

The Case for Handgun Waiting Period Legislation

Executive summary

Handgun waiting period laws impose a brief delay (typically a few days) between the purchase and final acquisition of a firearm. Our research, published in a leading peer-reviewed science journal, finds that **handgun waiting periods significantly reduce gun deaths**. Fifteen states currently have handgun waiting periods. Vermont could save lives by implementing a handgun waiting period.

What makes gun legislation difficult to pass?

Broadly speaking, there are two common questions raised regarding *any* gun legislation: (1) is there any evidence that the proposed gun law would reduce gun deaths? (2) isn't restricting an individual's right to own a gun inherently unacceptable? **Handgun waiting period laws address both issues:**

1. There is **compelling academic evidence** that Waiting Period Laws **reduce gun deaths**.
2. Handgun waiting periods save lives **without imposing any restrictions on who can own a gun**.

Evidence: Handgun waiting periods reduce gun deaths

- Our research finds that handgun waiting period laws **reduce gun homicides** by roughly 17%. Waiting periods also **reduce gun suicides** by roughly 7-11%.
- Using rigorous empirical methods, we provide strong evidence of causality: the data strongly suggest that enacting a waiting period directly causes a reduction in deaths.
- This impact is independent of any other law changes (i.e., it doesn't require passing other gun laws).
- Our paper – “Handgun Waiting Periods Reduce Gun Deaths” - was published in a leading peer-reviewed academic journal (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*). The paper can be found here: <https://www.pnas.org/content/114/46/12162.full>

The potential impact of handgun waiting periods is large

As of 2017, 15 states (including DC) had a handgun waiting period (either legislated directly, or as an indirect result of permitting systems). If waiting period policies are adopted by all states that do not currently have them, our data suggest that this would prevent an additional 900 gun homicides and 950 gun suicides per year, without imposing any restrictions on who can own a gun.

Broad bipartisan support for waiting periods laws

National survey results find that majorities of Republicans and Democrats—and even gun owners—already support waiting periods. Recent polls within Vermont found similar results, with the majority of Republicans and the majority of Democrats supporting the recently proposed gun policy.

About us

This memo was prepared by Prof. Deepak Malhotra (dmalhotra@hbs.edu), Prof. Chris Poliquin, and Prof. Mike Luca, and draws on our recent research on handgun waiting periods. We received no external funding for this research, and are not affiliated with any special-interest or lobbying groups.