



# Women Under the Gun

How Gun Violence Affects Women and 4 Policy Solutions  
to Better Protect Them

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# Introduction and summary

**This report contains corrections. See pages 16, 33, and 39.**

Violence against women looks very different than violence against men. Whether in the context of sexual assault on college campuses or in the military, violence by an intimate partner, or other types of violent victimization, women's experiences of violence in this country are unique from those of men. One key difference in the violence committed against women in the United States is who commits it: Women are much more likely to be victimized by people they know, while men are more likely to be victims of violent crime at the hands of strangers. Between 2003 and 2012, 65 percent of female violent crime victims were targeted by someone they knew; only 34 percent of male violent crime victims knew their attackers.<sup>1</sup> Intimate partners make up the majority of known assailants: During the same time period, 34 percent of all women murdered were killed by a male intimate partner, compared to the only 2.5 percent of male murder victims killed by a female intimate partner.<sup>2</sup>

A staggering portion of violence against women is fatal, and a key driver of these homicides is access to guns. From 2001 through 2012, 6,410 women were murdered in the United States by an intimate partner using a gun—more than the total number of U.S. troops killed in action during the entirety of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars combined.<sup>3</sup> Guns are used in fatal intimate partner violence more than any other weapon: Of all the women killed by intimate partners during this period, 55 percent were killed with guns.<sup>4</sup> Women in the United States are 11 times more likely to be murdered with a gun than are women in other high-income countries.<sup>5</sup>

Limiting abusers and stalkers' access to firearms is therefore critical to reduce the number of women murdered in this country every year. This idea is not new: Congress first acted 20 years ago to strengthen our gun laws to prevent some domestic abusers from buying guns. But we are still a long way from having a com-

prehensive system of laws in place at both the federal and state levels that protect women—and children and men—from fatal violence in the context of intimate and domestic relationships. This report provides an overview of the data regarding the intersection of intimate partner violence and gun violence, describing four policies that states and the federal government should enact to reduce dangerous abusers' access to guns and prevent murders of women:

- Bar all convicted abusers, stalkers, and people subject to related restraining orders from possessing guns.
- Provide all records of prohibited abusers to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, or NICS.
- Require a background check for all gun sales.
- Ensure that abusers surrender any firearms they own once they become prohibited.

Some states have already adopted some of these policies, and in the past 12 months, there has been a growing movement across the country to enact laws closing some gaps related to domestic abusers' gun access in several states, including Wisconsin,<sup>6</sup> Washington,<sup>7</sup> Louisiana,<sup>8</sup> New Hampshire,<sup>9</sup> and Minnesota.<sup>10</sup>

This report collected and analyzed data from a variety of sources, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, or FBI; the Centers for Disease Control, or CDC; the Office of Violence Against Women; state criminal justice agencies; state domestic violence fatality review boards; and academic research. These data provide a snapshot of women's experiences of violence in this country and show the glaring gaps in state and federal laws that leave victims of domestic violence and stalking vulnerable to gun violence. Many of these data have not been made public prior to the publication of this report and were collected through Freedom of Information Act requests. Among our findings:

- In 15 states, more than 40 percent of all homicides of women in each state involved intimate partner violence. In 36 states, more than 50 percent of intimate partner-related homicides of women in each state involved a gun.<sup>11</sup>

- A review of conviction records in 20 states showed that there are at least 11,986 individuals across the country who have been convicted of misdemeanor-level stalking but are still permitted to possess guns under federal law. It is likely that there are tens of thousands of additional convicted stalkers who are able to buy guns.
- While submission of records regarding convicted misdemeanor domestic abusers to the FBI's NICS Index has increased 132 percent over the past five-and-a-half years, only three states appear to be submitting reasonably complete records—Connecticut, New Hampshire, and New Mexico. Records from these three states account for 79 percent of the total records submitted to the FBI.<sup>12</sup>

Every day in the United States, five women are murdered with guns.<sup>13</sup> Many of these fatal shootings occur in the context of a domestic or intimate partner relationship. However, women are not the only victims. Shooters have often made children, police officers, and their broader communities additional targets of what begins as an intimate partner shooting. In fact, one study found that more than half of the mass shootings in recent years have started with or involved the shooting of an intimate partner or a family member.<sup>14</sup> Enacting a comprehensive set of laws and enforcement strategies to disarm domestic abusers and stalkers will reduce the number of women who are murdered by abusers with guns—and it will make all Americans safer.

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