



Top ten ways the pandemic intersects with the crisis of gun violence in the U.S.

1. FIRST-TIME BUYERS ARE RUSHING TO PURCHASE GUNS

Without adequate regulation and education, more guns in our communities--especially among first-time buyers--will just increase the public health and human rights crisis of gun violence. Many nonessential government programs are currently shuttered or operating on reduced capacity. For example, handgun safety courses in some places have been canceled due to COVID-19, and requirements for training prior to permit application are being waived in certain circumstances. This means that more people will be armed with deadly weapons without access to safe use and storage training.

2. ONLINE GUN PURCHASES ARE SPIKING

Online retailer Ammo.com reported a 68% increase in sales from mid-February 2020 through mid-March 2020. As more people are self-isolating and unable to purchase guns at physical locations, these numbers may only increase—and in many states, people at risk of misusing firearms can buy guns online without going through a background check.

3. YOUNG CHILDREN MAY BE IN HOMES WITH UNSECURED GUNS

Over 4.5 million children in the U.S. live in homes with access to a loaded and unlocked gun. With school closed for over 43 million K-12 students in the U.S.—and many families struggling to provide adequate childcare—the risk of accidental shootings could increase. All firearms should be safely and securely stored in a locked location with ammunition stored separately.

4. INDIVIDUALS AT RISK OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE MAY BE ISOLATED WITH THEIR ABUSERS

Varying levels of quarantines, curfews, mandatory work from home, or other self-isolation guidance may mean that domestic violence survivors are confined in close quarters with their abusers, and the presence of guns in the home greatly amplifies this danger. Women living with a gun in the home are three - five times more likely to be murdered than those with no gun in the home.

5. ISOLATION AND ANXIETY CAN LEAD TO INCREASED SUICIDE ATTEMPTS

While suicide is a heat-of-the-moment event in response to an acute crisis, the availability of firearms and their lethal nature greatly increase the risk of a fatal outcome. Social isolation, economic uncertainty and generally heightened anxiety as a result of the current crisis, combined with easy access to guns, may increase the already rising rate of suicides by firearm in the U.S.

6. EMERGENCY SHUTDOWNS MEAN LESS ACCESS TO EMERGENCY PROTECTION

In approximately 18 states and D.C. that have Extreme Risk Protection Orders, loved ones can ask the court to temporarily remove a weapon from someone proven to be at risk of harming themselves or others,

but in the majority of U.S. states where ERPO laws do not exist, those concerned about the safety of their loved ones may have no recourse to temporarily remove firearms from their possession, exemplifying the need for a national standard. Moreover, in some states where courts have closed amidst the COVID-19 outbreak, there may be delayed or limited access to protection orders meaning emergency mechanisms

7. HATE VIOLENCE AND XENOPHOBIA ARE ON THE RISE

Hate crimes in the U.S. were already on the rise before COVID-19, and the FBI estimates that guns are involved in approximately 8,500 hate crimes each year. Reports of the virus originating in China have spurred xenophobic attacks in the U.S. and around the world. This wave of bigotry—especially combined with the rush to purchase guns—may increase hate violence and must be closely monitored.

8. THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM IS STRUGGLING

Nearly 40,000 people lose their lives due to gun violence every year, and an additional estimated 133,000 people are shot and survive, requiring both immediate and long-term medical care. Victims of gun violence who are shot during this pandemic will require emergency care, putting additional strain on hospitals and health care providers already struggling to cope with the scope of COVID-19.

9. COMMUNITIES OF COLOR, DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTED BY GUN HOMICIDES, ARE CONCERNED ABOUT ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE, THE IMPACT OF A SEVERE ECONOMIC FALLOUT, AND POTENTIAL LAW ENFORCEMENT & CRIMINAL JUSTICE ISSUES

Gun homicides in the U.S. disproportionately impact communities of color, with African Americans being ten times more likely to be the victims of gun homicides than white Americans and gun homicides being the leading cause of death among black men ages 15–34. Government-imposed lockdowns to stem the COVID-19 pandemic and public panic have created a nationwide crisis impacting food access, health care access, lost wages, and increased anxiety about public and personal safety.

The causes of gun violence in communities of color are multi-faceted and there are deep-seated issues around poverty, discrimination, and economic, social and cultural rights which may be amplified with the increased number of firearms, concerns about safety and limited access to physical and mental health care in the wake of this pandemic. These issues are also amplified in the undocumented community struggling with food insecurity, little or no access to health care, fear of Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids, and limited or no employment benefits that allow for leave.



As legislators put together stimulus packages to address the fallout from this pandemic, they must take into account the concerns of black and brown communities who may be disproportionately impacted by the human rights implications of this crisis. We must ensure that any testing is available to all individuals, that everyone receives adequate food and shelter, that incarcerated populations are protected

and tested for the virus, that public benefits like unemployment and SNAP are sufficiently funded to cover those served, and that all individuals feel safe and protected in their communities, among other concerns.

10. THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION LOOSENING GUN EXPORT OVERSIGHT

The human rights crisis of gun violence doesn't stop at our borders. As countries shut their borders during this global pandemic, nations like the U.S. push people seeking asylum back into unsafe areas in other countries, like Mexico, flooded with U.S. sourced guns, many of which have ended up in the hands of dangerous individuals and human rights abusers. Research indicates that six countries across the Americas make up over half of the estimated 250,000 gun-related deaths worldwide. As the global pandemic and panic spreads, U.S. arms—now subjected to less restrictions and oversights—may contribute to further instability and human rights violations around the world.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

1. [Call on Congress](#) to pass critical laws that would address these ten intersections with COVID-19.
2. If you have firearms in your home, make sure that they are unloaded and safely stored.
3. If you or someone you love are worried about domestic abuse, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233. If you are unable to speak safely, visit www.thehotline.org. These resources offer 24/7, confidential support.
4. If you are thinking about harming yourself, or are worried about a friend or loved one, speak to someone at the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.
5. If your state has passed an Extreme Risk Protection Order law, you may still be able to petition law enforcement to temporarily remove a gun from someone who is showing signs of intending to harm themselves or others.
6. If you see someone being harassed or attacked on the basis of race or (real or assumed) country of origin, report this violation and intervene, if it is safe to do so. Stay safe and be respectful to each other.
7. Call out xenophobic remarks you encounter online or in conversation.
8. Support and stand in solidarity with Black and Brown communities that may be disproportionately impacted.
9. Consider making donations to and/or supporting community-led gun violence prevention organizations, many of which are under resourced, but provide critical services that help prevent gun violence. Examples include the [Community Justice Action Fund](#), [Live Free U.S.](#), [Advance Peace](#), [Life Camp Inc.](#), [Cities United](#), [NY Justice League](#), [Ceasefire](#), [Cure Violence](#).

WHAT SHOULD THE U.S. GOVERNMENT DO?

- Pass universal background checks legislation (S.42), Extreme Risk Protection Order bills at the state and federal level, safe storage legislation like Ethan's Law, the Disarm Hate Act expanding protections from gun-related hate violence, and ensure that all persons at risk of domestic violence are protected from gun violence through VAWA and other policies.
- Enact policies that adequately address oversight of U.S. arms exports to ensure that U.S.-sourced weapons are not further contributing to human rights abuses abroad.

Please contact egv@aiusa.org with any questions or to request citations behind any of this information.