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RAC Reads Guide

The New York Times: *How to Reduce Shootings*, an Opinion Piece A Discussion Guide Prepared by the Religious Action Center and Zoe Turner

[“How to Reduce Shootings,” an opinion piece from the New York Times](#), originally published in 2017, was posted again in the wake of the shooting in Parkland, Florida. It analyzes the scale of America’s issue with mass shootings through looking at comparative statistics from around the world, discusses models for regulating guns, and explains an approach to gun violence prevention through a public health perspective. The article also reminds readers that, while it’s most often mass shootings that draw the nation’s attention, suicides make up the vast majority of gun deaths; the article argues that America needs an approach that recognizes and understands this. The author provides case studies of states where gun laws have made a difference-- or a lack of gun laws have resulted in violence-- and breaks down polling in order for readers to understand exactly where the majority of the nation stands on these laws.

RAC Reads is a program by the Religious Action Center to encourage reading groups that explore contemporary social justice topics in the context of Jewish teachings and values. The discussion guides are designed for families, congregations and communities. As such, not all of the facilitation tips and discussion questions may be applicable in all cases. Feel free to take from and adapt the information provided here as you structure your own conversations. We hope that this guide will spark engaging and challenging discussions among Reform Jews about the complexities of gun violence. For more information about the RAC’s current work on gun violence prevention, visit our website at www.rac.org.

1. The US has the highest rate of firearm ownership out of any developed country. Why do you think this is the case? Do you think that this has an impact on America’s gun violence epidemic?
2. What is a “public health approach” to reducing gun violence? Do you think that it would be effective in reducing gun violence in America? Do you think that it has limitations?
3. The article shows statistical evidence that the presence of guns increases the likelihood of violence. Why do you think that so many people believe differently? How can we work to inform others and change their perspectives?
4. The article argues that our laws focus too much on the weapons themselves, and not enough on who has access to them. How much of a difference do you think that this shift in focus could make? Do you think that one view will achieve more than the other?
5. There is very little research on gun violence in America, meaning that there’s still so much that we don’t know about the best ways to solve it. Do you think that we need to do more research? What should this research focus on? Who should the results be made available to?
6. Do you think that gun safety trainings could reduce gun violence? Who should run these trainings? What do they need to focus on and emphasize in order to be the most effective?



The Religious Action Center pursues social justice and religious liberty by mobilizing the Reform Jewish community and serving as its advocate in Washington, D.C. The Center is led by the Commission on Social Action of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union for Reform Judaism (and its affiliates) and is supported by the congregations of the Union.



7. The article shows polling data that suggest that gun-owning households and households with no guns agree on a lot of gun violence prevention measures, such as background checks for all gun buyers and preventing people who have a history of violence from buying guns. If so many Americans agree, why do you think that it's been so hard to see these measures passed and implemented? What do you think needs to happen in order to bridge the gap between people and policy?
8. The author of this article maintains that he's optimistic that progress on gun violence prevention can be made. Are you? What gives you hope that America will see a change on this issue? What do you think American citizens can do to help be a part of this change?