

Issue Background

Over the past several years, gun violence prevention has once again been at the forefront of North American political discourse, spurred in large part by the movie theater shooting in Aurora, Colorado, the Navy Yard shooting in Washington, D.C., and the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut, among others.

The costs of gun violence in the United States are staggering: Consider these numbers:

- **8:** Each day, eight young Americans under age 19 die from gun violence.
- **12:** The rate of gun deaths among America's children is 12 times higher than those of the 25 other wealthiest nations combined.
- **30,000:** Over 30,000 Americans die each year from gun violence.
- **\$100 Billion:** The estimated medical and social cost of gun violence in America, every single year. Nearly 80% of this cost is borne by taxpayers.

The vast majority of Americans, even gun owners, support common sense gun safety measures. According to the National Opinion Research Center, 75% of gun owners support mandatory registration of handguns, as does 85% of the general public. 66% of gun owners and 80% of the general public favor mandatory background checks in private handgun sales, such as gun shows.

However, some Americans believe that such gun control measures are unnecessary, ineffective, and contrary to the wording and spirit of the Second Amendment of the Constitution, which states, "A well-regulated Militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms shall not be infringed." Groups such as the National Rifle Association (NRA) argue that law-abiding citizens, like hunters and sportsmen, will suffer the most under restrictive gun control laws, while criminals will always be able to access guns no matter what restrictions or gun control measures are enacted.

Reform Jewish Values

Jewish tradition emphasizes the sanctity and value of human life. The Torah commands us "Thou shalt not murder." The Talmud teaches us that "he who takes one life it is as though he has destroyed the universe and he who saves one life, it is as though he has saved the universe." Dehumanizing human beings and the carelessness with which human life is taken by guns stands in direct violation of our tradition.

Scripture encourages peaceful pursuit of our mutual welfare. Isaiah exhorts the people of the earth to "beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks." (Isaiah 2:4) We are commanded to turn weapons of destruction into tools for the greater good of society.

Reform Movement’s Position on and Work on the Issue

The URJ has long recognized the need for legislation “that would limit and control the sale and use of firearms” and has called on the United States government to “eliminate the manufacture, importation, advertising, sale, transfer and possession of handguns except for limited instances” (1975). Over the years, the URJ has spoken out on gun violence prevention with particular passion: then-URJ President Rabbi Eric Yoffie was the only religious leader to speak at the historic Million Mom March, and the URJ mobilized in favor of closing the gun show loophole. We insist that gun regulation is “a vital necessity.”

Recently, the Reform Movement has focused its efforts on supporting the Protecting Domestic Violence and Stalking Victims Act, and has met with multiple Members of Congress to secure their support of the bill. The Religious Action Center and NFTY were founding partners in the Wear Orange campaign on June 2, 2015, which called on people to wear orange to commemorate the first-ever Gun Violence Awareness Day and honor the victims of gun violence.

Legislative Update

In 1994, Congress passed the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (or ‘Brady Bill’) which mandated that dealers with a Federal Firearms License perform background checks on people purchasing guns. However, the law did not make background checks universal: due to a loophole, people can often buy guns in gun shows and online without a background check.

After the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary, Congress moved to make background checks on gun sales universal. However, legislative initiative was defeated, and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid pulled the bill off the floor.

Federal laws limiting the sale and possession of guns extend beyond the Brady bill. The landmark 1994 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) prohibits people convicted of domestic violence and subject to restraining orders from accessing guns. However, the law does not apply to dating partners, and does not cover people convicted of stalking. The result is that many victims of domestic abuse are particularly susceptible to gun violence—when a gun is present in a domestic violence situation, a woman is 500% more likely to be murdered. Moreover, three of every four women murdered by a current or former intimate partner experienced stalking in the year preceding the murder.

Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) has proposed the Protecting Domestic Violence and Stalking Victims Act, which aims to close those loopholes. Senator Klobuchar will be reintroducing the bill this year. The bill would extend domestic violence protections to include “dating partners” or others “similarly situated to a spouse,” and make it illegal for convicted stalkers to own guns.

Further Reading

- Call the Religious Action Center at 202.387.2800 or visit the RAC issue page on gun violence at rac.org/guns.

- Everytown for Gun Safety is the leading national organization working on issues of gun safety. Visit Everytown.org. For detailed information on the interplay between guns and domestic violence, check out their page: everytown.org/issue/domestic-violence
- Americans for Responsible Solutions is another leading national organization on these issues, led by former U.S. Congresswoman Gabby Giffords: ResponsibleSolutions.org
- The URJ is a supporter of the interfaith groups, Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence: FaithsAgainstGunViolence.org
- The National Rifle Association is the most powerful, influential, and financially endowed pro-gun lobby in the United States. The NRA generally stands in opposition to the Reform Movement on gun control issues. Visit <http://www.nra.org>

Get Involved

You can join the Reform Movement and [tell your Member of Congress](#) to support the Protecting Domestic Violence and Stalking Victims Act! Go to rac.org/guns