

Is Robert F. Kennedy Jr. wrong about a ban on NIH research about mass shootings?

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"Congress prohibits the NIH from researching the cause of mass shootings."

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. in an April 21 post on X

The National Institutes of Health is the federal government's main agency for supporting [medical research](#). Is it barred from researching mass shootings? That's what presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said recently.

Kennedy, whose statements about [conspiracy theories](#) earned him PolitiFact's 2023 "Lie of the Year," is running as an independent third-party candidate against President Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic candidate, and the presumptive Republican nominee, former President Donald Trump.

On April 21 on X, Kennedy flagged his recent interview with conservative commentator Glenn Beck, which touched on [gun policy](#). Kennedy summarized his gun policy views in the post, writing, "The National Institutes of Health refuses to investigate the mystery; in fact, Congress prohibits the NIH from researching the cause of mass shootings. Under my administration, that rule ends—and our kids' safety becomes a top priority."

But this information is outdated.

In 1996, Congress passed the " Dickey Amendment," an appropriations bill provision that federal officials widely interpreted as barring federally funded research related to gun violence (though some observers say this was a misinterpretation). Congress in 2018 clarified that the provision didn't bar federally funded gun-related research, and funding for such efforts has been flowing since 2020.

Kennedy's campaign did not provide evidence to support his statement.

What was the Dickey Amendment?

After criticizing some federally funded research papers on firearms in the mid-1990s, pro-gun advocates, including the National Rifle Association, lobbied to halt federal government funding for gun violence research.

In 1996, Congress approved appropriations bill language saying that "none of the funds made available for [injury prevention](#) and control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention may be used to advocate or promote gun control." The language was named for one of its backers, Rep. Jay Dickey (R-Ark).

But the Dickey Amendment, as written, did not ban all gun-related research outright.

"Any honest research that was not rigged to produce results that helped promote gun control could be funded by CDC," said Gary Kleck, a Florida State University criminologist. But CDC officials, experts said, interpreted the Dickey Amendment as banning all gun-related research funding.

This perception meant the amendment "had a chilling effect on funding for gun research," said Allen Rostron, a University of Missouri-Kansas City law professor who has written about the amendment. Federal agencies "did not want to take a chance on funding research that might be seen as violating the restriction" and so "essentially were not funding research on gun violence."

Also, the Dickey Amendment targeted only the CDC, not all other federal agencies. Congress expanded the restriction to cover NIH-funded research in 2011.

Although the Dickey Amendment didn't bar gun-related research, federal decision-makers acted as though it did by not pursuing such

research.

Moving past the Dickey Amendment

Over time, critics of the gun industry made an issue of the Dickey Amendment and gathered congressional support to clarify the amendment.

In 2018, lawmakers approved language that said the amendment wasn't a blanket ban on federally funded gun violence research. By 2020, federal research grants on firearms began to be issued again, starting with \$25 million to be split between the CDC and NIH.

By now, the CDC and NIH are funding a "large portfolio" of firearm violence-related research, said Daniel Webster, a professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Also, the Justice Department's National Institute of Justice has funded the largest study of mass shootings to date, Webster said, and is seeking applications for studies of mass shootings.

Kennedy said, "Congress prohibits the NIH from researching the cause of mass shootings."

Although the Dickey Amendment, a provision of appropriations law supported by the gun industry, didn't prohibit all federally supported, gun-related research from 1996 to 2018, decision-makers acted as though it did.

However, in 2018, Congress clarified the provision's language. And since 2020, CDC, NIH, and other federal agencies have funded millions of dollars in gun-related research, including studies on mass shootings.

We rate Kennedy's statement False.

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