

CALIFORNIA: STRONG GUN LAWS SAVE LIVES

Trends in California Firearm Mortality Compared to the Rest of the U.S.

California Chapters of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence

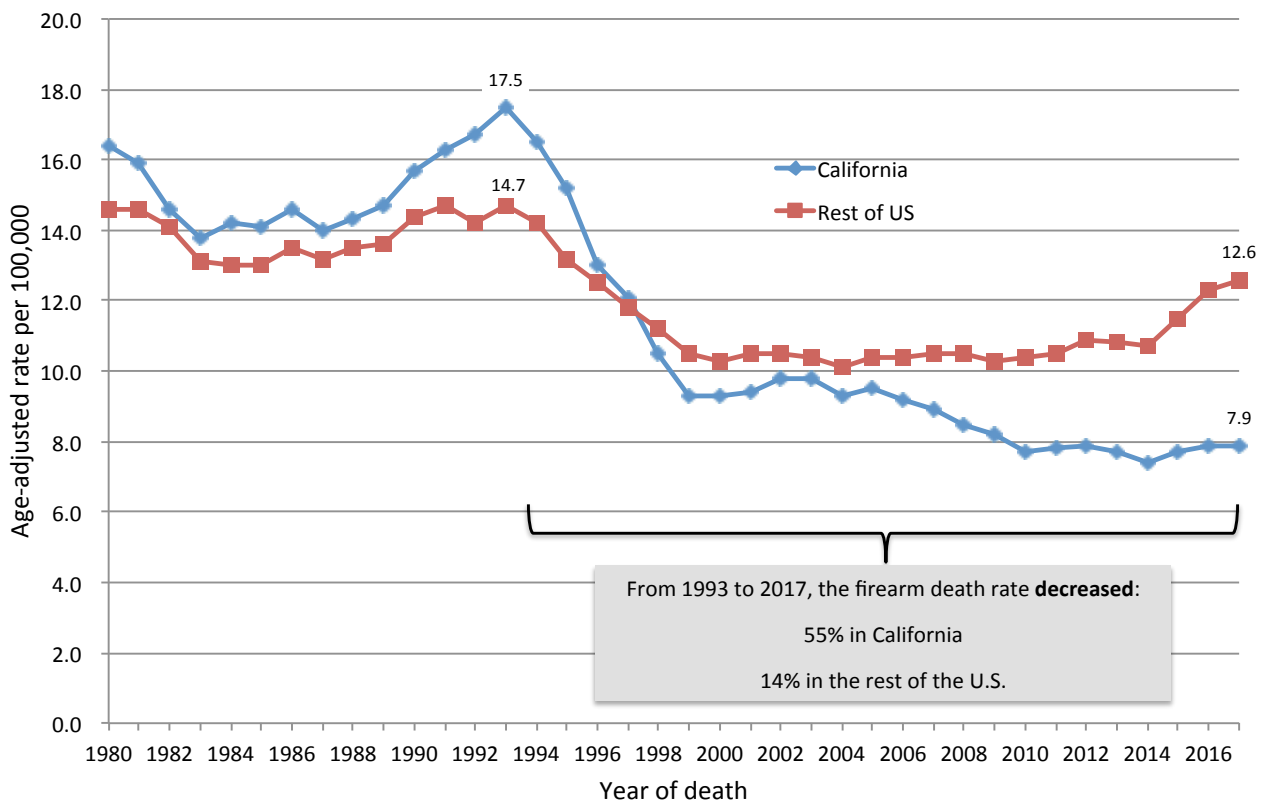


During the 1980s and early 1990s, California's firearm mortality rate was consistently higher than in the rest of the U.S. The state responded by enacting the strongest firearm laws in the country. (See the overview of California firearm laws below.)

To help evaluate the impact of California's firearm laws, this report compares firearm mortality rates in California with those in the rest of the U.S. from 1980 through 2017 (the most recent data available).

In California and the rest of the U.S., firearm mortality rates peaked in 1993. Then, as California's strong firearm laws took effect, the state's firearm mortality rate began a steep decline. From 1993 to 2017, California's firearm mortality rate decreased 55 percent—almost four times the decrease in the rest of the nation. **By 2017, the firearm mortality rate in California was substantially lower than the rate in the rest of the country.**

Firearm deaths in California compared to the rest of the U.S.



In 2017, there were nearly 40,000 firearm deaths in the U.S., of which 3,184 (8 percent of the total) were in California, which has 12 percent of the U.S. population. In 2017, if the firearm mortality rate in the rest of the U.S. were as low as in California, **more than 13,500 firearm deaths would have been prevented.**

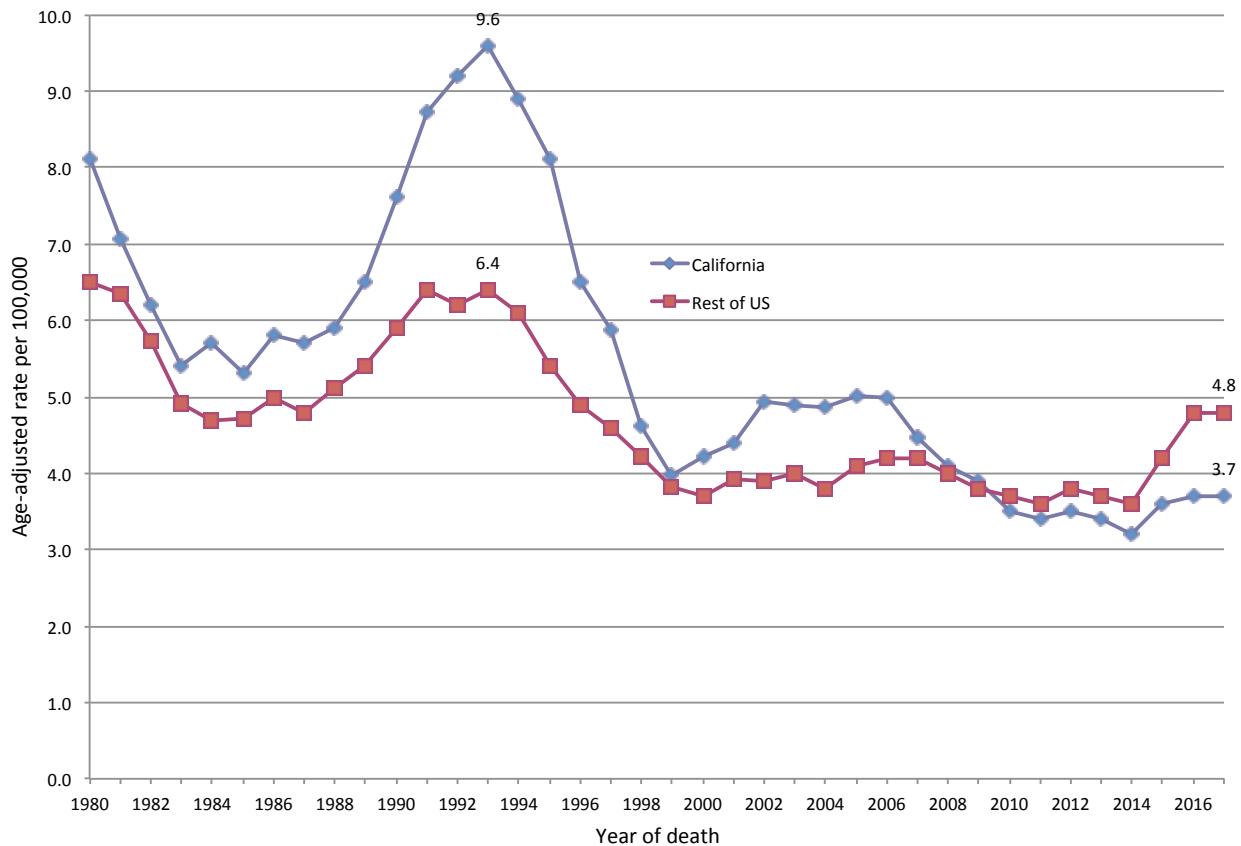
Firearm homicide

Of the 3,184 firearm deaths in California in 2017, 45 percent (n=1,435) were firearm homicides. Of the 36,589 firearm deaths in the rest of the U.S., 36 percent were firearm homicides (n=13,107).

In 2017, California's firearm homicide rates:

- decreased with age—8.1 per 100,000 for 15-24-year olds compared with 1.0 per 100,000 for 65-74-year-olds
- were higher among men (6.1 per 100,000) than women (1.1 per 100,000)
- were higher among blacks (16.1 per 100,000) than Hispanics (4.2 per 100,000), non-Hispanic whites (1.7 per 100,000), and Asian/Pacific Islanders (1.2 per 100,000).

Firearm homicide in California and the rest of the U.S., 1980-2017



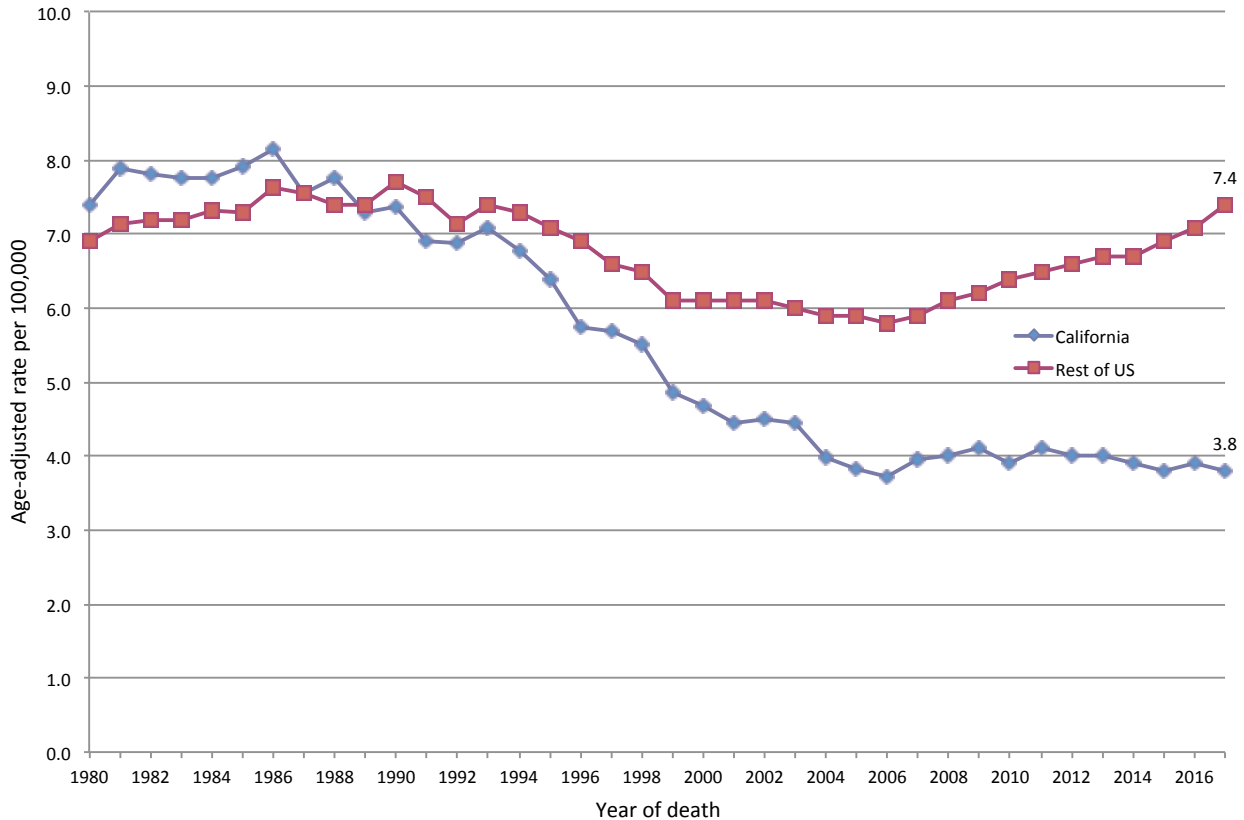
Firearm suicide

In 2017 in California, 51 percent of all firearm deaths were firearm suicides (n=1,610). In the rest of the U.S., 61 percent of all firearm deaths were firearm suicides (n=22,244). In the rest of the U.S., firearm suicide rates have increased steadily since 2006, but in California, they have remained relatively stable.

In 2017, California's firearm suicide rates:

- increased with age—3.1 per 100,000 among 15-24-year-olds compared with 11.7 per 100,000 among 75-84-year-olds, and 12.4 per 100,000 among those 85 years or older
- were higher among men (7.3 per 100,000) than women (0.7 per 100,000)
- were higher among non-Hispanic whites (6.4 per 100,000) than Hispanics (1.8 per 100,000), blacks (2.2 per 100,000), and Asian/Pacific Islanders (1.4 per 100,000).

Firearm suicide in California and the rest of the U.S., 1980-2017



California has done the best job in the country of enacting laws that make it harder for people who are a danger to themselves and others to acquire dangerous firearms. These laws have helped reduce both firearm homicides and firearm suicides, and have enabled law enforcement to combat gun trafficking and seize illegally owned firearms.

However, more must be done to make our communities safe. **Many Californians are killed or seriously wounded with firearms each year, and California’s firearm death rate has begun to rise again, though the increase is far less than in the rest of the country.** The U.S. has the weakest firearm laws of any industrialized nation, and weak federal laws undermine California’s stronger laws.

Firearm violence destroys families and communities. We must all work together to keep dangerous weapons out of the hands of dangerous people. We are accomplishing this in California by enacting sensible firearm laws that save lives.

Data source: CDC, National Center for Health Statistics, WONDER online database. Underlying cause of death used to select firearm deaths. Rates were calculated using Census population estimates adjusted to the 2000 and 2010 US population. In this report, the “rest of the U.S.” is the U.S. population excluding California.

Overview of California Firearm Laws*

Illegal Gun Possession, Gun Trafficking and Gun Crimes

- Background checks are required for all gun sales/transfers, including private party sales.
- People buying firearms must wait ten days before taking possession.
- The California Department of Justice (CalDOJ) maintains records of gun sales.
- It is illegal to sell or transfer to persons under age 21 any type of firearm, with certain exceptions, for example transfers among family members.
- Ammunition sellers must register and obtain a license. After July 1, 2019, they will conduct background checks on ammunition buyers and transmit information on the sales to CalDOJ.
- Persons with certain mental health determinations, felons, and persons guilty of certain violent misdemeanors are prohibited from purchasing or possessing firearms.
- People convicted of misdemeanor hate crimes are prohibited from purchasing or possessing firearms for ten years.
- Law enforcement must provide CalDOJ with data for tracing illegal or crime guns.
- Gun shows are regulated. For example, background checks and waiting periods are required for all firearm sales. CalDOJ monitors the compliance of gun shows and vendors.
- Handgun purchases are limited to one per 30-day period in order to reduce gun trafficking.
- CalDOJ checks to see if “prohibited persons,” such as those who have become felons, previously purchased a handgun. Guns illegally owned can be seized.
- Local law enforcement has discretion in issuing permits to carry concealed weapons.
- Law enforcement or immediate family members can seek a court order to temporarily prohibit a person who is a risk to him/herself or others from buying or possessing a firearm. (<https://speakforsafety.org/>)
- Persons who self-manufacture or assemble a firearm must apply to CalDOJ for a unique serial number that must be permanently engraved or affixed on the firearm, and they must pass a background check.

Domestic Violence and Firearms

- Persons convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence involving assault are prohibited for life from possessing firearms.
- Police may temporarily seize guns at the scene of domestic violence incidents.
- Courts may prohibit firearms possession due to domestic violence, harassment or stalking.

Unsafe Firearms

- Handguns sold must pass a state safety test. CalDOJ maintains a roster of approved handguns.
- New pistol models must have chamber load indicators and magazine disconnect safeties.
- Purchase or transfer of rifles with military-style features that do not have fixed magazines is prohibited. Grandfathered assault weapons are strictly regulated and owners of “bullet button” guns must register them with CalDOJ.
- Possession of large capacity magazines is prohibited.

Gun Manufacturers and Dealers

- Gun manufacturers must have a state license, tight security on premises and must conduct background checks on employees.
- All gun sales must go through a federally licensed firearms dealer who conducts a background check on the buyer.
- Gun dealers and manufacturers who sell/ship firearms must check the receiver's federal and state firearms license with CalDOJ to prevent illegal transfers from out of state.
- Gun dealers must post warnings about the risks of firearms and information about state gun laws. The information must be affixed to firearms packaging. Safety Certificate test takers must acknowledge their obligation to sell/transfer firearms through a dealer.
- It is illegal to sell ammunition to persons prohibited from possessing firearms.

Children, Families, and Public Safety

- Gun buyers must first pass a written safety test, obtain a firearm safety certificate, and perform a safe handling demonstration. Proof of residency and thumbprint are required.
- Firearm owners can be held criminally liable for leaving a firearm where a child could gain access, regardless of whether the child gets the gun or causes harm with it.
- All firearms sold by dealers must include CalDOJ-approved locking devices designed to prevent children and unauthorized users from firing them.

For more information about California Brady Campaign chapter activities, see: <https://www.bradycampaign.org/CA>

*For more information about California's gun laws, see <https://lawcenter.giffords.org/gun-laws/state-law/california/>

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