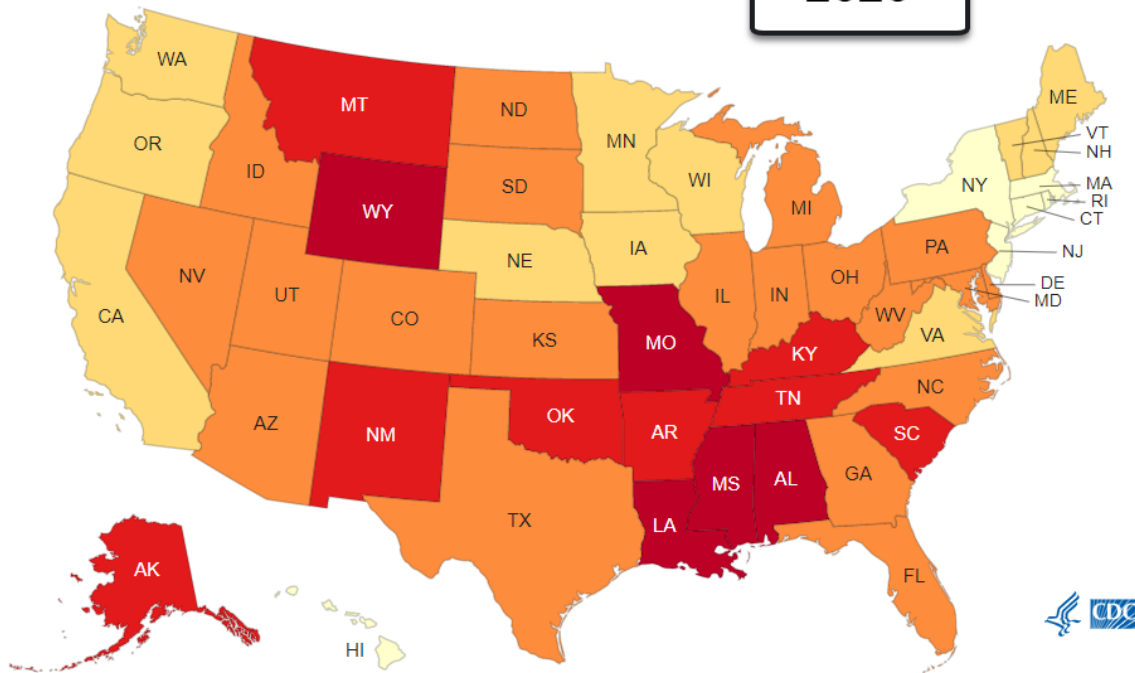


Which Policy Options Reduce Gun Violence?

Firearm Mortality by State

2020



Age-Adjusted Death Rates¹



In 2020, Arizona had 1,265 deaths from guns, 385 by homicide, about 1 a day, and 830 were suicides, slightly more than 2 a day.¹ State policies that encourage gun safety have a modest but significant impact on firearm homicide rates, e.g., California's homicide rate is 20% less than Arizona's. However, they have a much more significant impact on firearm suicide rates, as California's firearm suicide rate is about one-third of Arizona's. Though these differences may also reflect other social policies that help alleviate financial and mental stresses that people most at-risk experience.

The first time GCI put out this blog was after the mass shootings in El Paso, Texas and Dayton, Ohio. Today we're focused primarily on mass shootings by an 18 year-old white supremacist targeting African-Americans at a grocery store in Buffalo, 200 miles from where he lived, as well as the shocking school shooting by another disturbed 18 year-old in Uvalde, Texas, that killed two 4th grade teachers and 19 of their students.

Policy in the United States and Arizona toward guns is very different from other potentially dangerous activities. Consider that the perpetrators in these acts of domestic terrorism were too young to legally purchase alcohol, but they could legally purchase a deadly weapon. Likewise, they had to go through training to obtain the driver's license that each used to legally drive the vehicle to the site of their mass murders. But they needed no safety training in order to purchase and discharge their firearms.

We have these regulations in place for public safety reasons. Research showed that alcohol and young drivers was a dangerous combination, so the drinking age was increased and deaths from auto accidents involving those under 21 dropped significantly.²

When we fly, we take for granted that we need to be careful what we bring and are willing to wait in line to go through the TSA inspection process because even though we are not a terrorist, we recognize the public safety need.

For some reason, many people who support the above public health measures refuse to acknowledge them as it relates to gun safety.

The Grand Canyon Institute (GCI) has not conducted original research on the topic of reducing gun violence. However, it has taken this opportunity to review related studies in an effort to contribute to the discussion as policymakers in Arizona and Washington, D.C. consider public policy options.

Essentially, if we could do just three things to assure gun safety, it would be.

- 1) Require people who wish to purchase a firearm to get a license to do so from their local police department. This is one of the most effective methods to ensure gun safety.
- 2) Create a nationwide electronic data base that tracks gun purchases. Currently, after the fact we can track where purchases were done, but law enforcement has no tool to pre-emptively identify risk, such as the two semi-automatic rifle purchases of the Texas shooter right after he turned 18.

¹ Davis, Ari, Lisa Geller et al.(2022), "A Year in Review: 2020 Gun Deaths in the U.S.," The Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions, April 28, <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/sites/default/files/2022-05/2020-gun-deaths-in-the-us-4-28-2022-b.pdf>.

² Centers for Disease Control, "A Minimum Legal Drinking Age (MLDA) of 21 Saves Lives and Protects Health," Minimum legal drinking age of 21 saves lives | CDC.

3) Red Flag Laws--these are most helpful in preventing suicides by temporarily or permanently preventing individuals deemed to be a potential danger to themselves or others from procuring a firearm. These only work, though, if data bases used to conduct background checks are well integrated with mental health records as well as past violent offenses.

What Works--The Details

Focus should be brought on Congress to the degree that better research on gun violence would be useful. Only recently has the Dickey Amendment, which prohibited the Centers for Disease Control from researching gun violence, been lifted after the Parkland gun massacre, and only recently has Congress begun to fund research.³

However, the Tiahrt amendment remains in place, which restricts the ability of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) from developing an electronic database to track firearms that could be shared with researchers or law enforcement.⁴ So while gun traces are conducted after a crime has been committed, those traces are done through paper trail rather than computerized methods, which is both costly and time consuming. Pro-active uses to identify individuals who might be stockpiling a dangerous weapons cache, such as the Las Vegas shooter, is made extremely cumbersome and difficult by the Tiahrt Amendment.⁵

Summary of Policy Options	
Policy Option	Research Findings
Banning assault weapons, limits on high capacity clips	Likely to reduce number killed in mass shootings—not conclusive on reducing number of mass shootings due to limited data. 1994 Assault weapons ban had loopholes.
Universal background checks	May reduce homicide rates up to 15%. ⁶ But some recent studies indicate a far smaller impact. Studies do identify one very effective means of implementing universal background checks is

³ Stolberg, Sheryl Gay (2021), "Can New Gun Violence Research Find a Path Around the Political Stalemate," The New York Times, March 27, CDC Funding Gun Violence Research for First Time in Decades - The New York Times (nytimes.com)

⁴ Barton, Champe, "‘Americans Have Had Enough’: Lawmakers Demand ATF Transparency over Gun Store Inspections," The Trace, Congressional Dems Demand ATF Gun Store Inspections Data (thetrace.org).

⁵ Sources to consult: "Executive Summary." National Research Council. 2005. *Firearms and Violence: A Critical Review*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. doi: 10.17226/10881. "Krouse, William J. (2009), "Gun Control: Statutory Disclosure Limitations on ATF Firearms Trace Data and Multiple Handgun Sales Reports," Congressional Research Service, May 27, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RS22458.pdf>. Dooley, Erin (2017), "Here's why the federal government can't study gun violence," ABC News, Oct. 6, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/federal-government-study-gun-violence/story?id=50300379>.

⁶ Siegel, Michael, Molly Pahn, Ziming Xua, Eric Fliegler, and David Hemenway (2019), "The Impact of State Firearms Laws on Homicide and Suicide Deaths in the U.S., 1991-2016: a Panel Study," *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, March. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs11606-019-04922-x>

	permit-to-purchase that includes a background check and must be obtained from a local police department. ⁷ Studies have found this reduced gun-related homicides from 14 to 40%.
Prohibiting all violent offenders (including misdemeanors) from owning a gun	Linked with a reduction in homicide rates of about 15%. ⁸
Shall issue & Permitless carry	No effect to an increase of about 9% in homicides (studies vary). ⁹ Permitless Carry is linked to a 5% increase in gun-related suicides. ¹⁰
Red Flag (imminent danger) Laws	Studies of Indiana and Connecticut show a decrease in suicide rates by about 10%. ¹¹ Impact beyond suicide rates is likely limited as those with mental illness are not more likely to commit violence on others. Combining with universal background checks (most guns involved in crimes avoid current background checks), these laws are only effective to the degree databases include mental impairments that

⁷ 40%: Rudolph, Kara E., Elizabeth E. Stuart, Jon S. Vernick, and Daniel W. Webster (2015), "Association between Connecticut's Permit-to-Purchase Handgun Law and Homicides, American Journal of Public Health, April 4, <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/full/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302703>. 14%: Crifasi, Cassandra K., Molly Merrill-Francis, Alex McCourt, John S. Vernick, Garen J. Winemute, and Daniel W. Webster (2018), "Association between Firearm Laws and Homicide in Urban Counties," Journal of Urban Health, June, https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11524-018-0273-3?wt_mc=Internal.Event.1.SEM.ArticleAuthorOnlineFirst/ A third study of Missouri found a 25 percent increase in gun-homicides when they got rid of their PTP program: "Webster, Daniel, Cassandra Kercher Crifasi, and Jon S. Vernick (2013), "Effects of Missouri's Repeal of its Handgun Purchaser Licensing Law on Homicides," Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research, December 17, https://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/johns-hopkins-center-for-gun-policy-and-research/_archive-2019/_pdfs/effects-of-missouris-repeal-of-its-handgun-purchaser-licensing-law-on-homicides.pdf

⁸ Siegel, Michael, Molly Pahn, Ziming Xua, Eric Flegler, and David Hemenway (2019), "The Impact of State Firearms Laws on Homicide and Suicide Deaths in the U.S., 1991-2016: a Panel Study," Journal of General Internal Medicine, March. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs11606-019-04922-x>

⁹ Siegel, Michael, Xuan Ziming, Craig S. Ross, Sandro Galea, Biindu Kalesan, Eric Flegler, and Kristin A. Goss (2015), "Easiness of Legal Access to Concealed Firearm Permits and Homicide Rates in the United States," American Journal of Public Health, August, <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2017.304057> and Siegel, Michael, Molly Pahn, Ziming Xua, Eric Flegler, and David Hemenway (2019), "The Impact of State Firearms Laws on Homicide and Suicide Deaths in the U.S., 1991-2016: a Panel Study," Journal of General Internal Medicine, March. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs11606-019-04922-x>; Hamill, Mark E., Matthew C. Hernandez, Kent R. Bailey, Martin Zielinski, Miguel A. Matos and Henry J. Schiller, (2018), "State Level Firearm Concealed-Carry Legislation and Rates of Homicide and Other Violent Crime," October, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jamcollsurg.2018.08.694>.

¹⁰ See below in document for details on studies. For suicides see Siegel, Michael, Molly Pahn, Ziming Xua, Eric Flegler, and David Hemenway (2019), "The Impact of State Firearms Laws on Homicide and Suicide Deaths in the U.S., 1991-2016: a Panel Study," Journal of General Internal Medicine, March. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs11606-019-04922-x>

¹¹ Kivisto, Aaron J. and Peter Lee Phalen (2018), "Effects of Risk-Based Firearm Seizure Laws in Connecticut and Indiana on Suicide Rates, 1981-2015," Psychiatric Services, June, <https://ps.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.ps.201700250>.

	may predispose someone to violence (Jared Loughner had no records in a searchable database.)
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Many agree that there is limited political capital for passing firearm-related legislation. Therefore, proposed policies should have significant public support **and** be effective at reducing firearm related deaths. *The New York Times* published an article in October 2017 that gathered input from researchers regarding how they viewed the efficacy of a range of policies to prevent gun deaths and nationwide public support for those same policies.

The three policies that were identified as likely to be successful were:

- Barring sales to all violent criminals — 85% public support, 6.8 on a scale of 1 to 10 for effectiveness.
- Universal checks for gun buyers — 89% public support, 6.6 on a scale of 1 to 10 for effectiveness.
- Bar sales to people deemed dangerous by a mental health provider — 88% public support, 6.3 on a scale of 1 to 10 for effectiveness.

The data for *The New York Times* article was gathered in June 2016. Public support may have shifted on some of the policies reviewed given the number of mass shootings since the article was published.

Firearm laws in Arizona¹²

Arizona has minimal regulations in place to govern firearms. The following is a summary of Arizona's laws:

Shall-Issue/Permitless Carry

Also known as Constitutional Carry, no permit is required to carry a concealed handgun in Arizona for people 21 years and older. A person must be 18 years old or older to open carry. State law does not require the registration of firearms.

For purposes of reciprocity with other states and carrying firearms in regulated places, Arizona gun owners can apply for a concealed carry permit from the Concealed Weapons Permit Unit of the Arizona Department of Public Safety.

Stand Your Ground

This law allows for the deadly use of force as a first resort if a person is threatened in a public place.

Right to Possession Under Mental Health Law

A person found to have a persistent or acute disability or to be a danger to self or to others automatically becomes a prohibited firearm possessor indefinitely, with notification to the Arizona Dept. of Public Safety.

Background Checks

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gun_laws_in_Arizona

Are not required. In May 2017, Gov. Doug Ducey signed a bill that prevents local governments from requiring background checks for private sales.

Native American Tribes

Tribal governments may have gun laws that are identical to or more restrictive than state law. Some tribal governments in Arizona may not recognize Arizona law on the concealed carrying of firearms without a permit while on tribal land.¹³

Laws and their impact on gun violence

It is useful to understand the impact that firearm regulations have had on firearm-related deaths when contemplating any changes to legislation. The following provides an overview of various firearm regulations and data available to demonstrate their impact.

Assault weapons and high capacity magazines

Assault weapons are a focal point of discussion in the gun control debate and their ban is a priority for many given the lethal damage they can unleash in a short period of time. Less than 3% of gun homicides in the US are caused by assault rifles according to a review of the assault weapons ban published in Vox in April 2018.¹⁴

Analyses of the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, which banned assault weapons, provided mixed results. Christopher Koper, a Professor of Criminology, Law and Society at George Mason University, conducted the study for the US Department of Justice's National Institute of Justice. He found that crimes committed with assault weapons declined while there was a steady or increasing number of crimes committed with other guns equipped with large capacity magazines. Koper cautioned that the efficacy of the ban is difficult to determine because of its loopholes.¹⁵

Notably, Koper indicated that he felt the ban on large capacity magazines could have been the law's 'most important provision' because it affected firearms not covered by the assault weapons ban.¹⁶

The RAND Corporation went a step further and looked at assault weapons bans at the state level. RAND determined that evidence was 'inconclusive' with regard to the effect bans had on assault weapons and high capacity magazines in mass shootings and violent crime.

One of the criticisms of the 1994 ban is that it phased out assault weapons over time resulting in a gradual impact — some believe that if the ban had stayed in place the impact would have grown over time. Daniel Webster, director of the Center for Gun Policy and Research said that based on an unpublished analysis of a public mass shooting database created by Mother

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gun_laws_in_Arizona

¹⁴ Lopez, German. (April 3, 2018). *The Capital Gazette shooting and the limits of an assault weapons ban*. Retrieved from <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/4/3/17174160/assault-weapons-ar-15-ban>.

¹⁵ Koper, Christopher (July 2004) *Updated Assessment of the Federal Assault Weapons Ban: Impacts on Gun Markets and Gun Violence, 1994-2003*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/204431.pdf>

¹⁶ Lopez, German.

Jones, "...the number of people who are shot in public mass shootings goes down roughly by 10 percent every year that the law was in place."¹⁷

Universal background checks

A 2019 study found a 16% decrease in overall homicide rates associated with states that required universal background checks.¹⁸ Such laws require that a purchaser must undergo a background check at the point of purchase or through a license or permitting process. Other research has not found as dramatic an impact. RAND found moderate evidence that universal background checks reduce violent crime and suicide, but some other recent studies found no statistical effect. Background checks are only as effective as the datasets used as well as how well they are enforced. Some critics have noted that some research relied on times when implementation was still ramping up.¹⁹

Federal law currently requires that gun dealers conduct background checks before selling a customer a gun. Background checks are not required in firearm sales by unlicensed sellers – these sales take place at gun shows, over the internet, etc. This opens up the opportunity for people with domestic abuse record, violent offenders or people with mental illness to purchase guns. According to the Giffords Law Center, 22% of gun owners in the United States bought their most recent gun without a background check.²⁰ Those guns evading current background checks are far more likely to be used in crime.

One clear policy that consistently shows positive results are Permit to Purchase laws. Connecticut's Permit-to-Purchase law — in place for more than 20 years — has with statistical controls for other factors been estimated to reduce fire arms homicides by 40%. Under Permit to Purchase individuals must visit a local police station to receive a permit to purchase firearms and must pass a background check. That said, no gun restriction legislation will stop all violence, and this law was not able to stop the Sandy Hook massacre, probably because the killer's mother acquired the guns.²¹

PTP was rescinded in Missouri and researchers there found gun-related homicide rates rose nearly 25%. One of the recent studies that found no clear impact from expanded background checks did find that PTP reduced firearm-related homicides by 14 percent.²²

¹⁷ Lopez, German.

¹⁸ Siegel et al.

¹⁹ Links to research can be found in Lopez, German (2019), "The House just passed what could be the biggest change to federal gun laws in decades: The research, however, suggests that Congress should go even bigger," February 27, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2019/2/27/18224727/house-universal-background-checks-gun-violence-congress>.

²⁰ <https://lawcenter.giffords.org/gun-laws/policy-areas/background-checks/universal-background-checks/>

²¹ Rudolph, Kara E., Elizabeth E. Stuart, Jon S. Vernick, and Daniel W. Webster (2015), "Association between Connecticut's Permit-to-Purchase Handgun Law and Homicides, *American Journal of Public Health*, April 4, <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/full/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302703>.

²² 14%: Crifasi, Cassandra K., Molly Merrill-Francis, Alex McCourt, John S. Vernick, Garen J. Winemute, and Daniel W. Webster (2018), "Association between Firearm Laws and Homicide in Urban Counties," *Journal of Urban Health*, June, https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11524-018-0273-3?wt_mc=Internal.Event.1.SEM.ArticleAuthorOnlineFirst/ A third study of Missouri found a 25 percent increase in gun-homicides when they got rid of their PTP program: "Webster, Daniel, Cassandra Kercher Crifasi, and Jon S.

PTP is also been demonstrated to significantly reduce gun-related suicides as well.

Violent misdemeanor laws

Laws that bar individuals of convicted of violent misdemeanors from possessing a gun were associated with a 15 to 20 % decrease in homicides. Specific stipulations of the laws studied include that it:

- covers the possession as well as the purchase of firearms.
- must include assault as well as aggravated assault in reference to the prior misdemeanor.
- must extend beyond domestic violence-related misdemeanors, restraining orders and stalking.
- must not require that the misdemeanor be punishable by imprisonment of more than one year.
- must not require that the misdemeanor involve the use of a firearm or result in injury.²³

When a domestic abuser has access to a gun, their victim is five times more likely to be killed, according to the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.²⁴

Shall-carry laws

Thirty-six states have 'shall carry' laws that entitle a person to a concealed carry permit unless the individual meets some disqualifying criteria. Research on Shall-carry and permitless carry is mixed regarding its impact on homicides and violent crime. Two studies suggest a positive connection with homicide rates (leading to more murders) —about 7% more²⁵. A different study found no correlation with homicides or other violent crime.²⁶ No evidence has been found that such legislation reduces crime.

However, permitless carry was found to lead to a 5% rise in suicides.²⁷

Firearm violence research

Vernick (2013), "Effects of Missouri's Repeal of its Handgun Purchaser Licensing Law on Homicides," Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research, December 17, https://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/johns-hopkins-center-for-gun-policy-and-research/_archive-2019/_pdfs/effects-of-missouris-repeal-of-its-handgun-purchaser-licensing-law-on-homicides.pdf

²³ Siegel et al.

²⁴ <https://lawcenter.giffords.org/gun-laws/policy-areas/who-can-have-a-gun/domestic-violence-firearms/>

²⁵ Siegel, Michael, Xuan Ziming, Craig S. Ross, Sandro Galea, Biindu Kalesan, Eric Fleegler, and Kristin A. Goss (2015), "Easiness of Legal Access to Concealed Firearm Permits and Homicide Rates in the United States," American Journal of Public Health, August, <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2017.304057> and Siegel, Michael, Molly Pahn, Ziming Xua, Eric Fleegler, and David Hemenway (2019), "The Impact of State Firearm Laws on Homicide and Suicide Deaths in the U.S., 1991-2016: a Panel Study," Journal of General Internal Medicine, March. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs11606-019-04922-x>

²⁶ Hamill, Mark E., Matthew C. Hernandez, Kent R. Bailey, Martin Zielinski, Miguel A. Matos and Henry J. Schiller, (2018), "State Level Firearm Concealed-Carry Legislation and Rates of Homicide and Other Violent Crime," October, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jamcollsurg.2018.08.694>.

²⁷ Siegel, Michael, Molly Pahn, Ziming Xua, Eric Fleegler, and David Hemenway (2019), "The Impact of State Firearm Laws on Homicide and Suicide Deaths in the U.S., 1991-2016: a Panel Study," Journal of General Internal Medicine, March. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs11606-019-04922-x>

One of the challenges in identifying strategies to combat violence associated with firearms is that the Center for Disease Control and Prevention is effectively prohibited from researching firearm violence or effective strategies for reducing the number of deaths and injuries. The Dickey Amendment passed by Congress in 1997 states that the CDC is prohibited from using funds for injury prevention and control “to advocate or promote gun control.”

Ironically, Congressman Dickey who was passionate about Second Amendment rights changed his stance on research into gun violence. In a July 2012 opinion piece in the Washington Post he said, “Firearm injuries will continue to claim far too many lives at home, at school, at work and at the movies until we start asking and answering the hard questions. Scientific research should be conducted into preventing firearm injuries.”²⁸ However, the research ban though lifted in 2018 after the Parkland massacre of students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School has not been followed with any funding to actually student gun violence²⁹.

Similarly, research to understand the impact of assault weapons on mass shootings is also weak because there is no designated database for tracking these crimes or the weapons used.

Tracking guns

Another obstacle at the federal level is the Tiahrt Amendment which prohibits the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) from maintaining a searchable database. Tracking a gun used to commit a crime requires searching through paper records that are handwritten and stored in boxes. Proponents of the law claim that it protects second amendment rights while critics say it prevents enforcement of the law.

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The Grand Canyon Institute, a 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization, is a centrist think tank led by a bipartisan group of former state lawmakers, economists, community leaders and academicians. The Grand Canyon Institute serves as an independent voice reflecting a pragmatic approach to addressing economic, fiscal, budgetary and taxation issues confronting Arizona.

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²⁸ https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/we-wont-know-the-cause-of-gun-violence-until-we-look-for-it/2012/07/27/gJQAPfenEX_story.html

²⁹ Lalo, Matt (2019), “The CDC could totally study gun violence—it just needs money,” Wired, August 7, <https://www.wired.com/story/cdc-gun-violence-research-money/>

