UC San Diego
SCHOOL OF GLOBAL POLICY AND STRATEGY

TULANE UNIVERSITY
Newcomb Institute

DVRO AND GVRO KNOWLEDGE AND UTILIZATION:

FINDINGS FROM A FOUR STATE ANALYSIS OF VEX 2025 DATA FOR CALIFORNIA, LOUISIANA, MISSISSIPPI, AND TEXAS

VEXData
VIOLENCE EXPERIENCES SURVEY

MAY 2026

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Domestic violence restraining orders and gun violence restraining orders can reduce violence, including severe acts of violence such as intimate partner homicide (IPH). However, these protections are underutilized, potentially due to low public awareness and poor implementation (1,2). Domestic Violence Restraining Orders (DVROs) are civil court orders that protect individuals from violence, threats, or abuse from an intimate partner or family member and may include provisions limiting access to firearms. Gun Violence Restraining Orders (GVROs), which are also referred to as Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs), are civil orders that temporarily prohibit an individual from accessing firearms due to a risk they pose to themselves or others. Although these legal tools are intended to reduce violence and prevent harm, little evidence documents how well these tools are understood or utilized by those in need.

Although both DVROs and GVROs can play a role in violence prevention, they serve distinct legal functions. DVROs are survivor-centered civil protective orders intended to address intimate partner or family violence more broadly, including threats, harassment, and abuse, while GVROs/ERPOs are firearm-specific legal mechanisms designed to temporarily restrict firearm access among individuals deemed at risk of harming themselves or others. These differences may shape how individuals understand, access, and utilize these protections.

Our recent 2025 Violence Experiences (VEX) Surveys, conducted in California, Louisiana, Texas, and Mississippi, provide new multi-state data on awareness and utilization of these protective orders. The four VEX surveys asked residents about their awareness, understanding, and experiences with DVROs and GVROs. These data help identify informational gaps and opportunities to improve public education, access, and implementation of these legal protections.

METHODS

The CalVEX, LaVEX, TexVEX, and MsVEX 2025 surveys were conducted in the following four states, respectively: Louisiana (N=1034), Texas (N=1052), Mississippi (N=1034), and California (N=4007). The survey, conducted online in English and Spanish by NORC at the University of Chicago using their statewide panels, assessed adults' experiences with multiple forms of violence, substance use, and mental health. As part of this survey, respondents were also asked about:

a) Awareness of DVROs and GVROs.
b) Knowledge of DVROs and GVROs for intimate partner violence (IPV) protection.
c) Whether they have sought a DVRO or a GVRO before, among those with a history of IPV.

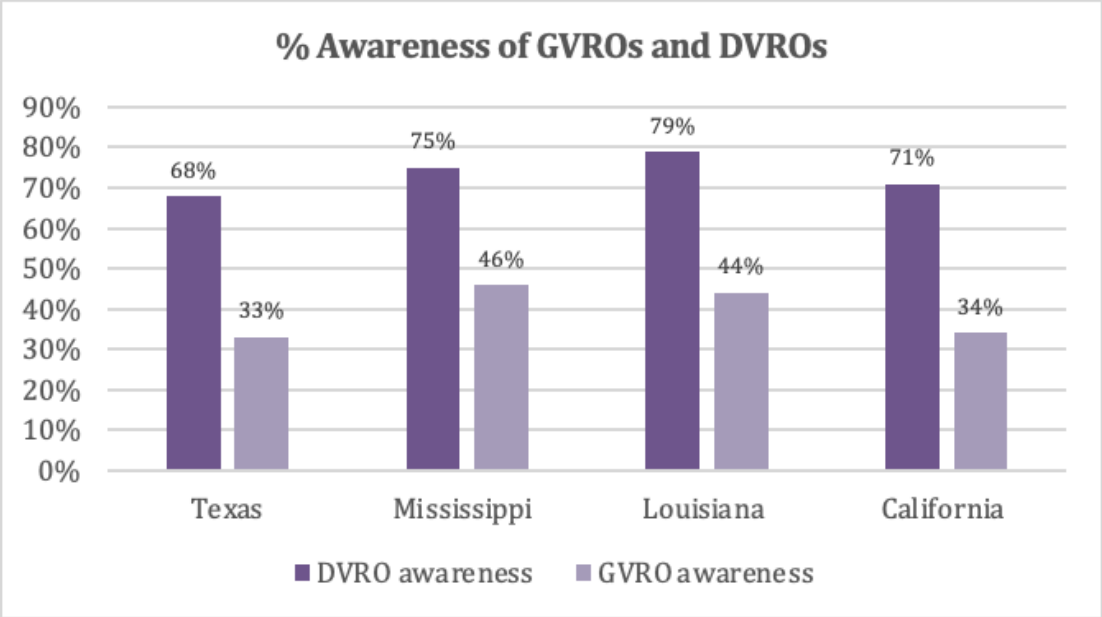
FINDINGS

Awareness of DVROs and GVROs

We assessed the extent to which survey respondents were aware of two key policy measures designed to protect individuals from domestic and firearm violence.

We asked: *Before this survey, had you heard of the following legal measures?(yes or no)*
a) Domestic Violence Restraining Orders (DVROs)
b) Gun Violence Restraining Orders (GVROs), also referred to as Extreme Risk Protection Orders or ERPOs

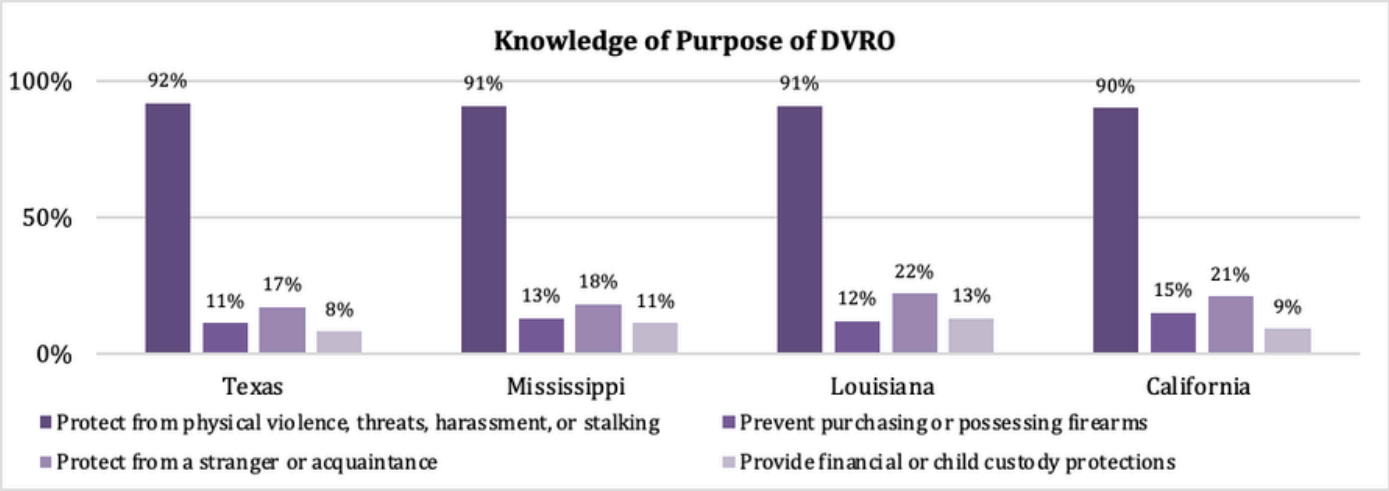
Across all four states awareness of DVROs is higher (ranges 68%-79%) than awareness of GVROs (ranges 33%-46%). Differences between states were also seen, with awareness of DVROs and GVROs being higher in Mississippi and Louisiana (DVRO awareness: 75% and 78%, respectively; GVRO awareness: 46% and 44%, respectively) than in Texas and California (DVRO awareness: 68% and 71%, respectively; GVRO awareness: 33% and 34%, respectively)



Knowledge of the Purpose of DVROs and GVROs

Next, we probed respondents' understanding of the purposes of these legal measures. Regarding DVROs, we asked: *In your opinion, which of the following best describes the purpose of a Domestic Violence Restraining Order (DVRO)? Select all that apply.*

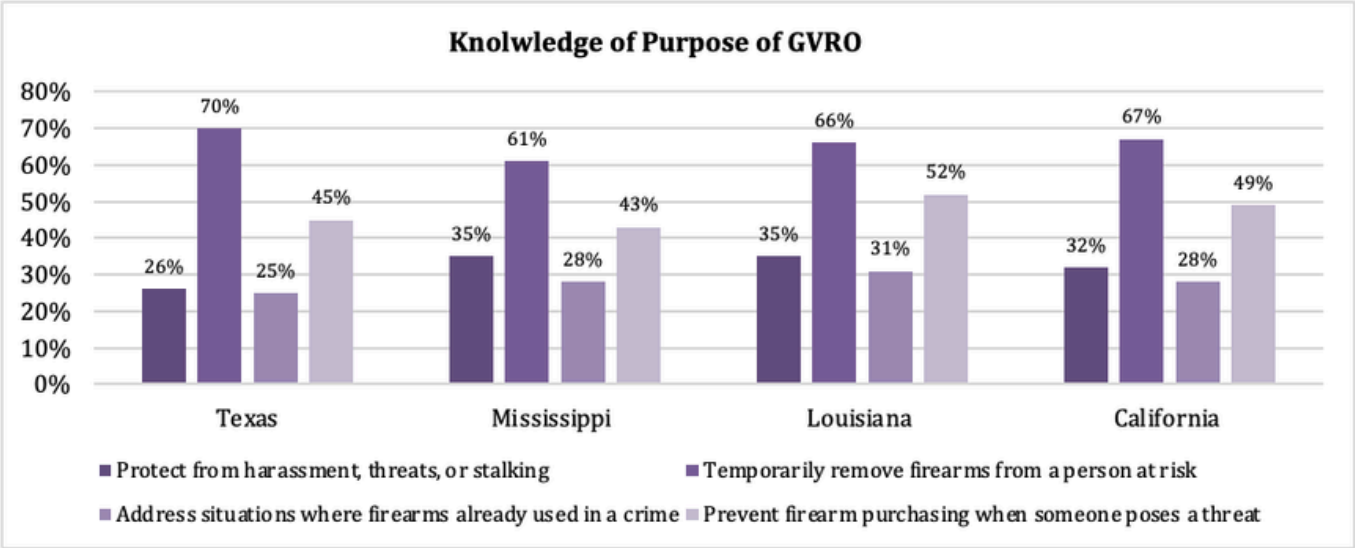
1. To protect someone from physical violence, threats, harassment, or stalking by someone they have a close relationship with (e.g., partner, family member).
2. To prevent someone from purchasing or possessing firearms.
3. To protect someone from a stranger or acquaintance.
4. To provide financial or child custody protections as part of the order.



DVROs enable family and other household members (e.g., intimate partners, children, parents, siblings, in-laws) to pursue a restraining order against an abuser. Over 9 in 10 respondents across all four states correctly reported that a purpose of the DVRO is to "protect from physical violence, threats, harassment, or stalking". The second most commonly selected purpose was "protect from a stranger or acquaintance" selected by roughly 2 in 10 respondents. About 1 in 10 respondents selected either "prevent purchasing or possessing firearms" or "provide financial or child custody protections," with the latter being the less frequently chosen of the two. Several respondents also identified additional functions that may accompany DVROs, including firearm restrictions and financial or custody-related protections

We asked: *In your opinion, which of the following best describes the purpose of a Gun Violence Restraining Order (GVRO)? Select all that apply.*

1. To protect someone from harassment, threats, or stalking.
2. To temporarily remove firearms from a person deemed a risk to themselves or others.
3. To address situations where firearms have already been used in a crime.
4. To prevent someone from purchasing firearms if they pose a threat.

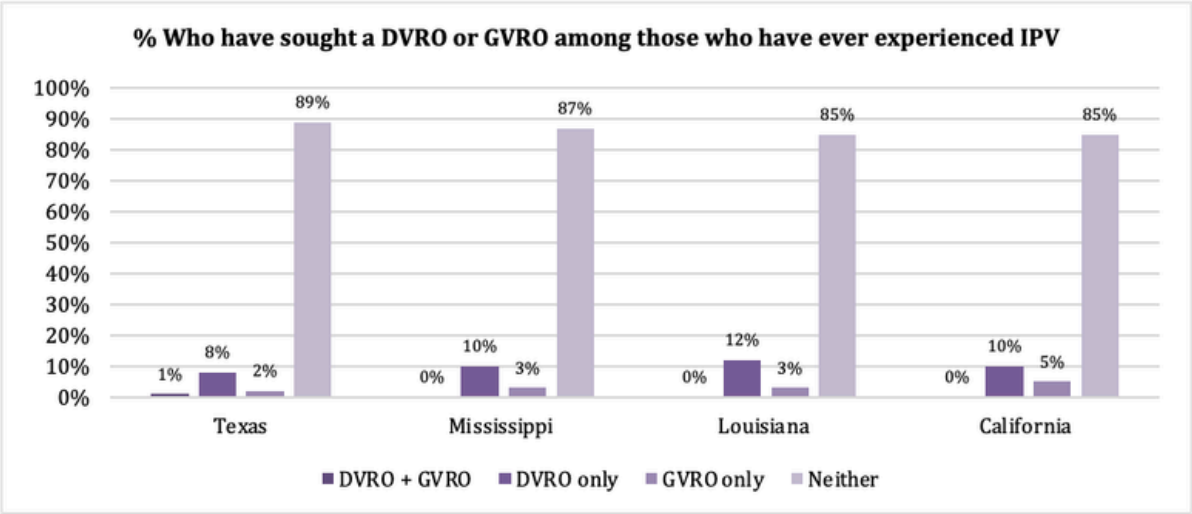


GVRO laws enable individuals (e.g., intimate partners, close family members, co-habitants, co-workers among others) and law enforcement to petition the court to suspend an individual's access to firearms on a temporary basis if they are suspected of endangering themselves or others. Most respondents correctly identified that the purpose of a GVRO is to "temporarily remove firearms from a person at risk" – 70% in Texas, 67% in California, and 61% in Mississippi and 66% in Louisiana. In all four states, higher education levels were significantly associated with identifying the purpose of a GVRO ($p<0.02$). The next most commonly correctly selected purpose was to "prevent firearm purchasing when someone poses a threat," reported by 45% of Texas respondents, 43% in Mississippi and 52% in Louisiana, and 49% in California. The two least commonly identified purposes of a GVRO were to "address situations where firearms have already been used in a crime" (25-31% of respondents) and to "protect from harassments, threats, or stalking" (26-35% of respondents). Findings suggest that respondents most strongly associated GVROs with firearm removal and prevention of firearm access, while fewer respondents associated them with broader violence prevention or post-incident intervention functions.

<u>Sought to Obtain DVROs and GVROs</u>

Next, we assessed the extent to which respondents reported seeking DVROs or GVROs. We focused specifically on respondents who reported experiencing IPV on the VEX survey. Among those who reported experiencing IPV during their lifetime (52% in California, 53% in Louisiana, 55% in Mississippi, and 57% in Texas), we asked: *Have you ever sought a DVRO or GVRO/ERPO for protection?*

1. Yes, I have sought a DVRO
2. Yes, I have sought a GVRO/ERPO
3. No, I have not sought either



Among respondents who have ever experienced IPV, DVROs were more likely to be sought than GVROs in every state: 10% vs. 3% in Mississippi, 12% vs. 3% in Louisiana, 10% vs. 5% in California, and 8% vs. 2% in Texas. Seeking to obtain both a DVRO and GVRO remains rare across all four states, ranging between 0-1%. Texas was the only state where any respondents reported seeking both a DVRO and a GVRO, accounting for only 1% of respondents.

CONCLUSION

This analysis reveals substantial gaps in public awareness and utilization of GVROs and DVROs across California, Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi, with particularly low awareness of GVROs and lower awareness in California and Texas relative to Louisiana and Mississippi. Use of these protections is more likely for those who have experienced IPV relative to those who have not, but use is relatively low across states even among those who have experienced IPV, particularly in terms of use of GVROs. While limited awareness may contribute to low utilization, structural barriers can also impede use and include fear of retaliation, stigma, legal complexity, limited trust in the legal system, and uneven implementation practices (Shah et al., 2023).

Improving public awareness of both DVROs and GVROs—particularly firearm-related protective orders may represent one important step toward strengthening access to these legal protections. This may be particularly important for those affected by IPV, especially those who have been exposed to life-threatening IPV. However, awareness alone is unlikely to be sufficient to increase utilization when needed. Policy efforts are needed to ensure protections exist, and monitoring and evaluation efforts are needed to ensure that implementation practices sufficiently address survivor safety concerns and procedural burdens. Institutional trainings for those in the judicial system are also needed to bolster trust, accessibility, and effectiveness of these types of policies.

REFERENCES

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2) Shah, N. D., Nguyen, G., Wagman, J. A., & Glik, D. C. (2023). Factors Influencing the Use of Domestic Violence Restraining Orders in Los Angeles. Violence against women, 29(9), 1604–1622. https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012221120442

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