

## **Robyn Tice**

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**From:** Don Kraher  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 19, 2021 11:36 AM  
**To:** Jared Moore; Ann Hill; Sherri Myers; Jennifer Brahier; Casey Jones; Teniade Broughton; Delarian Wiggins  
**Cc:** Elaine Mager; Sonja Gaines; Melanie Kruszona; Ericka Burnett; Robyn Tice  
**Subject:** FW: Article on Gun Buy Back programs

Council President and Members of City Council

Please find the link below regarding an article related to Gun Buy Back Programs, offered by a fellow Council Member.

<https://journalistsresource.org/studies/gun-violence/gun-buybacks-what-the-research-says/>

Respectfully,

***Don Kraher***  
***Council Executive***  
Office of the City Council  
222 W. Main Street  
Pensacola, FL 32502  
(850) 435-1686 – Office  
(850) 384-6363 – Cell



***City of Pensacola***

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## Gun buybacks: What the research says

*The JR Guide to the 2020 Democratic Policy Proposals*



Los Angeles gun buyback event, May 16, 2018. (Eric Garcetti / Flickr / Creative Commons)

By *Clark Merrefield*

January 9, 2020

*In the lead-up to the 2020 elections, the Journalist's Resource team is combing through the Democratic presidential candidates' platforms and reporting what the research says about their policy proposals. We want to encourage deep*

*coverage of these proposals — and do our part to help deter [horse race journalism](#), which research suggests can lead to inaccurate reporting and an uninformed electorate. We're focusing on proposals that have a reasonable chance of becoming policy, and for us that means at least 3 of the 5 [top-polling candidates](#) say they intend to tackle the issue. Here we look at what the research says about how effective gun buyback programs are at reducing gun violence.*

## **Candidates favoring voluntary buybacks**

Michael Bennet\*, Michael Bloomberg\*, [Joe Biden](#), Pete Buttigieg\*, John Delaney\*, Tulsi Gabbard\*, Amy Klobuchar\*, Bernie Sanders\*, Tom Steyer\*, Elizabeth Warren\*, Andrew Yang\*

## **Candidates favoring mandatory buybacks**

Cory Booker\*, Marianne Williamson\*

## **What the research says**

Voluntary gun buyback programs allow gun owners to trade their firearms to government entities — usually law enforcement — for vouchers that can be redeemed for cash or other items of value, such as tickets to professional

sporting events. Guns can usually be exchanged “no questions asked.” In other words, people who turn over their firearms are not typically subject to background checks or criminal inquiries and, in some cases, do not have to provide identifying information.

Early research on gun buybacks, mostly from the 1990s, largely finds these programs ineffective at curbing gun violence. Recent research frames gun buybacks in a more favorable light. On their own, buybacks might not be effective if the goal is to use them to directly reduce violent crime. But research shows buybacks can help if they're part of a broader effort to reduce gun violence. They can influence public perception of how authorities are dealing with gun violence and serve as opportunities to educate communities about gun violence reduction strategies, according to academic researchers.

When presidential candidates favor mandatory buybacks, they usually mean that if elected they would push for legislation requiring Americans with high-capacity assault weapons to trade them to a government entity.

Candidates in favor of buybacks either have policy statements on their websites or have clearly expressed support for

voluntary or mandatory buybacks to national news outlets. Booker, Gabbard, Klobuchar, Sanders and Warren have co-sponsored either [Senate](#) or [House](#) versions of the federal Assault Weapons Ban of 2019, which would outlaw semiautomatic assault weapons and magazines that hold more than 10 cartridges — except for semiautomatic assault weapons lawfully owned before the ban. The law would also give state and local governments access to federal funds to hold firearm buybacks. Deval Patrick\* hasn't staked out a clear position on gun buyback programs.

There are no government estimates on what a national gun buyback program might cost, but an [analysis from \*The Trace\*](#), a national news outlet that covers guns, estimates the total direct cost for a rifle buyback program would range from nearly \$1 billion to \$87 billion. Another recent [estimate](#), from the [Institute of Labor Economics](#), puts the cost of a national buyback program aimed at the types of handguns most often used in violent crime at \$7.6 billion. These estimates don't represent comprehensive economic analyses. For example, they don't account for labor costs for law enforcement and other government personnel.

## Key context

There's a lot to unpack when it comes to gun buybacks. The core question that academic research seeks to answer is whether such programs reduce gun violence. In absolute and relative numbers, Americans lead the world in firearm ownership. The general idea behind gun buyback policies is that gun violence can be lessened by reducing the number of guns in civilian hands.

The U.S. accounts for nearly 46% of all civilian-held firearms in the world, [according to](#) the Small Arms Survey, a research project from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva. There are about 121 firearms for every 100 U.S. civilians. Yemen has the second-highest rate of firearm ownership, with about 53 firearms for every 100 civilians. Canada's rate is about 35 while Mexico sits at about 13 per 100 civilians.

Gun ownership in the U.S. is also concentrated, with 3% of Americans owning half of all guns in the country, [according to a 2015 survey](#) from researchers at Harvard and Northeastern universities. Delaware has the nation's lowest gun ownership rate — 5.2% — while Alaska is at the top with a rate of 61.7%, according to a nationally

representative survey of 4,000 U.S. adults from the 50 states and the District of Columbia, [published](#) in June 2015 in *Injury Prevention*.

“We showed that exposure to social gun culture was robustly associated with gun ownership and to our knowledge, this is the first study to establish empirical evidence of the relation between social gun culture and gun ownership,” write the authors of that study.

# U.S. gun owner

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West South Midwest

Survey data, from "Gun Ownership and Social Gun Culture," June 2015, *Ir*  
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There are two threads through the research on gun buyback programs. First, certain types of guns are more likely to be used for certain types of crimes. While mass shootings committed with assault weapons draw national media attention, [those crimes are quite rare](#). Most homicides aren't from mass shootings, and homicides are usually committed



with handguns, [according to](#) the National Institute of Justice, the research arm of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Second, gun violence isn't just about homicides. Nationally, almost two-thirds of gun deaths are suicides, according to 2017 data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Firearm suicide attempts result in death 85% of the time, compared with 3% of attempts involving a drug overdose, [according to](#) a 2016 report from *Harvard Public Health*, the magazine of the T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

"What makes guns the most common mode of suicide in this country? The answer: They are both lethal and accessible," writes [Madeline Drexler](#), editor of *Harvard Public Health* and the report's author.

# U.S. gun deaths b

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Data from the Centers for Disease C

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## Formative findings

Philadelphia was one of the first U.S. cities to try gun buybacks with several programs in the early 1970s. Baltimore offered \$50 per gun in 1974 — roughly \$275 in today's dollars — [netting](#) more than 13,000 firearms over three months.

By the late 1990s, municipalities in the U.S. [had conducted](#) more than 100 buyback programs. Seattle's gun buyback

program in fall 1992 was among the first to be evaluated via peer-reviewed research. Gun owners turned over 1,172 firearms, almost all of which were working handguns, according to a 1994 evaluation [published](#) in *Public Health Reports*. Participants received a bank voucher worth \$50, no matter how many firearms they turned over to the Seattle Police Department. About three-fourths of participants were men. The evaluation didn't find statistical evidence that the program had an effect on gun violence.

"Gun buyback programs are a broadly supported means to decrease voluntarily the prevalence of handguns within a community, but their effect on decreasing violent crime and reducing firearm mortality is unknown," the authors write.

Another early evaluation looked at a gun buyback program in Sacramento in August 1993. The program allowed people to turn in firearms to police in exchange for tickets to a Kings basketball game. There were 127 participants, according to an evaluation of the program [that appeared](#) in *Injury Prevention* in September 1998.

Researchers heard from 92 participants via a mail survey that sought, in part, to understand why they turned in firearms.

Nearly half said they were concerned children might find and use the gun. (A large percentage of participants in a long-running gun buyback program in Worcester, Massachusetts [also cite](#) child safety reasons for turning in their guns.) Some 41% of respondents had no gun in their household after participating in the Sacramento program. Still, those “who still owned guns often kept them loaded and easily accessible,” the authors write.

Milwaukee instituted its own series of buyback programs from 1994 to 1996. An evaluation [published](#) in *Injury Prevention* in June 2002 looked at whether the types of handguns recovered from those buybacks were the same as those typically used in homicides and suicides. The authors compared 941 handguns recovered during the buybacks to 369 handguns used in homicides or suicides from 1994 to 1997.

Two-thirds of handguns used in homicides in Milwaukee and 40% of handguns used in suicides were semiautomatic, compared with one-third of buyback handguns. Most guns turned in to the city were revolvers. Semi-automatic guns automatically load cartridges and fire one bullet per trigger pull. Revolvers have rotating cylinders and each cartridge has to be manually loaded. Three-fourths of handguns

recovered during the Milwaukee buybacks used small-caliber ammunition, while much smaller percentages of guns used in homicides and suicides were small-caliber. Two manufacturers produced 30% of the handguns turned in while 5% of guns used in homicides came from those manufacturers.

“Handguns recovered in buyback programs are not the types most commonly linked to firearm homicides and suicides,” the authors conclude.

“Although buyback programs may increase awareness of firearm violence, limited resources for firearm injury prevention may be better spent in other ways.”

Finally, a [meta-analysis](#) from August 2008 in *Crime & Delinquency* [found](#) no research showing “significant changes in gun-related crimes due to these programs.”

## Recent research

The thinking among academics has shifted a bit in the past few years when it comes to gun buybacks. [Garen Winmute](#), director of the Violence Prevention Research Program at the University of California, Davis, [told the news outlet \*Governing\*](#) in 2013 that violent crime rates might not be the best measure of

success for gun buybacks, and that community engagement and education on gun safety during buybacks also have value.

A meta-analysis from December 2019 in *Current Trauma Reports* [suggests](#) that gun buybacks should be included in broader violence reduction strategies.

“Buybacks in conjunction with other methods have been shown to be successful in reducing the number of firearms that could lead to injury and death,” the authors write. They note that non-Hispanic black men are the most common victims of fatal firearm injury, while gun buyback participants tend to be older white men.

A September 2014 [evaluation](#) in *Trauma and Acute Care Surgery* found that gun buyback programs in Worcester, Massachusetts, New Haven, Connecticut and Phoenix, Arizona were structured differently from programs in the 1990s. Programs in those cities provided gift cards only to people who brought in working firearms, a notable change from earlier programs that offered trades for non-operational guns. In Worcester and New Haven, people turning over assault weapons and sawed-off shotguns got higher-value gift cards.

“The gun buyback program is solely one prong of a multipronged approach in reducing firearm-based interpersonal violence,” the authors conclude.

A 2013 [evaluation](#) of a multiyear gun buyback program in Buffalo, New York, found no effect on violent gun crime, including homicides. The authors also note that different parties, like law enforcement officers and politicians, may measure the success of gun buybacks in different ways.

“Given the empirical evidence, police agencies may use gun buyback programs not with the expectation of reducing violent crime, but to satisfy the public’s expectations,” the authors write. “When serious crime problems occur, mayors and police chiefs are under pressure from their constituents to ‘do something dramatic and effective’ about the violence.”

## **Mandatory buybacks in Australia**

In April 1996, a man armed with a semiautomatic rifle [killed 35 people and wounded](#) 23 others in Port Arthur, Tasmania. Australian legislators acted swiftly, agreeing less than two weeks after the massacre to outlaw semiautomatic and pump-action rifles through the [National Firearms](#)

[Agreement](#). A mandatory buyback at market rates followed that fall. By 2001, more than 650,000 of those types of guns were taken in and destroyed.

Another buyback in 2003 netted more than 68,000 handguns. The one-year [cost](#) to the government was about \$176 million for the rifle buyback program that started September 1996.

There have been numerous evaluations of Australia's mandatory buybacks. An investigation of the legislation, [published](#) in July 2016 in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, reported 13 mass shootings in the 18 years before the legislation and none in the 20 years following its passage — though in June 2019, there was a [mass shooting in Darwin](#) committed with a banned firearm. Firearm deaths also declined faster after the legislation, but suicides and homicides not caused by firearms declined, too. Because suicides and homicides overall declined starting around the mid-1990s, the authors couldn't attribute the improvement in gun violence statistics to the gun laws.

A RAND Corporation [analysis](#) from March 2018 similarly doesn't find research explicitly linking the 1996 National Firearms Agreement to reduced gun violence:



“There is more evidence consistent with the claim that the NFA caused reductions in firearm suicides and mass shootings than reductions in violent crime generally, but there is also evidence that raises questions about whether those changes can be attributed to the NFA or to other factors that influenced suicide and mass shooting rates around the time the NFA was implemented.”

While the science isn’t settled as to whether Australia’s gun control legislation was the reason for lower rates of gun violence, the fact remains that the country largely avoided mass shootings for more than two decades following the Port Arthur massacre.

A November 2019 [paper](#) in *Prevention Science* takes a slightly different approach from other analyses. The authors try to look at a world where Australia’s buyback program never happened. They use homicide and other fatality data from other countries to create gun-death data for a fictional Australia sans the 1996 buyback. Their findings suggest that “the universal and abrupt nature of the Australian Gun Buyback program significantly reduced Australia’s homicide rate in the decade following the intervention.”

## Further reading

### Firearm related deaths: the impact of regulatory reform

Ozanne-Smith, K. Ashby, S. Newstead, V. Z. Stathakis, A. Clapperton. *Injury Prevention*, October 2004.

**The gist:** “Dramatic reductions in overall firearm related deaths and particularly suicides by firearms were achieved in the context of the implementation of strong regulatory reform.”

## Subject experts

**David Kennedy**, professor, John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

**Lorraine Mazerolle**, professor of criminology, The University of Queensland, Australia.


**Richard McCleary**, professor of criminology, University of California, Irvine.

**Scott W. Phillips**, associate professor, SUNY Buffalo State.

**James J. Sobol**, associate professor, SUNY Buffalo State.

**Garen Wintemute**, director, [Violence Prevention Research Program](#) at the University of California, Davis.

\*Dropped out of race since publication date.

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