



U.S. Congress

Should Congress make it harder to buy handguns?



It is 1993. You are a congressperson. Congress is ready to vote on the "Brady Bill." If Congress approves this bill, it will be more difficult for people to buy handguns. How will you vote? Americans have strong feelings about this bill. Here are some of the arguments you have heard:

CON: The Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution says that Americans have the right to own guns.

PRO: Not true! The amendment says that the military has the right to have guns, not the people.

CON: There are lots of good reasons to have guns. Hunting and target shooting are sports. The government should not stop people from enjoying these sports.

PRO: Nobody uses handguns for hunting. For target practice, people can rent guns at shooting ranges. They are too dangerous to keep at home!

PRO: Guns are dangerous. There are too many accidents with handguns. Parents do not lock up their guns, and their kids accidentally shoot somebody. Also, guns are dangerous because they are so easy to use. Somebody gets angry and just picks up a gun and kills a person. Besides, if people did not have guns around, maybe there would not be so many suicides.

CON: *Guns* are not dangerous; people are. And people can be trained to use guns safely. More people are hurt or killed by falling down or drowning than by guns.

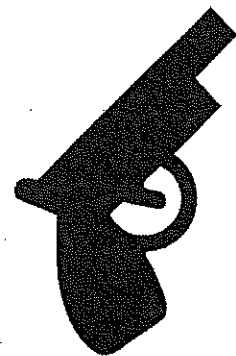
CON: People need guns for self-defense. If people have guns, they can protect themselves. Also, if criminals think that more people have guns, they will not attack. If we stop law-abiding people from having guns, only criminals will have guns.

PRO: Handguns are not good for self-defense. Most criminals say that guns don't stop them. Dogs stop them. Also, criminals often get their guns by breaking into houses and stealing them.

PRO: The U.S. has more handgun deaths than countries that have gun control laws. England and Japan, for example, have strict gun control laws, and they have very few shootings. In cities in America that have gun control laws, the crime rate has gone down.

CON: Not true! In England, the crime rate went up more than in the United States. Massachusetts has a strict gun registration law, but Boston has the fifth highest crime rate in America! And New York City has a gun registration law, but there are 1 to 2 million *unregistered* guns in the city. The gun control laws do not work.

The people in your state who voted for you want you to do the right thing. How will you vote?



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(continued)

Comprehension

1. Who are you in this story?
2. For each statement, write *F* for fact or *O* for opinion. Remember that facts are things that can be checked and agreed to by everyone. Opinions are a person's own ideas.
 - (a) The Second Amendment says that people have the right to own guns.
 - (b) Hunting and target shooting are sports.
 - (c) Handguns are too dangerous to keep at home.
 - (d) There are many accidental shootings.
 - (e) People can be trained to use guns safely.
 - (f) People are careless with guns.
 - (g) Criminals often steal guns from houses.
 - (h) England and Japan have strict gun control laws.
 - (i) The crime rate has gone down in cities that have gun control laws.
 - (j) The gun registration law doesn't work in New York City.
3. What is the purpose of the Brady Bill?

Decision

- *How are you going to vote on this bill? Choose one of the following options:*
 - (a) Vote for the Brady Bill. It should not be easy to get handguns.
 - (b) Vote against the Brady Bill. It should be easy to get handguns.
 - (c) Support another bill that makes all kinds of guns difficult to get.
 - (d) Oppose all gun control bills. People have the right to own any kind of gun they want.
 - (e) Oppose gun control bills. People who want to own guns will not vote for you in the future if you support this bill.
 - (f) Other: _____
- *Why did you decide that way? Plan how you will explain your decision to your classmates. Write out your reasoning completely.*