

Center for American Progress



Top 10 Reasons Why Communities of Color Should Care About Stricter Gun-Violence Prevention Laws



SOURCE: AP/Boza Ivanovic

Father Bob Gettinger, second right, leads a **prayer** for those killed by gun violence and for the safety of the community as people gather in St. Louis, Missouri, on Monday, November 23, 2009, one of among more than 20 other U.S. cities participating in the National Day of Outrage, a nationwide call to end violence in urban communities.

By **Morriah Kaplan** and **Sophia Kerby** | January 17, 2013

Last month Americans watched as yet another instance of horrific gun violence took place. While the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School is perhaps one of the most appalling instances of gun violence we have ever seen, it was far removed from the kind of gun violence that is both more common and more lethal in the United States today. Acts of gun violence take approximately **30,000 American lives every year**, and

gun violence is one of the **leading causes of death among teens**. Although the majority of these shootings rarely make national headlines, the tragedy is no less real.

As the following facts show, communities and families of color disproportionately suffer from gun violence. Here are 10 reasons why communities of color have a great stake in the public discourse on violence prevention.

1. People of color account for the majority of gun-violence victims. There are large racial disparities in homicide rates due to gun violence. The gun-homicide rate for black males is **2.4 times** as high as that of Latino males, and it is **15.3 times** as high as the rate for non-Hispanic white males. Murder and non-negligent manslaughter victims are most frequently black or Latino, with blacks comprising **67 percent of victims** and Latinos comprising **28.1 percent**. Blacks make up roughly 13 percent of the U.S. population, but in 2010—the last year for which data is available—they suffered **56 percent** of all firearm homicides.

2. Gun violence is one of the leading causes of death for teens of color. Guns cause the deaths of thousands of teens each year. In 2008 and 2009 gun homicide was the **leading cause of death** among black teens, and the rates of gun-related deaths are highest for black male teens. For black families, the chance of a male child dying from a gunshot wound is **62 percent higher** than the chance of him dying in a motor-vehicle crash. In 2010 American Indian male teens had the second-highest rate of gun-related deaths, with **19.3 gun-related deaths per 100,000** teens. Latino male teens followed, with **17.8 per 100,000**. In contrast, white male teens had the second-lowest rate, with only **9.4 per 100,000**.

3. Gun violence is a vicious cycle. Teens exposed to gun violence are more likely to commit violence in the future. In a **study** conducted by the Department of Justice, teens were interviewed over a number of years about their exposure to violence, as well as their own violent acts. Teens who had been exposed to firearms violence reported committing more serious acts of violence than teens who had not been exposed. Additionally, youth who live in dangerous and disadvantaged neighborhoods and have had more exposure to violence were found to be **more likely** to carry concealed firearms. This means that communities already facing high levels of gun violence will likely **continue** to experience violence unless policymakers take action.

4. Gun injuries disproportionately affect communities of color. Of the 34,347 children and teens who suffered **gun injuries in the United States in 2008 and 2009**, almost half were black, and more than one-fifth were Latino. Black teens alone are **25 times more likely** to be injured by a gun than white teens.

5. People of color strongly support gun-violence prevention. As people of color suffer higher rates of gun violence, it is not surprising that they strongly support stricter gun laws. **Forty-nine** percent of people of color are in favor of stricter gun-violence prevention.

6. The militarization of school safety and orderliness most heavily impacts children of color. In the wake of recent school shootings, members of the National Rifle Association, the nation's largest gun lobby, have **suggested putting armed police officers in every school**. But research shows that increased police presence in schools disproportionately affects youth of color, driving the school-to-prison pipeline and leading to youths' unnecessary involvement in the justice system. **Studies have shown** that the more interaction a young person has with the **criminal justice** system, the more likely they are to come into contact with the criminal justice system in the future. This dynamic works to push a disproportionate number of black and Latino students out of school and into the criminal justice system. Black boys in particular are **three times more likely** to be suspended than white boys, and black girls are **four times more likely** to be suspended than white girls.

7. Gun violence is concentrated in urban and poor neighborhoods, which tend to be populated predominately by people of color. In 2006 and 2007 the 62 center cities of America's 50 largest metro areas accounted for only 15 percent of the population but **39 percent of gun-related murders**. This ratio is only growing: In 2011 there were record highs of gun violence in cities such as **Chicago** and **Detroit**. Plans to combat gun violence must include prevention programs and policies that target urban violence.

8. The cost of gun violence is a significant burden on the health care system. Firearm-related injuries generally require hospitalization and significant emergency center resources. In 2005 U.S hospitals charged **\$108.4 million** to care for about 10,000 victims of firearm injuries. This number exceeds the total budget for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention by \$38 million, pointing to not only a lack of resources for prevention but also to the significant cost to the health care system. It strains the health services available in disadvantaged areas and exacerbates the health disparities that already exist within communities of color.

9. Gun violence poses a significant cost to society. Once all the direct and indirect medical, legal, and societal costs are added together, the annual cost of gun violence in America amounts to roughly **\$100 billion**. According to studies done at the **University of Chicago**, every crime-related gunshot wound imposes costs on society to the order of \$1 million. Businesses are more likely to close early in higher-crime neighborhoods, and high crime rates deter further business investment. Because communities of color tend to account for many of these high-crime areas, the community suffers double jeopardy: Not only are these communities losing their youth to gun violence, but their local economies are being devastated.

10. A two-sided approach, including better background checks and prevention programs, is crucial. An estimated **40 percent of U.S. gun sales**—more than 6 million gun transfers—originate from private sellers, who are not required to perform background checks. It is this loophole primarily that enables the transfer of guns **from dealers to city neighborhoods**. Any comprehensive gun legislation needs to address this

loophole. Additionally, legislation needs to include prevention programs for at-risk youth such as those proposed by the **Youth PROMISE Act**, which aims to reduce violence in communities with a high concentration of youth at risk of school disengagement, social disconnection, and delinquent behavior. These prevention programs would largely benefit **youth of color**.

These facts make it clear that the costs of gun violence are weighing disproportionately on our communities of color—and particularly on the youth within these communities. We must act now through targeted legislation to reduce violence in these communities.

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