



## **Biden Launches Push to Combat Gun Violence**

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U.S. President Joe Biden launched a new push Thursday to combat gun crime, calling for ramped up prosecutions of violent offenders and initiating new efforts to track the flow of illegal guns and pursue illegal gun sales.

Biden visited New York City and conferred with the city's new mayor, Eric Adams, a former police captain, who in his first month in office has had to grapple with the killings of two police officers and the shooting of another.

"Today, the attorney general directed all U.S. attorneys in the United States to prioritize combating gun trafficking across state lines and city boundaries," Biden said following a meeting with officials at New York Police Department headquarters.

Biden did not announce any new push to control gun ownership but said gun manufacturers have "got to be held responsible." He said, "I find it to be outrageous" that the sale of cigarettes is controlled in the U.S. but guns only to a limited degree.

The president committed \$350 million to cities throughout the country to confront a wave of crime that has risen during the two-year coronavirus pandemic.

The White House said under the new effort, the Justice Department has ordered federal prosecutors throughout the country "to increase resources dedicated to district-specific violent crime strategies ... to get repeat gun violence offenders off of our streets."

Biden said law enforcement personnel have been ordered to pay new attention to the so-called "Iron Pipeline" — the illegal flow of guns sold in southern U.S. states, transported up the East Coast and found at crime scenes in cities such as New York.

His administration launched the National Ghost Gun Enforcement Initiative, which trains prosecutors to bring cases against those who build "ghost guns" — weapons without serial numbers or other identification — at home, as well as to track unlicensed dealers who sell guns to criminals without the required background checks.

## **Right to bear arms**

Under the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, Americans have the right to own firearms, with limitations determined by states. With Republican opposition, prospects for federal legislation controlling guns are dim, leaving Biden with a series of executive options that he has taken since April of last year.

Gun control advocates applaud the measure.

"These latest actions from the Biden-Harris Administration demonstrate the President's continued attention to addressing violent crime and, gun violence specifically, with a comprehensive approach," Kris Brown, president of the Brady Campaign gun control group, said in a statement. "These actions address the supply of crime guns, which all too frequently are diverted from the legal to the criminal market and trafficked into communities nationwide."

However, some analysts say the federal government is not constitutionally empowered to deal with local issues such as gun crime.

"The federal government has a track record of being extremely ineffective when it comes to trying to combat issues that are properly known as business, things like drug prohibition, and trying to observe what we call police power at the local level," Clark Neily, senior vice president for legal studies at the Cato Institute, told VOA. "These are activities that are neither committed to the federal government by our Constitution, nor the things that the federal government has proven to be very good at."

## **Soft on crime**

Biden's visit is also meant to dispel criticism from Republicans that he hasn't been tough enough on crime. He rejected the "defund the police" message pushed by some progressive members of his Democratic Party.

"We're not about defunding," Biden said. "We're about funding and providing the additional services you need beyond someone with a gun strapped to their shoulder, to their hip. We need more social workers. We need more mental health workers."

Gun control is one of the most contentious of U.S. political issues, with the U.S. Constitution guaranteeing the right to gun ownership. For decades, furious debates have raged over the extent to which that right can be regulated or limited.

Despite all-too-frequent mass killings at schools, stores and businesses in the U.S., efforts in Congress to impose tighter controls on gun ownership or ban the sale of automatic weapons have routinely been defeated.

During Thursday's visit, Biden and Attorney General Merrick Garland attended an interagency gun violence meeting with Adams and New York state Governor Kathy Hochul and spoke with local leaders about community intervention efforts to help prevent crime.

Adams, who took office at the beginning of the year, has issued his own outline of programs to address gun violence, many focusing on similar issues such as gun trafficking and boosting youth employment and mental health services.

"We must do the work to end this epidemic of gun violence and deliver real peace and safety to our streets," Adams tweeted Wednesday as he noted the shooting of the off-duty police officer in the city.

Two New York officers were killed in a shooting last month.