



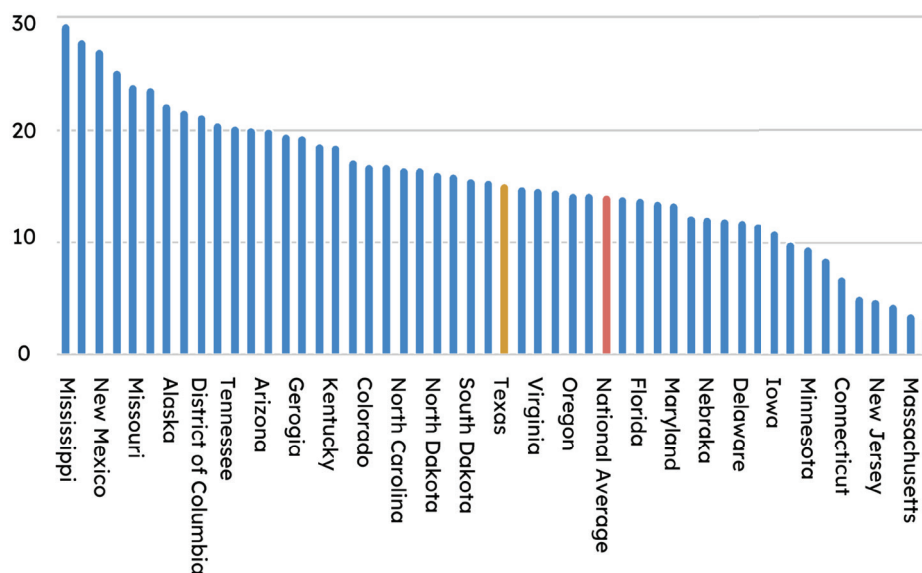
## Violence Prevention: Putting Texas Lives First

Faith communities affirm that responsible gun ownership is a historic and important tradition in Texas. However, responsible gun ownership requires responsible regulation. With tools that can take a life, there is a need for safeguards that prevent firearms from ending up in the hands of dangerous individuals or in dangerous situations. Data show that states with stronger firearm regulation policies have fewer gun deaths. Such policies address the variety of risks that firearms pose including threats of self-harm, crimes of passion, and accidental shootings.

Texas has seen more than its fair share of tragedy. In 2022 Texas ranked 26th in rates of gun deaths in the US. Texas has experienced more mass shootings than almost any other state. In 2023, an estimated **4,600 Texans died from gun violence**. The majority of those deaths—59%— were suicides, while 37% were homicides (the remaining percentage consisted of accidental shootings, undetermined shootings, and police shootings). On average, an additional 5,500 Texans are injured by firearms every year. It is clear that the status quo has an intolerable human cost.

Faith communities are called to seek peace and justice for all people and believe that peace is forged by being in community with one another. Faith communities insist that it is faith in our institutions and our commitment to our neighbor that keeps us safe. By investing in community solutions and prioritizing protecting the most vulnerable, Texas can holistically enact violence prevention while still respecting individual liberties.

**Gun Death Rate (Per 100,000) by state in 2022**



Source: Johns Hopkins University, Bloomberg School of Public Health, Center for Gun Violence Solutions



## Gun Violence Impacts the Most Vulnerable

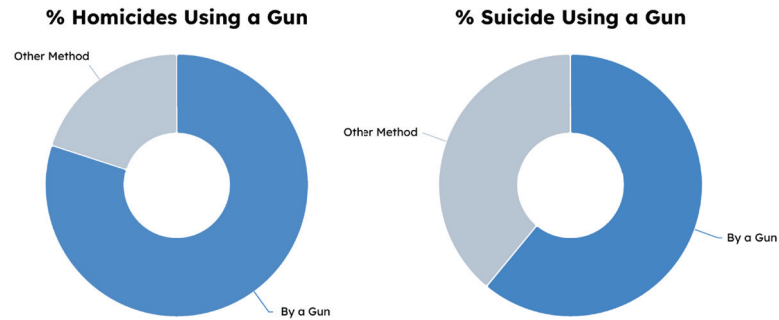
While no one is immune to gun violence, some communities experience a disproportionate amount of gun violence.

### Gun Homicides

The vast majority of homicides (80%) are committed with guns. Black and brown communities face a disproportionate incidence of gun homicides. While young black men make up less than 2% of the population, they make up 25% of gun homicides. Black Americans as a whole are 6 times more likely to die by gun homicide than White Americans and young Hispanic males are 3 times more likely to die by gun homicide.

### Gun Suicides

More than half of all suicides (60%) are committed with a gun. Gun suicides make up the majority of gun deaths in Texas and in the country as a whole. Older white men are particularly vulnerable to gun-suicide. White men



Source: Johns Hopkins University, Bloomberg School of Public Health, Center for Gun Violence Solutions

in Texas over the age of 34 constituted 45% of gun suicides in 2022, despite representing only 12% of the population.

### Domestic Violence

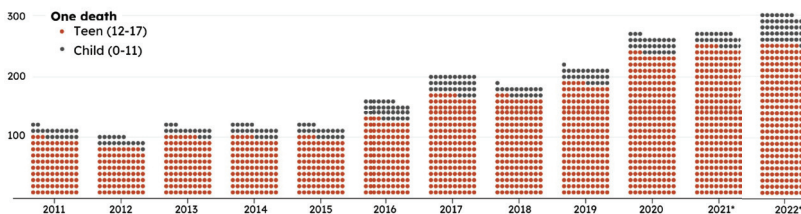
Domestic abusers with access to a firearm are 5 times more likely than other abusers to kill their partner. In 2023, 205 Texans were killed by their intimate partner. The overwhelming majority of victims were killed with a firearm. While laws prohibiting certain domestic abusers from owning firearms exist, there are few mechanisms to enforce them or to remove firearms from convicted abusers.

### Youth Gun Deaths

Firearms continue to be the leading cause of death for youth in America. Nearly 300 children were killed by gun violence in Texas in 2022. Youth gun deaths include incidents of suicides, homicides, mass shootings, and accidental shootings. The overwhelming majority of youth gun suicides, mass shootings perpetrated by youth, and accidental shootings are committed with unsecured firearms owned by the child's parent.

#### Guns are killing Texas Youths

A total of 295 Texans younger than 18 died from gunshots last year. Each of the dots below represents one of those Texans who lost their life to guns.



\*Data for 2021 and 2022 are not final.

Note: Numbers in this chart include homicides, suicides, accidental shootings and all other undetermined firearm-related causes of death. Source: Texas Tribune analysis of Texas Department of State Health Services data.

Shooting incidents on school campuses are continuing to rise (this includes mass shootings and other forms of gun violence that don't necessarily include fatalities). Texas leads the country in shootings on school campuses, with

at least 17 incidents in 2024, threatening students' bodily safety and peace of mind across the state.





## *The Status Quo*

To be responsible neighbors means investing in community solutions rather than relying solely on personal protection. In response to rising rates of gun violence and mass shootings, Texas leaders have relied on “hardening” tactics and increasing civilian access to firearms. These solutions are problematic and shortsighted.

Hardening tactics are focused on elevating security measures at schools and other vulnerable locations. This can include increasing the number of physical barriers, hiring more security personnel, or creating more in-depth emergency plans. While such precautions can help mitigate a crisis, there is little evidence of a decrease in shootings as a result. Hardening is a reactionary measure, not a proactive one.

Increased access to firearms or an increased presence of firearms in public spaces, however, is actively harmful. Data overwhelmingly show that increasing the volume of firearms in a space greatly increases the potential for an environment to turn deadly. This is especially true in high-traffic, public spaces such as university campuses, hospitals, and public parks. Traditionally these areas have been protected as gun-free zones, but those protections are being challenged. The argument is rooted in the idea that “good guys with guns” reduce the chances of “bad guys” acting, although there is no evidence to support this belief.

Individuals cannot prevent violence from happening through additional threats of violence. Policies need to be focused on prevention, not just reaction. To address all the various types of gun violence, in Texas, we have to invest in new solutions—solutions that look at communities as a whole and address overarching social issues. Solutions need to be a balance between policing, community investment, and reasonable regulation.

## *Solutions*

Gun violence cannot be mitigated by any one policy, but there are a variety of evidence-backed solutions that can make a difference.

### **Community Violence Intervention (CVI)**

Community Violence Intervention (CVI) programs are an increasingly popular and successful tool in reducing gun violence. CVI programs are community initiatives led by local residents who are members of the most affected communities. With their local knowledge and credibility, they are able to intervene in situations before they turn violent. CVI programs focus on addressing gun violence from a whole community perspective, often acting in concert with police, medical services, and other community partners. Community violence interrupters (those who actually intervene to stop violence) have been shown to be vital partners to emergency services, working in places where police and other professionals cannot. Most programs are funded by city governments and grants, but Texas can become a leader in supporting the growing movement.

### **Safe Storage Laws**

Texas has a long tradition of gun ownership. One way to respect and preserve that tradition is to practice responsible gun ownership—a key aspect of which is the safe and secure storage of firearms. Safe storage is a vital tool in addressing all aspects of gun violence. Most guns used in crimes are stolen, often from cars. Texas cities have seen gun theft from cars skyrocket in recent years. These stolen guns enable criminal activity and fuel organized





crime. By passing legislation that requires or incentivizes the use of safe storage tools in vehicles, the theft and subsequent use of illegal firearms would be greatly reduced.

Safe storage also reduces the potential for a child to obtain access to a firearm. Most accidental child shootings, teen suicides, and mass shootings perpetrated by minors are enabled by unsecured firearms. The responsible storage of firearms greatly reduces the chances of a youth unintentionally or intentionally misusing a gun.

### **Raising the Age to Purchase Semi-automatic-style Rifles to 21**

While there are a variety of factors that create a mass shooter, often including years of abuse and a lack of social resources, we still can't predict who might become the next shooter. However, as demonstrated by the Uvalde massacre and many other shootings, young men under the age of 21 are more likely to commit a mass shooting than other demographics. We know that youth under 21 are not fully cognitively developed. This is not new—in fact, there are a variety of laws that already reflect this, such as the legal drinking age and the age requirement to purchase handguns. If there are laws restricting the age to purchase handguns, then there is no reason the far more deadly semi-automatic firearms should not similarly be regulated. Raising the age would create another barrier to slow down or stop mass shootings from occurring. Such a restriction might have made a difference for the families in Uvalde.

## *Taking the Next Step*

The policy solutions above do not constitute a holistic list of all the tools necessary to stop gun violence. There are plenty of other policies that can address other aspects such as illegal gun trafficking or preventing domestic abusers from obtaining firearms. But these policies do provide a foundation for Texas to start tackling violence from a full and holistic perspective—one that is centered on community safety while still respecting Texans' individual rights.

## *Texas Impact Recommendations*

1. Investing in Community Violence Intervention programs
2. Passing legislation that encourages or requires the safe storage of firearms
3. Raising the age to purchase semi-automatic-style rifles to 21
4. Requiring licensing and training to own certain firearms
5. Creating mechanics to enforce the temporary or permanent removal of firearms from prohibited individuals

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