

Trump's Gun Control Policy

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Introduction

An essay titled "Trump's Gun Control Policy" now spans two different presidential periods and a major change in federal firearms law. During Donald Trump's first term, his administration supported a federal bump-stock rule after the 2017 Las Vegas shooting, discussed stronger background checks after mass shootings, created a school-safety commission, and sometimes expressed support for raising the purchase age for certain rifles. Many of those statements did not become comprehensive legislation.

During Trump's second administration, beginning in 2025, the federal policy direction has been substantially more protective of gun ownership and more skeptical of regulation. Executive Order 14206 directed a review of federal actions for possible infringement of Second Amendment rights. (The White House, 2025) The Department of Justice and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives later announced regulatory reforms, changes to license-enforcement policy, and a stronger institutional focus on Second Amendment litigation. A current analysis must therefore replace the original essay's future-tense recommendations with an evidence-based account of what occurred, what the courts changed, and which policy questions remain unresolved.

Constitutional Framework

The Second Amendment protects an individual right to keep and bear arms, particularly for lawful self-defense. (District of Columbia v. Heller, 2008) *District of Columbia v. Heller* recognized the right in the home, and *McDonald v. City of Chicago* applied it to state and local governments. *New York State Rifle & Pistol Association v. Bruen* required firearm regulations covered by the Amendment's text to be justified through the nation's historical tradition of regulation.

The right is not absolute. In *United States v. Rahimi*, the Supreme Court upheld application of a federal restriction to a person subject to a qualifying domestic-violence restraining order after a judicial finding of credible threat. Policy must therefore operate within a legal framework that recognizes a fundamental right while permitting historically grounded restrictions and due process.

First-Term Position After Parkland

After the 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida, President Trump publicly discussed stronger background checks, raising the minimum age for purchasing some semiautomatic rifles, arming

trained school personnel, and improving mental-health intervention. The administration's final school-safety approach emphasized state flexibility, threat assessment, school hardening, and possible armed staff more than universal federal age legislation.

The episode illustrated a recurring feature of Trump's policy style: broad statements during crisis followed by negotiation with political allies and administrative constraints. An analysis should distinguish a presidential comment, a formal proposal, an executive action, and enacted law.

The Bump-Stock Rule

Trump directed the Justice Department to address bump stocks after the Las Vegas shooting. ATF's 2018 rule classified covered bump-stock devices as machine guns under federal law, requiring owners to surrender or destroy them. The rule represented one of the most consequential gun-control actions of the first Trump term.

In *Garland v. Cargill* in 2024, the Supreme Court held that ATF exceeded its statutory authority because a semiautomatic rifle equipped with the device did not meet the National Firearms Act definition of a machine gun. (*Garland v. Cargill*, 2024) The decision did not hold that Congress lacks constitutional power to regulate bump stocks. It held that the existing statutory definition did not authorize the agency's interpretation.

ATF removed the bump-stock language from its regulations effective May 6, 2026. This history shows the limit of using agency interpretation to achieve a policy Congress has not clearly enacted.

Background Checks

The federal background-check system applies to sales by federally licensed dealers. Private-transfer rules vary by state and circumstance. The original essay refers vaguely to background checks at airports, which confuses different security systems. The policy debate is about firearm transfers, record completeness, prohibited persons, dealer obligations, and enforcement against illegal acquisition.

Universal background-check proposals seek to cover more private sales through licensed intermediaries or state systems. Supporters argue that consistent screening reduces channels through which prohibited purchasers obtain guns. Opponents raise concerns about burden, unenforceable informal transfers, registries, delay, and exceptions for family or emergencies.

System quality matters as much as formal coverage. Courts, military authorities, and agencies must submit accurate disqualifying records. A person wrongly denied needs a timely appeal, while missing records can permit an unlawful purchase.

Age Limits

Federal law generally allows licensed dealers to sell rifles and shotguns to people at least 18, while handguns and other firearms may not be sold by a licensed dealer to a person under 21. States may impose higher limits subject to constitutional litigation.

Trump discussed raising the age for certain rifles after Parkland but did not secure a general federal change. Policy arguments involve developmental risk, military service comparisons, self-defense, hunting, and whether an age-based restriction has an adequate historical analogue under current doctrine.

A serious proposal should specify which firearms, which transactions, what exceptions, and what evidence supports the threshold. “Raise the age” is not a complete policy.

School Safety

School shootings produce pressure for immediate national action, but school safety includes prevention, building design, emergency response, student support, reporting, firearm access, and community violence. Arming staff is supported by those who believe response time is decisive and opposed by those who fear accidents, mistaken identity, uneven training, and a more threatening school climate.

Threat-assessment programs can identify concerning behavior, but they require due process and safeguards against profiling. Mental illness should not be used as a general explanation for violence; most people with mental-health conditions are not violent. Safe storage, intervention in domestic threats, and rapid reporting may address risks that a generic mental-health label misses.

Executive Order 14206

On February 7, 2025, President Trump signed Executive Order 14206, “Protecting Second Amendment Rights.” It directed the Attorney General to examine federal orders, regulations, guidance, plans, international agreements, and other actions for ongoing infringements and to propose a plan of action.

The order did not itself repeal every firearm rule. It initiated review and established an administration policy strongly favoring the rights claims of lawful gun owners. Subsequent action should be evaluated rule by rule rather than described as one total repeal.

ATF Enforcement Changes

ATF replaced the prior enhanced regulatory enforcement policy for federal firearms licensees with a new administrative action policy in 2025. The agency stated that the revised approach would focus more closely on willful violations and public-safety impact rather than treating inadvertent paperwork errors as grounds for severe action.

Fair enforcement is important. A license should not be destroyed over a harmless error, but recordkeeping is not trivial because tracing and prohibited-sales investigations depend on accurate records. The appropriate standard should distinguish isolated mistake, repeated negligence, and intentional unlawful conduct.

2026 Regulatory Reform Package

In April 2026, DOJ and ATF announced a package of 34 final and proposed rulemaking notices following the Second Amendment review. The agencies described the initiative as reducing unnecessary burdens while retaining enforcement against violent crime and willful violations.

Because proposed rules must pass through notice and comment, their existence does not mean every change is final. Readers should check the Federal Register and final effective dates rather than treating a press release as completed law.

Second Amendment Enforcement Institutions

The current Justice Department has created or emphasized structures dedicated to Second Amendment rights, including litigation and rights-restoration processes. This shifts federal institutional attention from expanding regulation toward challenging state or local practices and reconsidering federal restrictions.

Supporters view this as correction of prior overreach. Critics argue that an aggressive rights agenda may weaken preventive rules or privilege industry concerns. Evaluation should ask whether each action is lawful, evidence-based, and consistent with public safety, not merely whether it is labeled pro-rights or pro-safety.

Domestic Violence and Dangerousness

Rahimi confirms that firearm rights can coexist with temporary disarmament after a court finds a credible threat. This area offers a model for focused policy: defined evidence, judicial process, limited duration, and a connection between the restriction and danger.

Implementation must protect survivors while providing due process. Orders that exist only on paper are insufficient; courts, law enforcement, firearm databases, and victim services need coordination.

Extreme Risk Protection Orders

State extreme-risk laws allow courts to order temporary firearm separation when evidence indicates serious danger to self or others. Trump has at times expressed openness to risk-based intervention, but federal policy has not produced one nationwide system.

These laws should include clear standards, prompt hearings, defined duration, penalties for knowingly false petitions, safe return procedures, and access to crisis care. Removal of a firearm can reduce immediate risk but does not resolve domestic conflict, suicidality, or treatment needs by itself.

Safe Storage

Safe storage can reduce child access, theft, accidental shooting, and suicide. The constitutional issue is whether a requirement preserves usable access for lawful self-defense. *Heller* invalidated a rule that made firearms in the home inoperable in a way that prevented immediate defense, not every possible storage expectation.

Policy can support quick-access safes, education, liability standards, and distribution of secure devices. Messaging should respect gun owners rather than assuming negligence while still recognizing that household access creates real risks.

Gun Trafficking and Violent Crime

A rights-protective administration can still enforce laws against straw purchasing, trafficking, prohibited possession, theft, and violent use. Focusing federal resources on criminal networks rather than technical mistakes is a coherent strategy if enforcement is adequately funded and evaluated.

Trafficking investigations depend on dealer records, interstate cooperation, and timely tracing. Deregulation that weakens essential data could conflict with the stated focus on criminal actors. The relationship between burden reduction and investigative capacity should therefore be monitored.

Public-Health Evidence

Firearm deaths include suicide, homicide, domestic violence, accidents, and public mass shootings. These categories have different causes and require different interventions. A policy that addresses school security may have little effect on suicide; a policy focused on street trafficking may not

prevent an abusive partner's access.

Evaluation should specify outcomes and time frames. Evidence can be politically contested, but disagreement is not a reason to avoid measurement. Regulations should be reviewed for effect, fairness, unintended consequences, and constitutional durability.

Federalism

States differ widely in licensing, carrying, waiting periods, storage, age limits, and risk orders. Federal courts are still interpreting how *Bruen* applies to many of these rules. The Trump administration's litigation posture can influence that development even without Congress passing new legislation.

Federalism permits local variation but can create confusion for travelers and dealers. Clear public information is necessary because conduct lawful in one jurisdiction may be restricted in another.

A Balanced Assessment

The original essay anticipated a president who might enact stronger federal gun control. The current record is mixed across time. Trump's first administration adopted the bump-stock rule and briefly supported several restrictions after major shootings. His second administration has pursued a broad review and rollback of rules viewed as infringing the Second Amendment.

Neither record should be described only through campaign rhetoric. The bump-stock rule was invalidated because the agency lacked statutory authority. Current reforms may reduce unjust enforcement, but each must also be assessed for public-safety effects. Durable policy requires Congress, clear statutes, constitutional analysis, due process, and competent administration.

Conclusion

Trump's gun policy changed from selective first-term regulation and crisis-driven proposals to a second-term program centered on Second Amendment protection and regulatory reform. The 2018 bump-stock ban became a major first-term action, but the Supreme Court invalidated its statutory basis, and ATF removed the language in 2026. Executive Order 14206 then directed a government-wide review that produced enforcement changes and numerous proposed or final regulatory actions.

The central policy challenge remains balancing a fundamental constitutional right with prevention of suicide, domestic violence, trafficking, accidents, and violent crime. Effective policy should be specific, legally authorized, historically grounded where required, supported by due process, and evaluated through real outcomes. Presidential statements can set direction, but durable solutions depend on statutes, courts, institutions, and implementation.

References

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