



THE ROOT CAUSES OF GUN VIOLENCE

In order to effectively reduce gun violence in disadvantaged communities of color, Congress must address the root causes of gun violence which include social and economic inequality

- These inequities combined with easy access to a firearm fuel the gun violence epidemic in the United States.
- Root causes of gun violence include:
 - Discrimination¹
 - Income inequality²
 - Poverty³
 - Underfunded public housing⁴
 - Under-resourced public services⁵
 - Underperforming schools⁵
 - Lack of opportunity and perceptions of hopelessness⁶
 - Easy access to firearms by high-risk people⁵

Disadvantaged communities of color are particularly impacted by these structural inequalities

- The inequalities that fuel gun violence are caused by racist policies that target communities of color and create segregated and underinvested neighborhoods.¹
- Black Americans are more likely to live in hyper-segregated poor neighborhoods with underfunded social services, less economic opportunities, and worse health outcomes than White Americans.⁷
- Many disadvantaged neighborhoods face several ongoing challenges from the shortage of affordable housing and inadequate infrastructure to wealth inequality and poverty.⁸
- The unemployment rate for Black Americans is at least twice as high as that of White Americans in many US cities.^{9,10}
- In addition to under-qualified instructors, high-poverty urban schools face problems of outdated curriculum, and dilapidated facilities, which impact students' developmental outcomes.¹¹

Interpersonal gun violence is highly concentrated within disadvantaged communities of color

- Nearly 60% of firearm homicide victims in the United States are Black Americans, yet African Americans account for less than 18% of the population.¹²
- Gun violence is the leading cause of death for Black men under the age of 55.¹²
- Young non-Hispanic Black males ages 15-24 are more than 23 times more likely to be murdered by firearm than their non-Hispanic White counterparts.¹²
- Young non-Hispanic Black females ages 15-24 are nearly 7 times more likely to be murdered by firearm than their non-Hispanic White counterparts.¹²
- In 2015, it was reported that 26% of firearm homicides in the US occurred within urban census tracts that contained only 1.5% of the population.¹³

In many disadvantaged communities of color, nearly everyone is impacted by the traumatic effects of gun violence, often at an early age

- A 2013 study found that among Black Americans the likelihood of having someone within their social network die by firearm at some point during their lifetime was more than 95%.¹⁴
- A survey of Baltimore City youth ages 12-24 found that 42% had witnessed a shooting, compared to 4% of suburban youth.¹⁵
- A survey of middle school children enrolled in the Richmond, Virginia public school system found that 94% of children reported hearing gunshots and 44% of boys and 30% of girls reported witnessing a shooting.¹⁶



Gun violence exposure changes the chemistry in the brain and can have lasting impacts on health, well-being, and development if left untreated¹⁷

- Exposure to gun violence is associated with:^{18,19,20, 21}
 - Posttraumatic stress disorder
 - Antisocial behavior
 - Depression
 - Stunted cognitive and emotional development
 - Risky alcohol and substance use
 - Increased likelihood in engaging in violence

Widespread community exposure to gun violence exacerbates already existing social and economic inequalities and further perpetuates gun violence²²

- A study that examined 500 African American youth found that direct exposure to violence was the best predictor of whether an individual would later engage in gun related crimes.¹⁸
- An analysis of gun violence in Oakland found that each gun homicide in a census tract in a given year was related to five fewer job opportunities in the subsequent year.²³
- An analysis of gun violence in DC found that ten additional gunshots in a census tract in a given year were linked to one less new business opening, one more business closing, and 20 fewer jobs.²³

Gun violence is a multifaceted challenge that demands a holistic set of solutions to stop the cycles of daily gun violence in disadvantaged communities of color. In addition to limiting easy access to firearms by high-risk people, Congress should:

- (1) address the underlying social and economic inequalities that fuel gun violence and**
- (2) adequately fund community-based violence prevention efforts which build authentic relationships with communities and support community-based organizations.**

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²⁰ Finkelhor D, et al. (2009). Children's Exposure to Violence: A Comprehensive National Survey. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

²¹ Salzinger S, et al. (2002). An ecological framework for understanding risk for exposure to community violence and the effects of exposure on children and adolescents. *Aggression and violent behavior*.

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