

Almost one in three US adults owns at least one gun

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Almost one in three US adults owns at least one gun, and they are predominantly white married men over the age of 55, reveals research published online in the journal *Injury Prevention*.

Gun owners are more than twice as likely as non-gun owners to be associated with an active 'social gun culture' where either their [family](#) or friends own guns or their social activities involve use of guns, the findings show.

Gun [death rates](#) in the US have remained high since 2000. In 2013, [gun violence](#) killed 33,636 people and injured 84,258 others in the US.

Previous research indicates that gun ownership increases the risk of death from gun violence. There are thought to be about 300 million guns currently in use in the US.

The researchers analysed the responses of 4000 nationally representative US [adults](#) to a survey on gun ownership and social activities with friends and family that involved guns.

Almost one in three (29.1%) respondents said they owned at least one gun. Gun owners were predominantly white men over the age of 55, and married.

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friends owned guns or their [social activities](#) involved use of guns.

Among those who said they did not own a gun only 6.1% said they were exposed to social gun culture, while the prevalence of gun ownership was 32.3% among those who were exposed to this.

Rates of gun ownership and gun deaths were higher in states with weak gun control policies.

Corresponding to the variation in deaths from gun violence, gun ownership rates varied widely, with the lowest rate in Delaware at 5.2%, and the highest in Alaska at 61.7%.

Elsewhere, Vermont had the highest rates of gun ownership in the north east of the country (28.8%) as did North Dakota in the Midwest (47.9%) and Arkansas in the south (57.9%).

Gun ownership rates were 50% higher in those states with high gun death rates as they were in those with low gun death rates, the findings showed.

"The link between social gun culture and gun ownership also suggests one avenue through which modern conceptions of the primacy of gun ownership, despite the potential public health consequences, are reinforced," note the researchers.

"Although notions of protection of one's family and property originally justified [gun ownership](#), [this] is today sustained in public consciousness much more through calls to constitutionally enshrined social values, reinforced intermittently by outrage at efforts to limit widespread gun availability," they add.

The results suggest that the prevailing social gun culture in the US should

be factored in to the planning and implementation of prudent gun policies designed to reduce the harms associated with [gun](#) ownership, they conclude.

More information: Gun ownership and social gun culture, *Injury Prevention*, [DOI: 10.1136/injuryprev-2015-041586](https://doi.org/10.1136/injuryprev-2015-041586)

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