

We need stronger legislation regarding who can purchase guns, and we need it *now*.

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Amid more Americans receiving COVID-19 vaccinations and more public areas opening to larger groups, the United States has been reminded of another safety threat that continues to loom: gun violence.

On March 22, [ten people](#) were killed in a grocery store in Boulder, Colorado. This came only six days after [eight people](#) were killed in attacks on three different spas in Atlanta, Georgia.

These tragedies have brought the topic of gun control back to the forefront of political discussion, but they are also a sickening reminder of just how common mass shootings and acts of gun violence have become in this country.

According to the [Gun Violence Archive](#), there have already been 119 mass shootings in the U.S. this year. The country saw a total of 611 mass shootings in 2020, which was more than the year before, despite the pandemic's limitations on public gatherings.

Unfortunately, gun-related incidents in general claim a staggering number of lives each year. In 2020 alone, a combined [43, 537 Americans](#) lost their lives to gun violence or suicide using a gun.

We need increased gun legislation. We've needed it for years, but as the violence continues and more lives are lost, it is becoming even more apparent that we need it *now*.

Current U.S. laws regarding gun purchases are confusing. And not only are they confusing, they seem almost useless when you consider how much they allow to slip through the cracks.

To summarize one of the greatest flaws in the existing laws, let's imagine a scenario. Let's say I had a gun I was looking to sell, and you – a complete stranger to me – just happened to be in the market for a gun.

Under federal law, as long as you and I live in the same state, I can sell you that gun without running any kind of background check.

Essentially, no one would have to know I sold you a gun, and no one would be required to adequately determine if I was selling to someone who will be a responsible gun owner.

The glaring issue here is that even if you are selling to a friend or an acquaintance, you do not really know whether or not that person should be allowed to own and operate a firearm. And as an individual, you should not have the right to determine on your own if someone is qualified or in the right state of mind to purchase a gun.

So, if people can sell to each other without completing a background check, when does the law require one?

Only individuals or businesses with a Federal Firearms License (FFL) are required to perform a background check.

Those required to have an FFL license would include retail companies, such as Cabela's or Bass Pro Shops. Individuals are required to have an FFL if they want to act as a gun dealer. Acting as a dealer would include ordering from a manufacturer, exchanging across state lines, and selling firearms that are not exclusively part of their personal collection.

FFL requirements are vital because they introduce several restrictions that promote safety, such as prohibiting regular consumers from ordering firearms online or receiving them in the mail. Alongside this, FFL dealers must run a background check before handing a gun over to a customer.

The system of background checks currently in place is the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), which is run by the FBI. The NICS determines who is not allowed to buy a gun, based on criteria established through the [Gun Control Act of 1968](#).

[Law](#) prohibits people from purchasing a firearm for various reasons, including if they: have committed felonies or certain state crimes, are a fugitive, have been convicted of domestic abuse or have a restraining order placed against them by a partner or child.

All of these are valid reasons why a person should not be allowed to purchase a gun. But wouldn't it be easy for people who fall into these categories to acquire a gun if they bought from an unlicensed individual who did not have to run a background check?

A significant way legislation can increase safety is by requiring background checks for *every* gun sale, not just sales completed by FFL dealers.

Additional debate regarding who is allowed to purchase guns centers on age requirements.

According to the [Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence](#), "A robust body of academic literature shows that the human brain continues to develop well past the age of 21, particularly in areas that may alter a person's likelihood of involvement in violence against themselves or others."

Given that federal law prohibits individuals under 21 from consuming alcohol or purchasing tobacco, several questions arise regarding why some guns can be purchased by 18-year-olds. The Gun Control Act of 1968 established federal law allowing licensed dealers to sell shotguns, rifles and their respective ammunitions to individuals who are at least 18. Federal law states

you must be 21 to purchase a handgun from an FFL licensed dealer, but 18 if buying a handgun from a private individual without a license.

While 18-year-olds are adults and should be respected for their capacity to make their own decisions, federal law shows inconsistencies. The government doesn't want a young adult to smoke a cigarette, but they'll let them purchase a weapon.

Restricting this age group's ability to own weapons has shown benefits. The Giffords Law Center [cites a study](#) that showed the rate of suicides using a gun decreased by 9% for 18 to 20-year-olds in states where the minimum purchasing age was raised to 21.

If federal and state governments truly prioritize the health and safety of young adults, they should either raise the purchasing age to 21 or introduce greater restrictions for what firearms this age group is allowed to own.

While the violence has continued to increase in the past several years, it feels as if politicians have been dragging their feet in finding a solution and passing helpful legislation.

As most would expect, it is highly unlikely that further gun regulation will be passed anytime soon, due to highly partisan politics and strong feelings from those who claim their Second Amendment right is going to be violated by any restrictive legislation.

But in a slight glimmer of hope, the [House recently passed](#) two bills that propose expanding background checks. The Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2021 would require an individual to give possession of the gun to a licensed dealer before the individual they are selling to, allowing the dealer to complete a background check before the sale is complete.

The second bill passed by the House is the Enhanced Background Checks Act of 2021, which very narrowly passed [at 218-210](#). This bill will require FFL dealers to wait at least [10 days](#) for a background check to be processed, as opposed to the current three business day wait period. This would be an incredible improvement, as the current law allows dealers to give the gun to the buyer if a background check does not come through in that short three-day period.

It is unlikely these bills will pass when they are moved onto the Senate floor, as they only really have Democratic support and a majority vote will be difficult to acquire. This is beyond frustrating for those who know there is no time to waste with a situation that is constantly taking American lives.

However, some hope can be found in that bills passing in the House mean more legislators are taking the situation seriously. And that is particularly important now and going forward, as more guns were sold in 2020 than ever before.

Will expanding background check requirements completely eliminate mass shootings in the U.S.? No.

Will more restrictions on who can purchase firearms eradicate gun violence completely? No.

No advocate or law maker is under the illusion that this is the be-all and end-all of solutions. But the goal is to save lives and prevent injuries by keeping guns out of the hands of people who are not fit to use them.

Like many people who grew up in the Midwest, I know a number of people who hunt and shoot for sport. I know people who have their FFL license so they can sell firearms to friends and family. I have seen people close to me consistently follow safety precautions, and I can honestly say their possession of firearms does not make me feel unsafe.

But I am also part of a generation who was still in grade school when active shooter drills became routine. I attended the March For Our Lives in Indianapolis as a high school senior, because at 18-years-old I knew that what I was seeing on the news day in and day out was not okay.

And I am also now one of so many within this country who worry every time my family, friends or I do something as simple as go to a grocery store.

It cannot be stressed enough how serious the issue of gun violence is in America. As a voting public, we need put pressure on lawmakers to take immediate action because – in many ways – it is already too late.