

# Gun violence more worrisome than job loss

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Nancy M. Preyor-Johnson

May 27, 2025



A 2024 Bexar County survey shows residents fear a school shooting more than losing their jobs, reflecting heightened anxiety amid a series of local gun violence incidents. At the same time, 48% of Bexar County adults report owning a gun, and most of those respondents said they own more than one.

On Tuesday, Bexar County Commissioners Court approved a proposal for the next step in its Bexar County Gun Safety Program that seeks to reduce gun-related injuries and deaths. Firearms are the leading cause of death among youth in Bexar County, mirroring a national trend.

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## Recent San Antonio gun violence

On Sunday afternoon, [a toddler shot himself in the head](#) after his 17-year-old brother left it loaded on a dresser, authorities said.

On May 12, police arrested a 13-year-old boy whom they suspect of [plotting an act of mass violence](#) at Rhodes Middle School on San Antonio's West Side. The teenager's mother, Ashley Pardo, 33, was arrested on a charge of aiding in the commission of terrorism, a

felony.

During school dismissal on April 16, seven students allegedly jumped, [shot and killed 14-year-old Simon Julian Cuevas III](#) two blocks from Brewer Academy on San Antonio's West Side.

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The county-funded Bexar County Gun Safety Program, branded as "Bexar Responsibly," which focuses on responsible gun ownership, is led by [Texas Creative](#), a San Antonio-based marketing agency.

The first phase, which focused on rollout and education, ended last month. The next stage, which will focus on building awareness, will run through September 2026 at no additional cost to the county due to a one-year renewal option.

"Research told us that the biggest impact that we can make quickly is by speaking directly to gun owners whose motivations for owning a gun are driven by fear and the protection of their home and their family," Ashley Landers, Texas Creative CEO, said during a commissioners court meeting.

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"I know I don't need to remind anyone in this room why this is critical, life-saving work. We all know the national statistics that firearms have become the leading cause of death for children and teens in the United States. We know the statewide numbers of accidental discharges and suicides," Landers said.

Commissioners unanimously approved the extension after hearing public opinion data framing gun violence as a public health issue.

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Monica Ramos, Bexar County spokesperson, told commissioners Tuesday the Bexar County Gun Safety Program, initiated in 2017, has distributed over 3,000 cable gun locks and 1,500 portable gun cases.

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## **Commissioners shift positions, citing urgent need**

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In 2022, the five-member court voted unanimously to devote \$1.1 million in Coronavirus relief funds to promote safe gun storage and responsible gun ownership. Of that amount, \$100,000 was allocated for the purchase of 1,000 gun locks and 3,300 gun cases, which the county has distributed at community events.

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Tensions over how to spend the campaign's initial \$900,000 budget have eased.

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In March 2024, the Commissioners Court approved a nearly \$1 million gun safety public education campaign for Texas Creative, which drew criticism from local anti-violence nonprofits that wanted the funding to be allocated to them instead.

In response, officials pledged to incorporate more grassroots involvement in phase two, which aims to develop a data-driven gun safety awareness program using community survey results.

Several organizations and nonprofits that make up the effort's 20 community-based partners, which were awarded in December, were present at Tuesday's meeting.

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Grant Moody, one of two commissioners who voted against the effort, and the lone Republican commissioner, was the first to offer remarks on the proposal, in support.

He cited recent stories and cases of gun violence involving young people, saying he found it "astonishing and stunning for the lack of awareness by some parents of what is possible with a firearm."

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"There are plenty of divisive political issues in this space that we could have gone down. But this is something that our community is 100% in agreement on, right? And it's trying to prevent the next tragedy," he said, saying he loved the creative. "It's trying to keep our kids safe. "Hopefully it'll save lives, and if it saves one life, then it's worth it for our community."

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Commissioner Tommy Calvert, who also opposed the original contract, now voiced support.

Citing data that shows a 32% reduction in violent assaults in areas with training programs, Calvert proposed offering scholarships that would cover both gun safes and training, especially in lower-income neighborhoods.

Ramos stated that free public safety classes are currently in development with federal partners and are expected to commence this fall.

Commissioner Rebeca Clay-Flores said some constituents might misinterpret at least one image in the campaign as an attempt to take away firearms, fears she called unfounded.

“We’re in Texas. Ain’t nobody gonna take away your guns,” she said, suggesting that the campaign’s messaging be reframed to avoid triggering that perception.

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## **Gun ownership common, safety practices lag**

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The June 2024 survey, commissioned by the county to gauge awareness and perception, was conducted by Pathfinder Opinion Research. The statistically relevant sample included more than 516 adults in Bexar County, which has an estimated 2.1 million residents, including 300 in households with children. Community partners are also conducting the survey, which is due this week.

The survey found that 48% of adults in Bexar County who responded to the survey reside in a household with at least one firearm, primarily for protection.

It also showed 63% of Bexar County adults surveyed view gun violence as a major problem, with 60% saying the problem has worsened over the past five years.

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Parents in particular expressed high levels of concern. Fifty percent of adults in households with children said they worry more about a school shooting than about losing their income, placing gun violence above economic anxiety. Thirty percent of open-ended responses listed crime, safety, or gun issues as the most pressing local problem.

Among the comments collected in the survey was one from a male gun owner with kids who asked for “Better gun laws and age restrictions.”

“Our youth are dying,” he said.

Despite widespread agreement on the importance of gun safety, behavior often fell short. Though 97% of gun owners surveyed value safety training, only 69% have taken a class. And while 75% of respondents believe guns should be kept unloaded, 53% admit to keeping one loaded and accessible at home.

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Communication was another area of concern. Sixty percent of gun owners surveyed said they rarely or never inform visitors with children that there are guns in their homes.

Three out of four adults surveyed supported expanding access to safety training and storage tools — measures they said would reduce deaths without infringing on Second Amendment rights. Support crossed party lines.

## Second phase of campaign starts next week

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County Judge Peter Sakai called the program a ‘middle-of-the-road’ effort focused on changing long-term behavior. ‘It requires a cultural shift,’ he said after the vote.

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Firearms have been the leading cause of death for U.S. children and teens (ages 1–19) since 2020. Gun-related deaths in this age group increased by 106% between 2013 and 2022, according to [Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health](#).

In Texas, the rate of gun deaths increased 44% from 2013 to 2022, compared to a 36% increase nationwide. The rate of gun suicides increased 27% and gun homicides increased 77% compared to an 18% increase and 70% increase nationwide, respectively, according to [EveryTown for Gun Safety](#), a national nonprofit.

An average of 452 children and teens die by gunfire in Texas each year. 60% are homicides and 35% are suicides, EveryTown said.

With a renewed emphasis on a grassroots collaboration among 20 community partners, the second phase of the campaign will start next week. It will target parents, first-time gun owners, and residents in high-risk areas to change behavior through responsible ownership. It will promote safe storage and handling of guns.

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The county will also continue distributing free gun locks and providing safety messaging in both English and Spanish through social media, community partners, and local influencers.

A 30-second public service announcement will be shared next week, along with digital billboards that will direct viewers to a website. “Your gun protects your family. Protect your family from your gun. BexarResponsibly.org,” one message urges.

Nancy M. Preyor-Johnson is a Senior Projects Reporter. She can be reached at [nancy.preyor-johnson@express-news.net](mailto:nancy.preyor-johnson@express-news.net)

She previously worked as deputy editor on the metro desk and the editorial board. The award-winning journalist and former teacher holds a master's degree from the University of Texas at San Antonio in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies. A native of the South

Texas town of Mathis, she has a bachelor's degree in communications from Texas A&M University-Kingsville. She serves on the executive board of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists.



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