



# SIRS Leading Issues:

## *Gun Control*

### Step 1: Developing basic knowledge

Read the following topic overview to understand the basics of the discussion regarding gun control.

It is estimated that a third of all firearms in the world are in the hands of American civilians. Guns have been part of our society since the first settlers came to America. While there were laws regulating weapons, the Constitution's Second Amendment gave citizens the right to own and bear arms. Gun-control laws have tightened over the past decade. The 1994 federal assault weapons ban, which expired in September 2004, made it illegal to possess a semiautomatic weapon. Despite the expiration of the ban, some states and cities continue to enforce bans on semiautomatic weapons. The Brady Bill, named after former press secretary James Brady, implemented a 15-day waiting period and background checks for potential handgun buyers. The Supreme Court has never addressed whether it is illegal for civilians to own guns. In *Printz v. United States*, the Court saw nothing in the Constitution that would bar handgun restrictions as long as they didn't violate states' rights.

### Step 2: Understanding differences of opinion

Read the viewpoint summaries and the related articles to understand the points of difference on the issue of gun control.

**Viewpoints** Gun-control **advocates** cite the high crime rate and death toll from guns as evidence that tougher laws are needed. They call for limits on the types of weapons civilians can own and stricter weapons registration and training requirements. Sarah Brady, chairwoman of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, presents the case that gun laws work and that crime is actually prevented by them in "The Second Amendment: A Closer Look." Ed Cohen argues that "the very existence of guns in our society is dangerous to our health" in "Public Enemy No. 1." Statistics to bolster the gun-control argument are presented in "The Urgency of Handgun Control."

**Opponents** to gun-control laws argue guns don't kill people, people kill people. They claim citizens have a constitutional right to bear arms for hunting or self-defense. Additionally, many opponents will argue that gun-control legislation, such as the federal assault weapons ban, is ineffective and unenforceable due to loopholes in the laws. Charlton Heston, past president of the National Rifle Association, argues that anti-gun laws do not impact crime in "The Second Amendment: A Closer Look." The article "In the Absence of Guns" challenges gun-control advocates' assertion that societies with fewer guns have less crime by examining the experience of the United Kingdom. Attorney Jeffrey Snyder argues in "Easing Handgun Licensing Laws: Helping the Public Fight Back," that existing gun-control laws deny law-abiding citizens the right to protect themselves against violent crime.

### Step 3: Separating Fact from Opinion

Making reference to the appropriate articles, complete the tasks below to clarify the competing perspectives on the issue of gun control.

- Provide examples of people or groups favoring legislation to increase gun control
- List the reasons they are in favor of gun-control legislation
- Of the reasons provided, give three examples of documented facts and three examples of opinions
- Provide examples of people or groups who oppose gun-control legislation
- List the reasons they provide for opposing gun-control legislation
- Of the reasons provided, give three examples of documented facts and three examples of opinions

### Step 4: Making up your own mind

With referral to the facts and opinions you identified in Step 3, express your opinion on issues relating to gun control. Provide documented facts to support your opinion.

- Do gun-control laws reduce violent crime in society?
- How does the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution impact the discussion of gun-control laws?
- Do gun-control laws infringe upon the rights of citizens to protect themselves? Why or why not?
- Does the experience of countries other than the United States support the argument for stronger gun-control legislation? Why or why not?

### Step 5: Apply your knowledge

Using the links found within the Toolbox section of SIRS Researcher, apply what you've learned to one of the following:

- Guide to Writing a Research Paper
- Guide to Writing a Mini-Research Paper
- Guide to Creating a Powerpoint Presentation
- Guide to Creating a Debate Outline

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## Gun Control—Articles Cited

**The Second Amendment: A Closer Look**  
American Legion Magazine Feb. 2002

**Public Enemy No. 1**  
Notre Dame Magazine Winter 1999/2000

**The Urgency of Handgun Control**  
Christian Social Action Nov./Dec. 1999

**In the Absence of Guns**  
American Spectator June 2000

**Easing Handgun Licensing Laws: Helping the Public Fight Back**  
USA Today (Magazine) Sept. 1998