



# Media Analysis on Gun Violence in California

## Executive Summary

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Spitfire conducted a targeted news media and social media scan to assess the conversation around gun violence in California over the past year. Our scan examined the focus and tone of gun violence coverage, the most prevalent messengers and the messages that dominated the discussion. In total, the scan analyzed 218 articles from nine major newspapers and 163,000 relevant mentions on Twitter between December 2015 and January 2017. This research provides a baseline that will enable us to measure progress as we seek to reshape the narrative about gun violence in California.



## Topline Findings

**Policy dominated the gun violence conversation.** In both the news media and social media scans, policy was the most frequent topic of conversation, accounting for 40 percent of news coverage. These policies included President Obama’s executive actions, Proposition 63 and the California legislature’s sweeping package of gun violence prevention policies. Print media coverage focused on local- and state-level policy debates. On social media, national gun policy hashtags such as #NoBillNoBreak, #Filibuster, and #GunControl generated significant conversation.

**Mass shootings sparked and sustained most policy debates.** In particular, the San Bernardino shooting and the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando prompted calls for policy change at the state and national levels. Both shootings generated major spikes in the conversation on Twitter.

**Coverage ignored everyday gun violence.** Ongoing gun violence in California -- including domestic violence, suicide and gang violence -- received minimal coverage compared to more sensational gun-related tragedies. These three issues accounted for just five percent of news coverage.

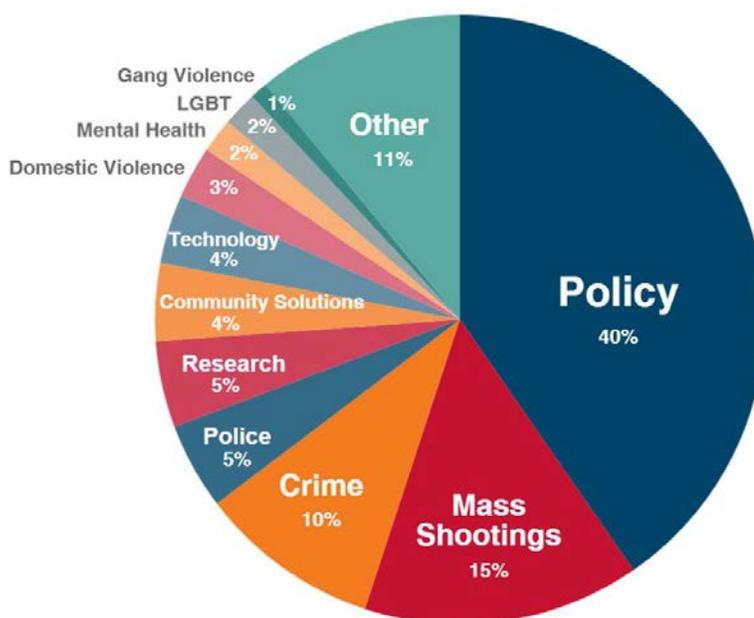
**Gun violence was rarely framed as a public health issue.** Only four percent of news coverage discussed gun violence in the context of public health.

**Conversation on solutions overlooked research, technology, philanthropy and community-based programs.** Most of the news coverage and social media conversation on solutions to gun violence focused on policy change. There was relatively little conversation around the importance of investing in gun violence research or smart-gun technology. Coverage of local solutions focused on initiatives within police departments, rather than philanthropic investments or community programs.

**California’s policy leadership fueled complacency.** Coverage often noted that California has some of the most robust gun laws in the nation, and these statements contribute to a narrative that there is little more that can be done to combat gun violence at the state level.

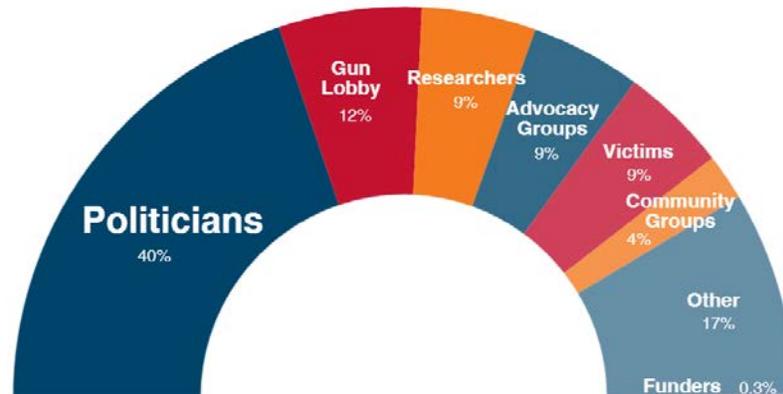
**Politicians were the primary messengers.** Politicians accounted for nearly 40 percent of newspaper quotes on gun violence – more than funders, researchers, advocacy groups, community groups and victims of gun violence combined. Democrats were more likely to be quoted than Republicans. On social media, politicians accounted for the majority of the messengers with the greatest spread.

Primary Topics of Gun Violence Coverage





## Messengers Quoted on Gun Violence



## Recommendations

Based on our findings, we have developed the following recommendations for Hope and Heal Fund's efforts to change the narrative on gun violence in California.

**Highlight the many ways gun violence affects California communities.**

Broaden the conversation beyond mass shootings by shining a light on the pervasive gun violence affecting all California communities, including suicide, domestic violence and gang violence.

**Make the case that there is much work left to be done in California.**

Counter the perception that California has done enough to address gun violence by pointing out that we must do more than enact strong gun laws – we must also address the root causes of violence.

**Elevate community voices and solutions to gun violence.** Position community leaders and those directly impacted by gun violence as the primary messengers. They can speak most effectively to how the problem manifests in their communities and what it will take to solve it.

**Reinforce public health framing.** Continue to talk about gun violence as a public health issue until that framing permeates the media narrative. Identify doctors, researchers and public health experts who can serve as effective messengers.

**Depoliticize gun violence by appealing to common values.** Sidestep political opposition by crafting messages that emphasize universal values like safety, opportunity and freedom from fear.

**Focus on storytelling instead of data.** Highlighting personal stories will bring statistics to life, create empathy and overcome stereotypes about who is impacted by gun violence.

### Top Hashtags

1. #DisarmHate
2. #Enough
3. #NoBillNoBreak
4. #WearOrange
5. #GunSense
6. #Filibuster
7. #GunControl
8. #EnoughIsEnough
9. #StopGunViolence
10. #Orlando