laws: If persons are permitted to carry a concealed weapon in their home state, every other state would be required to recognize that permit. The future success of gun control measures may depend upon partisan control of Congress, possible shifts in public opinion resulting from shooting incidents, the perceived danger of armed terrorists within the United States, and general shifts in the public mood regarding the role of the government in American society. In January 2010 at a political rally in Tucson, Arizona, a gunman, using a Glock pistol that he had legally purchased, shot and killed six individuals, including U.S. district court judge John Roll, and wounded a dozen others, including U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords (D-AZ). Giffords received a gunshot wound to the head but survived. In June 2016, a lone gunman entered a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, killing 49 and injuring at least 50 others in the deadliest one-person shooting in U.S. history. In the nationwide debate that followed these and other shooting incidents, some noted that the Assault Weapons Ban, which Congress allowed to expire in 2004, limited the capacity of ammunition magazines to 10 rounds. Calling for a reintroduction of the ban, they argued that if the restriction were still in place, lives could have been saved. Others more sympathetic to gun rights went so far as to suggest that members of Congress should be permitted to carry firearms on the floor of the House and Senate.

In January 2016, President Barack Obama, frustrated at what he perceived as lack of congressional action on proposed legislation, announced a series of executive actions, including tightening the definition of who is engaged in the business of selling firearms in order to expand the background check requirement to a greater number of purchasers, adding mental health records from the Social Security Administration to the NICS, and instructing government agencies to review the state of smart gun technology. Such actions, although applauded by those supporting more stringent gun control measures, were likely to have minimal effect on gun-related crime.

# CHRONOLOGY

- 1775 Colonial militia, called the minutemen, defend a store of arms in Lexington, Massachusetts, against an attempt by British troops under the command of General Thomas Gage to confiscate weapons. The minutemen take on a reputation far beyond their contribution to the fight for independence, becoming a crucial ingredient in many Americans' positive attitudes toward firearms.
- 1789 James Madison fulfills a promise to submit 12 constitutional amendments in the first session of the new House of Representatives; the amendments are to constitute a Bill of Rights to the recently adopted U.S. Constitution. Although initially holding that a Bill of Rights is unnecessary, Madison agrees to support the idea to attain ratification of the Constitution. One of Madison's proposed amendments originally reads: "The right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed; a well-regulated militia being the best security of a free country: but no person religiously scrupulous of bearing arms shall be compelled to render military service in person." The amendment is revised to exclude a religious exemption and is submitted to the states as: "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." This Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is ratified on December 15, 1791.
- 1792 Congress passes the Militia Act, which establishes an organized militia and an enrolled militia composed of all free white males, who were expected to provide their own muskets, firelocks, and ammunition. The act is never truly implemented by the states.
- 1846 In *Nunn v. State*, the Supreme Court of Georgia overrules a lower court decision convicting Hawkins Nunn of carrying a pistol in violation of an 1837 state statute. The court finds that both the U.S. and Georgia state constitutions guarantee the right to keep and bear arms and traces the historical roots of the right, calling it "one of the fundamental principles, upon which rests the great fabric of civil liberty, reared by the fathers of the Revolution and of the country."
- 1857 The U.S. Supreme Court, in *Scott v. Sanford*, rules that the Bill of Rights does not apply to blacks. Chief Justice Roger Taney argues that if blacks were given full citizen status with free white men, they would have the right of free speech and the right "to keep and carry arms wherever they went."
- 1871 Colonel William C. Church and George W. Wingate, former Union army officers, collaborate in establishing the National Rifle Association (NRA). The NRA hopes to encourage rifle practice so that Americans will be better prepared militarily for any future conflict. New York State provides funds to purchase land on Long Island to establish a rifle range for NRA members.

- 1876 The U.S. Supreme Court, in *United States v. Cruikshank*, rules for the first time on the basis of the Second Amendment, declaring that the amendment applies to the national government only, and not to private groups. Among other charges, the defendants were originally indicted for preventing two African Americans from exercising “the right to keep and bear arms for a lawful purpose.” The Court decided that only the states have the authority to protect citizens against such violations of their rights by private persons.
- 1881 A gun-wielding attacker assassinates President James Garfield, the second president to be killed in office.
- 1886 In *Presser v. Illinois*, Herman Presser, the appellant, appealed his state conviction for violating the Military Code of Illinois to the U.S. Supreme Court. Presser led a contingent of 400 armed men in a Chicago parade, himself carrying a cavalry sword, without receiving a license from the governor to parade as part of the state militia. The Supreme Court rules that the section of the Illinois statute banning armed parades without authorization does not violate the right of the people to keep and bear arms.
- 1901 President William McKinley is assassinated by a gunman.
- 1903 Congress passes the Dick Act, which repeals the Militia Act of 1792. The Dick Act is an attempt to revive state militias based on voluntary recruitment and greater national government control over the organization and operation of the National Guard.
- 1911 Responding to the outcry against street violence in New York City, the New York State legislature enacts the Sullivan Law, the most stringent gun legislation of the time. The statute requires a license to possess or carry a concealable weapon. One provision of the law forbids aliens to possess firearms in public.
- 1924 Congress passes the Mailing of Firearms Act, which prohibits sending pistols and other firearms that can be concealed on the person through the United States Post Office.
- 1934 Congress enacts the National Firearms Act, which focuses on limiting access to weapons commonly thought to be used primarily by gangsters. Over-the-counter sale of machine guns is prohibited, and automatic weapons, short-barreled rifles, and sawed-off shotguns must be registered.
- 1938 Congress passes the Federal Firearms Act, which is intended to regulate the interstate sale of firearms. Those wishing to manufacture, sell, or import firearms and ammunition must receive a license from the federal government’s Internal Revenue Service (IRS), which is responsible for collecting the license fees.
- 1939 In *United States v. Miller*, the U.S. Supreme Court rules on a challenge to the National Firearms Act of 1934 that by prohibiting the transportation of a sawed-off shotgun across state lines the law violates the Second Amendment. The Court rejects the appeal, ruling that the Second Amendment does not protect the possession of a sawed-off shotgun, which has no relation to the preservation of a well-regulated militia.
- 1948 The Federal Aviation Act prohibits the carrying of firearms on commercial aircraft.
- 1963 President John F. Kennedy is assassinated by a gunman using a mail-order rifle.
- 1966 Following the shooting incident at the University of Texas at Austin, in which 12 people are killed and 33 others wounded by a lone gunman, President Lyndon Johnson urges legislators to take action on gun control legislation before Congress.

- 1968 In separate incidents, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Senator Robert F. Kennedy are assassinated by gunmen.
- Congress passes the Gun Control Act. Among its provisions, the law strengthens the firearms licensing process to limit foreign and interstate transport of firearms, prohibits the interstate shipment of pistols and revolvers to private individuals, and forbids certain criminals, the mentally incompetent, and drug addicts from shipping or receiving weapons through interstate commerce, and firearms dealers are prohibited from knowingly selling weapons to these categories of people.
- 1972 The Internal Revenue Service's Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms Division receives bureau status in the Department of the Treasury, but does not receive status as an independent regulatory agency, leaving it more open to political attacks.
- 1980 In *Lewis v. United States*, the U.S. Supreme Court upholds a lower court conviction under a provision of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, which prohibits any person convicted by a federal or state court of a felony from possessing a firearm. The Court rules that Congress acted reasonably when it determined that a convicted felon should be prohibited from dealing in or possessing firearms, even if the conviction occurred without the benefit of counsel.
- 1981 The Village of Morton Grove, Illinois, receives national attention when it passes an ordinance to regulate the possession of firearms "and other dangerous weapons." No person may possess a handgun, unless it has been made permanently inoperative.
- In *Quilici v. Village of Morton Grove*, a U.S. Circuit Court affirms the constitutionality of the Morton Grove ordinance. The court rules that local governments with home rule charters have the right to govern their own affairs.
- 1982 Inspired by the firearm ban enacted in Morton Grove, Illinois, in 1981, the city council of Kennesaw, Georgia, a small town north of Atlanta, passes an ordinance to require residents to keep firearms in their homes.
- 1986 President Ronald Reagan signs the Firearms Owners Protection (McClure-Volkmer) Act, which limits various provisions of the Gun Control Act of 1968. The act permits the sale of ammunition through the mail, allows weapons dealers to resume the interstate sale of rifles and shotguns, and relieves ammunition dealers of record-keeping requirements. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (BATF) is prohibited from centralizing records and from establishing a firearms registration system. Focusing on the misuse of firearms, the law requires mandatory penalties for such misuse.
- 1988 Congress passes the Undetectable Firearms Act, which bans the manufacture, importation, receipt, and transfer of plastic and ceramic guns that X-ray machines and magnetometers cannot detect. The law requires firearms to contain a minimum of 3.7 ounces of metal to make them detectable.
- 1989 Following a shooting incident at a Stockton, California, elementary school, in which a man wielding a Chinese-made AK-47 killed several children, the California legislature passes the Roberti-Roos Assault Weapons Act, which is the first statute in the United States to ban the sale, possession, or manufacture of semi-automatic, military style firearms.

- 1992 A standoff between Randy Weaver and federal government officers occurs at Ruby Ridge, Idaho. After Weaver tries to sell two sawed-off shotguns to a government informant, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) tries to recruit Weaver as an informant. He refuses. The resulting standoff leads to the death of a U.S. Marshall and Weaver's wife and son. The event heightens the suspicions that more extreme groups have about federal government firearms policy.
- 1993 Federal agents conduct a raid on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, because the members of the religious group are suspected of weapons violations. Four BATF agents and six Branch Davidians die in the initial assault. After a 51-day siege, the compound is assaulted with tanks and tear gas. Seventy-five people, including 20 children, die in a fire apparently set by group members. The incident lowers the prestige of the BATF and increases the hatred some extremist groups have for the federal government.
- 1994 Congress passes the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act, which establishes a temporary five-day waiting period before individuals may purchase a handgun to run a background check to discover if potential purchasers are disqualified from owning a handgun.
- Congress passes the Assault Weapons Ban Act, which prohibits the sale, manufacture, importation, or possession of 19 types of assault weapons.
- 1995 In *United States v. Lopez*, the U.S. Supreme Court affirms an appeals court reversal of a conviction based on the Gun-Free School Zones Act of 1990. Basing its decision on an interpretation of Congress's commerce power, the Court disallows the measure that made it a federal crime to knowingly possess a firearm within a public, parochial, or private school, or in a zone within 1,000 feet of school grounds.
- 1996 Maryland enacts a one-gun-per-month statute, which limits an individual to purchasing no more than one gun in a 30-day period. The legislative success of the statute inspires gun control advocates to push for a similar law on the national level.
- 1997 In *Printz v. United States*, the U.S. Supreme Court declares unconstitutional a provision of the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act that requires chief law enforcement officers in local jurisdictions to perform background checks on prospective handgun purchasers. Speaking for the majority, Justice Antonin Scalia states that Congress violated the constitutional system of state sovereignty by compelling states to enforce a federal regulatory program.
- 1998 A National Instant Check System (NICS) goes into effect on November 30, in which gun dealers must consult a computerized background check system to determine whether a prospective handgun purchaser is disqualified from owning a firearm. The National Rifle Association (NRA) quickly files a suit against the operation of the system, claiming that records are being kept illegally.
- The Supreme Court rules in *Caron v. United States* that a felon may have the right to own firearms restored under federal law only if a state confers the right to own all types of firearms.
- Two boys, aged 11 and 13, are arrested in Jonesboro, Arkansas, for shooting and killing four fellow students and one teacher, and wounding 11 others at the Westside Middle School. The incident sparks renewed debates about gun control.

- 1999 A jury in New York finds in favor of a handgun victim against several firearms manufacturers. Given the potential significance of the ruling for manufacturers, the decision is expected to be appealed.

Two students, aged 17 and 18, enter their high school in Littleton, Colorado, with automatic weapons, sawed-off shotguns, and homemade bombs, killing 12 students, one teacher, and themselves. The incident and its aftermath receive nationwide coverage, opening a debate over the need for additional gun control measures.

President Bill Clinton proposes several gun control measures, including the reimposition of a waiting period to purchase a firearm, a prohibition on gun ownership for those under 21 years of age, and the establishment of penalties, including imprisonment and fines, for adults who give children access to firearms.

Although the U.S. Senate approves stronger gun control legislation, a coalition of conservative Republicans and Democrats defeat a considerably weakened measure in the U.S. House of Representatives. While rejecting a proposal to require labeling entertainment products with violent content, the House approves a measure allowing the posting of the Ten Commandments in schools and government buildings.

To counter cities such as Boston and San Francisco, which have initiated lawsuits against gun manufacturers and dealers to recover the costs of gun violence, the National Rifle Association lobbies state legislatures to limit the authority of local governments to file such suits.

- 2000 Pro-gun control activists organize the Million Mom March, a grassroots rally held in Washington DC on Mother's Day to support stronger gun laws. The rally attracts about 700,000 people. The MMM organization works to institutionalize its efforts, but enthusiasm ebbs, and while the MMM organization continues, it is combined with the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence.

Republican Texas Governor George W. Bush is elected president in the close and disputed 2000 presidential election. Bush defeats Vice President and Democratic nominee Al Gore. Gore supports stronger gun laws, whereas Bush wins the endorsement of the National Rifle Association. Bush proves to be the most gun-friendly president in modern history.

- 2001 President Bush's Attorney General, former Missouri Republican Senator John Ashcroft, sends a letter to the National Rifle Association in which he endorses the individualist interpretation of the Second Amendment's right to bear arms. The statement represents a change in Justice Department policy extending back to the 1930s accepting the militia-based interpretation of the amendment.

The United States is attacked by Islam extremist terrorists on September 11. The two World Trade Center towers in New York City are destroyed, and the Pentagon is also damaged as nineteen terrorists take over civilian airplanes to use them as missiles against targets. The attacks prompt Americans to purchase more guns in the months after the attack.

A three judge federal panel from the US Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit becomes the first federal court in American history to accept the individualist interpretation of the Second Amendment in the case of *United States v. Emerson*. Despite the ruling, the court fails to apply the right to the defendant in the case, who is eventually convicted of violating a federal gun law.

- 2004 Congress fails to reenact the federal ban on assault weapons, first enacted in 1994. Under the terms of the law, Congress had to act affirmatively for the law's provisions to continue. The lapsing of the law also again makes legal civilian ownership of large capacity ammunition clips.
- 2005 Congress enacts the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act, which bars civil suits against gun manufacturers, distributors, dealers, and importers of firearms and ammunition. Enactment of the law had been the top legislative priority of the National Rifle Association.
- 2006 New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Boston Mayor Thomas Menino form Mayors Against Illegal Guns, organized to track and curtail illegal gun trafficking from states with lax gun laws into urban areas. In four years, the organization attracts over 300 mayors to join the organization.
- 2007 A mentally unstable graduate student at Virginia Tech State University uses two legally acquired handguns to shoot and kill thirty-two students and faculty before killing himself, making this the worst gun massacre in modern history. The shooting prompted states to improve the accumulation and reporting of data concerning those unqualified to own guns by virtue of mental problems. In a rare moment of bipartisanship, gun control and gun rights groups combine to support enactment of a federal law to fund and more strongly regulate state reporting of data.
- 2008 The Supreme Court rules 5-4 in the case of *District of Columbia v. Heller* that the Second Amendment's right to bear arms protects a personal or individual right of citizens to possess handguns for personal self-protection in the home. The case arises as a challenge to DC's strict handgun law (DC is under federal control). The ruling reverses past court rulings which interpreted the amendment to protect a militia-based right, and becomes the first time in history that a gun law under federal jurisdiction is struck down as a violation of the Second Amendment.
- Five students on the campus of Northern Illinois University are shot and killed and eleven injured by a former student who entered a large lecture class and started shooting. This and the Virginia Tech shootings in 2007 prompt campuses to increase their security measures.
- Illinois Democratic Senator Barack Obama is elected president. Gun rights groups oppose his election and spend heavily in support of his opponent, Republican Senator John McCain from Arizona. Despite a past record in favor of stronger gun laws, Obama also voices support for Second Amendment rights. To the dismay of gun control groups, during his administration Obama avoids championing stronger gun measures.
- 2009 As part of a large spending bill, Congress includes a provision to allow Amtrak train passengers to carry unloaded guns in their luggage, with ammunition to be carried in separate, secure wooden or metal boxes.
- Congress approves a measure to allow people to carry loaded weapons in national parks. The measure is enacted in 2010 despite opposition from parks officials, conservationists, and law enforcement.

- 2010 The Supreme Court rules in *McDonald v. Chicago* that the Second Amendment's right to bear arms now applies to the states through the process of "incorporation," by which portions of the Bill of Rights are applied to the states. This ruling endorses the Court's earlier interpretation of the Second Amendment in the 2008 *Heller* case, and is the product of the same 5-4 vote as *Heller*.
- 2011 Arizona Democratic Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords was shot in the head during a constituent "Congress on Your Corner" meet-and-greet in front of a supermarket in Tucson. Giffords survived the shooting, but six others were killed, including a federal judge, and twelve others were wounded. The shooter, Jared Lee Loughner, has a history of mental problems, but legally purchased the handgun he used.
- A gunman firing an automatic weapon shot and killed seven people and wounded fifteen others before killing himself at a shopping mall near Amsterdam in the Netherlands. No obvious motive explained the shooting.
- 2012 An African American teenager, Trayvon Martin, visiting his father in Sanford, Florida was shot and killed by a neighborhood watch volunteer, George Zimmerman, who apparently mistook the teen for a possible thief. In 2013, Zimmerman was acquitted of murder.
- A disturbed former graduate student entered a movie theater at a shopping mall in Aurora, Colorado shortly after the start of a midnight showing of the latest Batman movie, *The Dark Knight Rises*, and started shooting with an assault weapon and another gun. He rapidly killed twelve and injured 70. In 2015, the shooter was sentenced to life without parole.
- The movie theater shooting briefly pushed the gun issue into the presidential campaign then unfolding between incumbent Democratic President Barack Obama and his Republican challenger, Mitt Romney. By and large, however, guns and gun violence played little role in the election.
- In December, a severely disturbed young man entered the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut where he killed 20 schoolchildren and six adult staff members with an assault weapon before killing himself. Before entering the school, he also murdered his mother as she slept. This shooting shocked and outraged the nation in a way few such shootings had. Within days, President Obama convened a task force, headed by Vice President Joe Biden, to produce policy recommendations.
- 2013 In January, Vice President Biden's task force issued its report, calling for universal background checks for all gun purchases, restrictions on assault weapons and high capacity bullet magazines, mental health and school safety initiatives, and other measures. The proposals were sent to Congress, but were defeated in several floor votes in the Senate (the House of Representatives did not take up the measures). Congress would take up no other gun measures for the balance of Obama's presidency.
- In the months after the shooting, over a dozen states enacted tougher gun laws. Over 30 states enacted measures to weaken their existing gun laws.
- A civilian contractor entered the Washington, D.C. Naval Yard with a shotgun and proceeded to kill twelve people and injure three others. The shooter, referred to in news reports as "delusional," was killed at the scene.

- 2014 The “Black Lives Matter” movement becomes a national movement in the aftermath of the police shooting of an unarmed eighteen-year old man, Michael Brown, by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. Brown, who had stolen some cigars from a local store, had some kind of encounter with the police officer before he gave Brown chase, resulting in the death of Brown. The officer was found not guilty of wrongdoing.
- 2015 A young white man who identified with white extremism entered a predominantly African American church in Charleston, South Carolina, and after sitting with a Bible study group for an hour, pulled out a gun and fatally shot nine people.
- A husband and wife of Middle Eastern ethnicity entered an office building in San Bernardino, California, where the man had worked, and opened fire on those present, killing 14 and wounding 22. After an intensive hunt, the two were killed in a gun battle by the police. The two had apparently been radicalized, although neither apparently had specific ties to radical Islamist groups.
- 2016 The gun issue intrudes on the presidential campaign. Democratic contender and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton expressed support for stronger gun laws and used the issue to criticize her primary opponent, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, who had a background of opposing some stronger gun laws. Republican presidential candidates uniformly opposed stronger gun laws.
- An American-born man who pledged allegiance to the Middle Eastern terrorist group ISIS entered a predominantly gay nightclub in Orlando Florida where he shot and killed 49 people, and wounded 53 others. After a three hour stand-off, police entered the nightclub, killing the shooter.