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Saving Lives by Taking Guns Out of Crime:

The Drop in Gun-Related Crime Deaths Since Enactment of the Brady Law

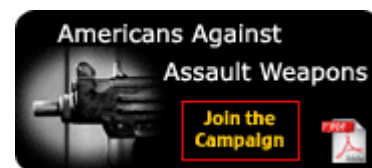
Executive Summary

In their book, *Crime is Not the Problem* (1997), Frank Zimring and Gordon Hawkins identified the "use of firearms in assault and robbery as the single environmental feature of American society that is most clearly linked to the extraordinary death rate from interpersonal violence in the United States." Their research led to the conclusion that, "without strategies for the reduction of firearm use in assaults, no policy can be accurately characterized as directed at the reduction of American lethal violence." This study, *Saving Lives by Taking Guns Out of Crime*, an analysis of FBI crime statistics, presents compelling evidence that implementation of the Brady Law has led to a reduction in the use of firearms in robberies and assaults, preventing thousands of deaths since the law took effect.

In November 1993, the Brady Bill was signed into law and took effect on February 28, 1994. Prior to its passage, **32 states had no system of background checks for gun purchasers** easing the way for guns to be funneled into the illegal market. **Before the law took effect**, a felon could walk into a gun store, sign a form stating that he or she has never been convicted of a felony, and **buy a gun**. The criminal's felony record would not be discovered because the form would simply get filed away by the gun dealer. **Brady closed the "lie and buy" loophole and research has shown the law had an immediate, disruptive impact on interstate gun trafficking** affecting the supply of guns available in the criminal market. Initially applying only to handgun purchases, today the background check is conducted as part of all retail gun purchases.

For seven years, the National Rifle Association led the opposition to the Brady Bill and continues to dismiss the effectiveness of the Brady Law today. The background check and waiting period were deemed too "inconvenient" for gun owners. **This report provides compelling evidence that this "inconvenience" has saved thousands of lives** and would have saved thousands more had the National Rifle Association not fought passage of the Brady Bill – delaying implementation by several years.

It has long been known that assaults and robberies committed with guns result in a much higher death rate than similar crimes committed without firearms. Consequently, the greater the proportion of violent crimes committed with guns – the greater the number of deaths expected. By analyzing crime data from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports for 1990 through 1998, the Center determined that the proportion of violent crimes committed with firearms rose steadily through 1993 suggesting that more crime victims were murdered than would have been predicted by changes in the crime rate. **In 1994, however, coinciding with the implementation of Brady, the trend reversed and gun-related crime has been dropping faster than the violent crime rate ever since.** The Center used this information to estimate the number of lives saved since Brady took effect – not because the crime



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rate was falling, but because the percentage of violent crimes committed with guns was falling.

The results of this analysis provide compelling evidence that the Brady Law is saving lives by taking guns out of crime: **from 1994 through 1998, an estimated 9,368 fewer people died than expected because the percentage of robberies and assaults committed with firearms fell each year after reaching a peak of 42.4% of robberies and 25.1% of aggravated assaults in 1993. Furthermore, from 1991 through 1993, an estimated 3,105 more people lost their lives in gun-related crime than expected because the proportion of assaults and robberies that involved guns increased each year from 1990 through 1993.**

At a news conference on March 2, 2000, President Bill Clinton said, "The Brady Bill is saving people's lives and keeping guns out of the wrong hands." Since the Brady Law was enacted, the U.S. Department of Justice periodically releases the number of prohibited purchasers who have been denied a gun thanks to background checks. In the five years of Brady covered by this study, that number was estimated to be 320,000 and has since grown to 500,000 denials. Clearly the Brady Law is keeping guns out of the wrong hands. This report presents for the first time powerful evidence that the Law is actually saving lives.

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DID YOU KNOW...

There are approximately 192 million privately owned firearms in the U.S. -- 65 million of which are handguns.

The odds that suicidal adolescents will kill themselves double when a gun is kept in the home.

In 1998, there were only 134 justifiable handgun homicides by a private citizen compared with a total of 6,498 handgun murders in the United States.



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