



Maine Women's Lobby

FIREARMS, VIOLENCE, AND GENDER IN MAINE

Prevention and Safety are Possible.

In the United States, gun violence and its ripple effects impact every person and community. Since 2020, it has been the leading cause of death of children and youth (1). Our nation's gun violence epidemic has a deep impact on the safety, health, and wellbeing of women and gender minorities. Women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ+) people are abused with firearms, shot at with firearms, wounded by firearms, and killed by firearms.

Gun violence reflects the inequities in our systems and society. While gun violence has affected and continues to affect everyone in the United States, historically marginalized people and communities (especially women and gender minorities, particularly those from Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color) bear the burden of this public health crisis.

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Maine Facts⁽²⁾

In an average year in Maine, **163 people** die by guns.

67% of female intimate partner homicide victims in Maine are killed with a gun.

89% of gun deaths in Maine are by firearm suicide.

In Maine, the rate of gun suicide increased **45%** from 2012 to 2021, compared to a **19%** change nationwide.

Mass Shootings

In nearly half of mass shootings where four or more people were killed, the perpetrator shot an intimate partner or family member.⁽³⁾

The last decade has included half of the 36 deadliest mass shootings in the United States over the past 120 years. And most of the deadliest shootings have occurred since the Columbine High School shooting in 1999. Mass shootings are an overwhelmingly male phenomenon. Men carry out 97% of attacks (4). There is growing attention on connections between gender and mass shootings, including gender-based mass shootings. This includes when the shooter cites a grievance toward a specific woman and toward women in general. There have been multiple public attacks using firearms and motivated by a hatred of women in the United States. In 2014, in Isla Vista, California, a man's violent attack that left six people dead and 14 wounded was motivated by his hatred of women (5).

Homicide

American Indian and Alaskan Native women are 3x more likely to be killed in gun homicides than white women.

2020 was the largest one-year increase in gun homicides in the U.S. on record. There was a disproportionate burden on women and women of color in particular. From 2019-2021 the gun homicide rate rose 44% for men and 49% for women (18). While white women experienced a 27% increase, for Black women there was a 78% increase (19). Black women are 5 times as likely to be killed in gun homicides as white women (20). Data on homicides of nonbinary and transgender people in the United States shows that most are firearm homicides targeting Black trans women. 67% of known trans homicide victims who were killed with a gun were Black women (21).



Misogyny & Sexism

Recent research has identified misogyny, also sometimes referred to as toxic masculinity, as one ideology that motivates violence. It is increasingly part of far-right extremism, which is a growing threat in the United States that has led to violent and deadly actions. Between 2018 and 2020, male supremacy, online misogyny, and the INCEL movement's connection to deadly violence were studied by the Southern Poverty Law Center, the Anti-Defamation League, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Biden Administration. Biden called for a national task force to study the connections between these phenomena and mass shootings and violence against women. (13)(14)(15)(16)

Domestic Violence

Access to a gun makes it 5x more likely that a woman will be killed by her abuser. (8)

The intersection of gun violence and domestic violence is traumatic and lethal for American women. Millions of women and families are impacted by domestic violence. One in seven women have experienced abuse with a firearm by an intimate partner (9). This includes being shot at or threatened with a firearm. Firearms are used more than any other weapon to uphold power, control, abuse, and kill an intimate partner.

Black, Latina, and American Indian and Alaskan Native women bear a disproportionate impact, with intimate partner firearm homicides at two to three times the rate of white women (10). Women with disabilities are also more likely to experience domestic violence and homicide is the leading cause of death for pregnant and postpartum people, with firearms involved in 70% of those deaths (11) (12).

LGBTQ+ Communities

In 2016, a man fatally shot 49 people and wounded 53 more at Pulse, an LGBTQ+ nightclub in Orlando, Florida. The mass shooting at Pulse was the second worst gun violence attack in American history. The victims and survivors were predominantly Latinx LGBTQ+ people. LGBTQ+ people are more than twice as likely to be a victim of gun violence than their cisgender and straight peers (6).

Across LGBTQ+ populations, the risk for violence is higher than in straight and cisgender populations. Lesbian and gay people are more than twice as likely, and bisexual people are seven times as likely, to experience violent victimization as straight people. Transgender people are 2.5 times as likely to be victims of violence as cisgender people (7).

Suicide

On average, more than 3,250 women die by firearm suicide each year. (22)

Suicides represent more than 54% of all gun deaths among women and the gun suicide rate is rising (23). This increase may be in part to the increased access women have to firearms in their homes. More women are becoming gun owners. From 2019-2021, half the new gun owners in the United States were women (24). Many studies show that firearm access and ownership are connected to an increased risk of suicide. Gun suicides disproportionately affect women of color. In the past decade, gun suicide rates rose 17% for all women, 15% for white women, 26% for Asian American and Pacific Islander women, 96% for Hispanic women, 103% for Black women, and 114% for American Indian and Alaskan Native women (25). Young women and girls account for some of this increase, since gun suicide rates have increased 79% among 10- to 17-year-old girls and 67% among 18 to 24-year-old women (26). A survey from the CDC found that more than 25% of teen girls reported seriously considering suicide in the past year and more than 10% reported attempting suicide (27).

Maine Gun Laws DO: (15)

- Maine holds responsible a person who did not adequately secure a gun that a minor accesses and uses/discharges (28).
- Maine prohibits dating partners convicted of domestic violence misdemeanors or under domestic violence restraining orders from having guns (29).
- Maine allows a court order to temporarily suspend a gun license or remove guns, after someone who suspects a gun owner is an imminent threat reports them to the police and law enforcement takes that person into protective custody, orders a mental health evaluation from a medical expert, and if the doctor and police deem necessary, law enforcement applies for a court order (yellow paper law) (30).

Maine Gun Laws DO NOT: (31)

- Require a background check on all handgun sales.
- Have an extreme risk protection order (red flag) law that allows family members or law enforcement to ask a court to temporarily prevent someone in crisis from accessing guns.
- Have a waiting period between when firearms are purchased and when they can be taken home.
- Require a permit to carry a concealed handgun in public.
- Require safety training to carry a concealed handgun in public.
- Prohibit assault style firearms.
- Prohibit high capacity magazines.
- Regulate do-it-yourself, untraceable guns known as “ghost guns.”
- Require abusers convicted of domestic violence misdemeanors or under DV restraining orders to turn in their guns when they become prohibited from having them.

Policy Solutions

We need solutions that address the impact of gun violence on women, gender minorities, and gender nonconforming people - alongside our whole community.

Strengthen Domestic Violence Laws

Maine does not require abusers convicted of domestic violence misdemeanors or under domestic violence restraining orders to turn in their guns when they become prohibited from having them. The state does not explicitly authorize or require the removal of firearms or ammunition at the scene of a domestic violence incident. In Maine, an intimate partner includes a current or former spouse, someone you have a child in common with, or someone you currently live with or used to live with. It does not include other dating partners. The state can increase safety for those being harmed by domestic violence by including dating partners in the definition of intimate partner and requiring the removal of firearms at domestic violence scenes where law enforcement intervene and when a restraining order or conviction is in place (32).

Policy Solutions, cont'd

Implement Comprehensive Background Checks

Federal law does not require background checks on purchases from unlicensed sellers. A person can easily get around current law by purchasing a firearm online or at a gun show. State laws that require background checks on all types of gun sales are shown to lower gun violence, including lower firearm homicide and suicide rates. Sales by unlicensed sellers can utilize local gun dealers to get background checks completed. 99.3% of Maine residents live within 10 miles of a gun dealer, making it easy and convenient to get a background check done (33).

Enact an Extreme Risk Protection Order Law

When a person is considering harming themselves or others, family members and law enforcement often recognize clear warning signs. Extreme risk (red flag) laws empower these individuals to intervene so that someone in crisis can temporarily be prevented from accessing firearms. While these types of laws are relatively new, there is growing research demonstrating the ability for red flag laws to prevent many types of firearm violence, including suicides and mass shootings.

Conclusion

Gun violence is a feature of life in the United States that we have lived with for far too long. We have lived with the narrative that gun violence is inevitable. It is not. Responsive policies reduce gun violence and firearm deaths. We need solutions that address the impact of gun violence on women, especially historically marginalized women and gender nonconforming people. Policies that focus on domestic violence help mitigate some of the most unsafe, traumatic, and deadly situations for women. In addition, comprehensive policies like background checks and red flag laws help ensure that women, their families, and their communities are safe.

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