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Heating the debate: Reports show gun homicides down since 1990s

From wire reports

Gun homicides have dropped steeply in the United States since their peak in 1993, a pair of reports released Tuesday showed, adding fuel to Congress' battle over whether to tighten restrictions on firearms.

A study released Tuesday by the government's Bureau of Justice Statistics found that gun-related homicides dropped from 18,253 in 1993 to 11,101 in 2011. That's a 39 percent reduction.

Another report by the private Pew Research Cen-

ter found a similar decline by looking at the rate of gun homicides, which compares the number of killings to the size of the country's population. It found that the number of gun homicides per 100,000 people fell from 7 in 1993 to 3.6 in 2010, a drop of 49 percent.

Both reports also found the rate of non-fatal crimes involving guns was also down by about 70 percent over that period.

Despite the drop in gun crime, only 12 percent of Americans surveyed said gun crime had declined compared with two de-

Gun-related homicides

1993	18,253
2011	11,101

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics

cadecades ago, according to Pew, which surveyed more than 900 adults this spring. Twenty-six percent said it had stayed the same, and 56 percent thought it had increased.

It's unclear whether media coverage is driving the misconception that such violence is up. The mass

shootings in Newtown, Conn., and Aurora, Colo., were among the news stories most closely watched by Americans last year, Pew found. Crime has also been a growing focus for national newscasts and morning network shows in the past five years but has become less common on local television news.

"It's hard to know what's going on there," said D'Vera Cohn, senior writer at the Pew Research Center. Women, people of color and the elderly were more likely to believe that gun crime was up than men, younger adults or

white people. The center plans to examine crime issues more closely later this year.

Though violence has dropped, the United States still has a higher murder rate than most other developed countries, though not the highest in the world, the Pew study noted. A Swiss research group, the Small Arms Survey, says that the U.S. has more guns per capita than any other country.

Experts debate why overall crime has fallen, attributing the drop to all manner of causes, such as the withering of the crack

cocaine market and surging incarceration rates.

The trend in firearm-related homicides is part of a broad nationwide decline in violent crime over past two decades, including incidents not involving firearms. But handguns play a major role in violent crime. The Justice study said that in 2011, about 70 percent of all homicides were committed with a firearm.

The data were released three weeks after the Senate rejected an effort by gun control supporters to broaden the requirement for background checks.

The answer is C - 49%