

Gun Violence: Polarization versus Peacemaking

- ★ Faith communities have spoken out against gun violence over the past half-century
- ★ Congregations can share their lived experience of causes and consequences of gun violence
- ★ Faith traditions support a peacemaking approach to limiting gun violence
- ★ Faith communities can help identify gaps in data needed for informed policymaking



Texas Gun Legislation, 2009 to 2021

- 2009 HB 3352, clarifying that those who receive certain mental health diagnoses or care cannot own a gun.
- 2011 SB 321, preventing public and private employers from prohibiting firearm possession by employees in vehicles parked at work.
- 2013 HB 1009, creating a school marshal program. The program allowed schools to identify certain employees to receive training and carry firearms on site in case of an emergency.
- 2015 HB 910, permitting open carry in Texas. The law went into effect Jan. 1, 2016 and allowed all licensed firearm owners to carry handguns in a hip or shoulder holster.
- 2015 SB 11, requiring public universities and community colleges to allow licensed gun owners to carry concealed weapons in dorms, classrooms and campus buildings.
- 2017 HB 2908, making it a hate crime to attack police officers.
- 2017 SB 12, creating a bulletproof vest fund for law enforcement.
- 2019 HB 1387; SB 11; SB 535. The bills removed the cap on school marshalls, required the implementation of emergency plans in schools, and permitted weapons in places of worship respectively. The set of bills was a part of the larger attempt to “harden schools” as a means to protect them from mass shootings.
- 2021 HB 1927, making it legal for Texans to carry a handgun without a permit or training.
- 2021 HB 1500, eliminating the governor’s power to ban gun sales during an emergency.
- 2021 SB 20, making it legal for gun owners to bring weapons into their hotel rooms.
- 2021 SB 741, allowing school marshalls to have handguns on their person.
- 2021 SB 19, prohibiting big state and local government contracts “that discriminate against the firearm or ammunition industries.”
- 2021 HB 2622 or the “Second Amendment sanctuary state” law, exempting Texans from federal gun regulation such as required background checks.



Gun Related Deaths in the US: What the Data Show

- In 2020, there were a record 45,222 total gun deaths, a 14% increase from the year before, a 25% increase from five years earlier and a 43% increase from a decade prior.
- In 2020, there were 19,384 gun murders, the most since at least 1968, a 34% increase from the year before, a 49% increase over five years and a 75% increase over 10 years.
- In 2020, there were 24,292 gun suicides, the most in any year except 2018, when there were 24,432, a 10% over five years and 25% over 10 years.
- While mass shootings receive intense media coverage, they account for a small share of gun related deaths in the US.

Source: The Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/02/03/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths-in-the-u-s/>

Texas Mass Shootings, 2009 to 2022



November 5, 2009	Fort Hood shooting	13 killed, 31 injured
April 3, 2014	Second Fort Hood shooting	3 killed, 12 injured
July 7, 2016	Dallas Police Shooting	5 killed, 11 injured
November 5, 2017	Sutherland Springs shooting	26 killed, 20 injured
May 18, 2018	Santa Fe High School shooting	10 killed, 13 injured
August 3, 2019	El Paso, Walmart shooting	23 killed, 25 injured
August 22, 2019	Midland-Odessa shooting	7 killed, 25 injured
May 24, 2022	Uvalde school shooting	21 killed, 17 injured
		Total deaths: 108; Total injured: 154



\$10,000	March shooting event, Wilmette
\$10,000	May windstorm damage
\$30,000	2005 Hurricane recovery – pastor salary support
\$10,000	January ice storm
\$10,000	Church support following fire
\$10,000	Tornado damage
167,187	2005 hurricane relief and recovery
\$200,000	and construction
\$10,000	May storm flooding
\$10,000	November flooding
\$3,000	April shooting event, Greenville
\$10,000	Church support following fire
\$10,000	April shooting event, Binghamton
\$20,000	August flooding events

Faith communities are not exempt from the financial costs of gun violence. In the framework of emergency response ministries, acts of violence qualify as disasters like floods, droughts, or earthquakes. One denominational disaster response agency’s records reflect the benevolence costs associated with mass shootings in three separate communities—in three states—over the course of one year.

Gun Violence in Texas

Gun violence in Texas has mirrored national trends. Texas currently ranks near the middle of the states in its rate of gun deaths per capita, although the incidence of gun violence in Texas is increasing more steeply than the national average. From 2011 to 2020, gun related deaths in Texas have increased by 38 percent, and gun related homicides increased by 90 percent.

According to the Giffords Foundation, Texas has an average of 3,500 gun deaths per year, with about 12 deaths per 100,000 residents. In the past 13 years Texas has experienced 8 mass shootings (defined as a lone shooter, killing at least three people in a public space,) resulting in the deaths of more than 100 Texans. According to analysis by the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, gun violence results in societal costs of \$1,769 per Texan each year, with gun deaths and injuries costing the state \$51.3 billion annually.

The history of gun regulation in Texas has been complicated. In its days as an independent republic, Texas enforced strict regulation of pistols. From 1866 to 1994, Texas lawmakers from across the political spectrum championed laws focused on restricting handguns in public spaces, along with prohibitions on other kinds of weapons, specifically to reduce violence in their growing state.

In recent years, Texas’ posture toward firearms has swung far away from the state’s

historic public safety priorities. Since 2009, the Texas Legislature has enacted a string of laws focused on two paradoxical goals: loosening gun regulation, and responding to mass shootings.

Faith Communities and Gun Violence

Over the past half-century, faith communities in the U.S. and Texas have published statements, studies, community resources, and legislative challenges calling for an end to gun violence. These public statements sometimes have been in response to mass shootings, but the faith community’s experience with gun violence goes far beyond shock and dismay at high-profile incidents. Congregations are located in communities impacted by gun violence. Church volunteers serve in communities with high gun violence rates; chaplains comfort families who lose loved ones to gun violence; clergy members perform funerals for victims of gun violence; and increasingly, faith communities of all types are finding themselves targets for gun violence including mass shootings.

Following the mass shooting in Uvalde in 2022, national denominations and local congregations alike have recommitted to working to end gun violence. As they investigate strategies and options, faith leaders are aware that the research to support evidence-based solutions is inadequate. They also are aware that they may themselves be targets of gun violence, by virtue of their beliefs, their geographic location, or the demographic makeup of their congregation.

THE WAY FORWARD FOR TEXAS

- ★ Establish standards for responsible gun ownership, including licensing requirements
- ★ Regulate gun purchasing, including establishing regulations related to age and regulations related to evidence that the purchaser poses a threat to themselves or others
- ★ Enhance safety and support for congregations and other local groups that are particularly vulnerable to gun violence
- ★ Fund research to identify efficacious strategies for peacemaking in local communities

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