

# Waiting periods reduce deaths from guns, study suggests

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(Phys.org)—A trio of researchers with Harvard Business School has found evidence that they claim shows gun deaths decline when states enact waiting period laws. In their paper published in *Proceedings of the*

*National Academy of Sciences*, Michael Luca, Deepak Malhotra and Christopher Poliquin describe their study and discuss their results.

There is no debate regarding the numbers of people that are killed each year in the United States from bullet wounds—good records exist. The average is now up to 33,000 each year. What remains up for debate is what to do about it. Some individuals and groups have proposed enacting laws restricting [gun sales](#), while others vehemently object to any such restrictions, citing their right to bear arms as spelled out in the Constitution.

Somewhere in the middle, there are possible ways to reduce [gun violence](#) by enacting less restrictive laws. One such approach is to mandate that anyone buying a gun must wait a specified number of days after the purchase before taking possession of it. The idea is that a waiting period reduces murders and suicides because it gives those gun buyers time to cool off and think a little bit more about their plans before obtaining a gun. Unfortunately, evidence of whether this actually happens has been scant because the U.S. government has enacted laws disallowing the government from funding studies seeking answers to such questions. In this new effort, the researchers circumvented that problem by asking for and receiving funding directly through their own institution.

The study consisted of two parts: The first looked at differences in gun death rates between states that had waiting periods and those that did not over the period between 1970 and 2014. The second part consisted of looking at changes in gun [death](#) rates in states that enacted waiting periods after passage of the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act in 1994, which essentially forced all states to enact waiting periods.

Results from the first part of the study showed on average 17 percent fewer gun-related deaths for [states](#) with a waiting period (and approximately 10 percent fewer gun-related suicides). Results from the

second part of the study nearly mirrored the first—the trio found that gun-related homicide deaths following passage of the Brady Bill dropped on average 17 percent while gun-related suicides dropped approximately 6 percent.

The researchers suggest their findings indicate that if the U.S. were to implement a nationwide waiting period for gun purchases, the country as a whole could reduce annual gun deaths by approximately 1,700 a year.

**More information:** Michael Luca et al. Handgun waiting periods reduce gun deaths, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2017). [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1619896114](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1619896114)

## **Abstract**

Handgun waiting periods are laws that impose a delay between the initiation of a purchase and final acquisition of a firearm. We show that waiting periods, which create a "cooling off" period among buyers, significantly reduce the incidence of gun violence. We estimate the impact of waiting periods on gun deaths, exploiting all changes to state-level policies in the United States since 1970. We find that waiting periods reduce gun homicides by roughly 17%. We provide further support for the causal impact of waiting periods on homicides by exploiting a natural experiment resulting from a federal law in 1994 that imposed a temporary waiting period on a subset of states.

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