



Gun Violence

An action of the 225th General Assembly (2022)



Approved by the 225th General Assembly (2022)
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Developed by
The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP)
of the General Assembly Mission Council/Presbyterian Mission Agency
www.pcusa.org/acswp or www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/acswp
See also www.justiceUnbound.org for current discussion



Affirmation:

We remember that the disciples ask Jesus when he saw them in faithful ministry and he answered, “As you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40). In our country 40,000 people are losing their lives each year to gun violence. Each one of these represents to us the crucified Christ, as do their orphans, their grieving parents and families, as do the nearly 100,000 who are injured and the countless others who are traumatized by gun violence through suicides, murders, family violence and accidents. In faithfulness to the Prince of Peace, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) stands with, grieves with and calls for change alongside the victims of our uniquely American epidemic of gun violence..

Recommendations:

As the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) marks 10 years since the adoption of “Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God’s Call,” the epidemic of gun violence has continued unabated and, in fact, has intensified and worsened. It is time for the PC(USA) to reaffirm and strengthen its commitment to be an active and prophetic leader in the national movement to end gun violence. To this end, the 225th General Assembly (2022) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approves the following recommendations:

1. Renew its commitment to end gun violence by approving a 10-year campaign, the Decade to End Gun Violence (2022–2032), to be conducted at all levels of the church.
2. Make this report and subsequent updates to this report available to congregations, mid councils and other entities during the Decade to End Gun Violence.
3. Incorporate efforts to end gun violence into the Presbyterian Mission Agency’s (PMA) Matthew 25 Initiative.
 - a. Develop and distribute online liturgical resources to mid councils.
 - b. Direct the Office of Theology and Worship to develop a resource to inform congregations and assist clergy with pastoral courage in addressing gun violence prevention.
 - c. Incorporate the work of the PMA on militarism with gun violence.
4. Direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency and its partner entities to develop online study and advocacy on:
 - a. How to build a faith-based gun violence prevention advocacy organization.
 - b. How to focus the attention of clergy and congregations on gun violence prevention as both a human right and public health issue, with a specific focus on the connection between guns and suicide completion.
 - c. Confront the mythology that guns make us safe, including providing education and resources around gun-free congregational security.
 - d. Law enforcement reforms, including changes in use-of-force training, police culture and fair prosecution of cases of police gun violence.
 - e. The intersection of white supremacy culture, Christian nationalism and gender with gun violence.
 - f. Ways to recognize the potential for, prevent and address intimate partner violence, especially as it relates to gun violence.
5. Direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency to provide funds to support local and regional initiatives to end gun violence, such as violence interrupters, community safe green spaces, and faith-based gun violence prevention organizations and legislation directed toward more effective regulation of firearm



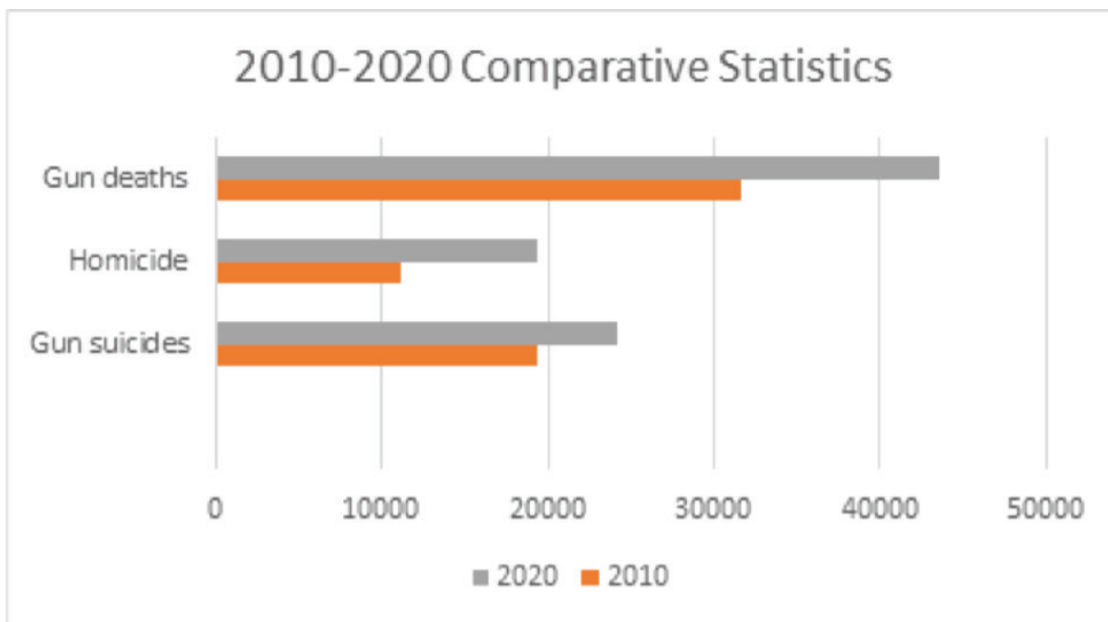
- sales, purchases, possession and ownership.
6. Direct the Office of the General Assembly to call upon all mid councils to:
 - a. Include ending gun violence as a regular part of their work and witness during the Decade to End Gun Violence.
 - b. Commend to all mid councils, as examples, the gun violence policies of the Presbytery of Detroit and the Presbytery of Transylvania.
 7. Direct Presbyterian Disaster Assistance to produce a sequel to the documentary *Trigger: The Ripple Effect of Gun Violence*, and Presbyterian Peacemaking Program to create an accompanying online study guide.
 - a. Make the documentary segmented for use in a variety of settings.
 - b. Create a brief video for use in worship and publicity.
 8. Direct and support the Office of Public Witness, the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations and other advocacy bodies, to continue to advocate for the policies previously approved by PC(USA) General Assemblies, adding:
 - a. Prohibit the sale, manufacture and importation of ghost guns (3D plastic produced guns).
 - b. Eliminate Stand Your Ground laws.
 - c. Develop childproof handguns and smart technologies to prevent unintentional or unauthorized discharge.
 - d. Advocate for extreme risk protection orders with awareness of potential racial disparities in Extreme Risk Protection Orders implementation.
 - e. Advocate for policies that address illegal gun trafficking, including laws that limit handgun purchases to individuals to no more than one handgun per month.
 - f. Advocate for policies that protect against intimate partner gun violence.
 9. Call upon federal, state and local governments to establish offices for gun violence prevention with strategies that would include funding for evidence-based community intervention programming, such as violence interrupters, trauma healing and promoting better access to mental health care, particularly for young people.
 10. Instruct PMA to establish a subgroup with additional staff support to create and oversee the Decade to End Gun Violence campaign. The group will:
 - a. Monitor, support and encourage all the efforts being made across the denomination.
 - b. Make recommendations about developing partnerships with other organizations.
 - c. Coordinate best use of the budgetary resources.
 - d. Bring annual reports to each assembly.
 - e. Encourage and coordinate advocacy efforts at federal, state and local levels.
 - f. Highlight best practices at gun violence prevention and facilitate training opportunities.
 - g. Be in communication with other entities in the denomination where agendas overlap.
 11. Call upon the entertainment industry to reduce depictions of gun violence and glorification of gun violence in movies, television, video games and music.
 12. The PC(USA) calls upon all civilly elected representatives, at all levels, to earnestly, courageously and urgently pass meaningful legislation for the common good and public safety of all our citizens, residents and visitors.



At the 219th General Assembly in 2010, the Social Witness Policy statement, “[Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God’s Call](#),” passed unanimously. “GV2” described the “plague of gun violence” in our society at that time, laid out a theological basis for response and presented a strategy for a mobilized response. Many Presbyterian congregations used the study guide provided to take a deep dive into the document. Although it was the ninth action by the GA within 30 years, and was part of a chorus of 19 statements among other mainline Protestant denominations, it reflected a fresh commitment and deep hope for change.

Indeed, much has changed in terms of gun violence since 2010:

- Gun deaths have increased significantly, from around 30,000 per year to current annual levels of over 40,000, with the greatest proportion being suicides. [In 2010, there were 31,672 gun deaths](#)—the lowest level since 1981. In 2020, the [total of firearm fatalities had climbed to 43,596](#).

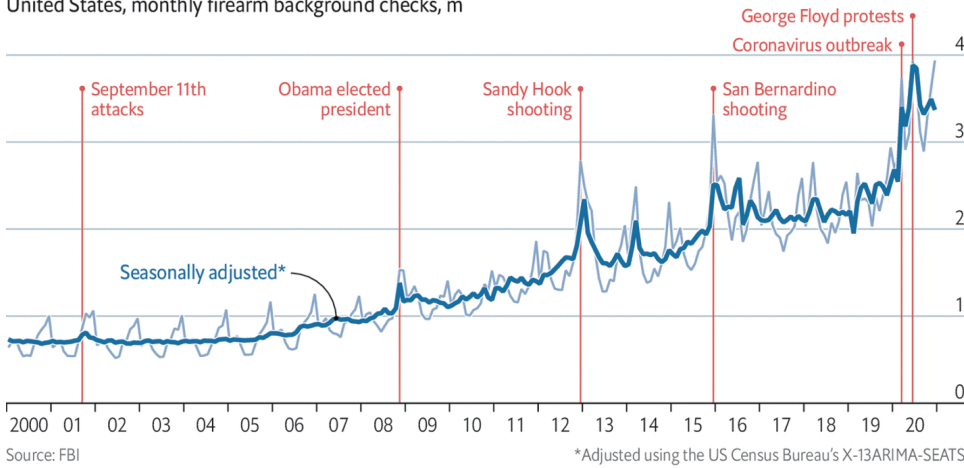


- As gun deaths increase, so do the number of people who are injured—about [twice the number of those who die suffer nonfatal injuries](#) that have a serious impact on their lives and those of their families. Young adults, males and people of color are disproportionately represented in these grim statistics.[3]
- Gun ownership has also increased dramatically in the past decade. Although sales spiked when Obama was elected, and after mass shootings (as many gun owners feared restrictions), during the pandemic and antiracism mobilization of 2020 gun sales surged even more by 40%. The proportion of households that have guns has increased in the past 10 years (now 42%, up from 39% in 2010) and more gun owners say that “personal protection” is their primary motivation for having firearms (63%).

Gun Sales 2000–2020:

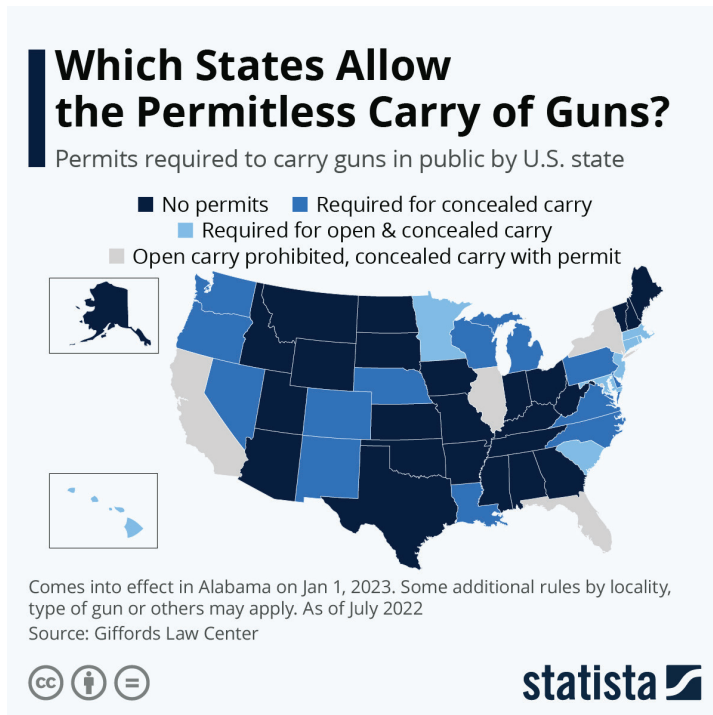
Load up on guns, bring your friends

United States, monthly firearm background checks, m



The Economist

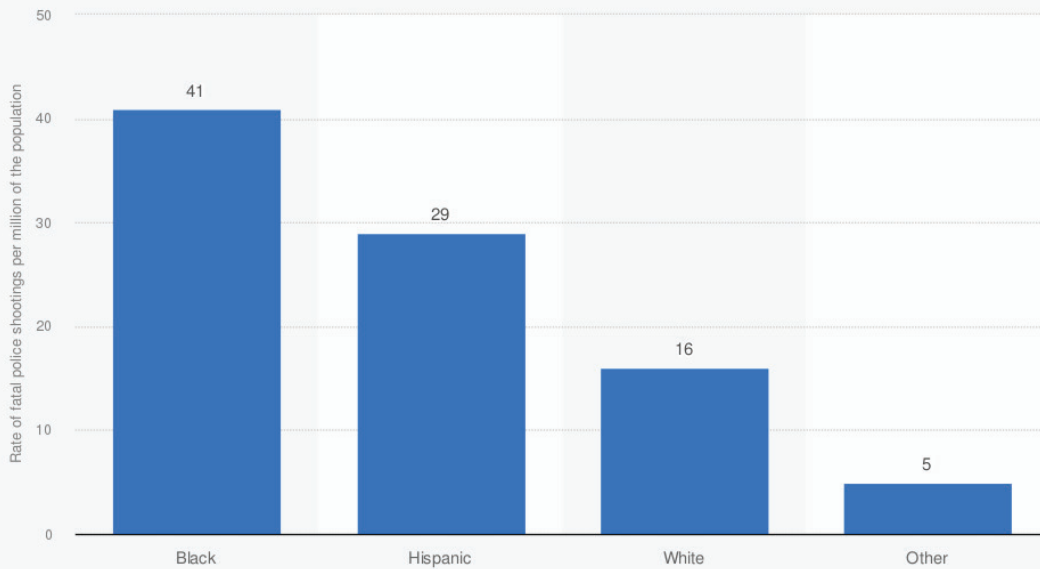
- Even as gun ownership grew, and gun deaths increased, [so too have gun laws become more permissive in the last 10 years](#). In 2011, Wyoming joined Vermont in not requiring permits to carry concealed or open weapons. Now, there are 20 states that do not require permits—four of which passed such laws in 2021.



- [Police shootings have remained relatively constant](#)—about 1,000 people are killed each year. But what is alarming is that African Americans have 2½ times the rate of fatality as white Americans; Latinos almost twice the rate.



Rate of fatal police shootings in the United States from 2015 to September 2022, by ethnicity (per million of the population)



Source
Washington Post
© Statista 2022

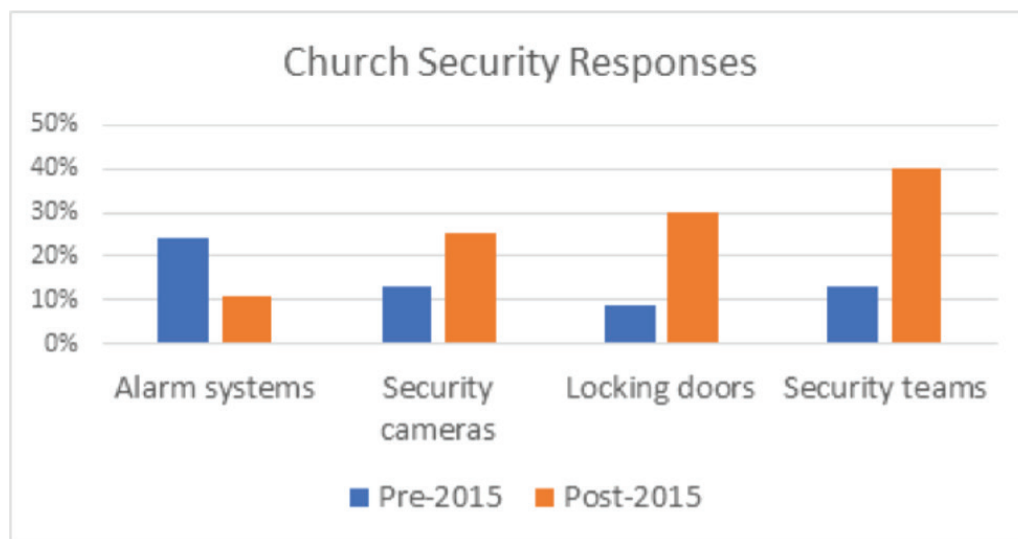
Additional Information:
United States; 2015 to September 29, 2022

- In recent years, there has been an increasing proliferation of “[ghost guns](#).” These are DIY kits that anyone can purchase online and build a handgun without a background check. They do not have serial numbers, so they cannot be traced. The actual number of ghost guns in circulation is not known, but in 2020 the ATF in Los Angeles said these relatively inexpensive and accessible weapons account for more than four out of every 10 of their cases.
- [Mass shootings have increased](#). Since 2010, when “GV2” expressed horror at shootings at Columbine High School and Virginia Tech University, we have mourned tragedies we could not have imagined at Sandy Hook; Las Vegas; Aurora, Colorado; Tucson, Arizona; Orlando and Parkland, Florida; San Bernadino, California ... and so many others that did not make the headlines.

Mass shootings-
(incidents in which 4 or more people killed or injured)



- Just as we spoke of “school shootings,” a new term has entered our lexicon: church shootings. High-profile shootings in faith communities as people gathered for worship challenged, if not shattered, a sense of peace, safety and invulnerability in congregations. At Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015 ... at First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, in 2017... at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh in 2018 ... sanctuaries have been violated as people of faith are murdered while they pray. There was a mass shooting at a Sikh gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, in 2012 ... and in 2019 there were two deadly attacks in mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. And there were others in between. The sense of threat and vulnerability rippled throughout the religious community. Churches increasingly implemented security measures, including having trained security teams, many of whom are armed.



Source: *Faith Communities Today (FACT)*, 2020.

Clearly, more is needed than public statements, prayers, and good intentions. Looking back on a decade of Nazi rule in his essay *After Ten Years*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer reflected on that violent context and challenged believers with the haunting question, “Are we still of any use?” This new document, “GV2 2.0,” represents a response to that question for the next 10 years. Yes, we are determined to be of use in reversing the deadly trends of gun violence. We are not alone; God will help us.

Gun Manufacturers

Theologian Walter Wink says there are hidden forces that act upon us and determine human existence. The invisible force behind the epidemic of gun violence is gun manufacturers and their need to have a market to sell the guns their factories can produce. By unmasking and naming this invisible force, we can release the power gun industry marketing has over us and open our imagination to new possibilities and solutions to ending gun violence.

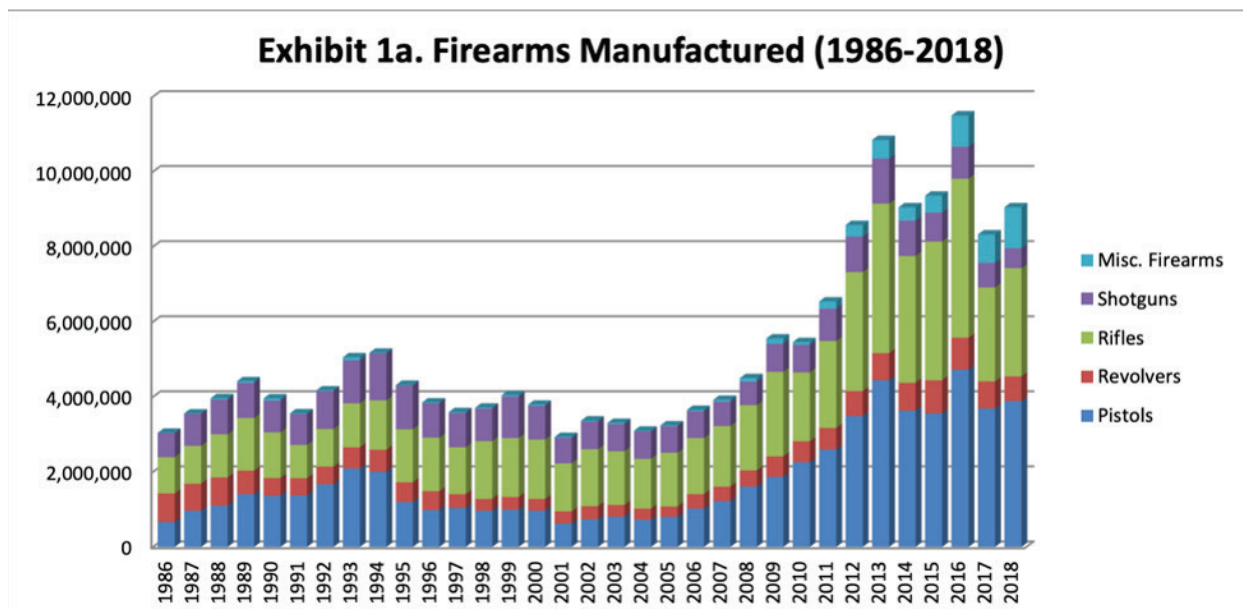
The United States has a gun violence problem because decades of gun industry marketing has flooded the American consciousness with the lie that guns make us safe. This is because the gun is a non-consumable



product and gun manufacturers need people to want to buy the large number of guns their factories can produce. Because a gun doesn't get consumed like soda or toilet paper and rarely wears out like a car or a washing machine, gun manufacturers are constantly in need of new customers or having to convince their current customers to buy more of a product they don't need.

The following chart shows the [number of guns manufactured in the United States from 1986 to 2018](#) that were then sold in the United States. The number of guns manufactured between the years 1986 and 2008 stayed at or below 4 million, with notable exceptions in the years 1993 and 1994. These years experienced an uptick in production to 5 million, which could be attributed to the election of Democratic President Bill Clinton, along with the federal government's mismanaged arrest of white supremacist Randy Weaver on firearms charges at [Ruby Ridge](#) in August 1992 and the deadly attempt to seize the guns of the religious sect Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas, in 1993, thus giving life to the narrative that the federal government will take your guns away.

The lowest year for gun manufacturing on the chart is 2001, which is the year Republican President George W. Bush took office. It was also the same year that the United States experienced an attack by foreign terrorists on American soil and went to war in Iraq. The chart shows that it is not war or fear of an attack by foreign terrorists that drive gun sales, but fear of Democratic presidents confiscating guns, a narrative that has been [promoted by the gun lobby for decades](#). The gun industry has used this narrative along with our nation's history of racism to sell guns and thereby created the [armed extremism groups](#) we have today showing up at state legislatures and storming the capital.



The real horror of the gun industry is revealed in the first major uptick in manufacturing, which occurred in 2013, when the number of guns manufactured climbed to 10,844,792, which is almost double what it was in 2011 at 6,541,886. This surge corresponds with the [attack on Sandy Hook Elementary School](#)

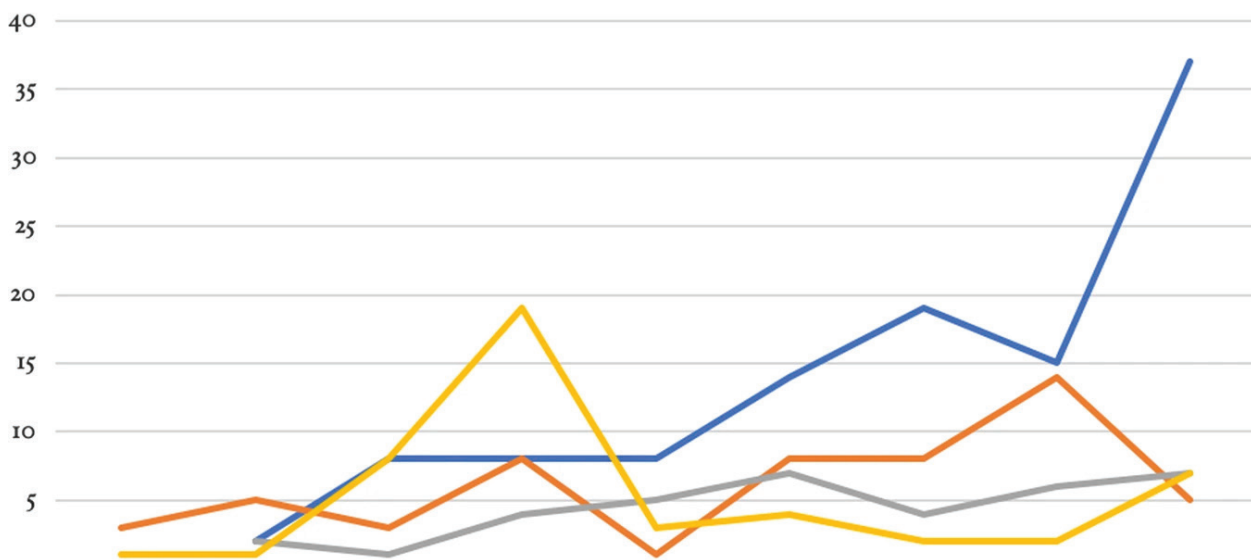


on December 14, 2012, when a 20-year-old gunman shot and killed 26 people, 20 of whom were children between the ages of 6 and 7. The horrific truth is that slaughtering kindergartners is good for business if you are in the gun business. This is why no new gun laws were passed, despite national outcry and advocacy by many of those children’s parents. Instead, the NRA called for the protection of our children in schools with more guns, giving birth to another industry — school security — that is wed to and fed by the gun industry.

The gun industry thrives on fear and division. The more gun violence there is, the more people are afraid, and the more guns they buy, which just leads to more gun violence. Violence is a never-ending cycle as violence only begets more violence. Violence never leads to peace. The only way to end violence is to interrupt the cycle, which is what Jesus did when he refused to participate in violence. The gospel message is not good news if you are in the gun business.

[West Point professor Maj. Jessica Dawson](#) shows how the NRA capitalized on the religious nationalism that arose in the late 1970s by increasingly using religious language to shape the discourse surrounding the Second Amendment. Dawson traced the use of God language (God-given, trust God, God bless and thank God) in the NRA’s longest running and most far-reaching publication, the American Rifleman, from 1975 (the year the NRA founded the Institute for Legislative Affairs) to 2018.

Types of Evil in the American Rifleman from 1975-2018



References to Evil in the American Rifleman from 1975 to 2018. This figure is covered by the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. Reproduced with permission of Jessica Dawson; copyright © Jessica Dawson, all rights reserved.

Dawson discovered that direct references to God were relatively low in the early years of the publication and began to increase in the mid-1990s when the NRA had a change in board members and the phrases “thank God” and “God bless” were used in reference to build trust in leadership both within the NRA



and the government. Today, gun rights advocates use the phrase “God-given right” to vehemently argue against all gun control measures, yet the original usage of “God-given” was tied to shooting ability and raw talent in the 1980s. The one time the term was used in 1990 was tied to stewardship of land, a usage that did not reappear in subsequent issues. It wasn’t until 1994 when the use of “God-given” began being tied to a government-granted privilege with its use dramatically increasing beginning in 2008, the same year the number of guns manufactured began to rise.

Dawson writes: “It is not merely the frequency of the phrase that demonstrates the lexical shift but also its usage explicitly with reference to bearing arms or self-defense.” The usage of the phrase “thank God” was the only God language that decreased, and this may be because new research on gratitude suggests that practicing gratitude changes the brain in a way that reduces fear and encourages more social behavior and people evaluating the likely effects of their actions on others. Dan Baker and Cameron Staught write in their book *What Happy People Know*:

“... during active appreciation, the threatening messages from your amygdala and the anxious instincts of your brainstem are cut off, suddenly and surely from access to the brain’s neocortex, where they can fester (and) replicate themselves. ... It is a fact of neurology that the brain cannot be in a state of appreciation and a state of fear at the same time.”

The American people have been made afraid and told a lie by those who profit from selling guns. We have been told that guns make us safe, but the evidence shows that is not true. The church must restore sight to the blind by telling the truth: Guns harm. The church must also engage in the way to true safety by joining with God in making the kingdom of heaven manifest here on earth and center the solutions of those most impacted by gun violence — women, children and communities of color. As a mostly white denomination, we must reflect on our own reliance on systems of power over, force, punishment and violence and actively work to reduce our own reliance on policing and other systems of punishment while advocating for the reallocation of resources to fund systems of care and restoration. Congregations can be a prophetic witness by embodying “they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks” (Isaiah 2:4) by becoming “chop-saw churches,” where they provide families an alternative to the gun market and the assurance that their guns will not be used for harm through a regular ministry of disarming unwanted guns. The gun parts can then be transformed into garden tools through the organization [RAW Tools](#) and used to grow food and create safe green spaces.

Suicide and Firearms

Whereas, of all the gun deaths in America each year, [approximately 60% are suicides](#), and the trendline has [increased by 35% since 1999](#), and about half of all suicides in recent years were by firearm, any serious discussion about gun violence in America must involve a discussion about suicide. Suicide is *not* inevitable and it is preventable. Evidence shows that heightened awareness, safety training, safe storage and training of intervenors are some of the ways to prevent these deaths, as creating time and distance between a person in crisis and lethal means can save lives. In addition to comforting the grieved, with



training and commitment, the church can become a critical, accessible source of information, training, pastoral care and support for people in crisis to help reduce the numbers of people who attempt or succeed in taking their own lives each year.

PC(USA) actions on gun violence prevention since 2010:

- Publication of policy [*Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God's Call*](#)
- 221st General Assembly (2014):
- [**Item 09-01**](#): On Taking Meaningful Action to Reduce Gun Violence—From the Presbytery of National Capital.
- [**Item 09-07**](#): On Gun Violence Prevention—From the Presbytery of Hudson River; this overture prompted the creation of “No Guns in God’s House” signs.
- [**Item 09-21**](#): Commissioners’ Resolution. On Advocating Regulation of Ammunition
- 223rd General Assembly (2018):
- [**Item 11-14**](#): On Praying for a Movement of the Spirit to Engage Presbyterian Congregations in Nationwide Action to Prevent Gun Violence; this overture included a prayer distributed throughout the PC(USA).
- 2019–20 [*Standing Our Holy Ground*](#) video series





PDS #10-2301-22-003
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*A policy statement is an excerpt from the Minutes of the
General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*

