



STATE BACKGROUND CHECK REQUIREMENTS AND RATES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOMICIDE

Loopholes in federal and state law make it easy for dangerous people – including domestic abusers – to get guns. But Everytown’s research shows that common-sense public safety laws can help reduce intimate partner gun violence of women and save lives. Simply put, background check laws make women safer: Controlling for population, there are 46 percent fewer intimate partner gun homicides of women in states that require background checks for private handgun sales than in states that do not.

METHODOLOGY

Everytown compared the number of women killed with guns by current or former male partners (husband, ex-husband, common-law husband, or boyfriend) over a five-year period (2008-12) in states that did or did not require background checks for unlicensed, “private” handgun sales.

Data were obtained from the FBI’s Supplementary Homicide Reports (SHR).¹ The SHR do not include data from the state of Florida. We obtained data for that state directly from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. Women killed by former (as opposed to current) dating-partners are not categorized in the data, and could not be included.

The SHR data is periodically updated as new information on deaths becomes available. This analysis used data obtained on September 25, 2014.

RESULTS

Throughout the study period, 14 states and the District of Columbia² required all gun buyers to undergo background checks before buying handguns in unlicensed sales, and 36 states did not. During that period, the FBI and Florida Department of Law Enforcement recorded 911 gun homicides of women by current or former intimate partners in the former group of states, and 2,199 in the latter. Adjusting for population, there were 46 percent fewer intimate partner gun homicides of women in states that require background checks for all handgun sales than in states that do not.

	Female Population, (2008-2012 average)	Female Gun Homicides by Intimate Partners (2008-2012 total)	Female Gun Homicides by Intimate Partners per Million Women (2008-2012 total)
Total	157,051,310	3,110	3.96
States that require a background check for private handgun sales (15)	68,442,298	911	2.66
States that do not require a background check for private handgun sales (36)	88,609,012	2,199	4.96
Difference			-46%

SENSITIVITY ANALYSIS

Both the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the FBI collect data on firearm homicides — the former from medical-examiners and the latter from local law enforcement. Each has distinct advantages and flaws. The CDC’s National Vital Statistics System records a higher percentage of all firearm deaths but fails to capture details about their circumstances, including the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim. This makes it unsuitable for measuring gun violence between intimate partners. In contrast, the FBI’s Supplementary Homicide Reports include details on the perpetrator and murder weapon but are more likely to be missing records because the FBI relies on police departments to voluntarily submit their homicide data on an annual basis. Despite these gaps, SHR data are utilized widely in the criminology community.³

To assess the impact of underreporting of homicides by different states, Everytown compared the number of SHR homicide records by year and state to those recorded by the CDC, and determined that in 41 states, more than 75 percent of the female homicides recorded by the CDC’s Fatal Injury Reports were recorded in the SHR.⁴

To assess the sensitivity of the analysis to states where fewer than 75 percent of homicides had been recorded, Everytown repeated the analysis without them. The results did not differ appreciably, and are not reported.

1. Available online at <http://bit.ly/1oWiuB3>.

2. We analyzed data for states that required background checks for all handgun sales during the period 2008-12. Since then, Colorado, Delaware, and Washington adopted these laws as well.

3. See James Alan Fox, “Missing Data Problems in the SHR: Imputing Offender and Relationship Characteristics,” *Homicide Studies* 8, no. 214 (2004); and Catherine Barber and David Hemenway, “Underestimates of Unintentional Firearm Fatalities: Comparing Supplementary Homicide Report Data with the National Vital Statistics System,” *Injury Prevention* 8 (2002).

4. States in which fewer than 75 of female homicides recorded by the SHR were Alabama, Arkansas, the District of Columbia, Illinois, Iowa, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, Montana, and West Virginia.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE GUN HOMICIDES OF WOMEN, 2008-2012

	BACKGROUND CHECK REQUIRED FOR ALL HANDGUN SALES?	2008					2009					2010					2011					2012					2008-2012			
		HUSBAND	EX-HUSBAND	CL. HUSBAND	BOYFRIEND	TOTAL	HUSBAND	EX-HUSBAND	CL. HUSBAND	BOYFRIEND	TOTAL	HUSBAND	EX-HUSBAND	CL. HUSBAND	BOYFRIEND	TOTAL	HUSBAND	EX-HUSBAND	CL. HUSBAND	BOYFRIEND	TOTAL	HUSBAND	EX-HUSBAND	CL. HUSBAND	BOYFRIEND	TOTAL	AVERAGE FEMALE POPULATION	AVERAGE ANNUAL DV GUN MURDERS OF WOMEN	DOMESTIC VIOLENCE GUN HOMICIDES PER MILLION WOMEN	
ALABAMA*	NO	13	1	1	8	23	14	1	0	9	24	7	3	1	4	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,458,430	12	5.04	
ALASKA	NO	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	3	340,969	1	4.11
ARIZONA	NO	6	1	0	7	14	11	1	0	5	17	10	1	0	6	17	15	1	1	3	20	17	1	0	7	25	3,221,418	19	5.77	
ARKANSAS*	NO	3	0	0	6	9	2	0	0	3	5	3	0	0	4	7	2	0	0	2	4	3	1	0	3	7	1,483,975	6	4.31	
CALIFORNIA	YES	30	3	0	23	56	30	4	1	21	56	47	3	1	26	77	38	4	1	30	73	26	5	1	23	55	18,753,607	63	3.38	
COLORADO	NO	5	0	0	3	8	7	1	0	3	11	3	0	0	3	6	1	2	2	2	7	8	0	2	3	13	2,512,529	9	3.58	
CONNECTICUT	YES	1	0	0	1	2	2	0	1	3	6	6	0	0	0	6	2	1	0	0	3	3	0	0	4	7	1,832,787	5	2.62	
DELAWARE	NO	1	0	0	2	3	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	3	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	1	1	463,870	2	4.74	
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA*	YES	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	319,115	0.4	1.25	
FLORIDA	NO	34	0	15	0	49	47	0	14	0	61	39	0	9	0	48	46	0	15	0	61	43	0	15	0	58	9,647,051	55	5.74	
GEORGIA	NO	15	0	0	12	27	19	1	0	9	29	21	0	0	10	31	11	4	1	11	27	17	2	0	17	36	4,962,723	30	6.05	
HAWAII	YES	3	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	678,774	2	2.65	
IDAHO	NO	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	1	1	7	1	1	1	3	6	3	1	0	0	4	782,085	4	4.86	
ILLINOIS*	YES	0	0	0	3	3	3	0	0	1	4	2	1	0	2	5	0	2	0	1	3	1	0	0	1	2	6,531,162	3	0.52	
INDIANA	NO	6	3	0	5	14	3	0	0	6	9	5	1	0	7	13	7	0	0	5	12	4	1	0	9	14	3,293,709	12	3.76	
IOWA	YES	2	0	0	1	3	3	0	0	0	3	3	0	0	2	5	3	0	1	0	4	2	0	0	0	2	1,538,377	3	2.21	
KANSAS	NO	0	0	0	2	2	4	2	0	1	7	3	1	1	2	7	4	0	1	3	8	3	1	0	3	7	1,435,312	6	4.32	
KENTUCKY	NO	9	1	0	3	13	6	2	0	6	14	9	2	0	3	14	5	0	0	2	7	7	0	0	5	12	2,204,591	12	5.44	
LOUISIANA*	NO	7	1	0	8	16	7	3	1	10	21	8	1	0	7	16	9	0	0	6	15	5	0	1	9	15	2,312,983	17	7.18	
MAINE	NO	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	5	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	2	2	678,675	2	3.54	
MARYLAND	YES	5	1	0	5	11	3	0	0	2	5	2	0	0	2	4	5	0	0	5	10	3	1	0	3	7	2,984,791	7	2.48	
MASSACHUSETTS	YES	1	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	1	2	3	0	0	2	5	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3,384,184	2	0.59	
MICHIGAN	YES	9	1	0	3	13	7	0	1	7	15	6	2	0	8	16	8	2	1	4	15	7	1	1	1	10	5,041,767	14	2.74	
MINNESOTA	NO	4	0	0	2	6	2	0	0	2	4	3	2	0	0	5	4	1	0	5	10	3	0	0	2	5	2,674,595	6	2.24	
MISSISSIPPI*	NO	4	0	0	5	9	5	0	1	3	9	5	0	0	3	8	4	1	0	2	7	3	0	0	5	8	1,526,305	8	5.37	
MISSOURI	NO	12	2	0	7	21	9	1	0	11	21	8	1	0	8	17	8	1	0	7	16	8	0	0	6	14	3,051,910	18	5.83	
MONTANA*	NO	0	0	0	5	5	2	0	0	1	3	4	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	3	493,350	3	6.49	
NEBRASKA*	YES	2	1	0	0	3	3	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	3	3	2	0	0	2	4	0	0	0	1	1	919,998	3	3.26	
NEVADA	NO	7	0	0	3	10	7	0	0	3	10	4	0	0	5	9	2	1	0	4	7	6	1	0	1	8	1,337,692	9	6.58	
NEW HAMPSHIRE*	NO	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	2	2	0	0	0	2	667,340	1	2.10	
NEW JERSEY	YES	8	0	0	4	12	6	0	0	5	11	1	0	0	1	2	2	0	0	2	4	6	0	0	1	7	4,509,440	7	1.60	
NEW MEXICO	NO	2	0	0	2	4	3	0	0	4	7	2	0	0	2	4	2	1	0	2	5	0	0	0	2	2	1,038,768	4	4.24	
NEW YORK	YES	8	1	0	9	18	13	0	0	8	21	5	0	0	13	18	6	1	0	10	17	6	1	0	8	15	10,004,577	18	1.78	
NORTH CAROLINA	YES	11	0	1	17	29	8	0	0	14	22	12	0	0	15	27	14	0	0	8	22	15	2	1	12	30	4,891,295	26	5.32	
NORTH DAKOTA	NO	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	334,173	1	2.39	
OHIO*	NO	6	2	0	3	11	12	1	0	6	19	14	0	0	4	18	9	0	2	6	17	11	1	2	9	23	5,902,413	18	2.98	
OKLAHOMA	NO	3	2	2	5	12	3	0	1	9	13	4	0	0	5	9	8	2	1	5	16	7	1	0	3	11	1,892,766	12	6.45	
OREGON	NO	3	0	0	0	3	3	0	1	4	8	6	0	0	4	10	7	0	0	4	11	7	0	0	1	8	1,937,164	8	4.13	
PENNSYLVANIA	YES	13	3	1	12	29	21	1	1	14	37	10	0	0	7	17	12	0	0	11	23	12	1	2	13	28	6,508,618	27	4.12	
RHODE ISLAND	YES	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	543,804	1	1.84	
SOUTH CAROLINA	NO	10	0	3	4	17	9	0	0	10	19	10	1	2	7	20	8	1	1	12	22	10	1	0	10	21	2,376,395	20	8.33	
SOUTH DAKOTA	NO	2	0	0	1	3	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	407,227	2	3.93	
TENNESSEE	NO	13	0	0	9	22	10	0	0	10	20	9	1	0	12	22	7	0	0	16	23	13	1	0	8	22	3,254,762	22	6.70	
TEXAS	NO	48	4	5	17	74	40	3	6	16	65	49	3	15	22	89	27	4	5	25	61	30	4	3	21	58	12,690,013	69	5.47	
UTAH	NO	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	3	5	3	0	0	1	4	4	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	3	4	1,375,281	4	2.62	
VERMONT	NO	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	317,251	1	3.15	
VIRGINIA	NO	6	2	0	12	20	19	0	0	7	26	14	1	2	14	31	14	2	1	7	24	5	1	0	1	7	4,078,141	22	5.30	
WASHINGTON	NO	4	0	0	3	7	3	0	1	10	14	7	0	0	7	14	5	1	1	2	9	8	0	1	2	11	3,376,902	11	3.26	
WEST VIRGINIA*	NO	5	2	1	3	11	3	0	1	1	5	3	0	0	0	3	6	0	0	2	8	5	0	0	1	6	938,441	7	7.03	
WISCONSIN	NO	6	0	0	1	7	8	2	0	0	10	2	0	0	1	3	3	0	0	0	3	2	0	0	2	4	2,864,138	5	1.89	
WYOMING	NO	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	275,665	1	2.90	

*For starred states, total homicides of women reported to the FBI Supplementary Homicide Reports by state law enforcement were less than 75 percent of the total reported by the CDC. Calculated domestic violence gun homicide rates for these states are likely underestimates. Homicides of women reported to the FBI Supplementary Homicide Reports by state law enforcement were less than 75 percent of the total reported by the CDC. Calculated domestic violence gun homicide rates for these states are likely underestimates.