



Violence Policy Center

Research, Investigation, Analysis & Advocacy for a Safer America

Revealing the Impacts of Gun Violence

Regulating the Gun Industry

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States with Weak Gun Laws and Higher Gun Ownership Lead Nation in Gun Deaths, New Data for 2015 Confirms

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Alaska, Louisiana Have Highest Gun Death Rates in the Nation; Massachusetts, Hawaii Have Lowest

2015 U.S. Firearms Death Rate Up 7 Percent Over 2014—Highest Rate Since 1997

Washington, DC — Newly available data for 2015 reveals that states with weak gun violence prevention laws and higher rates of gun ownership have the highest overall gun death rates in the nation, according to a Violence Policy Center (VPC) analysis of just-released data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

In addition, states with the lowest overall gun death rates have lower rates of gun ownership and some of the strongest gun violence prevention laws in the nation. However, even in these states the human toll of gun violence is far above the gun death rate in other industrialized nations.

The VPC analysis refers to overall gun death rates in 2015, the most recent year for which data is available. The deaths include gun homicides, suicides, and unintentional shootings. A table of the states with the five highest gun death rates and the five lowest gun death rates is below. For a list of gun death rates in all 50 states, see

<http://www.vpc.org/state-firearm-death-rates-ranked-by-rate-2015/>

States with the Five Highest Gun Death Rates

States with the Five Lowest Gun Death Rates

Rank	State	Household Gun Ownership	Gun Death Rate per 100,000	Rank	State	Household Gun Ownership	Gun Death Rate per 100,000
1	Alaska	56.4 percent	23.97	50	Massachusetts	14.3 percent	3.13
2	Louisiana	49.0 percent	20.38	49	Hawaii	12.5 percent	3.84
3	Montana	67.5 percent	19.85	48	New York	22.2 percent	4.29
4	Alabama	49.5 percent	19.72	47	Rhode Island	15.9 percent	4.83
5	Mississippi	54.3 percent	19.68	46	Connecticut	22.2 percent	5.26

The state with the highest per capita gun death rate in 2015 was Alaska, followed by Louisiana. Each of these states has extremely lax gun violence prevention laws as well as a higher rate of gun ownership. The state with the lowest gun death rate in the nation was Massachusetts, followed by Hawaii. Each of these states has strong gun violence prevention laws and a lower rate of gun ownership.

The total number of Americans killed by gunfire increased to 36,252 in 2015 from 33,599

in 2014. The nationwide gun death rate in 2015 was 11.28 per 100,000, an increase of 7.0 percent from 2014's gun death rate of 10.54 per 100,000. The increase in the overall firearm death rate was driven largely by firearm homicides, which increased by 17.8 percent (from a rate of 3.43 per 100,000 in 2014 to 4.04 per 100,000 in 2015). The firearms suicide rate was up 2.4 percent from 2014 to 2015.

The evidence could not be more compelling that states with fewer guns and strong gun laws have far lower rates of gun death," says VPC Legislative Director Kristen Rand. "The spike in firearm homicide should be of great concern to all Americans. Gun violence is a major public health threat that demands immediate attention from policymakers nationwide."

Regionally, the firearm death rate increase was greatest in the Midwest and South, which had increases of 8.8 percent and 8.1 percent respectively. The firearm death rate was up 5.0 percent in the West, and 2.4 percent in the Northeast. (Click here to see what states are included in the four regions used by WISQARS).




America's gun death rates — both nationwide and in the states — dwarf those of other industrialized nations. The gun death rate in the United Kingdom was 0.22 per 100,000 in 2013, and in Australia the gun death rate was 0.93 per 100,000 in 2015.³

State gun death rates are calculated by dividing the number of gun deaths by the total state population and multiplying the result by 100,000 to obtain the rate per 100,000, which is the standard and accepted method for comparing fatal levels of gun violence.

The VPC defined states with "weak" gun violence prevention laws as those that add little or nothing to federal law and have permissive laws governing the open or concealed carrying of firearms in public. States with "strong" gun violence prevention laws were defined as those that add significant state regulation that is absent from federal law, such as restricting access to particularly hazardous and deadly types of firearms (for example, assault weapons), setting minimum safety standards for firearms and/or requiring a permit to purchase a firearm, and restricting the open and concealed carrying of firearms in public.

State gun ownership rates were obtained from the October 2014 *American Journal of Public Health* article by Michael Siegel et al., "The Relationship Between Gun Ownership and Stranger and Nonstranger Firearm Homicide Rates in the United States, 1981-2010," which is the most recent comprehensive published data available on state gun ownership.

The Violence Policy Center is a national educational organization working to stop gun death and injury. Follow the VPC on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.

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