



Gun Laws Matter: A Comparison of State Firearms Laws and Statistics

Methodology

LCAV attorneys have been analyzing firearms laws since the organization's formation in 1993. Our website, www.lcav.org, provides in-depth summaries of federal, state and local firearms laws and policies, and is the most comprehensive resource for information on U.S. firearms regulation in either print or electronic form. Our experience tracking, analyzing and summarizing state firearms laws over the past 17 years informed the system of categories and points we developed to rank the states for this publication.

To rank the states, LCAV used the point system below. Comprehensive laws (such as those requiring a background check for every firearms transaction) received the most points. Partial points were given for measures that only partially enforce a given policy measure (such as requiring background checks for handgun transfers only). Points were deducted for measures that are likely to increase the risk of gun violence (such as allowing the carrying of concealed weapons without a permit). When two or more states received the same number of points, additional weight was given to states with more far-reaching or innovative policies (such as requiring ammunition sellers to be licensed). Conversely, weight was subtracted from states with particularly dangerous laws (such as declaring firearms made and kept in the state exempt from federal laws). The ranking system was developed to compare the overall strength of state firearms laws; however, even among similar laws, nuances in approach exist. For the specific details of each individual state's laws, please see our [state law summaries](#).

Ranking System and Description of Policies

The chart below details the point system and the 25 policies used to rank state firearms laws. Background information and detailed descriptions of relevant federal, state and selected local laws are available for most policies by clicking on the name of the policy in the left column.

| Policy and Description | Points |
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| <i>Classes of Weapons/Ammunition/Magazines</i> | |
| 1. Assault Weapons Laws that ban or regulate semi-automatic firearms designed with military features to allow rapid and accurate spray firing | Ban 3 Regulate 2 |
| 2. Large Capacity Ammunition Magazines Laws that ban detachable magazines with a capacity to store a large number of rounds of ammunition (usually more than 10) for automatic and semi-automatic firearms | Ban 3 |
| 3. Fifty Caliber Rifles Laws that ban or regulate military firearms that combine long range, accuracy, and massive power | Ban all 3 Ban select firearms or regulate 1 |
| 4. Ammunition Regulation Laws that regulate firearm ammunition | Require microstamping ¹ 2 Require license to purchase, sell or possess 2 Require sales record-keeping 2 |

¹ "Microstamping" is technology that allows a firearm to transfer an array of identifying characters onto a cartridge case when fired. The technology enables law enforcement to match a cartridge case retrieved at a crime scene to the gun that fired it.

| <i>Sales and Transfers</i> | | |
|---|---|------------------|
| 5. Prohibited Purchasers Laws that establish categories of persons deemed ineligible to purchase or possess firearms | Prohibit misdemeanors beyond federal law Prohibit drug or alcohol abusers | 2 2 |
| 6. Domestic Violence and Firearms Laws intended to keep firearms out of the hands of domestic violence perpetrators | Require removal of firearms at DV scene Allow removal of firearms at DV scene Require removal when protective order issued Allow removal when protective order issued | 2 1 2 1 |
| 7. Background Checks Laws that regulate the background check process used to identify persons who are not legally permitted to purchase or possess firearms | Point of contact ² state for all firearms Point of contact state for handguns only | 2 1 |
| 8. Mental Health Reporting Laws requiring that relevant mental health records are sent to the F.B.I. for the purpose of firearm purchaser background checks | Require that records are sent to the F.B.I. for inclusion in the National Instant Criminal Background Check System | 1 |
| 9. Waiting Periods Laws that require that a specified number of days elapse between the time a firearm is purchased and the time it is physically transferred to the purchaser | Require waiting period of 3 days or more Require 1-2 day waiting period or waiting period for select guns only | 2 1 |
| 10. Restrictions on Multiple Purchases or Sales Laws that restrict the number of firearms that may be purchased by or sold to an individual within a given time frame | Restrict multiple purchase or sales | 2 |
| <i>Gun Dealers and Other Sellers</i> | | |
| 11. Dealer Regulations Laws that require firearms dealers to be licensed and/or laws that impose other requirements on dealer operations such as recordkeeping, security practices, or employee background checks | Require dealer license Ban residential dealers Require employee background checks and/or security measures Require sales and/or loss or theft reporting to law enforcement | 3 1 1 1 |
| 12. Private Sales Laws that regulate firearms sales made by persons who are not licensed by the federal government to sell firearms (federal law requires only federally licensed dealers to conduct background checks and complete and maintain records of sales) | Require background checks for all private sales Require background checks for private sales of select firearms only Require background checks at gun shows only | 4 3 2 |
| <i>Gun Ownership</i> | | |
| 13. Licensing of Gun Owners or Purchasers Laws that require an individual to obtain a license or permit authorizing him or her to purchase and/or possess a firearm | Require license for purchase or possession of all firearms and/or allow only one gun per license Require license for select firearms only Require safety training or testing Limit duration of license to one year or less | 3 2 1 1 |
| 14. Registration of Firearms Laws that require gun owners to record the ownership of their firearms with a designated law enforcement agency | Require registration for all firearms Require registration for select firearms only or require retention of firearm purchaser records Require a firearm safety inspection by law enforcement and certificate of inspection | 4 3 1 |

² “Point of contact” states conduct their own background checks using state records and databases for purchaser background checks in addition to the F.B.I. database.

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| 15. Reporting of Lost or Stolen Firearms Laws that require individuals to report the loss or theft of their firearms within a specified period of time | Require reporting of lost or stolen firearms | 2 |
| <i>Carrying Firearms</i> | | |
| 16. Carrying Concealed Firearms Laws that regulate the carrying of concealed firearms | Prohibit carrying concealed weapons May issue ³ permitting scheme Shall issue ⁴ permitting scheme Allow concealed carry with no permit | 3 1 -1 -2 |
| 17. Openly Carrying Firearms Laws that regulate the open carrying of firearms | Prohibit open carry of handguns Prohibit open carry of long guns Require a permit for open carry of handguns Allow open carry of handguns or long guns with no permit | 3 3 1 -1 |
| 18. Firearms in Parking Areas Laws that require some property owners to allow possession and storage of firearms in vehicles in areas designated for parking | Require some property owners to allow firearms in parking areas | -1 |
| 19. Carrying Firearms Where Alcohol is Consumed Laws that allow firearms in establishments that serve alcohol for consumption on the premises | Allow loaded firearms in establishments that serve alcohol for consumption on the premises | -1 |
| <i>Consumer and Child Safety</i> | | |
| 20. Design Safety Standards for Handguns/ Junk Gun Regulation Laws that require firearms to meet design and construction standards to reduce the risk of unintentional death and injury | Require specific design and safety standards such as a chamber load indicator or magazine disconnect mechanism ⁵ Allow only sale of approved guns listed on an official roster | 2 1 |
| 21. Locking Devices Laws that require the sale and/or use of a wide range of disabling devices designed to keep unauthorized users from gaining access to guns and to reduce the risk of unintentional death and injury | Require use of locking device Require locking device with firearms sale | 2 1 |
| 22. Personalized Firearms Laws that require firearms to be equipped with technology that allows them to be fired only by an authorized user | Technology-monitoring law ⁶ | 2 |
| 23. Child Access Prevention Laws that impose liability on adults who leave firearms accessible to children or otherwise allow children access to firearms | Negligence-based law Knowing/intentional or recklessness-based law | 2 1 |

³ A “may issue” permitting scheme provides discretion to concealed weapon permitting authorities to decide, based on strict guidelines, who should be granted a permit.

⁴ A “shall issue” permitting scheme provides no discretion to concealed weapon permitting authorities – all applicants meeting specified minimum requirements must be granted a permit.

⁵ A “chamber load indicator” is a device that clearly indicates that a cartridge is in the firing chamber. A “magazine disconnect mechanism” is a mechanism that prevents a semi-automatic pistol that has a detachable magazine from firing when a detachable magazine is not inserted into the pistol.

⁶ A “technology-monitoring” law does not take effect until the specified technology has been developed.

| <i>Local Authority to Regulate</i> | | |
|--|------------------------------------|----|
| 24. Local Laws Allowed Laws regulating the scope of local authority to regulate firearms | Allow broad local regulation | 4 |
| | Allow substantial local regulation | 3 |
| <i>Application of Federal Law</i> | | |
| 25. Application of Federal Law Laws that declare firearms and/or ammunition made and kept in the state to be exempt from federal laws | Declare federal law inapplicable | -1 |