

Kamala Harris said 1 in 5 Americans have lost family to gun violence. A poll backs that.

[Kamala Harris said 1 in 5 Americans have lost family to gun violence. A poll backs that. \(tampabay.com\)](https://www.tampabay.com)

PolitiFact | A Kaiser Family Foundation survey found that 19% of U.S. adults have a family member who was killed by a gun.



Demonstrators carry caskets to the entrance of the state Capitol to protest gun violence as part of the Tennessee Moral Monday rally in Nashville, Tenn., Monday, April 17, 2023. [GEORGE WALKER IV | AP]

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1 in 5 Americans have lost family member to gun violence, poll shows

Just days after a series of high-profile incidents of gun violence, Vice President Kamala Harris sought to put the frequency of shootings in the United States into context.

“You’ve seen the statistics,” Harris [said](#) April 14 at the national convention of the civil rights group National Action Network. “Gun violence is now the No. 1 cause for death of children in our nation. And a heartbreaking 1 in 5 Americans has lost a family member to gun violence.”

We’ve repeatedly [checked](#) claims that firearms are the leading cause of death for children in the U.S.; we’ve rated them Mostly True.

But what about Harris’ remark that “1 in 5 Americans has lost a family member to gun violence”?

Harris’ office told PolitiFact she was referring to a Kaiser Family Foundation [survey](#) of 1,271 adults in the U.S. conducted in March.

The survey found that 19% of adults — essentially 1 in 5 — answered “yes” when asked, “Do you have a family member who has ever been killed by a gun, including death by suicide?”

The Kaiser poll also [found](#) that 16%, or about 1 in 6, had a family member who had been injured by a gun.

And a little more than 1 in 5 U.S. adults — 21% — told Kaiser that they have been personally threatened with a gun.

The Kaiser study broadly tracks the findings of the two relatively recent surveys we could find that asked similar questions, though Kaiser’s figures are a bit higher than those in the other polls.

A Survey USA [poll](#) of 1,200 U.S. adults sponsored by the pro-gun-control group Everytown for Gun Safety in December 2018 found that 15% said that someone they cared for was killed by a gun.

And a 2022 nationwide [survey](#) conducted by the University of Chicago’s Harris School of Public Policy and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research asked 1,373 adults, “Have you, someone in your family, or a close friend experienced gun violence in the last five years? For example, by being threatened with a gun or being the victim of a shooting.”

In all, 21% responded “yes,” with 4% saying they had experienced gun violence themselves, 8% saying someone in their family had experienced it and, 9% saying a close friend had experienced it.

The questions’ wording varied across the three polls, complicating direct comparisons. For instance, SurveyUSA asked about people the respondent “cared for,” which is not an identical analog to Kaiser’s “family member.”

And unlike Kaiser, SurveyUSA did not specifically mention suicide in its question about people killed by guns, though it didn’t label suicides as out of bounds for the question, either. (In a separate question, SurveyUSA found that 16% of respondents said someone they care for had “attempted or died by suicide with a gun.”)

The biggest difference among the survey results may stem from the most important variation in question wording. If you exclude the AP-NORC responses about a “close friend,” a category that Kaiser didn’t ask about, the AP-NORC survey found 12% of respondents had experienced gun violence personally or knew a family member who had.

However, unlike the Kaiser poll, AP-NORC asked respondents only about the last five years, which would limit respondents from considering older incidents when they answered.

One notable finding in the Kaiser survey also received attention in Harris' address — the differential experiences reported by Americans of different racial and ethnic groups.

“While all this violence impacts all communities in devastating ways, we know it does not do so equally,” Harris said. “Black people are only 13% of America’s population but more than 60% of homicide victims from gun violence.”

The Kaiser poll found that in each of four categories — being threatened by a gun, witnessing someone being injured by a gun, being injured by a gun themselves and being killed by a gun, including suicide — Black respondents were more likely than either whites or Hispanics to note having a family member experience one of those incidents. And in each category, white respondents were the least likely of the three groups to report such incidents involving a family member.

Our ruling

Harris said, “1 in 5 Americans has lost a family member to gun violence.”

The statistic comes from a Kaiser Family Foundation survey taken in March. The poll found that 19% of U.S. adults have a family member who was killed by a gun, including by suicide.

That’s a higher percentage than found in surveys conducted in 2022 and 2018, though differences in question wording make direct comparisons among the three polls tricky.

We rate the statement Mostly True.

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