

**BIGMUN 2026**

**GA1: Disarmament and Security**

# **Research Report**

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Topic 3: Reconfiguring legislation regarding civilian access to arms.



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## Table of Contents

Research Report	1
Introduction	3
Definition of Key Terms	3
Background Information	3
Major Countries and Organisations Involved	4
Relevant UN Resolutions	5
Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue	6
Possible Solutions	7
Bibliography	8

## Introduction

Nearly all countries in the world allow civilians to have access to arms in some capacity – most often related to hunting or sport shooting activities. However, a few select countries allow them for self-defence or other legitimate reasoning. It has long been questioned, both nationally and internationally, whether the increased private safety of a few is a reasonable bargain for the many lives taken by gun violence, gun-related accidents, and suicides.

In order to safeguard national and international peace, private safety, and suicide risk, it is vital to reconfigure legislation surrounding access to firearms.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Arms:** Weapons used to kill and injure

**Firearms:** Guns and other projectile-shooting weapons

**Gun violence:** Violence committed using guns/firearms encompassing; violent crime, mass shootings, gang violence, homicide, assault

## Background Information

In 2019, over 250,000 people suffered gun-related deaths worldwide; including suicides and accidental deaths<sup>1</sup>. The country with the by far highest rate of gun-related deaths is the USA, which has exponentially high rates of mass shootings/school shootings as well as other homicides, suicides, and accidental deaths due to the high rate of gun ownership per capita. It is an outlier in gun-related violence among countries of comparable socioeconomic status, and has been loudly criticised in the international community for its lax gun control laws and frequent instances of gun deaths.

Furthermore, Latin American countries have high rates of gun violence (homicide) due to high rates of gang activity and drug trafficking, meaning that North and South America have the relative highest rates of gun violence per capita in the world. By the phrase “the USA is an outlier in gun violence among its socioeconomic peers,” what is meant is that such a high rate of

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<sup>1</sup>"Gun Deaths by Country 2026,"

gun violence as is seen in the USA is usually seen in countries flooded with poverty and subsequent drug trafficking, gang violence, armed conflict, etc. to a larger extent than the USA. In fact, two-thirds of the world's gun violence occurs in Brazil, the USA, Venezuela, Mexico, India and Colombia<sup>2</sup> (descending order.) This makes it obvious that there is a pattern of where gun violence is most likely to occur, which is broken by the USA. While issues of interpersonal violence, suicide, and gang violence will not necessarily be eradicated by stricter gun controls, case studies worldwide obviously show a strong correlation between gun control policy and gun deaths. Therefore, while enforcing stricter laws on civilian access to arms would not solve the underlying issues, they would cause a significant decrease in related deaths and injuries.

Statistics from Amnesty International<sup>3</sup>:

- **1 billion** firearms in circulation
- **600** gun-related deaths per day globally
- **71%** (up to) of homicides globally involve firearms
- **85%** of firearms globally owned by private holders
- **30** gun homicides daily in South Africa (ZA)
- **90%** of homicides in Jamaica involve firearms

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Reconfiguring legislation regarding civilian access to arms.

**The United States of America** - As the country with the largest concentration of civilian arms, with more arms than all other nations combined<sup>4</sup>, the U.S. becomes a central stakeholder regarding legislative action on civilian access to firearms.

**Australia** - In response to the Port Arthur Massacre in 1996, Australia implemented the National Firearms Agreement (NFA). Cited as one of the most comprehensive gun legislation documents,

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<sup>2</sup>"Gun Violence," Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/arms-control/gun-violence/>.

<sup>3</sup>"Gun Violence," Amnesty International

<sup>4</sup>"Global Firearms Holdings," Small Arms Survey

Australia's benchmark standard in regard to this issue can be nuanced in the face of the recent tragedy at Bondi Beach.

**Austria** - This EU member state serves as a peculiar case regarding the relation between civilian gun ownership and mass shooting or suicide rates. Austria has a moderate to high rate of civilian gun ownership (30 guns per 100 people)<sup>5</sup> and relatively liberal gun laws, though has suffered almost no mass shootings in recent history<sup>6</sup>.

**International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA)** - This organisation works to reduce demand for civilian weapons, improving firearm regulation and strengthening controls on arms transfer and trades<sup>7</sup>. Through advocacy, campaigning and research, IANSA members promote both small and large, global scale measures in order to strengthen civilian's security<sup>8</sup>.

**Control Arms** - This NGO is based out of Geneva. Switzerland is focused on preventing the civilian casualties and suffering that arises from irresponsible, unregulated transfer of arms<sup>9</sup>.

## Relevant UN Resolutions

### UN PoA - 2001

Titled in full as the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, this is a central global framework to combat this issue. This provision is significant in guiding states' development and reform of national legislation regarding civilian arms, such as legalised handguns. The resolution stresses the encouragement of thorough regulation through comprehensive licensing systems, registration, and national legislation. These measures directly affect civilian access to weapons, limiting the potential damage and civilian casualties gun violence perpetuates. Further, this Programme of Action provides the framework for activities to counter the illicit trade of small,

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<sup>5</sup>"Gun Ownership by Country 2026," World Population Review

<sup>6</sup> "Firearm legislation reform in the European Union: impact on firearm availability, firearm suicide and homicide rates in Austria," The British Journal of Psychiatry, [Page 5]

<sup>7</sup>"What we do," IANSA, <https://iansa.org/what-we-do/>.

<sup>8</sup> "What we do," IANSA.

<sup>9</sup>"Control Arms," Control Arms, <https://controlarms.org/>.

civilian arms. While this PoA is non-binding, it nonetheless significantly shapes firearm legislation at the local, national and international level, through the establishment of strong monitoring and reporting mechanisms, ultimately making it foundational in global small arms governance and regulation.

### **United Nations Firearms Protocol - 2001**

As a supplement to the UN convention against transnational organised crime, this Firearms Protocol works as a legally binding document. This document requires states to establish or strengthen national legislative frameworks regulating the manufacture, transfer, and possession of firearms. Research emphasises the importance of heavily regulating civilian access to arms. Frequently cited as a key legal instrument influencing domestic reforms to arms access, this protocol is essential in states addressal of illicit diversion from legitimate and civilian markets.

### **Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue**

#### **General Assembly Resolution 54/54 - 1999**

As one of the first formal UN efforts to address the global risks posed by small arms, this resolution is significant in addressing the proliferation of firearms held by civilians. In effect this resolution serves as a precursor to the 2001 UN Programme of Action. It calls for an international conference to examine illicit trade, national controls, and possible legislative measures. Experts digress that this resolution marks a significant shift toward recognizing the need for domestic legal reform, alongside international coordination to effectively regulate civilian access to firearms. Ultimately, this document lays the foundational legal groundwork for later UN small arms governance frameworks.

## Possible Solutions

### **Tightening International Laws and Regulatory Standards**

Strengthening international legal frameworks is essential in reconfiguring legislation regarding civilians' access to arms. This is most effectively accomplished by reinforcing UN-led instruments such as the Programme of Action (PoA 2001) and the Firearms Protocol. It becomes necessary for states to clarify and strengthen standards on licensing, registration, and safe storage. In effect, this reduces the legal inconsistencies present that enable the illicit diversion of arms, while improving accountability for actors involved. Stronger frameworks therefore support responsible civilian firearm regulation at the global level.

### **Engaging National Monitoring, Registration and Transparency Mechanisms**

This solution is essential as it encourages Member States and other relevant stakeholders, to bolster their regulation of civilian-held firearms. Measures such as national registries and reporting systems work as examples of practical solutions that improve oversight and support evidence-based policymaking. Though challenges to this solution exist, increased transparency ultimately reduces illicit transfers and misuse. Therefore, reconfiguring regulatory civilian arm legislation becomes preventative rather than being reactive.

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