



2025 OFFICIAL DOCUMENT

Study Guide

US CONGRESS

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COMMITTEE INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Congress committee is a simulation of the legislative hub of the United States located in Washington D.C . The U.S Congress is the pillar of the three branches of American government and its effects have a daily impact on not only the lives of the 340 million Americans, but also the political climate all throughout the world.

The most current social questions on the minds of many American constituents are gun control and immigration, which is what you, the representatives of your given states, will be tackling during the conference . The path to a passed resolution, given the ongoing circumstances, will not be easy, due to the fact that both the GOP and the Democratic party have opposing views on both topics. However, we firmly believe you will take on this challenge with vigor and passion, ultimately leading to a fruitful debate.

First topic: Gun Control Policies: Balancing Rights and Public Safety

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

The United States of America has one of the highest firearm ownership rates in the entire world with around 32% of guns owned for personal causes and 44% for household protection. Furthermore, the U.S. has significantly more guns for personal uses than people with roughly 120.5 guns per 100 people. Hence, the country is under high levels of gun violence and mass shooting, e.g. one of the deadliest school shootings being Parkland high school shooting in 2018. Over the years and rising gun violence in the U.S., the question of gun control has become a national issue. The central dilemma of this conflict is the protection of constitutional rights while also ensuring public safety.

The Second Amendment of the Bill of Rights from 1791 states that the civilians have the right to “keep and bear arms.” This amendment was originally tied with the military status of America in the 18th century, but now it is interpreted as an individual right to bear arms which was reinforced by the Supreme Court in the case of District of Columbia v Heller. Throughout the years, gun culture and bearing privileges has become deeply rooted in the identities of the majority of Americans. The reasons for holding a firearm range from self-defence and hunting to resistance to government overreach.

The current federal laws that are implemented in some states include background checks and restrictions on certain weapons. The variation and severity of the policies vary from state to state; California and New York having the most strict gun laws and states, such as Texas and Arizona, having a permissive approach to the issue. One of the most recent reforms include the **2022 Bipartisan Safer Communities Act** that ensured the expansion of background checks for young buyers to funding of mental health programs.

Another issue that rose throughout the years are the political and social diversities regarding the topic of gun restrictions. While Democrats favor universal background check, red flag laws, and bans on assault weapons, Republicans put a strong emphasis on Second Amendment rights and limited government interference when it comes to gun control and policies. These opinions furthermore show in statistics regarding the gun ownership rates in the U.S. with 20% gun ownership among Democrats and 44% among Republicans. The public opinion is constantly shifting after each mass shooting, but the society is still divided between the political, geographical (urban vs. rural), and generational aspects.

The issue at hand is not whether guns should exist in America, but rather how to regulate them responsibly and ensure public safety.

KEY TERMS

- **Democratic Party** - One of the two major political parties in the United States. The Democratic party is often associated with more progressive policies and is often described as a center-left party. The party advocates for stricter gun laws. They are the minority in the Senate by 6 seats.
- **GOP/ Grand Old Party/ Republican Party** - One of the two leading political parties of the United States. Leans mostly conservative and is strongly opposed to any kind of gun regulation and will challenge any senator wishing to do so. The GOP has currently (September 2025) a majority in the Senate (53 Republican seats, 47 Democratic seats).
- **Second Amendment** - the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution states and protects the right for citizens to hold firearms. This was ratified in 1791 as a part of the U.S. Bill of Rights.
- **Bill of Rights** - The Bill of Rights are the first 10 Amendments of the U.S. Constitutions that are the cornerstone of basic rights of American citizens. Furthermore, they guarantee civil rights and liberties to the individual, such as the freedom of speech, press, religion, etc. The Bill of Rights were added in order to persuade the anti-federalist party to pass the Constitution.

- **Swing State** - State in the U.S. that usually has two major political parties on the same or similar level of power and support from its voters. These states are important when determining the overall results in elections, especially in the presidential ones. Candidates often tend to hyperfocus on the swing states, e.g. by holding more rallies, ultimately shedding a light on the controversial factors of the Electoral College.
- **Electoral College** - According to the U.S. Constitution, the president is not chosen directly by the people but through a system of electors. The framers of the Constitution established the Electoral College as a compromise between a direct popular vote and selection by Congress. Each state's number of electors equals its congressional representation; two senators plus its members in the House of Representatives. The District of Columbia, though lacking voting members in Congress, is granted three electors. Altogether, the Electoral College consists of 538 electors, and a candidate must secure at least 270 votes to win the presidency. Few weeks after the general election, electors gather in their state capitals to cast official votes for president and vice president. These votes are then forwarded to the Senate president, who, on January 6 in a joint session of Congress, counts the votes and declares the winner.
- **Gun Control** - Regulation, sale, and use of firearms.
- **Gun Rights** - Gun rights refer to the legal privileges of an individual to own and use firearms. The main purpose of holding a gun ranges from hunting and sport activities to self-defence.
- **Background Checks** - A process of systematic verification of a person's history. This includes their identity, criminal records, employment and search history, etc., in order to confirm qualifications of the person and potential threats and risks.
- **Constitutional Carry** - Individuals do not need a permit to hold a firearm.
- **Assault Weapons** - Legal and primary terms that refers to the semi-automatic firearms that contain specific features.
- **Bump Stock** - A device that attaches to a semi-automatic rifle that allows it to fire bullets faster, almost at the speed of a fully automatic weapon.

- **Red Flag Laws** - Legal measures that allow the court to temporarily restrict a person's access to firearms if deemed as a significant threat to themselves or to the society. They are also known as **Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs)** or **Gun Violence Restraining Orders (GVROs)**.
- **Gun Show Loophole** - A political term that refers to the sale of private firearms in the secondary market. Furthermore, sellers do not sell firearms with a special license (**Federal Firearms Licences**) and background checks on potential buyers.
- **Federal Firearms Licences (FFL)** - A license that is issued by the **U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF)** which allows individuals and businesses to manufacture, import, and/or sell firearms.
- **Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF)** - ATF is a law enforcement agency that is responsible for the enforcement of federal laws and regulation of governing firearms, explosives, arson, alcohol, and tobacco.
- **National Rifle Association (NRA)** - NRA is a gun rights advocacy group that supports the rights of holding firearms by U.S. citizens.
- **Public Safety** - The collective efforts to protect people and communities from potential threats, such as crime, accidents, disasters, and health emergencies.
- **New York State Rifle & Pistol Association v. Bruen (2022)** - A Supreme Court case that serves as a landmark decision of the U.S. regarding the Second Amendment. The Court concluded that the State of New York's law was unconstitutional and that the civilians have the right to bear firearms in public.

TIMELINE OF THE TOPIC

In this section of the study guide, you will find a general timeline of the topic, furthermore highlighting important milestones that can help you with your research.

1791 - Ratification of the Second Amendment.

The ratification of the Second Amendment guaranteed the right to “keep and bear arms” which was originally linked with the state militias. Over the time it has become a central debate between individual rights and the government regulation.

1934 - Creating National Firearms Act (NFA) that regulates the usage of machine guns and sawed-off shotguns.

This was the first major federal gun control law that has passed and furthermore imposed strict regulations and taxes on the so called “gangster weapons” (e.g. machine guns, silencers, sawed-off shotguns). This law was passed in response to the rising of organized crime and violence during Prohibition.

1968 - Gun Control Act (GCA) is passed after the assassination of JFK, MLK, and RFK.

After the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., and Senator Robert Kennedy, the government restricted mail-order gun sales, banned interstate firearms transfers (except for licensed dealers), and furthermore prohibited certain groups from gun purchasing, such as felons, drug dealers and users, and mentally ill civilians).

1993 - The introduction of the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (Brady Bill) that contains the implementation of federal background checks.

The Brady Bill is named after Brady Handgun, who was severely injured in 1981 during the attempt for assassination on President Ronald Reagan. This bill established the federal background check system (also known as NICS) and required waiting period for handgun purchases. The waiting period was later replaced by instant checks.

1994 - Federal Assault Weapons Ban.

This ban was part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act that was signed by President Bill Clinton. This banned the manufacture and sale of certain semi-automatic firearms that are defined as “assault weapons” and high-capacity magazines. Hence, this law is deemed as controversial and later expired in 2004.

2008 - Supreme Court decides in the case of *District of Columbia v. Heller* about the individual rights to bear arms.

In 2008, the Supreme Court ruled that the Second Amendment will protect an individual's rights to possess a firearm for self-defense within their property. The Supreme Court presented the amendment as a way of guaranteeing an individual's right, not just a right tied to militias.

2012 - National debate rose after Sandy Hook shooting.

The Sandy Hook shooting in the local elementary school is to this day one of the most brutal tragedies regarding the possession of guns. In this mass shooting, 20 children and 6 adults were killed and this event sparked worldwide calls and debates for stricter gun laws, especially on assault

weapons and background checks. Unfortunately, the Congress failed to pass major gun reforms despite the increasing pressure from the public, thus creating an example of a political gridlock.

2018 - Parkland Shooting and March for Our Lives Movement.

Student-led movement after the tragic Parkland mass shooting in Florida where 17 people were killed, advocated for universal background checks, assault weapons bans, and limitations on high-capacity magazines. This demonstrated the youth's desire to resolve this problem at hand and renewed public pressure on lawmakers.

2022 - Bipartisan Safer Communities Act; One of the Most Significant Federal Reforms in Decades.

The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act is the first significant federal gun safety law that has passed in nearly 30 years. This act expanded background checks for gun buyers under the age of 21 years, restricted gun access for abusive partners, and furthermore provided funding for school and public safety. Due to the rarity of bipartisan support, this act shows the potential for compromise in the Congress.

PAST ACTION

Past actions are here to help you with the identification of past actions and their significance. This will be divided into 3 groups: **federal laws, state-level variation,** and **Supreme Court rulings.**

Federal Laws:

- Gun Control Act of 1968 - This act restricted firearms and prohibited certain groups, e.g. felons and mentally ill civilians, from owning guns.
- The Brady Bill of 1993 - This bill stands behind the creation of NICS, a federal background check system.
- Federal Assault Weapons Ban between 1994 - 2004 - In the span of a decade, the government banned certain semi-automatic weapons and high-capacity magazines, but due to controversy this ban expired in 2004.
- Bipartisan Safer Communities Act of 2022 - The act ensured further background checks for potential and young gun buyers, closed certain loopholes, and started funding public and school safety programs.

State-Level Variation:

- Strict States - States like California and New York are known for their strict gun laws which include universal background checks, assault weapons banns, and red flag laws.
- Permissive States - Arizona and Texas states where the individual can have a gun permit-free. These states are known for fewer restrictions.
- Special Cases - Some states, such as Florida, are one of those cases where a state has strict gun laws, but are still mostly gun-friendly.

Supreme Court Rulings:

- District of Columbia v. Heller in 2008 - This case affirmed individual's rights to own guns.
- McDonald v. Chicago in 2010 - This case is an extension to the Heller case, further applying the verdict of Heller's case to state and local governments, thus preventing cities and states from completely banning handguns.
- New York State Rifle & Pistol Association v. Bruen in 2022 - This case expanded gun rights, hence limiting the state's ability to restrict concealed carry.

Country positions

California - California is known for one of the strictest gun laws in the U.S. due to implementing strict universal background checks, waiting periods, red flag laws, and assault weapon ban. They are often set as a model for strong regulation of firearms and with their Democratic leadership they push for more restrictions.

Texas - Texas has very permissive gun laws and they put a strong emphasis on the Second Amendment rights of their citizens. Recently, the Republican leadership in Texas allowed permitless carry of handguns. Furthermore, the NRA has a strong influence in this state.

Florida - Florida is a state with mixed records regarding laws and restrictions on firearms. Traditionally, Florida is a gun-friendly state, but after the Parkland shooting in 2018, the Floridian government passed reforms such as raising

gun purchase age to 21 or introducing red flag laws. Due to the fact that Florida is politically divided between pro-gun Republicans and gun-safety advocates, Florida's stance on the matter is indecisive.

New York - The state of New York is known for its strict gun laws that include bans on assault weapons, magazine limits, and red flag laws. The Democratic leadership supports the nationwide stricter gun controls, but has tension between them and the federal courts due to a 2022 case of *New York State Rifle & Pistol Association v. Bruen*.

Illinois - Illinois implements strong restrictions due to its high gun violence, especially in Chicago. These restrictions include background checks for private sales, red flag laws, and furthermore banned assault weapons since 2023. The Democratic leadership in Illinois recognizes the increasing gun violence and frames it as a top priority of public safety issues.

Georgia - Georgia is a Republican-led and gun-friendly state that passed permitless carry of firearms in 2022. Furthermore, the government of Georgia puts an emphasis on the strong cultural and political support for the Second Amendment.

Virginia - Due to its nature of shifting policies, Virginia has a mix of pro-gun and pro-control policies, while also implementing policies that restrict the usage of firearms. After the Virginia Beach shooting in 2019, Democrats pushed through a policy containing universal background checks and red flag laws.

Colorado - Colorado is a most frequent site for mass shootings (e.g. Columbine, Aurora, Boulder), therefore the Coloradoan government passed strict laws regarding firearms, such as magazine limits, red flag laws, and/or universal background checks. Moreover, Colorado generally leans towards the Democratic view and actions on gun issues.

Michigan - Historically, Michigan was a moderate state on the issue presented, but after the Oxford High School shooting in 2021 and MSU shooting in 2023, the Democratic party passed new gun safety laws such as safe storage of firearms, background checks, and red flag laws. They lean and show the shift towards stricter regulations and public safety.

Washington - Washington is a state with very strict gun laws, ranging from universal background checks and bans on high-capacity magazines to assault weapon restrictions. Its Democratic party leadership constantly pushes the state towards new and stricter gun reforms.

Nevada - One of the swing states that contains a mixed approach to the problem of gun control. After the Las Vegas shooting in 2017, the state passed stronger policies on background checks and bans on bump stocks.

Arizona - Arizona is a strong advocate and promoter of pro-gun culture due to its Republican-led government. Arizona was one of the first states to allow constitutional carry and strongly opposes most new gun restrictions.

Questions a resolution must answer

1. *How can the U.S. Congress balance the Second Amendment with the growing need to reduce gun violence?*
2. *Should the government implement a federal assault weapons ban or keep the laws the same?*
3. *How can the U.S. Congress address the loopholes in the background checks on potential buyers of firearms.*
4. *Should mental health checks play a role in firearm ownership? 5. How can Congress address the influence of interest groups while making the policy?*
5. *Should policies focus on preventions, such as education or community programs, or restrictions, such as bans or stricter laws?*
6. *How can bipartisan compromise be achieved in such a polarized issue?*

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Second topic: Illegal immigration: Policy Challenges and Solutions

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

The U.S. immigration system was built decades ago and isn't designed to handle today's ever-increasing arrivals. Congress has tried and failed many times to pass sweeping reforms, leaving a conundrum of policies that shift depending on who is in the White House. Republicans focus on border security and asylum limits, while Democrats usually insist on a mix of enforcement and new legal pathways, especially for groups such as DACA recipients. Public opinion is intensely divided. A majority of Americans want increased border security but also support a process that would allow long-time unauthorized residents to gain legal status.

The southern border with Mexico remains the center of the debate. Record-breaking numbers of migrants, families, and unaccompanied children have overwhelmed shelters and immigration courts in recent years. Some states, such as Texas, have spent billions of dollars on building barriers and deploying their own law enforcement, while others, such as California and New York, have put their efforts into integration and legal representation. The challenge is finding a way to balance national security, economic needs and the country's humanitarian commitment without having the system collapse under pressure.

KEY TERMS

Illegal Immigration – Presence in or entry into the United States without legal permission, either through crossing the border illegally or by overstaying a visa.

U.S. Congress – The federal legislature of the United States that possesses the power to create and fund immigration policy.

Border Security – A series of barriers, patrols and technology that are designed to control who is able to enter the country.

Asylum – A safeguard for those who can prove that they would be persecuted if sent back to their home country.

DACA – A 2012 policy that shields those unauthorized immigrants who came to the U.S. as children from deportation and allows them to work in the states but does not offer citizenship.

Visa Overstay – Someone enters legally but remains after their visa expires, which today accounts for a large share of unauthorised immigration .

Catch and Release – A practice in which some migrants are released while they await their immigration hearings.

Sanctuary Cities – Districts or counties that limit cooperation with federal immigration enforcement.

Comprehensive Immigration Reform – A broad policy idea that would mix tightened border security with new visa rules and possible legal status for some illegal immigrants.

Overview of the topic

The United States has historically been a nation shaped by immigration, but the question of how to deal with those in the country illegally has become one of the most difficult for its people to answer. Current estimates are that roughly eleven million people are living in the U.S. without legal authorisation. Some crossed the border with Mexico illegally, but many others entered fully within the confines of the legal system and merely overstayed their visas. Poverty, violence and scarcity of opportunity in their home countries generally force these decisions, and for the majority of migrants, the journey itself is dangerous but still worth the risk.

Timeline of the topic

1986 – The Immigration Reform and Control Act legalised millions of undocumented immigrants and penalised employers who knowingly employed them.

1996 – The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act intensified border enforcement and narrowed regulations for achieving legal status.

2001 – The DREAM Act was first introduced, demanding a path to legal status for immigrants who were brought to the United States as children but has yet to be passed.

2012 – The DACA program began, granting temporary protection and work permits to eligible undocumented youth, though it remains mired in the courts.

2018 – The "zero tolerance" policy of the Trump administration led to the

separation of thousands of children from their parents along the border, which caused national outrage.

2021–Present – Migrant encounters along the southern border reached record levels, putting intense strain on border facilities and immigration courts.

Past Action

States have responded in varying different ways. Texas has been at the forefront of strict enforcement, using state funds to build new barriers and send additional officers to the border. California and New York have prioritized legal services and sanctuary policies, limiting coordination with federal enforcement and offering services to unauthorized residents. Florida has a mixed record, implementing strict policies at some points but also announcing limited humanitarian programs after natural disasters or significant influxes of arrivals. Illinois pays for immigrant services and protects “Sanctuary Cities” while calling for federal reform. Such disparate strategies point out how piecemeal immigration policy can be without Congressional action.

Country Positions

California - prefers legal status tracks and sanctuary policies, appealing to Congress to come up with a national overhaul that includes legal protections for long-time residents

Texas - focuses on hardline enforcement and border security, funding its own

barriers and demanding forceful deportations.

Florida - blends firm enforcement with humanitarian measures

New York - offers legal support and state-level protections while demanding the federal government move to reduce immigration court backlogs.

Arizona - has switched back and forth from hardline to moderate policies depending on political leadership and pressure from local communities.

Illinois - funds immigrant services and advocates for strong state protections while urging Congress to pass permanent reforms.

Nevada – A key swing state that tightened background checks and banned bump stocks after the 2017 Las Vegas shooting, and now supports stronger border screening but remains open to limited legalization for long-time residents.

Washington – Maintains some of the most welcoming policies in the country, offering legal aid, drivers' licenses for undocumented residents, and broad sanctuary protections while pushing for federal action.

Michigan - Historically moderate but shifting toward more protections after several high-profile immigration raids, with new laws promoting legal assistance and limits on state cooperation with federal enforcement.

Colorado – Frequently a destination for migrants and refugees, it leans toward providing state services and legal aid while still supporting improved border technology to reduce dangerous crossings.

Virginia – Holds a mix of pro-immigrant and pro-enforcement policies, with recent Democratic leadership expanding access to driver's licenses and legal

support even as Republicans call for tougher screening.

Georgia – A Republican-led state that prioritizes enforcement and cooperation with federal authorities, though some urban areas and universities have pushed back by funding legal aid and support programs.

Questions a resolution must answer

1. *How can Congress balance border security with humanitarian protections for asylum seekers?*
2. *Is a pathway to legal status suitable for undocumented immigrants who have been living in the U.S. for decades?*
3. *How can visa overstays, which represent a large share of unauthorized immigration, be reduced?*
4. *How much authority should states have compared to the federal government in the enforcement of immigration laws?*
5. *How can lawmakers reduce the immigration court backlog without sacrificing due process?*
6. *Should the law focus more on enforcement, on expanding legal immigration, or on a balanced mix of the two?*

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