



## Firearms in Louisiana: Statewide Experiences and Beliefs

### OVERVIEW

The CDC identifies Louisiana as having among the highest rates of firearm-related mortality in the United States, and now, new analysis from the *Louisiana Experiences of Violence Survey (LaVEX)* shows that more than one in five Louisiana residents report having been directly threatened or harmed by a gun in their lifetime.<sup>1</sup> LaVEX is the first-ever statewide survey focused on violence in Louisiana and assesses gun-related beliefs and experiences. With this brief, we offer specific insight into Louisianans' experiences of gun violence, gun ownership, and beliefs regarding the value of guns.

### METHODS

LaVEX used an online survey administered to approximately 1000 Louisiana residents ages 18-95 in May and June 2023. The survey asks about respondents' experiences of physical violence (including threats with or use of a weapon) and sexual violence, as well as about their health and socioeconomic circumstances. This brief focuses on participant reports of threat or harm with a gun, gun ownership, and beliefs regarding the value and risks of guns and other firearms in the home. We present results by gender and by race for White and Black respondents.

### FINDINGS

#### Direct Experiences of Gun Violence: Threatened or Harmed with a Gun

- More than 1 in 5 (22%) Louisiana adults have directly experienced gun violence in their lifetime.
  - Men are 2x as likely as women to have directly experienced gun violence, 29% vs. 15%.
  - Lifetime prevalence of direct experiences of gun violence is comparable for White and Black Louisiana adults, 21% and 20%, respectively.
  - More women compared to men reported having been threatened or harmed with a gun by an intimate partner (3.8% vs. 1.2%)
- One in 20 (5%) Louisianans directly experienced gun violence before they were 18 years old.
  - Boys were more than 2x as likely as girls to have had a direct experience of gun violence, 7% vs. 3%.
  - Prevalence of direct experience of gun violence before age 18 is comparable for white and Black Louisianans, 5% and 4%, respectively.
- One in 50 (2%) Louisiana adults – 63,000 Louisianans - experienced gun violence in the past year,
  - Men are 3x as likely as women to have directly experienced gun violence in the past year, 3% vs. 1%.
    - A stranger was the most commonly reported perpetrator for men (39%).
    - For women, the most commonly reported perpetrator was a spouse/partner (31%).
  - More Black respondents reported directly experiencing gun violence in the past year than White respondents (2.9% vs 1.4%), though this difference is not statistically significant.

## Mental Health Effects of Experiences with Gun Violence

- People who experienced gun violence in the past year were **2x more likely to report severe depression or anxiety** (23% vs. 9%,  $p<0.05$ ), **past year suicidality** (24% vs. 9%,  $p<0.05$ ), and **past year substance misuse** (70% vs 32%,  $p<0.001$ ).

*These findings suggest that direct experiences of gun violence, either threat or harm from a gun, are common in Louisiana, especially for men, with almost one in three men reporting this experience. Black men may be as likely as White men to have ever faced gun violence. Still, their greater risk for past year gun violence suggests that they may be more likely to have multiple or ongoing experiences of gun violence in their lives, increasing their gun mortality risk. People who experienced gun violence in the past year are also more likely to report mental health concerns.*

## Gun Ownership

- More than 1 in 3 Louisiana adults in this sample report currently owning a gun (42%)
  - Men were more likely than women to report gun ownership (51% men; 35% women).
  - White respondents were more likely than Black respondents to report gun ownership (46% White; 30% Black)
  - Individuals who committed acts of IPV in the past year were 2x more likely to own a gun compared to those who did not report IPV perpetration (84% vs. 41%)
- Less than 1 in 5 (18%) Louisiana adults report being a registered owner of the gun.
  - Men reported slightly higher registered gun ownership than women (22% men; 15% women), but the difference was insignificant.
  - White and Black respondents were similarly likely to report being a registered gun owner (19% White; 17% Black).
- 1 in 3 (33%) Louisiana adults report having been trained to use a gun.
  - Just over half (56%) of adults who own a gun report that they have been trained to use one.
  - Men were more likely than women to report having been trained to use a gun (40% men; 27% women).
  - White respondents were more likely than Black respondents to report having been trained to use a gun (37% White; 24% Black).
- 1 in 10 (10%) Louisiana residents reported purchasing a gun in the past year.
  - Men were more likely than women to report past year gun purchasing (13% men; 8% women).
  - White and Black respondents were similarly likely to report past year gun purchasing (9% White; 13% Black).

## Recent Gun Violence and Gun Purchasing

- People who experienced gun violence in the past year were **5x more likely to have purchased a gun** in the past year (44% vs 9%) and were **significantly more likely to own a gun** (69% vs 41%).

*Louisiana adults are obtaining guns without registering them and without being trained to use a gun, and most of this is occurring among men rather than women. We also see higher gun ownership among men compared to women and among White compared with Black adults.*

## Having a Gun or Other Firearm in the Home

- More than one in three (35%) Louisiana adults report that there is a firearm in or around their home.
  - Men were more likely than women to report having a firearm in or around their home (41% men; 31% women).
  - White respondents were more likely than Black respondents to report a firearm in or around their home (41% White; 22% Black)

## Beliefs Regarding the Value of Having a Firearm in the Home

Gun ownership & attitudes	Total	White		Black	
		Women	Men	Women	Men
Most people in my neighborhood have firearms in or around their home	31%	35%	41%	16%	19%
Having a firearm in or around your home can help keep your home and family safe	44%	49%	50%	33%	34%
I would not want to have a firearm in or around my home	34%	31%	25%	53%	41%

*Having a firearm in the home is not uncommon in Louisiana, and almost half of Louisiana adults (44%) believe that 'Having a firearm in or around your home can help keep your home and family safe'. At the same time, one-third of Louisiana adults report, 'I would not want to have a firearm in or around my home'. We see a strong divide by gender and race/ethnicity, with White men most likely to support firearms as a means of protecting your household, and Black women most likely not to want to have a firearm in or around their home.*

## IMPLICATIONS

Louisiana has some of the weakest gun control policies in the United States.<sup>2</sup> We see the consequences of this in recent reporting, which indicates the firearm injury death rate in Louisiana as 29.1 deaths per 100,000 people, nearly 10 times the national average.<sup>3</sup> Even more troubling is the fact that **Louisiana has the highest firearm death rate for children and teens in the country** at 17.7 deaths per 100,000 children and teens aged 1-19.<sup>4</sup>

We remain hopeful though, given the recent decision by the State Senate not to pass House Bill 131: the No-Permit Concealed Carry proposal.<sup>5</sup> This is a step forward and when it comes to the lives of Louisiana residents, every step counts. Community safety is imperative, and a stronger commitment to legislation that protects Louisiana residents is in the best interest of the state. An extreme risk or red flag policy is another important step given the high rate of intimate partner violence related gun violence and gun related suicides statewide,<sup>6</sup> as well as the broad mental health impacts of experiencing gun violence noted in these data. Extreme risk policies allow for loved ones and law enforcement to file for temporary restriction to firearm access for individuals in crisis.<sup>7</sup> Further, current rates of firearm ownership along with the increased likelihood to purchase a firearm after experiencing gun violence necessitate policies and funding for programs that promote safe storage and training.

Survivors of gun violence also need appropriate supports to address their physical health as well as their mental wellbeing. Collaboration among state and local health departments and healthcare systems will make addressing trauma more available and accessible, and policymakers should allocate critical funding for programs, including trauma recovery centers, to provide healing and prevent the perpetuation of violence.

Finally, gun violence does not occur in a void, and as such, addressing the societal and economic factors can further prevent its occurrence. Policymakers and community leaders can collaborate to understand and address what basic needs are not being met in the state. Affordable housing, food security, educational and economic opportunity, and income equality reduce violence. Implementing policies and programs that advance equity for all Louisiana residents are lasting preventative measures that ensure everyone can thrive within our state.

## References:

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2. Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. *Louisiana Gun Laws*. 2023.
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5. HB131: No Permit Concealed Carry. 2023.
6. Everytown for Gun Safety. Everystat. *Gun Violence in Louisiana*. 2023.
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*This work is part of the Louisiana Violence Experiences (LaVEX) 2023 Survey; for more details on this survey, please see the [LaVEX 2023 Report](#).*

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