

Future Without Fear

Ms. Richards' 4th Hour
Estrella Middle School
2025-2026 Project Citizen Submission

Introduction to the Problem

Our class choose Gun violence because it is a serious problem that affects many people and communities. When guns are easy to get, arguments or fights can quickly turn deadly. Instead of solving problems by talking things out, some people use guns, which can cause permanent harm in just seconds. Gun violence doesn't just hurt the people involved—it affects families, friends, and even whole neighborhoods. Kids may feel scared at school, and families may worry about their safety every day.

As one report explains, “The overall gun death rate increased by 37% in 2023 compared to 2014. Arizona had the 14th highest gun death rate in the country in 2023. Firearms were the leading cause of death among young people ages 1–17 in 2023. In 2022, there were at least 119 domestic violence-related homicides in Arizona. Nearly two-thirds (65%) were by firearm.” Another news report states, “Phoenix — Gun violence is impacting many families here in the Valley. Now, at least eight teens have been shot in less than two weeks.”

These facts show how serious and real this issue is, especially for young people and families.

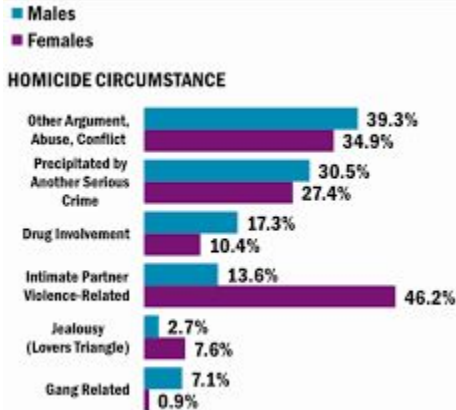
Introduction to the Problem - Causes

19%
OF DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE
INVOLVES A
WEAPON



THE PRESENCE OF A
GUN IN A DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE SITUATION
INCREASES THE RISK
OF HOMICIDE BY

500%



Gun violence is closely linked to domestic abuse, especially when an abusive partner has access to a firearm. Studies show that a domestic violence victim is **five times more likely to be killed** when their abuser has a gun, turning everyday threats into deadly situations. Gun safety laws can save lives by reducing this risk and stopping firearms from being used as tools of intimidation, coercion, and control. By preventing people from accessing guns after they have been convicted of domestic violence offenses or while they are under active court orders, these laws help protect victims, create safer homes, and give survivors a better chance to escape abuse without facing lethal harm.

Introduction to the Problem - Causes



Gun violence and domestic violence are tragically intertwined, as firearms in abusive relationships dramatically increase the risk that a victim will be killed — studies show an abusive partner’s access to a gun makes it five times more likely a woman will be killed and domestic shootings are far more lethal than other assaults. Laws aimed at preventing people with significant histories of domestic violence from buying or possessing guns — including federal prohibitions on firearm ownership after certain domestic violence convictions and state laws requiring relinquishment of guns upon protective orders — are designed to save lives by keeping guns out of the hands of those most likely to use them as tools of coercion and lethal violence. Strengthening background checks, closing loopholes that let some abusers retain access, and ensuring that protective orders are linked to firearm prohibitions have been shown to reduce intimate partner gun homicides and are widely supported as critical components of efforts to reduce gun-related domestic violence in the United States.

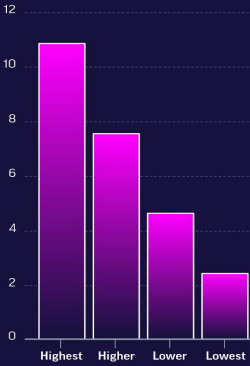
Introduction to the Problem - Causes



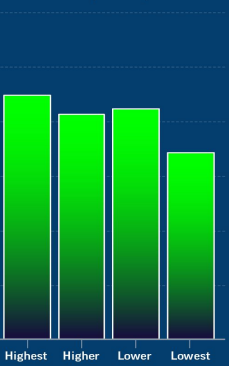
Gun violence in minority communities has long been addressed through a criminal and legal lens rather than with the public health resources those communities urgently need. As the panelists—which included professors, anti-gun activists, and law enforcement representatives—agreed, this approach has prioritized punishment over prevention, leaving root causes like trauma, poverty, and lack of access to mental health care largely unaddressed. By focusing almost exclusively on arrests and incarceration, policymakers have overlooked evidence-based public health strategies that could reduce violence before it occurs. The consensus among the panel emphasized that treating gun violence as a public health crisis, rather than solely a criminal issue, is essential for creating safer and healthier minority communities. guns can also lead to major death casualties or severe injuries that could be life threatening.

Introduction to the Problem - Causes

2020 FIREARM HOMICIDES
Rate per 100,000



2020 FIREARM SUICIDES
Rate per 100,000

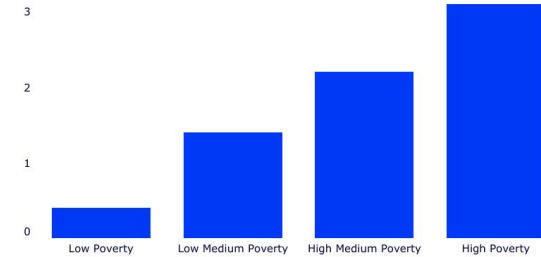


COUNTY POVERTY LEVELS

Gun violence disparities often stem from deep structural and economic issues that shape people's daily lives and opportunities. Communities facing long-term disinvestment, concentrated poverty, underfunded schools, limited access to quality healthcare, and unstable housing are more likely to experience higher rates of violence. These conditions can increase stress, reduce access to supportive resources, and limit pathways to economic stability, all of which raise the risk of harm. At the same time, unequal policing practices and gaps in social services can worsen mistrust and leave violence unaddressed. As a result, gun violence is not evenly distributed but instead reflects broader inequalities rooted in history, policy decisions, and economic systems rather than individual behavior alone.

Gun violence increased more in poorer communities.

Increase in County Firearm Homicides per 100,000 Persons by Poverty Category, 2019–2020



<https://www.cepr.org>

Source: Scott R. Keigler et al., "Vital Signs: Changes in Firearm Homicide and Suicide Rates — United States, 2019–2020," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, May 13, 2022, 71:656–663.
Note: In this analysis, counties are grouped by their poverty rates. "Low Poverty" refers to counties with poverty rates less than 9.1 percent, "Low Medium Poverty" to counties with rates between 9.1 percent and 12.1 percent, "High Medium Poverty" to counties with rates between 12.2 percent and 14.6 percent, and "High Poverty" to counties with rates above 14.6 percent.



Introduction to the Problem - Causes



Gun violence in the United States is often attributed primarily to mental illness, but research shows this explanation is overly simplistic and misleading. According to a study published in *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, mental illness was mentioned as a cause in only 17 cases, or 10.8 percent, of incidents where information about the perpetrator was available (Tuason & Güss, 2019). Far more frequently, the study found that subclinical or non-diagnosable mental health factors—such as relational stress, revenge, job-related pressures, substance use, and trauma—were cited as contributing influences. This distinction is important because it highlights that emotional distress or life stressors do not necessarily equate to mental illness, yet they can still play a significant role in violent behavior. Additionally, the authors emphasize that gun violence is not a single phenomenon but includes different types with varying causes and contexts, meaning no one explanation can account for all cases. Overall, the research suggests that focusing narrowly on mental illness distracts from the broader social and psychological factors that more commonly contribute to gun violence, limiting the effectiveness of prevention efforts.

Introduction to the Problem xavier

Arizona is facing a crime gun crisis—and the evidence points squarely at the state’s own federally licensed gun dealers (also known as Federal Firearms Licensees or FFLs). In 2023, law enforcement recovered and traced nearly 14,000 guns in connection with crimes in Arizona. Nearly half of all Arizona crime guns were recovered in Phoenix (4,640) and Tucson (2,250).¹

<https://everytownresearch.org/report/arizona-firearms-trafficking-and-crime-gun-factsheet/#:~:text=State%20Where%20Gun%20Originated%2010,Less>

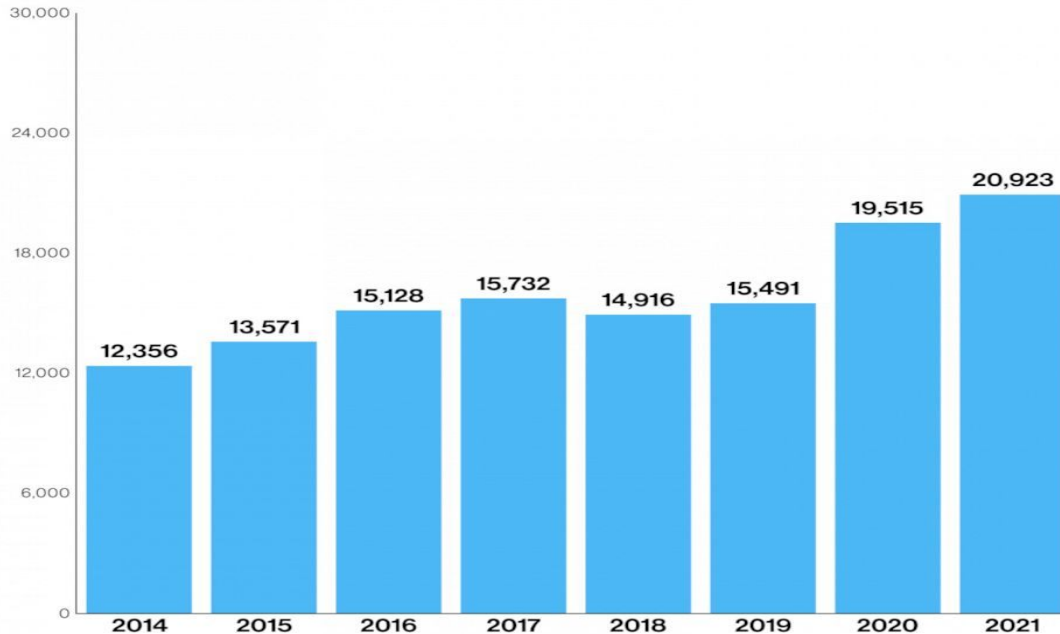
Among children ages 0 to 17, falls were the top mechanism of injury, but firearm injuries were the top cause of death. In 2023, 34 pediatric patients died from firearm-related trauma, or one-third of the total of 101 pediatric trauma deaths.

<https://directorsblog.health.azdhs.gov/2024-stab-report-reveals-arizonas-top-causes-of-trauma-injury-and-death-and-opportunities-for-injury-prevention/#:~:text=Among%20children%20ages%200%20to,of%20101%20pediatric%20trauma%20deaths>

Introduction to the Problem

Number of Gun Violence Related Deaths

EXCLUDING SUICIDES



- <https://abcnews.com/US/americas-gun-violence-problem-numbers/story?id=85136358>

Gun violence deaths rose from 12,356 in 2014 to 20,923 in 2021 — a 69% increase.

Introduction to the Problem



- In 2024, about 17.3 out of every 100,000 people in Arizona died from a gun-related injury. For context, around 15.9 out of every 100,000 people in Arizona died in a motor vehicle accident that year.

<https://usafacts.org/answers/how-many-people-die-from-gun-related-injuries-in-the-us-each-month/state/arizona/>



Problems with gun violence in Phoenix

Some Disagreements About Current Policies

- Arizona has a high gun death rate (1,419 deaths in 2023)
- Firearms are the leading cause of death for ages 1–17
- Ranks 43rd in gun law strength → linked to illegal trafficking
- ~14,000 crime guns recovered in 2023 (many recently purchased)
- Gun violence costs ~\$15.9 billion annually

Mixed Progress:

- Phoenix crime is decreasing (homicides dropped in 2025)
- Violent crime down by 1,000+ incidents

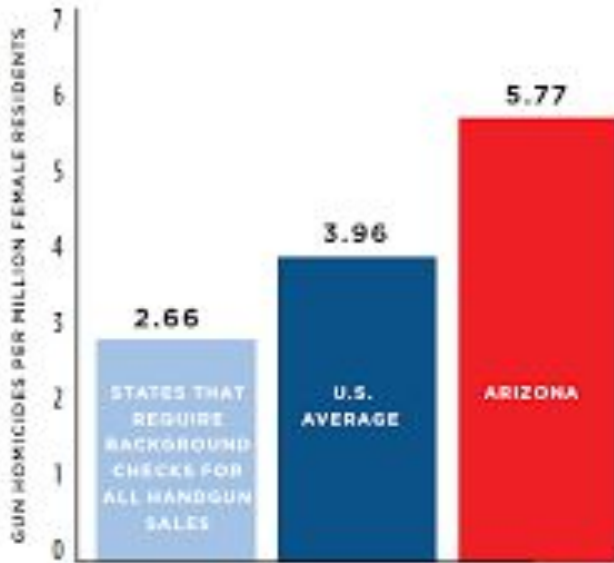
Ongoing Concerns:

- Weak regulations & illegal gun trafficking
- High suicide rates (majority of deaths)
- Disproportionate impact on some communities



Community Disagreement about the Impact of gun violence

RATES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE GUN HOMICIDE OF WOMEN



Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation Supplementary Homicide Reports, 2008-2012, and Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

Debate Over Gun Laws, People in the community often disagree about gun laws. Some think stricter gun laws, like background checks for everyone and limits on certain guns, can help lower gun violence and stop dangerous people from getting weapons. Others believe these laws mostly affect responsible gun owners and do not fix bigger problems like mental health, poverty, or crime.

Safety vs. Rights, Many people care most about keeping everyone safe and support laws they think will prevent shootings. However, others believe it is important to protect Second Amendment rights and personal freedom. They argue that people who follow the law should not be punished for crimes they did not commit.

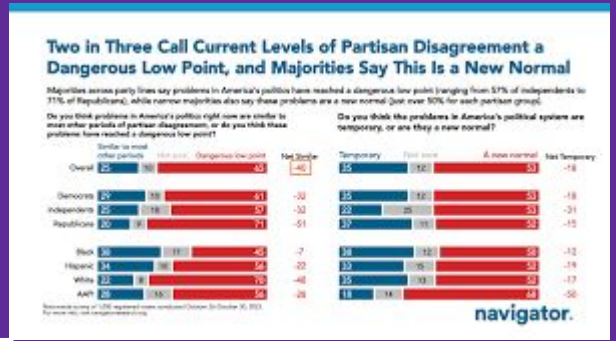
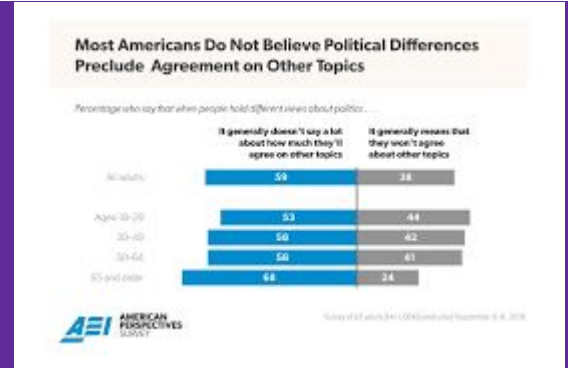
Current Policy on gun purchases in Phoenix-

- You must be 18 to own a long rifle and 21 to own a hand
- Background checks from licensed dealers you don't need a background check for private purchases
- You don't need to register your firearm with the state
- Convicted felons are banned from buying firearms



Disagreements about current policies

In **Phoenix**, people disagree about gun laws. The state of Arizona has rules that stop cities from making their own stricter gun laws, so Phoenix cannot change certain policies, like what to do with seized guns. In the **Arizona Legislature**, lawmakers argue about whether guns used in murders should be destroyed instead of sold. Groups like **Everytown for Gun Safety** and **Giffords Law Center** think Arizona's gun laws are too weak, but gun rights supporters believe the laws protect people's constitutional rights.



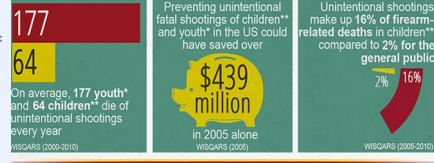
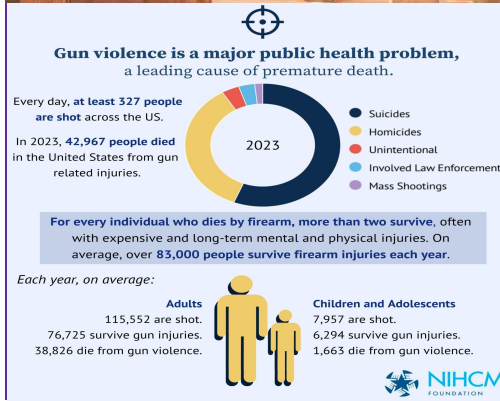
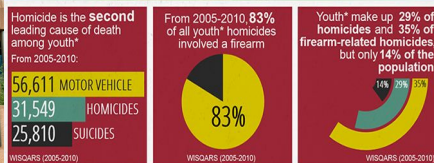
Why should government be involved.

A state government should be involved in addressing drug problems because these issues directly impact public health, safety, economic stability, an overall quality of life for residents.

The government should help stop gun violence because it is a serious problem that affects thousands of families every year. In the United States, over 40,000 people die from gun-related injuries each year, which is more than 100 people a day. That is a huge number, and many of these deaths could be prevented. One of the government's most important responsibilities is to protect its citizens, so it makes sense for them to take action. The government can create smart laws like stronger background checks and safe storage requirements to help keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people and young children. Experts also say gun violence should be treated like a public health issue, which means studying it, funding prevention programs, and finding real solutions—just like we did with car safety and smoking. Gun violence also costs billions of dollars in hospital bills, law enforcement, and lost wages. Since guns can easily cross state lines, one state's laws aren't enough to fix the problem. We can respect people's rights to own guns while still creating reasonable rules that help reduce violence and save lives.



FIREARM-related fatalities: HOMICIDE, SUICIDE, & UNINTENTIONAL in US CHILDREN & YOUTH



*Youth are defined as ages 15-24
**Children are defined as ages 0-14

For evidence-informed strategies for prevention, visit our resource guide: [ChildrensSafetyNetwork.org/resource-guide-2013](https://www.childrensafety.org/resources/evidence-informed-strategies-for-prevention)

To view detailed sources for this infographic, please visit: [ChildrensSafetyNetwork.org/publications/firearms-intent-infographic](https://www.childrensafety.org/publications/firearms-intent-infographic)

www.ChildrensSafetyNetwork.org

CSN Children's Safety Network

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- <https://cepr.net/publications/poverty-correlates-with-the-recent-increase-in-gun-violence/>
- <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/for-immigrants-marching-with-black-lives-matter-has-risks>
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- https://www.google.com/imgres?q=Gun%20violence%20in%20minority%20communities&imgurl=https%3A%2F%2Fmedia.licdn.com%2Fdms%2Fimage%2Fv2%2FD5612AQEmqgVj1qQuVA%2Farticle-cover_image-shrink_600_2000%2Farticle-cover_image-shrink_600_2000%2F0%2F1701004252972%3Fe%3D2147483647%26v%3Dbeta%26t%3DKOx2rxSTqX62UlgIH5GwDD-CkicJ0_uOU-k1YfHerjQ&imgrefurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.linkedin.com%2Fpulse%2Fgun-violence-america-its-disparate-impact-black-charles-om6yc%3Ftrk%3Dpublic_post&docid=UUft8edmXd4HDM&tbnid=2y4XkNzC2u3BDM&vet=12ahUKEwj20Mf95eOSAxUDM0QIHVLRDN84ChCc8A56BAgsEAE..i&w=275&h=183&hcb=2&itg=1&ved=2ahUKEwj20Mf95eOSAxUDM0QIHVLRDN84ChCc8A56BAgsEAE
- www.abc15.com/news/crime/families-impacted-by-gun-violence-speak-out

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 - <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19434472.2019.1687561>
 - <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/who-can-have-a-gun/domestic-violence-firearms/>
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 - <https://www.humanrightscareers.com/issues/root-causes-of-gun-violence/>
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 - [https://publichealth.jhu.edu/center-for-gun-violence-solutions/data/state-gun-violence-data/arizona#:~:text=Arizona%20had%20the%2014th,65%25\)%20were%20by%20firearm.](https://publichealth.jhu.edu/center-for-gun-violence-solutions/data/state-gun-violence-data/arizona#:~:text=Arizona%20had%20the%2014th,65%25)%20were%20by%20firearm.)
- <https://ww>

Alternative Policies Introduction

We considered policies to address this problem.

- Background Checks
- Assault Weapon Bans

Alternative one

One solution we considered Governments can enforce background checks by making sure every gun sale goes through a screening process before the purchase is finished. In the United States, the Federal Bureau of Investigation runs the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, which checks a person's criminal record and other information to see if they can legally buy a gun. Lawmakers can make the system stronger by closing loopholes on private sales, giving stricter punishments to sellers who break the rules, and making sure records are reported correctly and on time, This helps keep guns out of the wrong hands.

Enforcing background checks for gun purchases is an important way to improve public safety while respecting lawful ownership. Strong, universal background checks help ensure that firearms do not end up in the hands of people who are legally prohibited from owning them, such as those with serious violent convictions or a history of dangerous behavior. Using a consistent system checks run through for all gun sales that are made in Az, including private and online transactions, closes loopholes and creates clear, fair rules for everyone. When background checks are accurate, timely, and applied equally, they can help prevent tragedies, build public trust, and balance individual rights with the shared responsibility to keep communities safe.

Alternative one



Pros

- Prevents prohibited individuals from legally acquiring firearms
- Since the Brady Act's background check requirement began in 1994 (and NICS launched in 1998), millions of sales have been blocked to people who shouldn't have guns.
- Over 4-5 million denials have occurred cumulatively (with recent annual figures around 100,000-370,000 denials out of tens of millions of checks).



Cons

- The cons of background checks is can create significant, costly, and time-consuming barriers to employment, often penalizing candidates for past mistakes or minor offenses.
- Private sellers aren't equipped to run checks easily (no direct access to NICS without becoming licensed dealers), leading to required FFL involvement and potential monopolies for dealers.

Alternative Two-

One alternative reasons our class came up with was Assault weapon banned.

Assault weapon bans are laws that restrict or prohibit the sale and manufacture of certain semi-automatic firearms defined as “assault weapons.” These laws usually target guns with military-style features and sometimes limit high-capacity magazines. Supporters argue they reduce mass shooting severity, while opponents question their effectiveness and constitutionality.



Alternative Two-

Assault weapon Bans **States With Assault Weapon Bans**

These states have **laws that generally ban assault weapons** (covering sale/manufacture and typically possession with varying “legacy” provisions)

- **California** – Statewide ban on defined assault weapons.
- **Connecticut** – Long standing ban expanded after Sandy Hook.
- **Delaware** – Ban in place.
- **Hawaii** – Assault pistols and related weapons banned.
- **Illinois** – Assault weapons banned (sale/manufacture), with registration rules for those owned before law.
- **Maryland** – Ban on assault-style rifles and pistols.
- **Massachusetts** – Assault weapons prohibited.
- **New Jersey** – Broad ban including many semiautomatic firearms.
- **New York** – Statewide ban (often tied to the SAFE Act).
- **Washington** – Sales and manufacture banned (possession rules vary).

Plus:

- **District of Columbia** also has strict assault-weapon prohibition laws.

Alternative 2 Assault weapon bans



Pros

- **May reduce mass shooting harm** – Supporters argue banning certain high-powered semi-automatic rifles could lower the number of deaths and injuries in mass shootings.
- **Limits access to military-style weapons** – Supporters believe civilians do not need weapons designed for rapid fire and combat-style use.
-

Cons

- **Second Amendment concerns** – Opponents argue bans limit the constitutional right to own firearms.
- **Effectiveness questioned** – Critics say most gun crimes involve handguns, not assault-style rifles, so bans may have limited impact on overall crime.



Government Responsibility

Our state government has a responsibility to regulate gun purchases because they must help keep their communities safe. By creating rules like background checks and waiting periods, cities can make it harder for dangerous people to buy guns. These laws can help reduce gun violence and protect families, students, and neighborhoods. For example, states like California have stricter gun laws that work with national laws made by the United States Congress to help prevent shootings and keep people safer. When city governments regulate gun purchases, they are working to protect public safety and save lives.



Analysis

Background checks help verify identity, qualifications, and criminal history, promoting safety and reducing risk. They can protect organizations and build trust. Private sellers don't have simple access to systems like NICS unless they become licensed dealers, which makes running checks on their own difficult. As a result, they must go through an FFL, which can concentrate control in the hands of licensed dealers and potentially limit competition.

Assault weapon ban allow us to reduce the potential injuries and deaths in mass shootings. They also allow us to keep military style weapons off the streets are away from dangerous people hands. The issue with an assault weapon ban is the rights provided by our country, according to our 2nd amendment we have the right to bear arms. People might be able to contest this law saying it violates their second amendment right.



Our Class Policy

Our class chose a 7 day gun waiting period as a law because they help stop people from acting on impulse, give time for background checks, and can prevent tragedies like suicides and domestic violence, keeping more people safe.

A waiting period for guns is a law that requires someone to wait a certain number of days after buying a firearm before they can take it home. Even if the buyer has already paid for it and passed a background check, the gun can't be transferred until the waiting time ends. These waiting periods are meant to give law enforcement extra time to complete background checks and create a "cooling-off" time so that someone acting on strong emotions won't have immediate access to a firearm.

Benefits of Gun Waiting Periods

1. **Prevents impulsive violence**

Waiting periods create a “cooling-off” time between purchasing and receiving a firearm. This can reduce crimes or harmful actions that happen in moments of anger, fear, or emotional distress.

2. **Reduces suicide rates**

Many suicides happen during short-term crises. A waiting period can delay access to a firearm, giving a person time to calm down or seek help, which may lower suicide risk.

3. **Allows time for background checks**

Waiting periods give authorities more time to complete background checks thoroughly, helping prevent firearms from being sold to individuals who are legally prohibited from owning them.

Drawbacks of Gun Waiting Periods

One drawback of gun waiting periods is that they can delay people who want a gun for self-defense, especially if they believe they are in immediate danger. Another drawback is that they can be frustrating for law-abiding citizens who have already passed background checks. Waiting periods can also create extra paperwork and costs for gun stores and government offices. In addition, people who have already owned guns before may feel it is unfair to wait again for another purchase. Because of these reasons, critics believe waiting periods can inconvenience responsible citizens.

Constitutionality

Our proposed policy does not break any constitutional rights- here are cases that support this assertion.

Gun waiting periods are rules that make people wait a few days like 3 to 10 days before they can take home a gun they bought, even after passing a background check. These laws are constitutional because they help keep people safe. They give someone time to cool off if they're mad or sad, which can stop bad things like crimes of passion or quick suicides. Courts used to say these waits are okay as a smart safety measure, and many still do. They don't take away the right to own guns forever they just add a short delay to make sure guns aren't used in the heat of the moment. Experts say waiting periods lower gun deaths without stopping law abiding people from protecting themselves in the long run. So, they're a fair, commonsense way to follow the Second Amendment while saving lives.

Constitutionality

Our proposed policy does not break any constitutional rights:
Our proposed policy does not break any of the 10 amendments. Actually, the Bill of rights state plenty of reasons supporting our case.

- Cases defended waiting periods in California, Maine, New Mexico, Vermont and ruled that these laws are justified.
 - <https://everytownlaw.org/brief-type/waiting-periods/>
- **Ortega v. Grisham, No. 24-2121 (10th Cir. 2025)** – Opinion on *Justia*
 - <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate-courts/ca10/24-2121/24-2121-2025-08-19.html>
- **Silvester v. Harris, No. 14-16840 (9th Cir. 2016)** – Opinion on *Justia*
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- **Courthouse News Service – Ninth Circuit ruling on California waiting period**
The Ninth Circuit upheld the waiting period as a reasonable safety precaution.
<https://www.courthousenews.com/ninth-circuit-oks-californias-gun-waiting-period/>

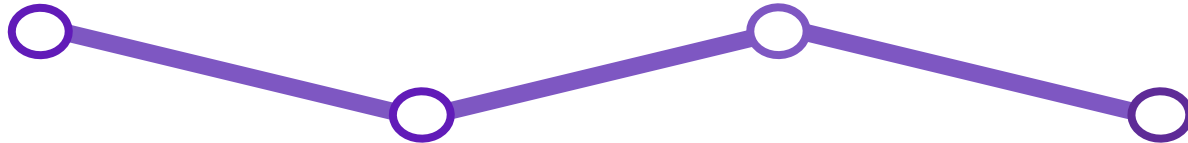
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Action Plan Introduction: Timeline of events

Conduct research

Create a solution and find
available funding sources



Survey the Community

Propose our solution to the
City Council

Step 1- Conduct Research to Identify the Problem

Our first step was to research the problems caused by gun violence in our neighborhood. We used Google to find news articles that explained what is happening with gun violence in Phoenix. We also researched what our government is doing to solve the problem of gun violence. This helped us see how big of a problem gun violence is in our community and that we need to do more to help solve this problem.



Step 2- Survey the Community

We discussed this with our school and community about the problems related to gun violence. This was done to identify the perspectives of our community on this problem. It was important to be sure that this was not just an issue that impacted us but our whole community.



Step 3- Funding the proposed project

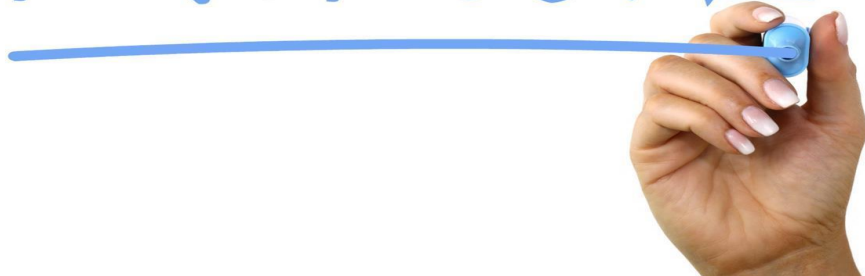
We looked for grants that could help fund this policy. We did this so we can implement this project without raising taxes. People may not support this if they have to pay extra tax to make it happen. We were not able to find cost for the government to implement this law .



Step 4- Propose solution to the City Council

Our last step would be to present this solution to legislators for their consideration. We will work to contact our local representative or senator to discuss how to bring this idea up for consideration by the legislature in general session..

PROPOSAL



Proposed Costs



Around \$20–60 million annually (basic background check system):

One estimate found that running checks tied to waiting periods could cost about **\$20 million per year for retail sales** and up to **\$60 million for all gun transfers**, based on per-transaction costs.

Higher upfront + ongoing costs for larger systems:

More complex systems (like nationwide databases or expanded enforcement)

Gun retailers are going to lose money because customers will buy it by a from a private seller instead of waiting.

We couldn't find out of the government cost there is no evidence of much that would cost.

Proposed funding sources

<https://www.ncgvr.org/grants.html>

<https://www.everytown.org/solutions/voca/>

<https://www.bohnettfoundation.org/grants/category/gun-violence-prevention/>



Government Officials Needing to be Influenced

We would need to influence the City Council as their vote is needed to enact this solution.

- The current Mayor of Phoenix is Kate Gallego,
- Our current vice mayor is Kesha hodge washington

And our current city council members

- Ann O'Brein (District 1)
- Jim Waring (District 2)
- Debra stark (District 3)
- Laura pastor (District 4)
- Betty Guardado (District 5)
- Kevin robinson (District 6)
- Anna hernandez (District 7)
- Kesha hodge washington (District 8)

Supporters and opponents

SUPPORTERS

- Community members who want to see these people get the help they need.
- **Arizonans for Gun Safety**. One of the biggest statewide groups focused on reducing gun violence. They support “**evidence-based solutions**” and **safer gun policies**, which can include things like waiting periods
- **Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America** Has active chapters in Phoenix Advocates for stricter gun laws and organizes rallies and events locally.
- **Alternatives to Violence Project Arizona Focuses** more on reducing violence overall, but groups like this often support policies that prevent harm.
- **Everytown for Gun Safety** Works with local activists and pushes for laws like background checks and waiting periods.

OPPONENTS

- Taxpayers because they don't want to pay more money
- **National Rifle Association (NRA)** – A major national group that opposes restrictions on gun purchases, including waiting periods.
- **Arizona Second Amendment Association** – Advocates for minimal restrictions on gun ownership in Arizona.
- **Gun Owners of America (GOA)** – Often opposes additional regulations on firearms sales
- **Gun Owners of America (GOA)** – Often opposes additional regulations on firearms sales
- **Local gun ranges and shooting clubs** – Many local ranges, clubs, and pro-gun community groups resist policies that they see as limiting gun access.

