

- [Corrections](#)

- [More](#)

Site Mobile Navigation

Advertisement

Follow Us:

- [Visit The Upshot on Facebook](#)
- [Visit The Upshot on Twitter](#)
- [Follow The Upshot via RSS](#)

[Get the Upshot in your Inbox](#)

The Upshot

22

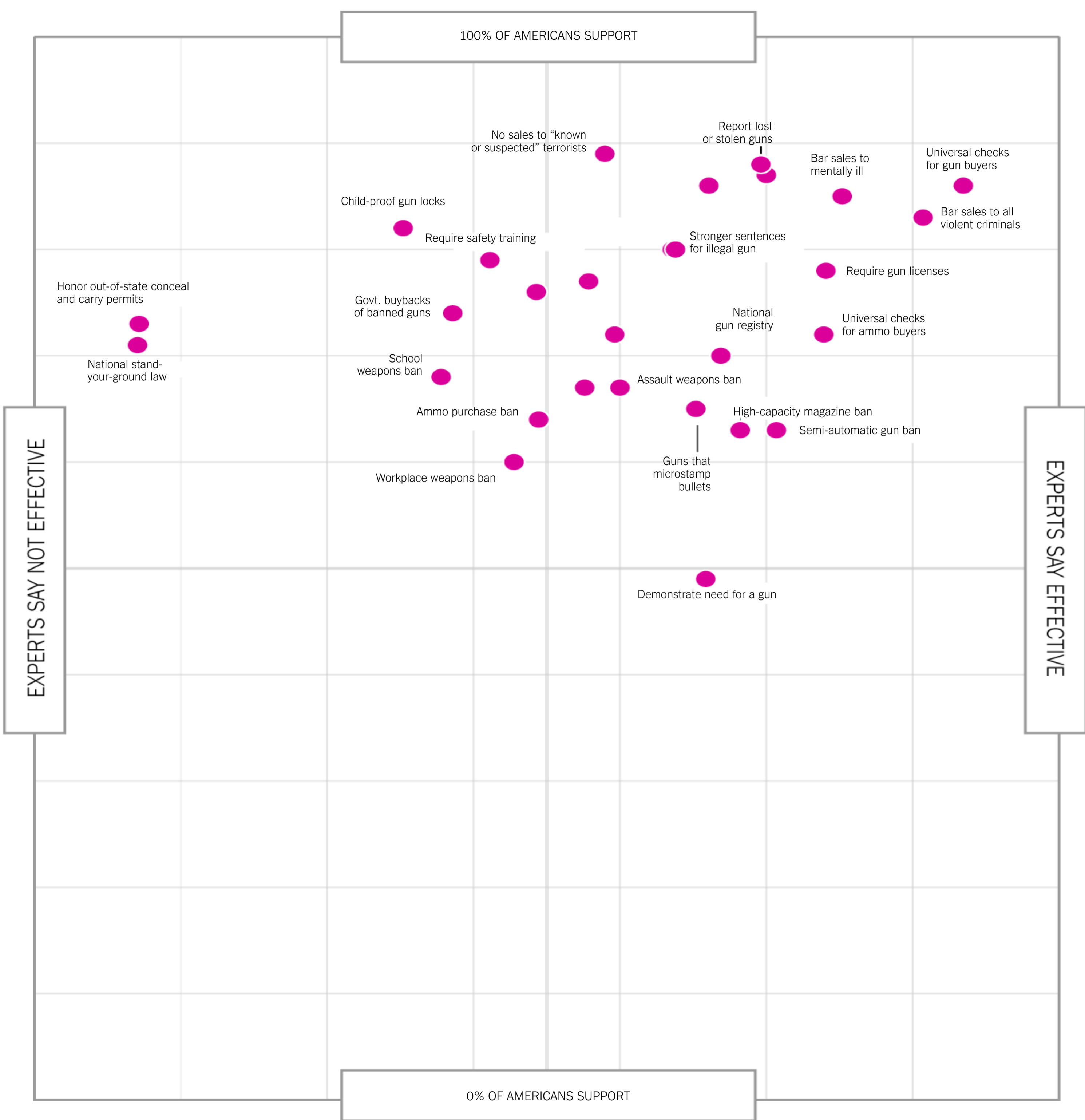
Upshot Ideas Matrix

How to Prevent Gun Deaths? Where Experts and the Public Agree

- [Share](#)

By [QUOCTRUNG BUI](#) and [MARGOT SANGER-KATZ](#) JAN. 10, 2017

We conducted a survey on 29 gun control ideas, looking for the intersection of effectiveness and popularity.



The [mass shooting at the Fort Lauderdale airport](#) in Florida last week shows how much the conversation around gun violence has changed since the presidential election.

Five people were killed, and many others were injured; a few months ago, such carnage would have prompted new calls for more restrictions on guns. But Republicans are preparing to control the White House along with Congress. Donald J. Trump has promised to roll back gun restrictions. The most prominent gun measure currently before Congress is one [that would allow people](#) with concealed-weapon permits from one state to carry their weapons

to other states.

The concealed carry legislation is one of many gun measures that policy makers have debated in recent years. Backers of those ideas, whether the emphasis is gun rights or gun control, often say the intent is to make Americans safer. We've wondered whether the various ideas politicians talk about would work, and whether the public would support them. In June, we asked [Morning Consult](#), a media and polling firm, to survey two groups: some of the country's leading experts on gun violence, and [a representative sample of the American electorate](#).

Our expert survey asked dozens of social scientists, lawyers and public health officials how effective each of 29 policies would be in reducing [firearm homicide deaths](#), regardless of their political feasibility or cost. Policies deemed both effective and popular appear in the upper-right corner of the matrix. Less popular, less effective measures fall lower down and to the left.

The two policies ranked most effective were those requiring all sellers to run background checks on anyone who buys a gun, and barring gun sales to people convicted of violent misdemeanors, including domestic assaults. The experts were more skeptical of other much-debated proposals, including a national gun registry and an assault weapons ban. The idea of requiring states to honor out-of-state concealed weapon permits was ranked low.

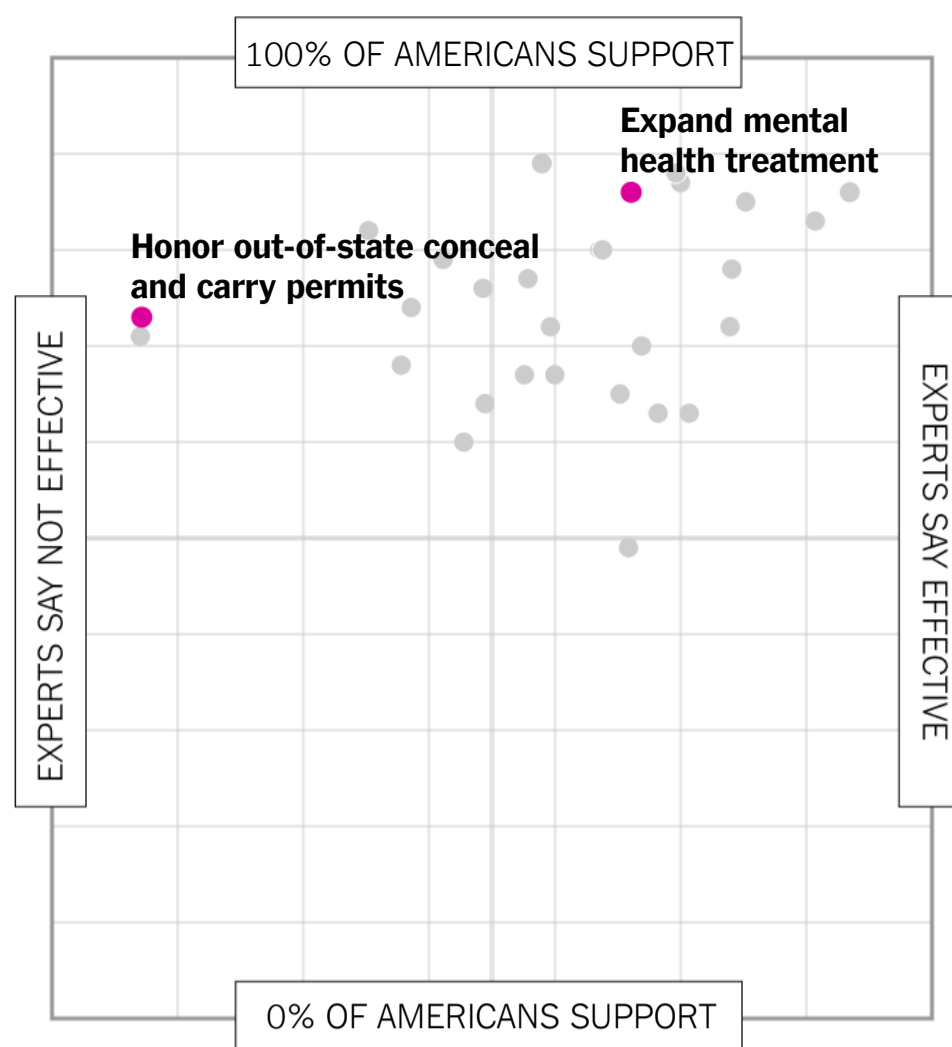
The academics in our panel — many of the country's best empirical researchers on gun policy — were far more likely than the general public to support gun control. But nearly all of the policies that experts think could work have widespread support from the general public.

While Americans remain [sharply divided](#) in their overall view of the tension between gun control and gun rights, [individual proposals](#) are widely favored. The most popular measures in our survey — policies like universal background checks and keeping guns from convicted stalkers — were supported by more than 85 percent of registered voters. Even the least popular idea, a law that would limit gun sales to people who had to demonstrate a “genuine need” for the weapon, was favored by nearly 50 percent.

“We think of guns being an incredibly controversial topic, but what your polling shows and ours has shown is there's a whole lot of gun policies that really aren't controversial,” said [Daniel Webster](#), a professor and director of the Johns Hopkins center for gun policy and research.

Public support, of course, doesn't always translate into legislative action. The Republican Congress, like Mr. Trump, has shown little appetite for measures that would curb gun rights.

What Does Trump Support?



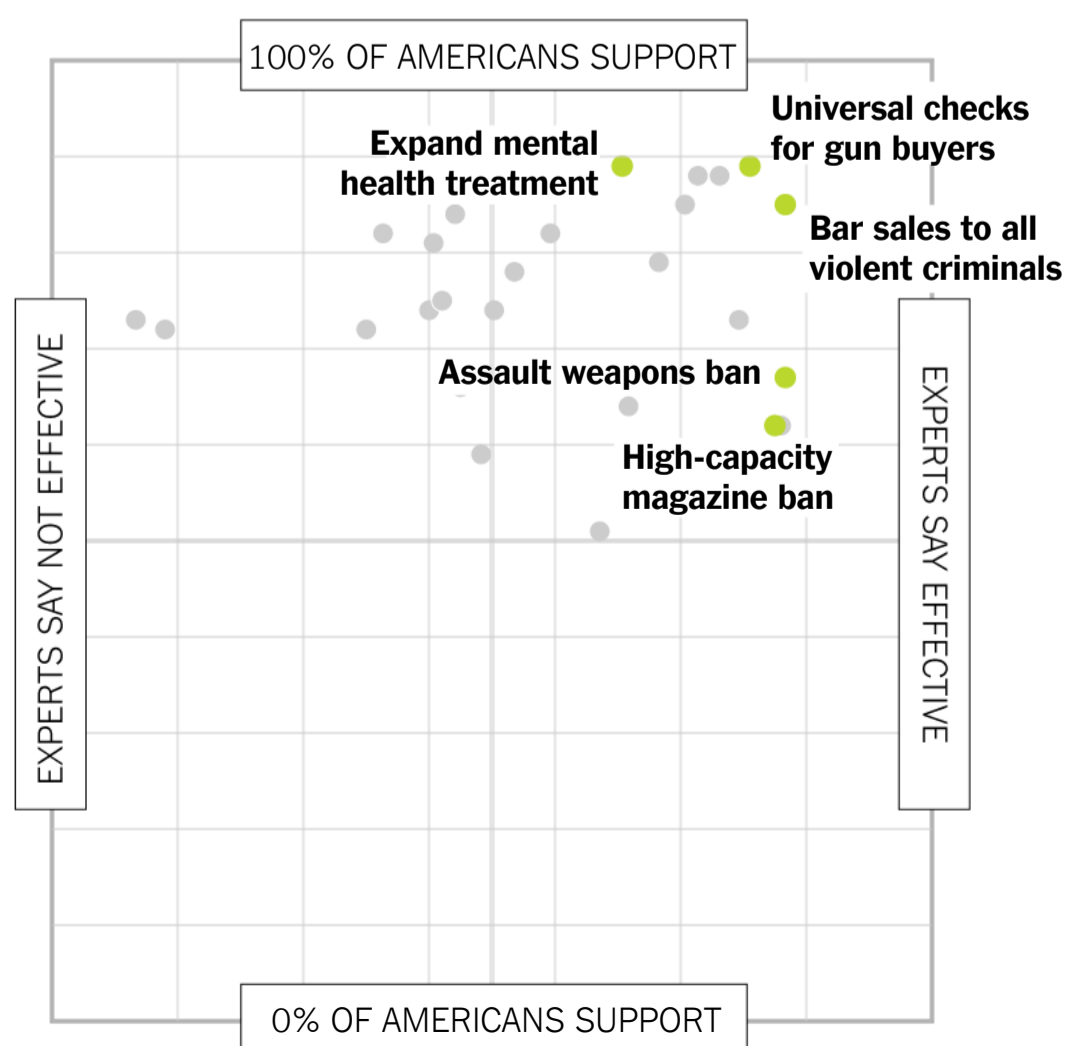
Historically, Mr. Trump has expressed support for some of the more popular measures on our matrix. But once he entered the presidential race, he came out strongly against changes that might limit gun rights for most Americans. [He has said](#) that he supports nationalizing concealed carry permits, and that he wants to lift restrictions on carrying guns in places like schools or military bases.

The [concealed carry bill](#) was one of the first introduced in the new Congress. The bill, filed by Richard Hudson, a Republican representative from North Carolina, would require states to honor out-of-state permits to carry a concealed weapon even if the standards for obtaining them differ, just as states honor driver's licenses from other states.

On our matrix, it is one of the worst-performing ideas. Our panel of experts did not think it would be effective in reducing gun homicides, though a majority of Americans said they'd support it.

Mr Trump has also advocated more treatment for people with mental illness. That idea fared better among the public and the experts in our surveys.

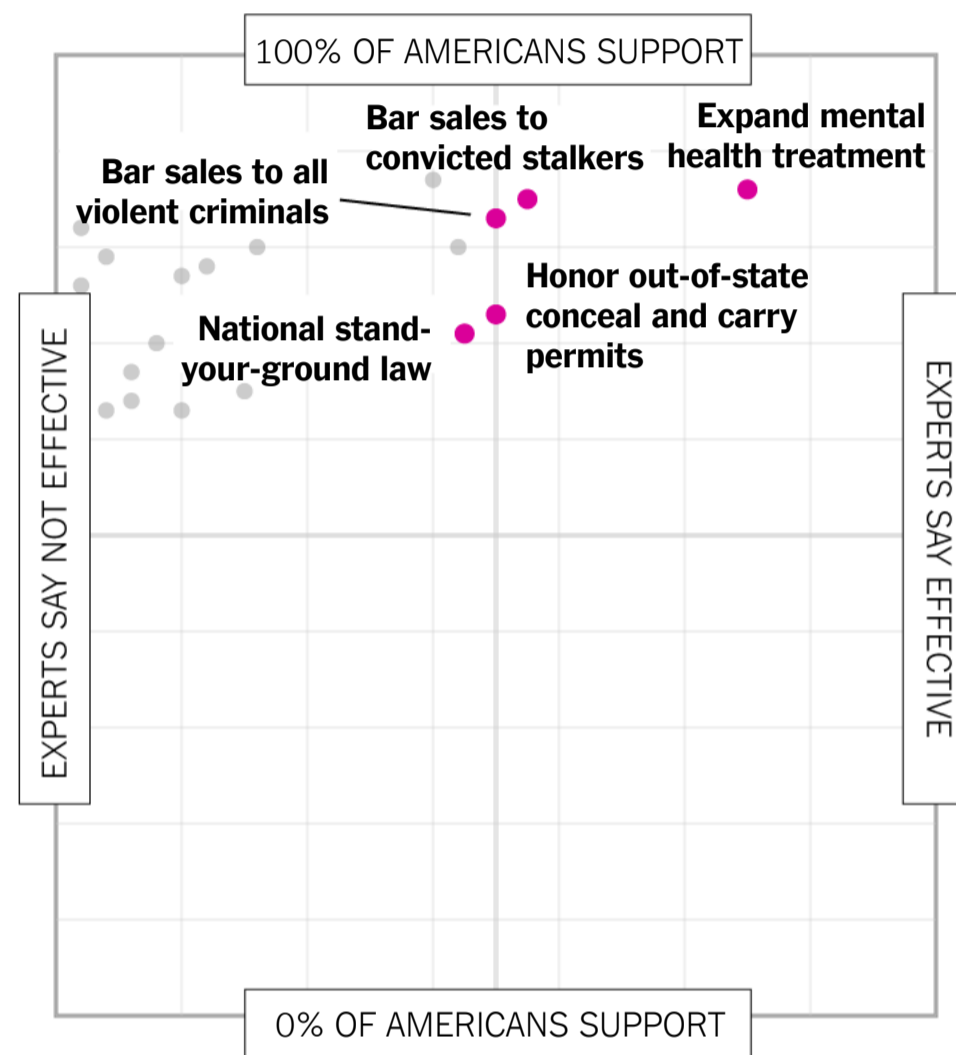
What About Mass Shootings?



In addition to asking experts about all firearm homicides, we asked them to rate the same set of policies according to their effectiveness in reducing mass shootings, which make up around 1 percent of gun homicide deaths. Many of their favored policies stayed the same, but a few changed.

Bans on assault weapons and large-capacity ammunition magazines, or limitations on ammunition purchases, would have a greater effect on mass shootings than on routine gun violence, according to the survey. Those rules wouldn't necessarily reduce the number of mass shootings, the experts said, but could lower the death toll when they occur.

Measures Supported by Academics Opposed to Gun Control

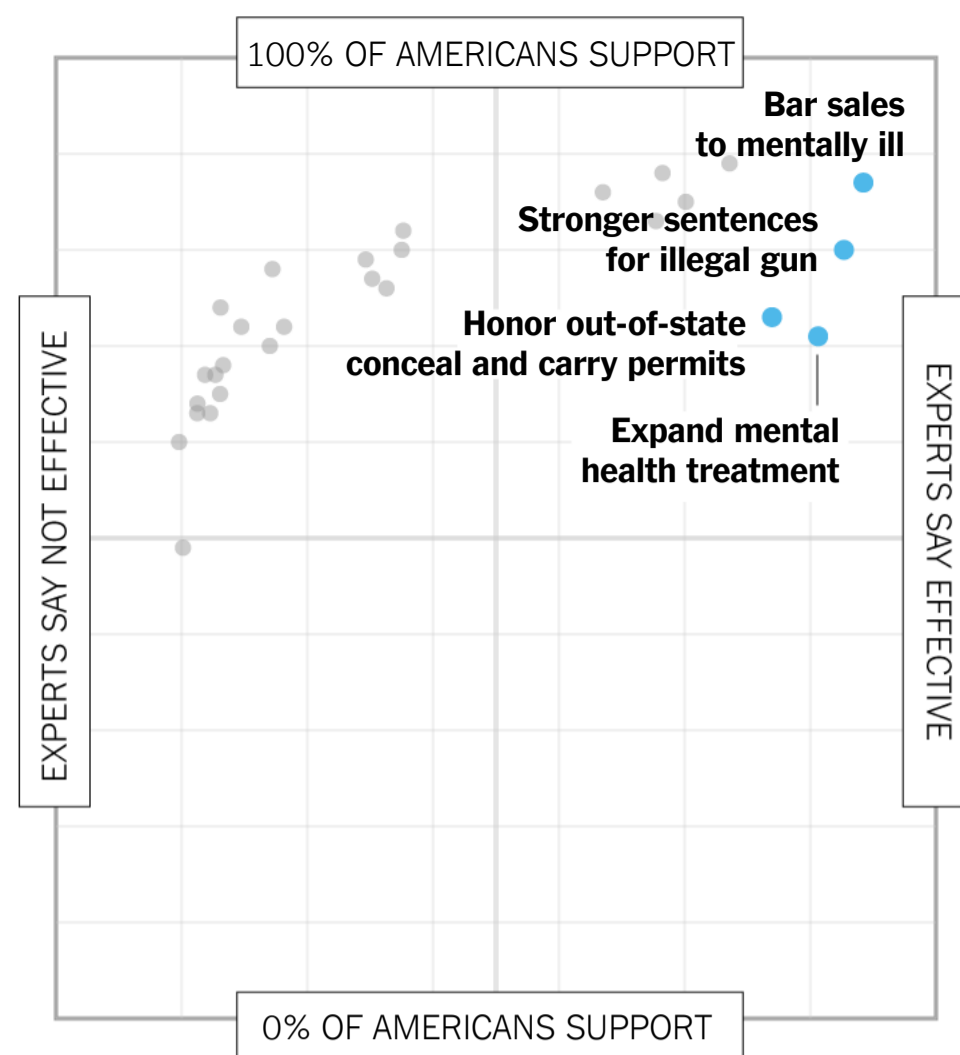


Most of our experts generally favor gun control policies. Only five said they oppose them, and these five rated nearly every policy option as less effective than their colleagues did. But there were still some policies they thought would reduce gun homicides, including expanded screening and treatment of mental illness, and restrictions on gun sales to people convicted of stalking.

Our gun experts who were opposed to gun control tended to particularly oppose blanket policies. “The essence of a ban is it applies to everyone equally, at least theoretically,” said Gary Kleck, an emeritus professor of criminology and criminal justice at Florida State University. “But in practice, criminals, being criminals, don’t obey the law.”

We also asked the National Rifle Association for its favored gun control policies and its thoughts on our results, but the group declined to comment.

Things Law Enforcement Likes



We asked the membership of two groups of law enforcement professionals to answer our survey (their responses were not combined with those of the academic experts). Just under 100 police officers and chiefs responded, representing only a small percentage of the law enforcement community.

In general, the participating law enforcement professionals expressed more support than the academics for measures that would encourage the use of guns by civilians to defend themselves against crime. They gave higher ratings on stand-your-ground laws and the concealed carry measure, for example. They were far more wary than the academics of measures that involved banning categories of firearms or restricting where individuals can carry guns.

Our sample mixes the two groups of law enforcement professionals, which may obscure differences among them. Previous research has shown that police chiefs tend to be more supportive of policies that restrict gun access, while rank-and-file police officers tend to favor more gun rights.

Other Ideas

In interviews, we asked some of our experts for safety ideas that weren't included in our survey.

A few pointed to strategies that wouldn't involve new legislation or regulation, particularly for gang-related gun homicides, which are far more common than mass shootings. Studies have shown that a few programs that focus on community outreach can reduce gun violence in cities. Expanding such programs wouldn't require new laws, just more funding.

There were also some policies that we didn't ask about. We didn't ask about a ban on all handguns, which Washington, D.C., and Chicago have tried. Nor did we ask about barring gun sales to people with a history of alcohol-related offenses, like D.U.I.s. We didn't ask about lifting restrictions on carrying guns on [military bases](#) or near schools, which Mr. Trump has endorsed. And we didn't ask about a measure, recently passed in a few states, that would allow law enforcement officials or family members to seek [a kind of restraining order](#) from a judge to temporarily confiscate guns from a person who appears to be in crisis.

What Works and Doesn't Work in Reducing Gun Deaths

Suggested Policy	Effectiveness	Public Support
Requiring all sellers to run background checks on anyone who buys a gun.	7.3	86%
Preventing sales of all firearms to people who have been convicted of violent misdemeanors, including domestic assaults.	7.1	83%
Preventing sales of all firearms to people who have been convicted of stalking another person	6.5	85%
Requiring all gun owners to possess a license for their firearm.	6.4	78%
Requiring all sellers to run background checks on anyone who buys ammunition.	6.4	72%
Banning the sale and ownership of all semi-automatic and automatic firearms.	6.1	63%
Preventing sales of all firearms to people who have been reported as dangerous to law enforcement by a mental health provider.	6.0	87%
Requiring all owners to report lost or stolen firearms.	6.0	88%
Banning the sale and ownership of all ammunition magazines with a capacity greater than 10 bullets.	5.8	63%
Requiring that all firearms be recorded in a national registry.	5.7	70%
Expanding screening and treatment for the mentally ill.	5.6	86%
Requiring that all gun buyers demonstrate a "genuine need" for a gun, such as a law enforcement job or hunting.	5.6	49%
Requiring all guns to microstamp each bullet with a mark that uniquely matches the gun and bullet.	5.5	65%
Increasing minimum penalties for people found possessing firearms illegally.	5.4	80%
Requiring gun dealers to keep, retain and report all gun records and sales to the Federal government.	5.4	80%
Banning the sale and ownership of assault rifles or similar firearms.	5.0	67%
Requiring all gun owners to register their fingerprints.	5.0	72%
Preventing sales of all firearms and ammunition to anyone considered to be a "known or suspected terrorist" by the F.B.I.	4.9	89%
Requiring a mandatory waiting period of three days after gun is purchased before it can be taken home.	4.8	77%
Limiting the number of guns that can be purchased to one per month.	4.8	67%
Limiting the amount of ammunition you can purchase within a given time period.	4.4	64%
Requiring that all gun owners store their guns in a safe storage unit.	4.4	76%
Banning firearms from all workplace settings nationally.	4.3	60%
Requiring that gun buyers complete safety training and a test for their specific firearm.	4.1	79%
Implementing a national "buy-back" program for all banned firearms and magazines, where the government pays people to turn in illegal guns.	3.9	74%
Banning firearms from schools and college campuses nationally.	3.8	68%
Requiring that all gun owners store their guns with childproof locks.	3.5	82%
Requiring every state to honor out-of-state permits to carry a concealed weapon.	1.7	73%
Authorizing stand-your-ground laws nationally that allow people to defend themselves using lethal force without needing to retreat first.	1.7	71%

How We Made Our Matrix

To build a list of possible policies, we consulted the academic literature on laws from American states and foreign countries and spoke with advocates for gun rights and gun control. Both surveys were conducted in June of last year.

For our measure of popularity, Morning Consult conducted an [internet survey of 1,975 voters](#), who were asked whether they approved of the possible laws.

For our effectiveness survey, we asked experts in gun policy to evaluate each idea on a scale of 1 to 10, according to how effective they thought it would be in reducing fatalities. We asked the experts to ignore considerations of political or legal feasibility.

Our expert panel consisted of 32 current or retired academics in criminology, public health and law, who have published extensively in peer-reviewed academic journals on gun policy. We know our sample is small and may not include every expert that readers would like consulted. But we feel it represents a useful, if imperfect, measure of what people steeped in the research think might save lives.

The panel of academics included: Cathy Barber, Magdalena Cerdá, Jay Corzine, John Donohue, Laura Dugan, Liza H. Gold, David Hemenway, David Kennedy, Louis Klarevas, Gary Kleck, David Kopel, Tomislav Kovandzic, Adam Lankford, John Lott, Jonathan Metzl, Matthew Miller, Carlisle E. Moody, Andrew Papachristos, Charles Ransford, Peter Reuter, Mark Rosenberg, Robert J. Sampson, Michael Siegel, Gary Slutkin, Robert Spitzer, Stephen P. Teret, George E. Tita, Eugene Volokh, Daniel Webster, April Zeoli and others.

Special thanks to the Fraternal Order of Police and the Major Cities Chiefs Association for distributing the survey to their membership.

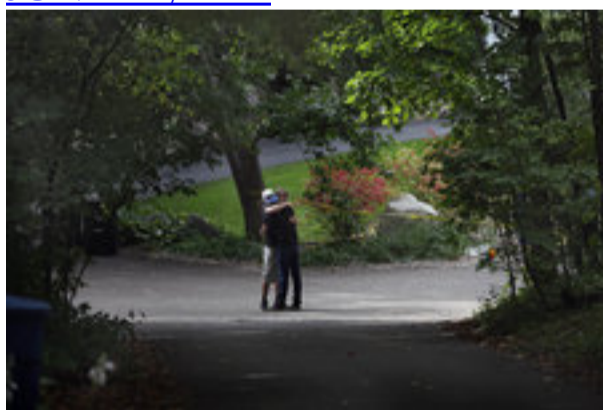
More on NYTimes.com



[Outlier](#)

[Compare These Gun Death Rates: The U.S. Is in a Different World](#)

[JUNE 13, 2016](#)



[Public Health](#)

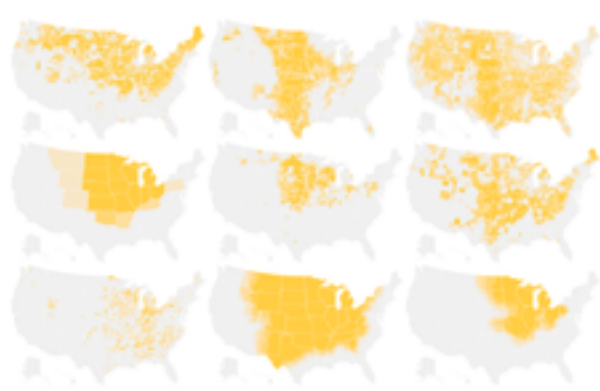
[Gun Deaths Are Mostly Suicides](#)

[OCT. 8, 2015](#)



[Before Florida Shooting, Guns in Checked Bags Raised Few Concerns](#)

[JAN. 7, 2017](#)



[Where Is America's Heartland? Pick Your Map](#)

[JAN. 3, 2017](#)



[Jeff Sessions Says He Would Be Independent and Stand Up to Trump](#)

[Jan. 10, 2017](#)

Site Information Navigation

- [© 2017 The New York Times Company.](#)
- [Home](#)
- [Search](#)
- Accessibility concerns? Email us at accessibility@nytimes.com. We would love to hear from you.
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Work With Us](#)
- [Advertise](#)
- [Your Ad Choices](#)
- [Privacy](#)
- [Terms of Service](#)
- [Terms of Sale](#)

Site Information Navigation

- [Site Map](#)
- [Help](#)
- [Site Feedback](#)
- [Subscriptions](#)

[Go to the previous story.](#)

[Go to the next story.](#)