In June, four months after 17 of their classmates and teachers were killed by a former student armed with a semi-automatic rifle, students and recent graduates of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., took to the road.

Their first stops on a nationwide, summerlong bus tour: Chicago and its suburbs, where they recounted the horrors of Feb. 14 to large crowds and urged young people to support candidates for office who back tougher gun laws.

“This issue affects every community, and we're all fighting for our lives,” said Ryan Deitsch, a Parkland student. “We'll make our voices heard, register young people to vote, get them to the polls and change America's gun policies so that these senseless tragedies stop.”

The students’ activism — coupled with public revulsion at a series of mass shootings over the last year — has spurred many businesses and government officials to adopt gun restrictions that seemed unlikely in the recent past. Indeed, gun control advocates are hoping the Parkland shooting marks an inflection point in their longtime fight to change Americans’ relationship with firearms.

“There's something qualitatively different about what happened [in Parkland] and about the response of the youth in Parkland,” says Michael Siegel, a professor in the Community Health Sciences Department at Boston University who studies gun violence. “I don't think it's going to die away.”

But many analysts are skeptical Congress will tighten gun laws, and gun-rights supporters, including the National Rifle Association (NRA), say that’s a good thing.
“As heartwarming as it is to see high school students organize anti-gun marches, they are no more likely to be successful in busting the NRA narrative . . . than the parents of Columbine and Sandy Hook,” wrote Bill Scher, a political analyst for Politico Magazine, referring to earlier school shootings that killed a total of 39 students and staff plus three shooters. “The gun-rights community is steeled against succumbing to sympathetic victims, as they have convinced themselves that they are above the politics of knee-jerk emotion.”

“We don’t need more laws regulating pieces of metal,” says Stephen Halbrook, a senior fellow at the Independent Institute, a conservative think tank in Oakland, Calif. “It’s human violence. People do things, and they use all kinds of tools.”

Despite the skepticism, gun control supporters say their movement has scored some striking wins since the Parkland tragedy:

- Dick’s Sporting Goods, a Fortune 500 retail chain, has stopped selling assault-style rifles and high-capacity ammunition magazines and is destroying its existing stocks to prevent manufacturers from redistributing the guns to other retailers.

- Slide Fire Solutions, a Texas company that invented the bump stock and is its primary manufacturer, said it would stop making the device, which enables semi-automatic rifles to fire like automatic ones. Bump stocks were used to kill 58 concert-goers and wound more than 500 in Las Vegas in October.

- The banking giant Citigroup said it would require its retail clients to stop selling high-capacity magazines, bump stocks or any firearms to people younger than 21 or who have not passed a state or federal background check. Bank of America said it would stop lending to manufacturers of the AR-15 and other semi-automatic rifles.

- United Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Hertz Corp., Alamo Rent A Car and MetLife ended special discounts and benefits for NRA members.

Gun control advocates also point to developments in several states traditionally opposed to gun control.

In Florida, Republican Gov. Rick Scott signed a bill passed by the GOP-controlled Legislature that raised the legal age to buy a rifle from 18 to 21; banned bump stocks; imposed a three-day waiting period for all gun purchases; and made it easier for police to seize weapons and ammunition from people deemed a threat, while also enabling school districts to arm teachers.

In Vermont, Republican Gov. Phil Scott signed legislation passed by the Democratic-controlled Legislature that banned high-capacity magazines, outlawed bump stocks, increased the gun-purchase age to 21 and required background checks on all gun sales.

And in GOP-controlled Oklahoma, Republican Gov. Mary Fallin vetoed legislation to allow firearms to be carried without a permit.

A growing number of candidates — mostly Democrats but also some Republicans — are running as supporters of gun control and opponents of the NRA, including in such gun-friendly states as Montana, Georgia, Alabama and Kentucky.

But the NRA remains steadfast. After the Parkland shooting, the group renewed its opposition to most gun control proposals and accused the media of loving mass shootings because they increase audience size.

Gun control advocates “don’t care about our schoolchildren,” NRA Chief Executive Wayne LaPierre declared in mid-February, stressing that government must do far more to protect schools. “Evil walks among us. And God help us if we don’t harden our schools and protect our kids.”

School shootings have kept the gun control issue in the public eye. Three weeks before the Parkland shooting, a gunman killed two students and wounded 14 other people at Marshall County High School in Benton, Ky. On May 18, a shooter killed eight students and two staff members at Santa Fe High School in Texas and wounded 10 more. “It’s been happening everywhere,” Santa Fe student Paige Curry, 17, said afterward. “I’ve always kind of felt like eventually it was going to happen here, too.”

Other mass shootings also have attracted considerable attention, including the Las Vegas massacre — the deadliest in modern U.S. history — and the killing of five Capital Gazette staff members at the newspaper’s office in Annapolis, Md., on June 28.

The three mass school shootings so far this year are the most since 1997, according to James Alan Fox, a professor of criminology, law and public policy at
Northeastern University in Boston. There also have been more than 140 mass shootings during the first six months of this year that were not on school grounds.

Definitions of “mass shooting” vary, but among the most commonly used are a shooting incident in which at least four people die — or, more broadly, at least four people are wounded — not counting the shooter, not involving another crime and not involving gang warfare.

Despite the intense attention generated by a mass shooting, just 1 percent of gun deaths occur in such incidents, about the same proportion as deaths from accidental shootings. Suicides accounted for 61 percent of all shooting deaths in 2016 and homicides 35 percent. Overall, the number of firearm-related deaths in the United States rose between 2008 and 2016, from 31,593 to 38,658, fueled primarily by an increase in the suicide rate, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported.

Polling indicates that gun ownership is falling out of favor with the public but remains popular with a sizable minority of Americans. According to a CBS News poll in 2016, 36 percent of U.S. households had at least one gun, down from 46 percent in 2012 and 53 percent in 1994. It is the lowest level since CBS began asking the question in 1978. A drop in background checks indicated that the number of guns sold nationwide also fell in 2017, after rising steadily since 2010.

Researchers at Harvard and Northeastern universities, meanwhile, found that 3 percent of American adults owned half of the country’s privately held guns. This 3 percent had an average of 17 guns each, according to the study.

Congress routinely refuses to tighten gun laws despite the overwhelming public support for some measures: Two-thirds of Americans back banning the sale of assault weapons, and 97 percent support background checks for all gun buyers, according to a February poll by Quinnipiac University.

But neither proposal has passed Congress since an earlier assault-weapons ban expired in 2004, partly because of partisan divisions in both chambers and effective lobbying by pro-gun groups.

Gun owners are more likely to take political action to promote their views than those who don’t own guns, according to a 2017 Pew Research Center survey. The poll found that 21 percent of gun owners have contacted a public official about gun policy and 28 percent have donated to an organization that takes a position on gun issues. Among nonowners, those figures are 12 percent and 10 percent, respectively.

Experts also cite the NRA’s effectiveness in representing firearm owners who oppose gun control. The organization, which claims nearly 5 million paid members, consistently highlights perceived threats to gun ownership through its streaming network called NRATV, its media appearances and its lobbying campaigns. The NRA spent $5.1 million on lobbying in 2017, compared with just $1.9 million by groups advocating gun control, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, a research group that tracks political spending.

By contrast, passion for gun control in the immediate days after a mass shooting rises and then tends to fade,
saying Jaclyn Schildkraut, assistant professor in the Department of Public Justice at the State University of New York, Oswego. “People stick their heads in the sand and, when something happens, they pop up and run around a few days,” she says, “and then they put their heads back in the sand until the next shooting happens.”

David French, a senior fellow at the National Review Institute, a conservative think tank in New York City, said the gun control movement’s problems run deeper than a short attention span. Its supporters, he said, are condescending toward gun owners and fail to understand why Americans want firearms.

“The individual decision to purchase and carry a gun isn’t rooted in some sort of strange gun fetish or Wild West swagger,” French said, “but rather in the fundamental desire (and right) to protect your loved ones from harm. If arguments for gun control don’t grapple with this reality, then they’re destined to fail.”

Gun control advocates dismiss arguments that guns are needed for self-protection.

“The best research shows what common sense tells us: More guns mean more crime and more death,” wrote Devin Hughes, founder of the gun control advocacy group GVPedia, and Mark Bryant, executive director of Gun Violence Archive, which tracks gun violence. “Gun possession significantly increases your risk of being killed by someone you know.”

As researchers, advocacy groups and lawmakers debate gun violence, here are some of the questions they are asking:

Are recent mass shootings increasing the likelihood of stronger gun control laws?

With each mass shooting, gun control advocates think the time for significant government action has arrived. And each time, they ask how such a tragedy could lead to little or no action.

That question was asked with particular poignancy after 20-year-old Adam Lanza shot 20 young children and six staff members at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., on Dec. 21, 2012. If the slaughter of 6- and 7-year-olds did not spur significant gun control action, would anything?

But gun control supporters suggest this time is different, citing the post-Parkland actions by businesses and traditionally gun-friendly state governments, the dogged activism of the Parkland survivors and growing public support for gun control.

The difference between Parkland and Sandy Hook is that “6- and 7-year-olds can’t talk about it, whereas the high school students can,” Boston University’s Siegel says. “The survivors of this [Parkland] massacre are out and about and speaking about having been through this experience, and they are not letting this go away.”

The students’ activism does not surprise Mary Kusler, who heads the National Education Association’s (NEA) political activities. Students played key roles in the civil rights and anti-war movements in the 20th century, she says. Students today are “not waiting for permission, not waiting for someone to tell them it’s OK to do something. They’re singularly focused on moving forward, dogged in their determination to make a difference in the world.”

After last fall’s Las Vegas massacre when a gunman killed 58 and wounded hundreds more, a CNN survey
found that 52 percent of Americans wanted stricter gun laws. After Parkland, that grew to 70 percent, the highest since 1993. In a Washington Post-ABC News poll conducted in February, three-quarters of Americans said Congress was not doing enough to prevent mass shootings.20

Pro-gun groups acknowledge the rising support for stricter laws but say it’s too soon to know whether this is a temporary phenomenon.

“Sometimes after a notorious crime, new laws are enacted, especially if they can be rushed through immediately,” says David Kopel, research director at the libertarian Independence Institute in Denver, which backs gun rights. “But nothing seems to fundamentally change in the long term.”

The support for more laws is “ludicrous” because police failed to enforce those laws already on the books, the Independent Institute’s Halbrook says. People should not “blame law-abiding gun owners” for authorities’ failures to pick up on warning signs the Parkland shooter sent out, he says.

Similarly, the NRA sent members an “Emergency Alert” that proclaimed: “Don’t Let Them Blame You For Parkland.” Support for the organization soared in the shooting’s immediate aftermath, with February contributions to the group more than triple January donations.21

Shortly after the shooting, U.S. Rep. Steve Scalise of Louisiana, the Republican whip, noted the “breakdowns in existing laws” that enabled the Parkland shooter to buy guns and avoid detection of his plans. The FBI, for example, had received tips that the suspect was acting erratically and threatening to kill people but did not act.

“Before people talk about putting new laws on the books, when we find out that multiple laws on the books were not followed, [enforcing existing laws] should be the first thing we figure out,” said Scalise, who was severely wounded by a shooter at a congressional baseball practice last year. The suspect had obtained guns legally because his misdemeanor arrests were not covered by Illinois firearms laws and a battery charge, which would have been covered, was dropped.22

Lawmakers in Vermont, a state with a strong hunting tradition, approved new gun restrictions because they saw that “public opinion is changing in Vermont,” said Eric Davis, an emeritus political science professor at Middlebury College.

But it was not just the Parkland shooting that brought about the change. The day after that shooting, Vermont Gov. Scott said he did not see a need for new gun legislation. He changed his mind a day later after a Vermont teenager was arrested and accused of planning a school shooting. The legislation passed a few days after hundreds of thousands of people attended March for Our Lives rallies in Washington, D.C., and across the country on March 24. In Vermont, 2,500 gathered on the state Capitol’s steps in Montpelier.

The turnabout on gun control disappointed John Rodgers, a Democratic state senator and gun owner from a rural district, who voted against the restrictions. “Maybe it is over,” he said. “Maybe the Vermont I grew up with is over, and it’s changed.”23

Congress also acted, passing the Fix NICS Act, gun control legislation that was supported even by the NRA. The law is designed to get more names into the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), a database of people with criminal records or documented mental health issues that make them ineligible to buy guns from federally licensed dealers and dealers without federal licenses in some states. Other dealers and private sales are not covered by federally mandated background checks.24

Other factors, such as demographics, also are boosting gun control efforts, analysts say. Since 2000,
suburban and urban populations have grown 16 percent and 13 percent, respectively, while rural populations increased just 3 percent.25 Asked by the Pew Research Center last year whether it is more important to protect gun-ownership rights or to control gun ownership, 63 percent of rural residents picked rights, while 62 percent of urban residents said control. Suburbanites split almost evenly on the question.26

Student activism could further boost gun control efforts, according to some observers. More than 400 volunteers registered voters during the Washington rally, and registration occurred at many other demonstration sites.27

Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, who studies youth voting as director of the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University in Medford, Mass., termed this the most sustained effort to register young people since 1972, after the voting age was lowered to 18 from 21. Parkland students and other activists are urging young voters to make their voices heard on Election Day.

“By voting in the midterms, I will choose to vote for senators and representatives who do not support the NRA,” said Kira Pomeranz, a senior at T.C. Williams High School in Alexandria, Va., who turns 18 in August.28

Should a state’s concealed-carry gun license be honored in every state?

The NRA has declared “concealed-carry reciprocity” to be its top federal legislative priority, and such a bill passed the House last December.29

But the legislation has stalled in the Senate, at least in part because of reaction to the Parkland shooting, according to Rep. Richard Hudson, R-N.C., the chief House sponsor of the bill. “Talking to pro-Second Amendment senators, I think there was just a sense that the timing was bad and that we’d have a better chance if we waited,” he said, referring to senators who argue the Constitution’s Second Amendment forbids almost all gun controls, a position that is rejected by others.30

The House-passed measure would require states to honor concealed-carry permits issued by other states, even if those states have less-stringent permitting processes. It also would permit concealed carry in national parks and on other federal lands and would allow off-duty or retired law enforcement officers with permits to carry concealed weapons in school zones.31

Both sides are debating the issue on constitutional and practical grounds.

Opponents — including many law enforcement officials — say passage would increase gun violence and represent an unconstitutional increase of the federal government’s power over the states. Supporters — including some law enforcement officials — argue that the federal government has the authority to enforce the constitutional right to bear arms and that the legislation would uphold gun owners’ rights to self-defense.

In an April letter to congressional leaders, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, which represents 18,000 U.S. police departments, called the bill “a dangerous encroachment on individual state efforts to protect public safety.” It also would “effectively nullify duly enacted state laws and hamper law enforcement efforts to prevent gun violence.”32

Earlier, 23 Republican state attorneys general asked Congress to pass the legislation because “the citizen interest in self-defense, supported and protected by the Second Amendment, is called into serious question by such blanket refusals to permit carrying firearms in self-defense outside the home or to allow nonresident visitors to carry concealed weapons.”33

Gun owners had more than 8 million concealed-carry permits in 2011, according to the most recent statistics compiled by the U.S. Government Accountability Office. Florida, Georgia, Pennsylvania and Texas had issued the most, more than 500,000 each. The greatest concentrations of permits — more than 10 percent of the adult population — were in Georgia, Iowa, South Dakota and Utah.34

All states and D.C. allow concealed-carry, but provisions vary widely. A dozen states do not require a permit to carry concealed guns. In 30 states and the District of Columbia, virtually anyone can obtain a permit (called a “shall-issue” permit) with a few exceptions, such as convicted felons. Eight states give authorities discretion to consider additional factors when issuing permits (called “may-issue” permits), such as whether an applicant can demonstrate good character or the need to carry a concealed firearm. Some states require training and proof of proficiency with the firearm. In Massachusetts, all gun owners must obtain a permit from their local police chief.35
Those differences are at the heart of the opposition to the NRA’s push for “reciprocity.”

Texas, for instance, requires proof of training and proficiency. Until a similarly strong national standard exists, Houston Police Chief Art Acevedo said, “we should not be forced to accept reciprocity with places where any buffoon who has a pulse gets to carry a gun.”36 Disagreeing with the chief, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, a Republican, signed the attorneys general letter in support of the bill.

Massachusetts has the nation’s lowest per-capita rate of gun deaths, 3.4 per 100,000 residents, which Boston Police Commissioner William Evans attributes to the state’s strict gun laws. The worst rate — 23 per 100,000, nearly seven times Massachusetts’ rate — belongs to Alaska, which allows concealed carry without a permit.37

Boston University’s Siegel says research supports Evans’ position. Homicide rates are 6 percent lower in states with stricter rules than those with more-permissive regulations, he says.

Opponents also argue that the bill is unconstitutional, based on the Supreme Court’s decision in May striking down the federal ban on sports gambling. The court ruled that federal lawmakers could not order states to ban sports gambling because Congress had not established a national standard for such betting, according to Eric Tirschwell, director of litigation and national enforcement policy at Everytown for Gun Safety, which advocates stronger gun laws.

Writing for the court majority, Justice Samuel Alito said that “conspicuously absent from the list of powers given to Congress is the power to issue direct orders to the governments of the States.” Similarly, said Tirschwell, who is a former federal prosecutor, because Congress has not established a national concealed-carry standard, it cannot require one state to honor another’s permit.38

But the Independent Institute’s Halbrook argues that “Congress has the authority to enforce constitutional rights,” including the Second Amendment right to bear arms.

Reciprocity legislation also is enabled by Congress’ constitutional authority to regulate interstate commerce, which includes interstate travel, says the Independence Institute’s Kopel. People who carry a gun for self-defense might avoid travel to states if they cannot take their firearm with them, he says.

“The need to be prepared for self-defense is especially acute when one is traveling in a different state,” he testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee in December. “At home, one will be familiar with the relative safety of different parts of town at different times of the day. A visitor will not have such familiarity, and could more easily end up in a dangerous area.”39

When the bill passed the House, Chris Cox, the NRA’s chief lobbyist, called it “a watershed moment for Second Amendment rights” and the “culmination of a...
30-year movement recognizing the right of all law-abiding Americans to defend themselves, and their loved ones, including when they cross state lines." \(^{40}\)

### Should a background check be required for every gun transfer?

President Trump’s signing of a $1.3 trillion federal spending bill on March 23 was notable in part for a non-spending provision — the Fix NICS Act of 2018. The law stiffens requirements that federal agencies report to the database the names of people with criminal records or documented mental health issues that make them potentially violent. It also provides financial incentives for states to do so.

Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, introduced the legislation in the Senate last November, shortly after a gunman killed 26 people at a church in Sutherland Springs, Texas. While in the Air Force, the suspect, Devin Patrick Kelley, had been convicted of assaulting his wife and stepson, which should have prevented him from purchasing the rifle he used in the attack. But the Air Force failed to report the conviction to NICS, as it is required to do under federal law. \(^{41}\)

Before he killed 32 people and himself at Virginia Tech in 2007, student Seung-Hui Cho had passed background checks because the state failed to report his mental illness to NICS as it was required to do under state law. \(^{42}\)

Although gun control advocates support the new Fix NICS law, they say it falls short of what is needed.

“If all Congress does in response to the Parkland shooting is to pass the Fix NICS bill, it would be an abject failure and a dereliction of our duty,” said Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer, D-N.Y. The government should conduct universal checks that would cover all gun sales, he said. \(^{43}\)

Lindsay Nichols, a lawyer with the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, in San Francisco, agreed. Universal checks “may be the single most important gun-violence prevention measure that the government could adopt,” she said. “This loophole [of not covering all gun transfers] means that dangerous criminals and dangerously mentally ill individuals have almost unfettered access to firearms.” \(^{44}\)

The 2017 survey by researchers at Harvard and Northeastern universities found that 22 percent of gun owners who had acquired a firearm in the previous two years had purchased the gun without a background check or had received it as a gift or inheritance with no check required. \(^{45}\)

“There’s a lot of evidence that policies that help to keep guns out of the hands of people who are of danger [to themselves or others] do save lives,” Siegel of Boston University says. “The solution is not so much the guns themselves. It’s controlling who has the guns — making sure law-abiding citizens can have access to them but people who have a history of violence, or for some reason are at high risk of violence, shouldn’t have access.”

Researchers concluded, for instance, that Connecticut’s law requiring gun buyers to get permits and undergo background checks helped lead to a 40 percent drop in gun homicides and a 15 percent decline in suicides. After Missouri repealed a similar law in 2007, researchers said gun murders rose 23 percent and suicides 16 percent. \(^{46}\)

Cornyn, a longtime gun-rights supporter, said he would consider expanding checks beyond federally licensed dealers but not to sales by private individuals.

“If somebody’s in the business of selling firearms, then I believe they should be covered,” he said. \(^{47}\)
The NRA opposes expanding the current system, saying universal background checks would “criminalize the private transfer of a firearm between lifelong friends and even family members. Further, criminals will never submit to such a system so it will never truly be ‘universal.’”

Dean Rieck, executive director of the Buckeye Firearms Association, a pro-gun advocacy group in Ohio, says universal checks would “infringe on private property. If you and I are neighbors and I have a shotgun and I want to sell it to you, universal background checks would stop that (without a check). I couldn’t even give it to my son.”

Halbrook, of the Independent Institute, says Congress can regulate federally licensed gun dealers, but “the federal government doesn’t have constitutional authority over local sales.” The proposals also “bring up another problem with over criminalization,” he says. “What makes it a crime for law-abiding people to sell guns to each other?”

Some gun-rights supporters say existing checks are already too stringent.

Jacob Sullum, a senior editor for the libertarian Reason magazine, complained that the current system already “blocks gun sales to people based on criteria that are unfairly and irrationally broad. Congress has decreed that any felony punishable by more than a year in prison, no matter how long ago it was committed and regardless of whether it involved violence, is enough to strip someone of the fundamental right to armed self-defense. So is any record of court-mandated psychiatric treatment, even if the involuntary patient never posed a threat to anyone else.”

Gun control supporters say those who fail a background check can file an appeal on the NICS website. Background checks, when conducted properly, can keep guns away from individuals with a propensity to violence, Nichols said. “Background checks have a huge deterrent effect,” she said. “People who are ineligible to buy a gun are unlikely to try if they know they are going to be subjected to a background check.”

BACKGROUND
“A Well Regulated Militia”

In myth and reality, guns have played a major role in U.S. history. Popular novels, films and television shows tell stories about pistol-packing cowboys, rifle-toting mountain men and armed cops battling gangsters armed with machine guns.

Before the Revolution, the American colonies adopted a mishmash of gun policies. White men were required to serve in the militia and to supply their weapon, but nonwhites were forbidden to have firearms. As early as 1637, the Massachusetts Bay Colony seized guns and ammunition from about 100 colonists suspected of religious heresy. Colonial Georgia required men to bring their guns to church but later banned arms during services.

After the Revolution, the Founders feared standing armies and worried that, without constitutional restraints, the federal government could emulate European kings’ penchant for waging war. Those fears of a professional military, according to historians, helped lead to adoption of the Second Amendment, which declares: “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.”

In the early 19th century, Kentucky, Louisiana, Indiana, Georgia, Tennessee, Virginia and Alabama — which would later become fervently pro-gun — barred individuals from carrying concealed weapons. A few states banned guns at educational institutions.
# CHRONOLOGY

**1870s-1930s** *First federal gun laws are enacted.*

1871 Concerned by the poor shooting skills of Union soldiers, two Civil War officers found the National Rifle Association (NRA) to teach marksmanship.

1891 In what may be America’s first school mass shooting, a man firing a shotgun wounds 14, mostly children, in Liberty, Miss.

1894 First federal gun law requires registration of machine guns, silencers and sawed-off shotguns.

1934 U.S. Supreme Court upholds the 1934 controls, saying the Second Amendment only protects the rights of those with a “reasonable relationship” to militias.

**1960s-1990s** *Gun laws stiffen amid assassinations, mass shootings.*

1963 Using a mail-order rifle, Lee Harvey Oswald assassinates President John F. Kennedy in Dallas.

1966 University of Texas student Charles Whitman fatally shoots 15 people from the campus’ clock tower.

1968 After the assassinations of civil-rights leaders Martin Luther King Jr. and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, D-N.Y., Congress restricts the shipment and sales of firearms and ammunition.

1976 Washington, D.C., stops registering handguns, effectively outlawing those not already registered.

1977 Strict gun control opponents elected to leadership of the NRA.

1981 John Hinckley Jr. critically wounds President Ronald Reagan, press secretary James Brady and two others. Brady and his wife, Sarah, become prominent gun control advocates.

1986 Congress repeals the 1968 ban on the interstate shipment of firearms and limits federal inspections of gun dealers.

1993 Legislation named for James Brady requires federally licensed dealers to conduct background checks of buyers and imposes a five-day waiting period on handgun purchases.

1994 Ten-year ban begins on semi-automatic rifles with military-style features and on magazines holding more than 10 rounds.

1998 Computer-supported system enables “instant” background checks for handgun purchases, ending the waiting-period provision.

1999 Two Columbine High School students in Colorado kill 12 classmates and a teacher.

**2000-Present** *Gun laws are eased.*

2004 Congress allows the assault-weapons ban to expire. . . . States begin passing “stand-your-ground” laws, which allow people who believe they are in danger to shoot in self-defense.

2005 Federal legislation prohibits liability lawsuits against gun manufacturers when their weapons are used in crimes.

2008 Supreme Court overturns the D.C. ban on handguns, ruling for the first time that the Second Amendment protects individuals’ rights to possess firearms.


2015 Nine worshipers at the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, S.C., are shot to death.

2016 Gunman kills 49 at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Fla.

2017 Shooter kills 26 worshipers at the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas.

2018 Former student fatally shoots 17 students and teachers at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla. (February) . . . Parkland survivors begin a nationwide gun control campaign that draws wide support (March); gun-rights supporters hold small countermarches. (July) . . . Gunman kills five at a newspaper’s office in Annapolis, Md. (June).
Some Americans challenged gun laws on Second Amendment grounds, especially those laws restricting individuals' rights to carry guns in public, but most courts sided with the government and its right to set limits on the use of firearms. “It has . . . been generally held that the Legislatures can regulate the mode of carrying deadly weapons,” a Kansas state court wrote in 1905.53

First Mass Shootings

Many accounts of mass shootings in the United States begin with architectural engineering student Charles Whitman, who fatally shot 15 people from the 27-story clock tower at the University of Texas, Austin, on Aug. 1, 1966. But researchers at that university trace mass shootings back to at least March 28, 1891, when a man fired a double-barreled shotgun into a crowd of students and faculty at Parson Hall School in Liberty, Miss., wounding at least 14, mostly children.

The first mass killing identified by the Texas researchers occurred on Aug. 14, 1903, when former soldier Gilbert Twigg fatally shot nine and wounded 25 in Winfield, Kan. Other mass killings occurred in 1936, 1948, 1949 and 1956, according to the researchers.54

The St. Valentine’s Day Massacre — in which seven men, most of them mobsters, were killed on Feb. 14, 1929, in Chicago — would not appear on most mass-shootings lists because it was part of a gangster war. But those battles of the 1920s and ’30s — often fought with automatic weapons — led Congress in 1934 to pass the National Firearms Act taxed the manufacture or transfer of machine guns, gun silencers and sawed-off shotguns and rifles. The weapons also had to be registered with the Treasury Department.55

Four years later, Congress banned gun sales to fugitives and people under indictment for or convicted of violent crimes. The lawmakers also required gun manufacturers, importers and interstate dealers to be licensed by the federal government and to keep sales records.60

The Supreme Court upheld the 1934 law in 1939, declaring that the Second Amendment protects possession of weapons with a “reasonable relationship” to militias. In the 1930s, most states either forbade the carrying of concealed weapons or required a license to do so.57

1960s Assassinations

Gun control advocates demanded tougher laws after Lee Harvey Oswald used a mail-order rifle he obtained through an ad in the NRA’s American Rifleman magazine to assassinate President John F. Kennedy in 1963.58 But it took the University of Texas shooting and two more assassinations — of the slain president's brother Robert F. Kennedy and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968 — to produce legislation.

The Gun Control Act of 1968 banned the interstate shipment of firearms and ammunition to individuals; outlawed the sale of guns to fugitives, drug addicts, the mentally ill and convicted felons; stiffened licensing and record-keeping requirements for gun dealers and collectors; forbade the importation of some handguns; required serial numbers on all guns; and raised the legal age to purchase guns from federally licensed dealers to 21.59

President Lyndon Johnson had wanted more, including national registration of all firearms and federal licensing of all gun owners, but the NRA helped defeat tougher measures.60

The mid-1970s saw two developments that would play key roles in later gun control battles. The District of Columbia in 1976 stopped registering handguns, essentially outlawing guns that were not already registered. The policy survived two lower-court challenges, but the Supreme Court overturned it in 2008.

In the 5-4 decision, the court held in District of Columbia v. Heller that the Second Amendment protects individuals’ rights to possess firearms “for traditionally lawful purposes, such as self-defense within the home.” In citing that right, the justices said the Second Amendment’s reference to a “militia” is not confined to those serving in the military. But Justice John Paul Stevens argued in a dissent that the Second Amendment does not give individuals an unlimited right to possess guns for self-defense and that legislatures have authority to regulate the nonmilitary use of firearms.61

In 1977, NRA members who were unhappy with the organization’s compromises on gun control elected new leaders, who began to turn the organization into the pro-gun force it is today.

In 1981, John Hinckley Jr. — an obsessed fan of actress Jodie Foster who wanted to impress her by
Gun Control Advocates See Australia as a Model

When a 61-year-old Australian farmer fatally shot his wife, daughter, four grandchildren and himself in May, it was that nation’s worst mass shooting since 1996.¹

In contrast, the United States had 12 shootings that killed at least four people in the first half of this year alone and more than 140 incidents in which four or more people were shot but not necessarily killed.²

After the 1996 shooting in Port Arthur, Tasmania, in which a gunman killed 35 and wounded 23, Australia banned semi-automatic rifles, placed stiff controls on other rapid-fire weapons and confiscated almost 600,000 of the newly outlawed guns in a mandatory buy-back program.³

To buy a gun today, Australians must prove they need it, such as for farming or hunting; be an active member of a hunting or shooting organization, or be a documented collector; take firearms training and pass tests; have proper storage equipment; pass a background check; and wait at least 28 days to take possession. If a buyer fails to stay active in a shooting or hunting club, the organization must report that to the government.⁴

Gun control advocates frequently cite Australia — along with other affluent democracies with strong firearms restrictions — as a model for the United States. They note that Australians, like Americans, have a legacy of wielding guns when conquering a massive frontier.

“We know that other countries, in response to one mass shooting, have been able to craft laws that almost eliminate mass shootings,” then-President Barack Obama said in 2015. “Friends of ours, allies of ours — Great Britain, Australia, countries like ours. So we know there are ways to prevent it.”⁵

Australia recorded 238 gun deaths in 2016, the most recent data available, down from 516 in 1996. The United States had 38,658 gun deaths in 2016. (The figures for both nations included suicides.) Adjusted for population, the U.S. death rate was more than 10 times Australia’s. In addition, the overall homicide rate is far lower in Australia than in the United States: 1 per 100,000 in the former to 3.5 per 100,000 in the latter. In 2016, more than twice as many Australians were killed in knife attacks than in shootings.⁶

But gun-rights supporters say the United States is legally and culturally distinct from Australia, especially because of the Second Amendment.

“This is a country that exists because the people were able to carry out successfully an armed revolution against what they considered to be a dictatorial government,” said David Kopel, research director at the libertarian Independence Institute in Denver. “It’s unrealistic to imagine that the response in the U.S. [to mass shootings] would be the same” as in Australia.⁷

Other gun-rights supporters cite Americans’ strong attachment to liberty. “Another person’s irresponsibility is irrelevant to the existence of my fundamental liberties,” said David French, a senior fellow at the National Review Institute, a conservative think tank in New York City. “I don’t surrender my free-speech rights because another person uses theirs to troll Twitter. I don’t surrender my right to free exercise of religion because another person joins a cult. I don’t surrender my inherent and unalienable right to self-defense because a man across town decides to kill himself.”⁸

The United States, with 4 percent of the world’s population, has 46 percent of the globe’s privately owned firearms, according to a June report by the Small Arms Survey, a Geneva group that monitors firearms in 230 countries. The United States also leads the developed world in gun deaths per 100,000 population, with a rate about triple Finland’s, which is the next highest. A study of mass shootings in 11 countries from 2000 to 2014 found that the United States had nearly six times as many incidents as the other 10 combined.⁹
Like Australia, other developed countries have fewer guns and tougher gun laws than the United States. To buy a handgun or semi-automatic rifle in Austria, for instance, purchasers must prove they are in serious physical danger, then pass psychological and physical exams. Germans who keep guns in their homes must allow police to make unannounced inspections to check that the weapons are stored safely.10

Kopel challenges the relevance of statistics from other countries, saying strict gun regulations are alien to the American experience. In other places, he says, gun control is a holdover from fascist, communist and monarchical regimes in Europe and Asia.

“When you have countries where the government has a near monopoly on the means of force, you often end up with tyranny and frequently end up with genocide,” Kopel says. “The amount of death that occurred in Europe of civilians under tyrannical fascist or communist regimes in the most-developed countries in the last century is vastly larger than the amount of gun violence on a per-capita basis” today in the United States.

Some researchers say tougher laws are no panacea for the nation’s problems with violence. “If there were no guns,” says James Alan Fox, a criminology professor at Northeastern University, the United States would still have more homicides than other developed countries, because “we have a more violent country” for a variety of reasons, such as poverty.

But Liza Gold, a clinical professor of psychiatry at the Georgetown University School of Medicine and editor of Gun Violence and Mental Illness, disagrees. “We don’t have more people with mental illness in the United States,” she says. “The U.S. doesn’t have more angry, impulsive men. What we have are more firearms and more access to firearms.”

— Tom Price

1 “Grandfather kills 6 family members, including grandkids, in Australia mass shooting, official says,” Fox News Channel, May 14, 2018, https://tinyurl.com/y95e8hbw.


10 Carlsen and Chinoy, op. cit.
The NRA Arose From the Ashes of the Civil War

Its early focus was on marksmanship and shooting competitions.

Col. William Church had lamented the poor marksmanship of his Union troops during the Civil War. After the fighting ended, an official Army report estimated that Northern soldiers fired 1,000 bullets for every Confederate soldier they hit. Some suggested Confederate troops had outperformed urban Union soldiers who lacked firearms experience.

So Church penned an article for the August 1871 issue of *Army and Navy Journal*. “An association should be organized . . . to promote and encourage rifle-shooting on a scientific basis,” he wrote.

In November of that year, New York state granted a charter to the National Rifle Association (NRA). Former Union Gen. Ambrose Burnside became the NRA’s first president.1

Thus began the NRA’s march to the political juggernaut it is today.

For much of its first century, the NRA focused on marksmanship while occasionally taking stands both for or against gun control legislation. It sponsored shooting matches. It opened local shooting clubs for its growing membership.2

The NRA created the National Revolver Association in the 1920s to promote handgun training, and that subsidiary took the organization into public policy debates by crafting model legislation for gun regulation. The proposal, eventually adopted by nine states, required individuals to obtain a permit to carry a concealed weapon. It also banned handgun sales to non-citizens, instituted a one-day waiting period for the purchase of a gun and made records of gun sales available to police.3

In 1934, the NRA backed the first national gun control act, passed in response to the gangster violence of the 1920s and ’30s. “I have never believed in the general practice of carrying weapons,” NRA President Karl Frederick testified before a congressional committee in 1934. “I seldom carry one. I think it should be sharply restricted and only under licenses.”

But Frederick also cautioned that Congress should not “burn down the barn in order to destroy the rats.” He opposed legislation that was “properly aimed at the crook” but that would “reach the honest man” who wanted to protect his family.4

After President John F. Kennedy’s assassination in 1963, with a rifle bought through a mail-order advertisement in the NRA’s *American Rifleman* magazine, NRA Executive Vice President Franklin Orth supported legislation banning mail-order sales. “We do not think that any sane American, who calls himself an American, can object to placing into this bill the instrument which killed the president of the United States,” he told a congressional committee.

Members’ objections to Orth’s stance marked the beginning of the revolt that would transform the organization in the following decade. Many expressed outrage at the mail-order sales ban and demanded Orth and other leaders quit.5

Members also were alarmed by the riots, protests and turmoil of the later 1960s and increasingly saw gun ownership as a matter of self-defense. By the time of the assassinations of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy in 1968, the NRA was becoming more
politically active and gun control advocates had begun to see the organization as the opposition.

After the assassinations, Congress passed legislation that year that required serial numbers on guns, prohibited the mentally ill and drug addicts from possessing guns and required identification for purchase of some bullets. Orth said the law “appears to be one that the sportsmen of America can live with.”

President Lyndon Johnson had wanted more, but the NRA successfully blocked proposals to register guns. He complained that lawmakers were cowed by “a powerful lobby, a gun lobby.”

Some gun-rights advocates viewed the NRA’s actions as capitulation. Future NRA President David Keene called the law “the most restrictive piece of Second Amendment legislation ever passed” and “the turning point” for gun owners who feared that liberal politicians would take away their arms.6

In 1975, the NRA created the Institute for Legislative Action to run its political operations and named Texas lawyer Harlon Carter to lead it. Presaging later NRA slogans, Carter declared: “You don’t stop crime by attacking guns. You stop crime by stopping criminals.”

Carter’s aggressive actions angered the organization’s longtime leaders, and they responded by cutting his staff. At the organization’s convention in Cincinnati in 1977, Carter led the overthrow of NRA leadership and became executive vice president.7 He described the new goals succinctly: “No compromise. No gun legislation.”

Carter led the NRA into electoral politics by giving candidates A to F grades on its gun policy “report cards,” then directing endorsements and campaign contributions to those with the best grades. The NRA endorsed its first presidential candidate in 1980, backing Republican Ronald Reagan. In 2016, it endorsed Republican Donald Trump.

In the last two decades, the NRA has donated more than $13 million to political organizations and spent over $45 million lobbying in Washington, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, which compiles and analyzes political financial data. It also independently spent $144.3 million to support or oppose candidates in elections.8

The organization added NRATV, an online television network that streams shows and has two live news channels, to its arsenal in 2016. The segments feature gun owners and discuss current events, from the Black Lives Matter movement to the Trump administration, in an effort to build a sense of shared identity among its members.9

— Tom Price

limited federal inspections of gun dealers to no more than one per year, forbade the creation of a national registry of gun owners and allowed federally licensed dealers to sell away from their principal place of business.62

In the states, the Florida Legislature in 1987 banned local governments from passing or enforcing local gun legislation, threatening officials with removal from office if they did so.63

The decade’s final year began with 26-year-old Patrick Purdy opening fire on an elementary school playground in Stockton, Calif., with a legally obtained AK-47, killing five children ages 6 to 9 and wounding 29 others and a teacher.64

3 Coleman, op. cit.
6 Sellers, ibid.; Coleman, op. cit.
The Pendulum Swings

With Democrats controlling Congress and the White House in the early 1990s, federal gun policies took another turn toward gun control.

In 1990, a Democratic-controlled Congress outlawed guns within 1,000 feet of schools. In 1993, President Bill Clinton signed legislation — named for James Brady — that required federally licensed dealers to conduct background checks of buyers and imposed a five-day waiting period on handgun purchases. The next year, the federal government enacted a 10-year ban on the manufacture or sale of so-called assault weapons — semi-automatic rifles with certain military-style features — and of magazines holding more than 10 rounds.

In 1996 a Republican-controlled Congress passed legislation to forbid gun sales to people convicted of domestic violence, and many states took similar steps. In 1991, no state had denied guns to people subject to permanent domestic-violence restraining orders and just three banned possession by those convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence. By 2017, 27 states had adopted restraining-order provisions and 28 had passed bans for those with misdemeanors.

But also in 1996, Congress passed legislation that effectively ended CDC research into gun-related violence. The law did not ban the research. Instead, it said the CDC could not fund research that “may be used to advocate gun control,” and it cut the agency’s budget by the amount that had been spent on such research the previous year.

In 1998, the handgun-purchase waiting period expired with the advent of computer-supported “instant” background checks.

As in the previous decade, the final year of the ’90s witnessed a horrific shooting, when two Columbine High School students killed 12 of their peers and a teacher and wounded 21 others in Littleton, Colo., on April 20, 1999. The incident led to a “sea change” in police tactics, according to the Police Executive Research Forum.

Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold entered the school with semi-automatic rifles, pistols and explosives, which they did not detonate. They eventually took their own lives, while police stayed outside for a half hour waiting for a specially trained and equipped SWAT team to arrive. That strategy complied with police training at the time. But new training teaches the first officers on the scene to confront the shooter as soon as possible, despite the risk to officers, in order to save lives.

With Republicans controlling Congress and the White House through most of next decade, gun regulation further eased.

Congress in 2003 forbade law enforcement agencies from publishing data showing where criminals obtained their firearms. Lawrence Keane, a senior vice president and general counsel of the National Shooting Sports Foundation, a firearm industry trade association, said the law was needed because disclosure could interfere with criminal investigations or jeopardize the lives of law enforcement and witnesses. The next year, lawmakers allowed the semi-automatic weapons ban to expire. Also in 2004, states began passing “stand-your-ground” laws, permitting people to shoot others in self-defense when they believe they are in danger. By 2017, 24 states had done so.

Federal legislation passed in 2005 prohibited lawsuits against manufacturers whose firearms were used in crimes. By 2017, 33 states had adopted similar laws. The NRA praised the federal law as “a vitally important first step toward ending the anti-gun lobby’s shameless attempts to bankrupt the American firearms industry through reckless lawsuits.”

The last decade has witnessed numerous mass shootings, which have occurred everywhere from a movie theater in Aurora, Colo., to a nightclub in Orlando, Fla., as well as places of work such as a holiday party in San Bernardino, Calif., and the Navy Yard in Washington, D.C.

CURRENT SITUATION

“Red-Flag” Orders

In the aftermath of recent mass shootings, gun control advocates are campaigning to ban bump stocks, raise the age for buying firearms and implement so-called red-flag orders, which allow authorities to quickly seize guns from people thought to be dangerous to themselves or others.

While opposing most new gun legislation, gun-rights supporters propose to protect schools by arming teachers, increasing the number of security guards and
“hardening” buildings with metal detectors, fewer entrances and bullet-proof doors and windows.

The red-flag proposal is modeled on domestic violence restraining orders that require individuals to keep away from domestic partners they are accused of abusing. A complainant can ask a judge for a temporary gun-seizure order that the police would execute immediately. The subject of the order could object at a quickly scheduled judicial hearing, says Liza Gold, a clinical professor of psychiatry at the Georgetown University School of Medicine and editor of Gun Violence and Mental Illness.

Red-flag orders are promising, Boston University’s Siegel says, because research shows that domestic-violence orders reduce homicides.

Gold says red-flag orders would be particularly effective when a person is suicidal, because people are less likely to kill themselves when a weapon is not handy. As of late June, 11 states had enacted red-flag laws and six more were considering them, Gold says.

The Buckeye Firearms Association’s Rieck says the proposal is a bad idea because “firearms are taken away and due process happens afterward.”

Halbrook of the Independent Institute warns that people could seek red-flag orders for the wrong reasons. “If a person really is a danger to others,” he says, “they need to take the person” into custody. “I’m not quite sure how and why the focus has shifted to, ‘Why don’t we just confiscate the person’s guns?’ ”

Federal Action

President Trump joined calls for banning bump stocks, and in late March, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) formally proposed the ban, but has not said when it will take final action. In addition, Attorney General Jeff Sessions has ordered federal attorneys to step up prosecution of people who lie during background checks.

Acting ATF Director Thomas Brandon told Congress that legislation would “clearly be the best route” for banning bump stocks because regulation could face court challenges that would delay implementation. A decade earlier, the agency had said it lacked authorization to ban bump stocks.

Bipartisan groups of lawmakers in both congressional chambers have introduced bills to ban the devices, but the legislation is stalled. The NRA supports regulatory action but opposes legislation because of fears congressional debate could lead to more-sweeping restrictions on guns, according to political analysts. Bans have been approved by several states, including Massachusetts and New Jersey. And some municipalities, such as Denver and Columbia, S.C., have banned bump stocks as well.

During a White House meeting with survivors of the Parkland shooting in February, Trump endorsed a number of gun control proposals, including increasing the age to buy guns from 18 to 21, but the NRA opposed the proposal as a “significant, unequal and impermissible burden on the right to keep and bear arms of a class of millions of law-abiding 18- to 20-year-old adult citizens.” Trump said, “The NRA is opposed to it, and I’m a fan of the NRA. . . . They love our country, but that doesn’t mean we have to agree on everything.” Congress has not acted on age proposals, despite Trump’s prodding.

Arming teachers, which Trump also supported at the meeting with the Parkland students, has been the most controversial action proposed in the aftermath of recent school shootings. A March poll of members in the NEA, the nation’s largest teachers union, found 74 percent opposed the idea.

“The problem with arming teachers is they’re not people who are trained marksmen,” says security consultant Chris Joffe, founder and chief executive of Joffe Emergency Services in Santa Monica, Calif. “You can hand someone a weapon, but unless they’ve been exposed to live fire they’re not going to be able to respond effectively in the moment.”

The NEA’s Kusler says “no kindergarten teachers want to be armed when they give a hug to a student and the student might feel their gun.”

Siegel warns that “having weapons accessible can cause more accidental death than intentional death.” In March, a California teacher accidentally fired into the ceiling at Seaside High School — during a public safety class.

Teachers already carry guns in at least 14 states. School boards are allowed to arm teachers in another 16 states, but officials in March told Vice News that they did not know of any schools that had. Rieck says teachers can be trained to use guns effectively and that his organization has been doing so since
AT ISSUE

Would arming teachers make schools safer?

**YES**

Dean Rieck  
Executive Director,  
Buckeye Firearms Association

Written for *CQ Researcher*, July 2018

Arming school staff is a simple and effective option. Objections spring from ignorance about the reality of mass murder and the role teachers can play in stopping it. Consider common misconceptions:

- **Teachers don’t want firearms training to stop school shooters.** Some don’t. But many do. When my foundation’s FASTER Saves Lives program, which trains educators to stop school violence rapidly and render medical aid immediately, announced a class for 24 Ohio teachers, more than 1,000 applied. Over the last five years, 1,300 have attended training in 225 school districts across 12 states.

- **Teachers aren’t trained as well as police.** Actually, many police officers have no active-killer training. And general firearms training represents only a tiny fraction of what they learn at the academy. FASTER provides teachers with 27 hours of intensive active-killer training. Even with no training, teachers who volunteer to carry a firearm at school tend to be those who carry in their private lives and have a lifetime of firearms experience.

- **Teachers carrying a concealed handgun destroy the learning environment.** How? In Ohio, more than 650,000 people (one of every 14 adults) are licensed to carry a handgun and do so in restaurants, malls and nearly everywhere else without anyone noticing. Why would a school be different?

At least 14 states already allow teachers to carry at school. Another 16 give school boards the authority to approve school carry. In Texas and Utah, teachers and staff have been carrying guns for more than a decade.

The issue isn’t about guns. It’s about time. The more time a killer has, the more people die. Based on past mass shootings, on average there are 12 to 16 deaths if you wait for police to arrive, but only two to three if someone confronts the killer immediately. Mass murderers aren’t looking for a fight; they’re looking for a slaughter. Teachers don’t have to be Rambo to stop them. In almost every case, an aggressive challenge can stop the killing quickly.

Forget the politics and be honest. If it’s your kid at school when the slaughter starts, would you rather have armed teachers there, or would you prefer everyone were defenseless, helplessly waiting five, 10, 15 minutes or more for police to show up and stop the killer before he aims his gun at your kid? Look your child in the eyes when you answer that question.

**NO**

Mary Kusler  
Senior Director, Center for Advocacy,  
National Education Association

Written for *CQ Researcher*, July 2018

It’s a routine we’ve all unfortunately come to expect. As the images of yet another school shooting horrify the nation, elected officials offer “thoughts and prayers” to the victims and families and admonish the rest of us not to “politicize” the tragedy. Behind these platitudes, the message is clear: Do not expect us to debate, let alone adopt, ways to reduce access to military-style, rapid-fire assault weapons (the weapon of choice in most mass shootings) or any other productive measure to prevent gun violence in our schools.

This is not to say no action will be taken. Preposterous and ill-conceived ideas, on the other hand, are on the table.

Take the Trump administration’s proposal to arm teachers and other school staff, the marquee item in the plan to “harden” public schools. Putting firearms into the hands of educators is a gun manufacturer’s solution that will make schools and students less safe than before.

Students don’t want it, parents don’t want it, law enforcement doesn’t want it and educators don’t want it.

Teachers should be teaching, not acting as armed security guards. Nor should they be receiving training to become sharpshooters.

Most law enforcement officials are opposed because school staff lack the tactical knowledge of handling weapons that trained law enforcement personnel receive on a regular basis. Even if the funding for the weapons and training were available after massive cuts to education budgets, armed educators pose too high a risk to school safety.

With more weapons in school, there will be more accidents, fatalities and fear.

In a poll commissioned by the National Education Association (NEA) in March, 74 percent of educators believed arming school personnel would be ineffective at preventing gun violence in schools. Eighty-two percent said they would not carry a gun in school. Even among members who own guns, 63 percent said they would not agree to be armed in school.

What’s more, two-thirds of educators said they would feel less safe if school personnel were armed. A Gallup Poll in March found similarly high levels of opposition.

The White House and Congress owe it to communities traumatized by gun violence to abandon this foolish idea and get to work on solving the real problem behind gun violence: Very dangerous people have very easy access to very dangerous weapons. That’s what we need to fix.
2012. The Buckeye Firearms Association sponsors training, which is handled by two companies that conduct classes for law enforcement, military and security personnel.

“After the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, we offered to train 24 teachers,” he says, “and within a few weeks we had 1,000 applications from around Ohio.”

To date, the program has trained 1,300 teachers and school staff from more than 200 Ohio school districts and from 25 districts in a dozen other states, Rieck says. Another 400 will participate this year, and 2,000 are on a waiting list.

Applicants must hold a state-issued concealed-carry license, which in Ohio requires at least eight hours of training and a background check, he says. Some teachers may take another eight-hour course to ensure basic firearm skills. Then they take 27 hours of training over three days and a test that Rieck says is tougher than what is required by the Ohio Police Academy for certain shooting skills. Additional training is available, and the organization encourages local law enforcement agencies to run drills with the trained teachers when school is not in session.

Some insurance companies refuse to cover schools that arm teachers due to the safety risks.77

Both advocates and opponents of gun control agree that better mental health services are needed. “We need more school psychologists and guidance counselors and smaller classes so students feel more attached to their school,” Northeastern’s Fox says.

SUNY Oswego’s Schildkraut says better threat assessment is also key to heading off violence. The more people who are able to recognize warning signs and know where to report their concerns, the more likely an organization can “disrupt that behavior before it comes to fruition,” says Schildkraut, who has studied mass shootings.

Students who favor gun rights organized rallies in July in 10 cities, but turnout was small — about 50 attended in Los Angeles, 35 in Chicago and 13 in Palm Beach, Fla., for example. Student Ashley Johnson of Palm Beach was hoping for 100 people at the rally she organized in her hometown. She called the turnout disappointing.

“I don’t know why more people didn’t show up,” Johnson said. “I think a lot of conservatives are just afraid to show up for public events.”78

School teachers and administrators participate in a mock active-shooter drill on June 28, 2018, during a training course at Flatrock Training Center in Commerce City, Colo. Teachers already carry guns in at least 14 states, and school boards in 16 other states have the authority to arm teachers if they choose to do so. But arming teachers is controversial: About three-quarters of the members of the National Education Association, the nation’s largest teachers union, oppose the idea.

Kavanaugh Nomination

Both sides in the firearms debate agree that Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh would make the court more skeptical of gun control legislation if he is confirmed to replace Anthony Kennedy, who is retiring in July and who sometimes votes with the liberal justices. Although the court established an individual right to own guns in its 2008 Heller decision, lower courts have continued to uphold most gun control legislation, and the Supreme Court has refused to hear 15 appeals that would have given it the opportunity to clarify Heller.

In 2011, the Court of Appeals for the Second District, where Kavanaugh now sits, upheld bans on semi-automatic rifles and openly carrying firearms in Washington, D.C. Kavanaugh dissented, arguing that Heller permits possession of the rifles because they “have not traditionally been banned and are in common use.”

Everytown for Gun Safety called the dissent “a dangerous view of the Second Amendment that elevates gun rights above public safety.”

The NRA’s Cox praised Kavanaugh’s “strong support for the Second Amendment” and for “the fundamental, individual right to self-defense.”

Kavanaugh could cast a gun vote in the high court within a year or two, according to Hannah Shearer, a lawyer with the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun
Violence. “There’s multiple cases already pending challenging state and local assault weapon bans,” she said.79

OUTLOOK
Division to Grow?
The Independence Institute’s Kopel and Boston University’s Siegel disagree about gun policy, but they hold similar views of the future of gun legislation.

“My best guess,” Kopel says, “based on what was going on in the last several years, is that highly restrictive places like New Jersey and California will be getting more restrictive and other places that are more rights-focused will continue to advance in protecting [gun owners’] rights.”

Siegel says his study of gun legislation revealed that states with the strongest gun controls tended to tighten those controls over time. Those with weaker controls not only did not strengthen them, they often repealed some existing laws.

The NEA’s Kusler laments that “the politicized nature of the gun debate has urged people to retreat to their corners and lob things at each other rather than coming to the center and finding somewhere to meet.” But she says she is hopeful that young people will lead the change, including by voting in large numbers in the November elections. “If you change whom we elect,” she says, it creates “more opportunities to change policy.”

Siegel says the Parkland students’ activism has changed his outlook. “If you had asked me before Parkland, I would have been quite pessimistic,” he says. “I would have said there will be little done. After Parkland, I think we are going to see change.”

Gold, of Georgetown, also looks to “the younger generation taking a leading role. They have a different perspective, that the Second Amendment doesn’t wipe out my rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

She says gun violence is “a public health problem” and that “we know how to do public health problems” when the nation has sufficient will. Changes in laws and attitudes have reduced the tolls from motor vehicle wrecks and childhood accidents, she notes.

In addition to the boost from student activists, established gun control organizations have matured and become more politically sophisticated.

“When Sandy Hook happened, the gun lobby was ready for us,” Sen. Christopher Murphy, D-Conn., said of the elementary school massacre in his home state. “They had been preparing for 20 years to take down those parents. There was no anti-gun movement.”

Today, “there is an increasingly mature political movement that can combine with the unique moral authority of the kids.”80

NOTES


28. Ibid.


32. Ibid.


40. Jackman, op. cit.


44. Martinez, op. cit.


46. Kurtzleben, op. cit.


49. Martinez, op. cit.


52. “Blocher and Miller compile comprehensive historical gun law database,” op. cit. Also see Barbara Mantel, “Gun Control,” CQ Researcher, March 8, 2013, pp. 233-56.


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67. Hughes and Bryant, op. cit.

68. Jost, op. cit.


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Books


Researchers at RAND, a California-based think tank, comb through scientific studies to evaluate the effects of different gun policies and identify the most effective ones.


With her ex-astronaut husband (Kelly), Giffords — the former U.S. representative from Arizona who was nearly killed by a mass shooter in 2011 — describes her ordeal and her crusade for what she terms “responsible gun ownership.”


A pro-gun-rights lawyer describes the origins of the Second Amendment as told by the Founders in newspapers, correspondence, debates and resolutions between 1768 and 1826.


A prominent survivor/activist (David Hogg) of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School assault and his sister describe the mass shooting in Parkland, Fla., on Feb. 14, and call for tougher gun control measures.

Articles


Some insurance companies are refusing to cover teachers who carry guns at school, citing heightened risk.


A pro-gun-rights lawyer reviews Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh’s writings on key firearms legislation and concludes that Kavanaugh would satisfy neither those who oppose all gun restrictions nor those who consider the Second Amendment “a second-class right.”


Education programs and tougher state laws are helping to reduce accidental gun violence, experts say.


At least 14 states allow teachers to carry guns, but it is unclear how many teachers actually do because most local districts do not report the numbers.


In the aftermath of a church shooting, a pro-gun-rights Republican expresses a willingness to compromise on some gun legislation.


In an interview with the left-leaning magazine, Avery Gardiner — co-president of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, a leading advocate for stricter gun laws — explains her concerns that Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh would favor overturning gun control legislation.
Reports and Studies

The United States continues to experience a long decline in violent crime, according to a New York University law and policy institute.

Researchers at the University of Texas uncover U.S. mass-shooting incidents stretching back to the 19th century that few have heard of.

A research organization in Washington provides a comprehensive look at how Americans of many backgrounds and beliefs view guns.

Researchers who study gun violence as a public health issue say lax concealed-carry laws appear to increase violent crime.

For More Information

Brennan Center for Justice, 120 Broadway, Suite 1750, New York, NY 10271; 646-292-8310; www.brennancenter.org. Institute at the New York University School of Law that researches criminal justice issues and analyzes crime data.

Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, 268 Bush St., #555, San Francisco, CA 94104; 415-433-2062; http://lawcenter.giffords.org. Research and advocacy group that studies and reports on gun issues and participates in litigation supporting gun control.

Gun Violence Archive, 1718 M St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036; inquiry@gva.us.com; www.gunviolencearchive.org. Nonprofit that gathers and publishes on its website data about mass shootings, accidents and gun-related deaths and injuries.

Independence Institute, 727 E. 16th Ave., Denver, CO 80203; 303-279-6536; https://i2i.org. Libertarian think tank whose research interests include the Second Amendment.

National Rifle Association, 11250 Waples Mill Road, Fairfax, VA 22030; 800-672-3888; https://home.nra.org. Major defender of Second Amendment rights; also conducts education and competitions for gun owners.

Pew Research Center, 1615 L St., N.W., Suite 800, Washington, DC 20036; 202-419-4300; www.pewresearch.org. Nonpartisan group that conducts public opinion polling on a wide range of topics, including crime.


Repository of Historical Gun Laws, Duke University Law School, 210 Science Drive, Durham, NC 27708; 919-613-7006; https://law.duke.edu/gunlaws. Searchable database of gun laws from medieval times to 1776 in England and from the colonial era to the mid-20th century in the United States.

State Firearm Laws Project, Boston University School of Public Health, 801 Massachusetts Ave., 4th Floor, Boston, MA 02118; 617-638-5167; www.statefirearmlaws.org. Scholarly program that collects information about state gun laws and researches their effectiveness.