

In South Carolina, a Lethal Combination of Firearms, Permissive Gun Laws and Poverty

An abundant number of firearms, permissive gun laws and poverty conspire to put many South Carolina and Horry County residents at risk for gun violence.

Poverty

Away from the rows of gleaming hotels and vacationers enjoying our beautiful beaches, there is another South Carolina that is hidden from view. South Carolina's poverty rate is the 14th highest in the nation. In cold reality, this means that more than 220,000 South Carolina families have annual earnings of less than \$25,000. In this South Carolina, nearly one in seven residents live in poverty. Many others who are not considered statistically poor live from paycheck to paycheck.

In Horry County, this grim existence is all too real for many of our neighborhoods and communities. Nearly 20 percent of all families have annual earnings of less than \$25,000. Sadly, this desperate economic situation disproportionately impacts children as nearly one-third live in families or households unable to lift themselves above the poverty line.

The ability to secure good paying jobs to lift families out of poverty is out of reach for many Horry County residents. With an economy largely tied to the tourist industry, employment available to residents is largely centered on seasonal jobs that provide a low hourly wage and few or no benefits.

South Carolina Gun Laws Overview

	Rifles & Shotguns	Handguns
Permit to Purchase	No	No
Registration of Firearms	No	No
Licensing of Owners	No	No
Permit to Carry	No	Yes

Source: National Rifle Association, Institute for Legislative Action

It should not be surprising then, that many of our youth are disconnected. In 2015 seventeen percent (17%) of young people in South Carolina (ages 18 to 24) did not have a high school diploma and were not in school or working. Among the states, only eight ranked worse than SC. in the percentage of disconnected youth.

Gun Violence

Against this backdrop, the combination of idle hands, lack of education, and few avenues for economic advancement has caused violent crime to soar, with gun violence leading the way.

In addition, permissive SC gun laws have allowed many guns to fall into the hands of individuals who, because of prior convictions and inactions, would otherwise be prohibited from possessing a firearm. Often these gun loopholes have lethal consequences.

How many guns are in South Carolina? Without having the benefit of any state or federal registry of firearms, it is impossible to nail down the number of guns in South Carolina, or in the United States for that matter with any precision. Anecdotal evidence, however, suggests that per capita ownership placing it 12th highest among the states.

With this much firepower, and high joblessness and economic distress, many communities live in daily fear of gun violence. In 2016 South Carolina had the dubious distinction of having the 10th worst violent crime rate and the 10th worst firearm mortality rate in the United States. In that year, 891 South Carolina residents died from gun play, either by homicides, suicides, or accidental shootings.

Accidental Shootings and Suicides

Numerous studies have shown that owning a gun is linked to higher risks for suicides and accidental shootings (as well as homicides). Nearly two million minors in the United States live in homes where firearms are loaded, unlocked and easy to access. In one experiment, one-third of eight to 12-year-old boys who found a handgun pulled the trigger.

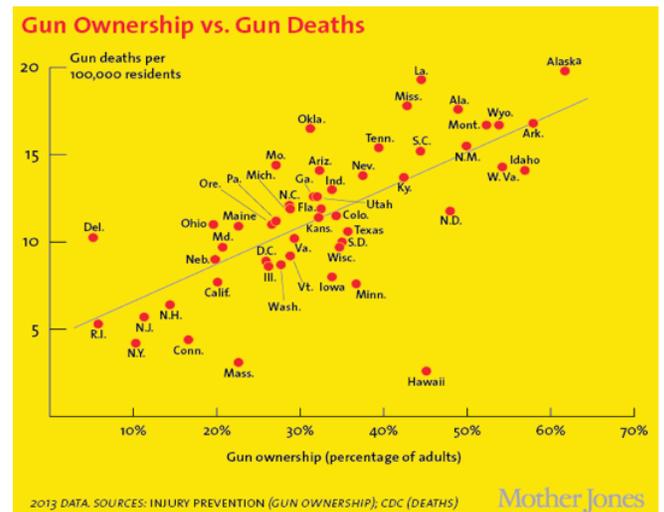
Permissive Gun Laws in South Carolina

Across the country, state laws addressing gun ownership vary significantly in their form, content and level of restriction. Some states and localities require that a person obtain a license or permit in

order to purchase or possess firearms. In addition, some states and localities require that individual firearms be registered with the police or with another law enforcement agency.

In South Carolina, no permit is necessary in the purchase of any type of firearm; no registration of firearms is enforced, permits to carry are only issued to those seeking to carry a concealed handgun. While several states have enacted laws to prohibit the possession of “assault firearms”, and/or enacted restrictions on magazine (ammo) capacity, South Carolina has not enacted these kinds of laws.

Women’s Health and Safety



Sadly, many victims of gun violence are the most vulnerable members of our communities –women and children. Intimate partner and domestic violence are major public health and criminal concerns in the state. Nationally, women are five times more likely to be shot by husbands, boyfriends and ex-partners than murdered by male strangers. South Carolina ranked fifth among states with the highest rates of women killed by men, according to a report by the Violence Policy Center, which reviewed 2015 data -- the most recent year information was available from the FBI. According to the organization, SC has ranked in the top 10 for women killed by men for the last 20 years.

Solutions

The Horry County Democratic Party supports the Second Amendment and believes that the over-whelming majority of gun owners practice sound gun safety measures, and use their firearms solely for legal purposes, including self-defense of life and property, hunting, and recreational shooting.

Horry County Democrats also recognize that the solution to the increasing gun violence in our communities is not simple and will take the efforts of citizens, and the leaders of government, business and church organizations all working together. Targeted efforts must be taken to create greater employment opportunities for County residents and initiatives supported to help people learn skills needed in our emerging economy. Democrats support economic development that creates growth beyond tourism and which emphasizes clean industries and high-technology businesses able to create higher-paying, year-round jobs for County residents.

We also believe that action taken now on common sense measures can help stem gun violence. These measures include:

- **Mandating universal background checks** for all firearm purchases, including those done through private and on-line gun dealers. Private sales, like those that occur at gun shows, may constitute 20 to 40 percent of all gun purchases and are not required by federal law and the laws of most states (including South Carolina) to do any background checks. (The Horry County Democratic Party urges the SC state legislature to review the experiences of several states that have opted to go beyond the federal law and require all handgun and, in some localities, all firearm sales to undergo a background check, including those done through private dealers. Between 2009 and 2012, these states had 35% fewer gun deaths per capita than those without the requirements).
- **Eliminating the “Charleston Loophole”** which allows a gun purchase to proceed from a federally licensed dealer even if the background check is not finished.
- **Banning civilian ownership** of assault-style firearms designed for use in combat zones.
- **Closing the “Boyfriend Gap”**. Federal law prevents anyone with domestic violence misdemeanors from having a gun, but the law is defined narrowly and doesn’t include all domestic violence perpetrators, such as boyfriends. Specifically, the law doesn’t keep guns from abusers who are not married, do not live with their partner or do not share a child with them.
- **Promoting the safe storage of firearms.**
- **Improving mental health reporting.** Federal law already prohibits anyone committed to a mental-health facility or deemed dangerous from having a gun. But the reporting of mental health records to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System has been spotty and has large gaps.
- **Supporting bullying and abuse prevention** training in public schools, and the establishment of secure and sanitary shelter programs for victims of domestic abuse.

We need your support to reduce gun violence.

Please contact us at issues@horrydemocrats.org for more information.

Contributed by David Higham