Lizzy: Hi, I'm Lizzy Ghedi-Ehrlich

Avigail: And I'm Avigail Oren.

Lizzy: And we are your hosts for Scholars Strategy Network's No Jargon. Every other week, we discuss an American policy problem with one of the nation's top researchers—ithout jargon.

Avigail: So, Lizzy, one of the things we do at SSN is work with researchers to help them make their research findings jargon free, more concise, more accessible. And a lot of our academics struggle with that, right? Because research is about nuance. And so often we have to say things like, "yes, but you know, we want just an elevator pitch for right now, we want to just focus on like one or two points and then you can always get into more nuance later." But this is actually one of those stories where the nuance is the story, isn't it?

Lizzy: Yeah, sometimes it's the big picture public conversation that is a little bit oversimplified and maybe misdirected. And so we're here today to talk about gun violence, gun violence prevention, what trends we've seen kind of at the city level, and then going all the way up to state, to federal.

And you know, for me, that conversation typically is located in the two sides: there's the pro-gun camp and the anti-gun camp. And there's people who say, "Get the guns outta here, we need more laws, we need more reform. This country has too many guns. Of course there's gun violence." And then there's people saying, "Hands off our guns, do not regulate this. Violence is a different problem." And then we kind of just stop there. I think if you asked the average American on the street about what the conversation about gun violence is in this country, that's kind of the impression that you get.

And so I'm really interested in talking to our researcher today because it turns out the nuance underneath that, what's actually driving gun violence, and most importantly, what's actually reducing gun violence, is something that's really important to get out there. Because while the picture of things right now in terms of

maybe what this administration is doing in terms of what changes to programs and funding might mean for some of the stuff that works, the fact is there is stuff that works and I love that. It really kind of changed my view of a problem that can seem intractable or coded into sort of American culture. And it turns out maybe all of that can be true and we can still improve people's health and public safety. And so that's why I am really excited for this episode, where I spoke to Professor Daniel Semenza. He's the Director of Research with the New Jersey Gun Violence Research Center and an Associate Professor at Rutgers University. Here's our conversation:

Lizzy: Professor Semenza, thanks so much for coming on No Jargon.

Daniel: Thanks so much for having me. I'm excited to be here.

Lizzy: Yeah, so you recently wrote an op-ed with our help that was published in *Common Dreams* about the recent declines in violent crime and gun violence. And this is something that, it definitely feels to me, hasn't gotten a lot of attention in broader public debates. Part of that is simply because of how much else is happening in the world, but it strikes me as another one of those cases where we know what public opinion says. It seems like the average person thinks that there is a ton of gun violence or more, like increasing gun violence, and the data actually shows that that's not what we're experiencing and that's an interesting disconnect.

Can you tell us, first, what you think is driving these positive trends? I want to really nail that down and see what we're doing in terms of policy that has been making gun violence decline. And then I'm also interested in unpacking what you think about how people are receiving or not receiving that information.

Daniel: Yeah, so this is kind of an age old trend in criminology and of crime public polling research is that no matter what the trends are, everyone thinks crime is up and things are terrible all the time. That's been true for decades now. You can go back and look at public opinion polling research on crime, you know, for a Gallup poll and the gap between what the crime rate actually is and what people think it is. There's always this disconnect. And so it's not surprising that when the news is

really good like it is right now, that people still aren't really aware of that. And just to be clear, in 2024, there was about a 16% decline in homicide, which is—

Lizzy: Just in that one year?

Daniel: —Just in that one year. That's right. And there had been declines in the year before that, and before that really. So there's been this precipitous decline since roughly 2022, 2023, and that's continued. And the trends are showing in 2025, at least in these first roughly six months, that that is expected to continue. So we are seeing right now one of the fastest drops in crime overall, and particularly in violent crime and homicide, really than any other time that it's been recorded by the FBI and some of these bigger agencies that do national statistics and research on this. And that's really amazing because at the height of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021, violent crime and gun violence was at some of the highest levels that it had ever been in this country. So we went from the highest level of gun violence in the country to some of the fastest declines coming down from that period.

And there's lots of reasons why people aren't necessarily familiar with the good news. Politics definitely comes into play here, right? It is advantageous for politicians to be able to say that crime is high and this is what I'll do about it, and this is how my administration will take care of you, right? So crime can always be the boogeyman that anyone uses on either side of the aisle, to be politically advantageous.

But the other thing is that, like you said, there's just been a lot going on in the last few months and good news is particularly difficult to get people to click on and pay attention to.It's a lot easier to, I think, solicit rage and clicks when the news is bad and when the news is scary rather than when it's maybe a little bit more uplifting. And so there, there's a lot to unpack in there and we can definitely keep talking about it. But yeah, there's always a disconnect and the news has been good in the last couple years.

Lizzy: Well, I want to spread that message and celebrate that. But also the reason that we're talking to you and the reason that we're talking to researchers is because

I want to know why, and I want it to be based on your research and your ability to actually analyze these things as opposed to speculation.

Like, sure you can figure out what are some of the reasons that crime has gone down, that gun violence has gone down. And some of those might be natural reasons. We think about, like, the conditions that the pandemic created. But then other things are the direct consequences of policy choices that have been made, laws that have been implemented. And so I'd really love to know what do you know about why that decline has happened?

Daniel: Yeah, this is a great question. I mean, criminologists are not in the business so much of predicting what's going to happen. They're much better at kind of looking backwards and looking at the data and then trying to piece the story. You know, working backwards. So I think criminologists, almost like archeologists, you know, they're looking at not fossils, but they're looking at crime data from years past to try and understand what has happened. So we can move forward with a better understanding of what's to come.

And, like you kind of pointed to, the pandemic put, everywhere in the world, but particularly the United States, into this really precarious position, where violence really skyrocketed. And that had a lot to do with the fact that a lot of important government and community-based services shut down and were no longer available to the people that needed them and to the communities that needed them most. One of the biggest reasons that gun violence, happens is because people are out and about late at night. It might be younger people, but often it's actually more like 20-somethings into their early 30s. And there's not a lot of community engagement. There are not a lot of eyes on the streets. So people can get into arguments and those arguments quickly spin off into a fight, which then quickly turns into a shooting if people are carrying guns. And during the pandemic, everybody was locked down at home. So when people were out, If people were getting into arguments, there were no community witnesses, there were no services to step in and try and stop things before they happen.

In Camden, where I work, in Philadelphia, right across the bridge, there are lots of groups called community violence intervention groups that actually employ people to stop shootings before they start, getting in the middle of things before they turn deadly. And so much of that just completely went away. Policing became a lot more difficult. The ability to work with young people through schools became really challenging because we were locked down.

There are all these really complicated reasons, but they combined to really lead to the skyrocket of violence and in the years since the pandemic, really thinking about 2022 afterwards. Some of that, the coming down and the reduction of violence, I think is just regressing back towards coming off of the pandemic conditions. Getting back those services, getting more eyes on the streets, getting more people who are doing the work of intervening, more accessible healthcare. All of these things have kind of returned to normal and I think a return to normal is definitely responsible for part of the explanation for why we've become a safer country. But there is a really important key second half of the explanation in my opinion, and that has to do with the investments that the federal government and many states made in the years coming off of the pandemic.

The Biden administration in particular put in hundreds of millions into the billions of dollars in investments of infrastructure, to support a lot of these community organizations to do more work, to have a longer term, kind of grant, not where they were just writing one year grants, but where they could work for three, five years and really know that they could get out there and hire the people they needed to do the work, to stop shootings. A number of policies, we can get into it if you want, were implemented, to try and strengthen some gun laws and to make sure that things were safer at the federal level and then some states followed suit. We even had a federal office of gun violence prevention housed at the White House. And that provided real leadership to show that this was a space worth working in that this is work worth doing. And so I think there was a soft component to that leadership, but also the very real dollars and cents that got put into all of this, that I think is almost impossible to deny, that it had this very real effect over the last couple of years, and I'm sure we'll talk about it, but now the concern is where we might end up if we start undoing a lot of that progress.

Lizzy: Well, to put a finer point on it, on those specific things that actually worked because I want to spread that news too. I want people who have a role, you know, in their city or in their state, in their community to understand, like, what tools have been proven to be effective, you know, as square one.

And it seems like one of the ways to do that in a way that's going to work for listeners is to talk about a city in your home state, Camden, New Jersey, that went from being one of the most dangerous cities in the country to a national model for violence prevention. Can you give us kind of a little case study, some of this funding that you're talking about, some of this federal leadership. How did that translate down to the city level? What did that look like and what can other cities learn from it?

Daniel: Sure. Camden is this really remarkable case that extends beyond the kind of shorter time period that we're talking about, just around the pandemic. But I think that it is so worth highlighting because of the success that it's had and because it demonstrates the need for a kind of all in approach where lots of different stakeholders are involved in making somewhere safer.

I can tell you a little bit of a story about what happened with Camden. Back in 2011, 2012, Camden was getting called by the media, "the murder capital of the country." It was considered, and it was by the rate of violence, one of the most violent cities in the country. And that's saying a lot for a city that, at the time, had about roughly 75,000 people.

So Camden is a small city. It's a similar size to where a lot of people live in America and. It was a very violent place. Camden, since this deindustrialization in the 50s and 60s, Camden has really suffered from high rates of unemployment and poverty. It is historically quite a poor city. And so there are all these different conditions in the city that had led it to becoming quite high in violence and in crime more broadly. At the same time, because of being a poorer city, it was having a really significant issue with a budget shortfall, and there was a lot of corruption in the police force.

So in 2013, Camden County made the decision to take over the Camden City Police Department. So the county basically took over, it laid off the entire police force, said, “Hey, if you want to rejoin, you got to basically reapply. We're going to change the entire structure, and really start from scratch.” Since then, there has been this, you know, really incredible transformation. And I think a lot of residents, and a lot of stakeholders would agree. Some will tell you different reasons for why, but the police change was definitely a major starting point. The chief at the time, Scott Thompson, he said, “Look, we're going make a complete transformation. We're gonna shift our officers from being warriors to guardians.” Using different force policies, less ticketing, more community-facing approaches where police officers were on the streets talking to people every day, getting to know them before anybody ever showed up at anybody's house on a police call.

And what that ended up doing was over time the drop in crime getting steeper and steeper and steeper, to where we are in 2024 into 2025, homicide rates for Camden are at a 40-year low, according to the most recent data at the end of last year, and a 55-year low for all crime in the city. So really, really tremendous in terms of the transformation that happened with the police. But it wasn't just the police.

At the same time, there were investments being made into the city. Companies like Subaru and American Water came in and really started changing the waterfront, brought more people working in the city. Rutgers continued to attract more people. And there were also investments in things like healthcare, Cooper Health, and violence intervention. So a group that I work closely with, who I hold very dear to my heart, is a group called Cure for Camden, and they are a violence intervention, an interruption organization. They employ people both on the streets and linked to the healthcare system in the city, to prevent shootings before they happen, to mediate conflict, to get out there, to take advantage of that kind of “come to Jesus" moment and get people to step away to stop shooting, whether it's because they've been a victim of a shooting themselves, so that retaliation stops, or just to help people see that there's another pathway and get them services, whatever it might look like. Groups like Cure for Camden have really proliferated in communities throughout the United States over the last couple of decades. It's hard to show exactly how they're working and exactly how they're being affected. But overall it's

definitely having an impact on contributing to violence reduction alongside the efforts of police departments like the one that has really operated well in Camden.

Lizzy: Those are all really interesting things for people at the city level to consider how they might put together a tweak to kind of see some of those changes that Camden saw. Tell me a little bit more about those federal level policies and investments that we touched on previously from this last administration that were maybe maybe fueling some of those changes at the lower level or maybe doing their own thing.

I know we worked together on an agency rule change that may have had some effect on gun sales. There are so many other things beyond the Camden New Jersey borders that I also want to see how they were affecting people's violence rates.

Daniel: Sure. Yeah. I mean, the way that I always think about—whether you want to talk about Camden, New Jersey or the state of New Jersey as a whole, or the country as a whole—is when you're trying to make the public safer, when you're trying to reduce violence, it's really an ecology of effort, which means that, yeah, there's lots of different stakeholders that are going to come into play.

You know, at the local level, that means police, that means businesses, that means violence interruption and kind of grassroots organization. But all of those local players are then built within the context of the state, right? The state gun laws, the state investment, you know, in terms of the dollars and sense that they put into the community organizations and into the police initiatives. And that is then further supported by federal investments, so groups like Cure for Camden and many, many other community and grassroots-based violence interruption programs throughout the country. They're often supported by grants that come from the Department of Justice, or the National Institute of Justice, the Bureau of Justice Assistance, all of these different types of federal agencies that filter money into those programs. And that was a huge part of the Biden administration's investment is supporting a lot of these kind of groups and organizations, whether they were on the streets or in healthcare, organizations it was supporting them through longer term grant funding.

You cannot talk about effective violence prevention at the local level without also talking about how the state and the federal level props up a lot of the work that is getting done locally. At the same time, you have a lot of different things moving federally over the last couple of years. There was this kind of leadership, in the White House with the Gun Violence Prevention Office. That leadership was responsible for putting more money, not just through grants into violence prevention and interruption, but helping to get money into schools for better mental health care, and mental health screening, implementing what are called red flag laws. These are laws at the state level, to enable people to petition, to get guns removed from the home in the case of a concern about a domestic violence incident, who are a risk for somebody who has the gun that they might hurt themselves or somebody else, right? And so these red flag laws can be lifesaving, if people know about them, if they know how to petition the police or the courts, in order to get those guns out.

So this was another major mechanism that the Biden administration was able to use to help support those kind of things. And at the same time, you also have groups at the CDC and the NIH that do injury prevention research that implement a lot of kind of local public health programs. Whether it's through technical assistance or through funding support, to put the money at the federal level down into the local level. It is really important when thinking about the local shooting that you read on the news in your local city is being affected by all the players in that city, which are affected by the state, where they are, which is affected by the federal context of where the country is as a whole. And I think we've lost sight in just the last few months of how deep those connections go and how important it is to keep that full picture together. Otherwise, things start breaking apart.

Lizzy: You mentioned earlier in this interview talking about the conditions of the pandemic and what specifically about that time period was part of the cause of increased violence rate that we had so much shut down of services. Not even specifically services dedicated to violence intervention, although importantly, those too, but simply the presence of certain types of city level services, access to health care, schools, all of these things that are funded by the federal and state

government, when they were shut down during that time, that created sort of this vacuum that created potentially conditions for violence to flourish.

And you also said, of course, that people working in criminal justice don't like to predict. We'd rather kind of look back at the data and see what things worked, but I cannot help but be struck by the fact that while we can't say that we're about to enter another pandemic, but it does seem like we are creating through policy choices and funding choices, some of the similar conditions.

And I'm wondering, you know, if you'd like to speak upon some of the policy reversals and funding changes that you've seen under the current federal administration that we know haven't really hit that level of informing people's behavior yet. And if we might expect to see potentially changes in violence because of those.

Daniel: Yeah, I mean, I'm really worried and, you know, at the risk of being a bad criminologist, my expectation and my concern is that we are reversing trends. And if we don't right the ship relatively quickly, that we might be looking at reversing a lot of the positive impacts that we've had over the last couple of years in terms of reducing crime in general, but violence in particular, which is where I really spend a lot of my time thinking about.

Over the last few months, really since January when the second Trump administration started, there has been a wholesale reversal on a lot of the things that were done by the Biden administration, in terms of policy and funding. But also to your point, a kind of attack on a lot of our broader systems that I think played a major role in helping us get back to normal after the pandemic, once they were turned back on. You know, a great example of this is just all of the defunding and grant termination that has happened by the Trump administration and DOGE and everyone involved in these different organizations. I had multiple grants terminated, but I know colleagues who have had entire labs shutdown, whole portfolios of grant just basically ended overnight in a nondescript email giving no information other than stop work and the money is cut off.

This doesn't just matter for research, but the Department of Justice canceled hundreds of millions of dollars of grants, as well as the NSF. And much of that money was going to local violence prevention groups. Some of that money was also going to police departments who were doing things related to substance use intervention and other types of criminal justice related work Right now, much of that has not been reversed. So there are groups like Cure for Camden, who had a major grant that was going to move them forward, allow them to expand services, do more work on the street, continue the progress that had been made that we've talked about, and that funding is just gone. And so what they're having to do to scramble and, and decide how they're gonna allocate what money they do have, what they can continue working on, there are all of these questions that are really, really hard to answer.

And so if we pull the funding away for the community organizations, there are fewer people at a lot of police departments (just because people have not come back to them since the pandemic, so employment at police agencies is down in a lot of places), the question then becomes, well, you know, if we don't have the things that have been in place that have really helped us move the needle and bring violence down, are we going to start to see an uptick? And it's just one weekend, and it's only July, but the 4th of July weekend here in Philadelphia and in Chicago and a few other cities around the country was a very, very violent weekend.

Now, 4th of July is notoriously high in violence every single year for reasons we can get into, but it was particularly deadly. And there are a lot of shootings that happened this year and so, we have no idea if that's a harbinger of things to come, but I am concerned about going backwards when really we know what works and we should be moving forward.

Lizzy: Yeah, so it sounds like kind of a twofold potential for moving backwards. We're cutting programs that have been proven to reduce gun violence, and we're also cutting the research that helps us see that and make those programs more efficient and better understand what's working and what's not, and how we can allocate resources effectively to actually do this.

But I think another part of the picture that's really important to get people to understand what's happening and to care about this and to see why research and why the funding of certain programs might matter to them, is you've got people who, if gun violence hasn't affected them directly, it can be hard to see how maybe some of this is affecting your life.

And I'm remembering a conversation I had recently with another SSN member, Nicole Huberfeld. We had her on the podcast to talk about Medicaid, and I asked her a similar question to the one I'm about to ask you, which was just, for folks who aren't covered by Medicaid, that's not their insurer, why does this matter to them? And you know the answer is always how these programs are so much more connected than you know and affect so many other more people's lives than just those that they serve directly. You know, not having Medicaid insure low-income people doesn't make low-income people's health problems go away, it increases wait times for all of us in emergency rooms. It increases the cost of premiums for people who have employer-funded insurance because this is all one health of the nation is all one big pool that we're kind of working on together.

Similarly, for gun violence, I know that part of your research background is not just gun violence prevention, but also looking at how gun violence is having an impact on people beyond perpetrators and victims or people who are living in these explicitly high crime areas—the house that was next to the shooting. You've been looking at the broader impacts of gun violence. Can you tell us about these ripple effects? Like what does it matter that the CDC is no longer shining a light on gun violence in the same way for someone who says, well, “hey, I'm not a gun owner and neither are my neighbors. There wasn't a shooting on my block this week. What's in it for me?”

Daniel: It's a good question. And I've been working on a book about this for the last year and a half, two years or so since I started really thinking through it. But I think that the research is pretty strong here and I think that there's a really strong case to be made that gun violence affects all of us. And what that means, you know, you use the term ripple effects and I think that's apt. Anytime you have a shooting, when the bullet leaves the gun, whether it hits one person or whether it hits many

people, the direct survivors or the direct victims, the people who are shot and live, or the people who are shot or killed, they're just the first people that are affected. The people who know those victims and those survivors are another layer, right? The people who live in communities where shootings happen, especially in places and neighborhoods where shootings happen often, right? These are often disadvantaged neighborhoods in just a few blocks of radius, but these are places in cities that suffered disproportionately really high rates of gun violence as well as things like unemployment, poverty, residential segregation. And then you have this kind of further layer that is harder to research, but absolutely there. The people who are witnessing or hearing about gun violence from afar. Hearing about shootings happening, even if it's not in their own community, with the kind of frequency that we do in the United States, even when shootings are down like they have been the last couple of years. It's still a daily occurrence that we almost have become numb to that most other countries can't even believe is something that we deal with. And so there are all of these different layers of exposure. Anytime there is a shooting and that takes a real toll. It takes a mental, a physical, and a behavioral toll on our health.

So I'll give you a few examples. When somebody is shot and the bullet hits them, that does all kinds of physical damage to them. But if somebody is grieving a person that they know and love that has been shot or killed, or if somebody is repeatedly witnessing or hearing about shooting, it goes beyond those physical wounds and turns into a kind of chronic stress, right? And the anxiety and the stress that comes from that constant exposure, that fear living in places where violence is higher, that kind of mental anguish or stress can turn into what a lot of us are, have become familiar with in terms of just general wellbeing and health talk, is inflammation, right? Stress gets under the skin and it turns into inflammation in our bodies. And inflammation is just your organs and your body becoming more inflamed and becoming attuned to that stress.

But over time, inflammation can result in lots of different health problems, including chronic illness, higher rates of heart disease, diabetes, chronic pain, and for kids, developmentally, that can actually impact changes to their brain. And so there's all these knock on effects of, even if you are not directly hit by a bullet, the

stress and the experience of violence, especially if it's happening over and over again, that changes our minds and our bodies, and our behaviors. It makes us functionally less able, harder to move around. If you live in a violent place, you may not be able to go out and get the exercise that you need because you're afraid to move around your neighborhood. You might not be sleeping well because you are afraid, or because you are literally hearing bullets outside of your windows at night. Again, especially salient for kids. And even makes it harder for socializing and hanging out with other people, and feeling like you are in a safe space. And so the point I'm trying to get across is that there are all these really broad ripple effects, as you mentioned, that come much further beyond, just being the direct victim of violence.

And so that is why, even as there is good news of homicide and gun violence going down over the last couple of years, we are not even close to where we need to be compared to our industrialized peer nations across the world in terms of getting shootings down to a point where we can call ourselves safe, where we can call ourselves healthy, because we are still experiencing these kinds of exposures far more than the average citizen in most other countries that are anything like us.

Lizzy: Yeah, and I'm struck by how your answer balances those two spheres of safety and health. You know, we know that it's sort of an age old debate with gun violence—Is this an issue of crime that needs to be viewed exclusively through a crime lens? People who commit gun violence are criminals who need to be punished and law enforcement as part of what can keep neighborhoods safe versus gun violence is also a health issue. This is affecting people's bodies, and as you've said so eloquently, not just the bodies that have actually been shot or pulled the trigger of a gun, but in so many other ways, this is having these kind of knock on effects that are true health things.

And I thinking of how some of this research and some of this leadership has been based out of the CDC, the Centers for Disease Control and working hand in hand with the DOJ and other places that control law enforcement, that strikes me as a very, it's not saying that one is right and the other is wrong. It's showing how this is

really a multifaceted, complex, blended phenomenon. And it seems that your work kind of lives at the center of that.

And so I'm kind of wondering how you toe that line. You know, when you see all these different pieces interact as a researcher who kind of has a bird's eye view of a lot of it, what works and what doesn't, what things are being maybe suppressed or not paid as much attention to. What's your take on the safety versus health debate and how might you frame that for audiences that you think could actually be helpful?

Daniel: Yeah, this is a good question because I think we're actually living in a really difficult time to talk about gun violence as a public health problem, which is ironic because the field of people who study this in universities and the field of people who do the work on the ground that are doing violence prevention, they’ve called gun violence a public health problem for, for years, if not decades. Right? Longer than I've been doing this work. It was only until 2024, where the attorney, or excuse me, the Surgeon General, actually came out and said it was a public health problem. And then in 2025 that was taken off the website, from the current administration and you can no longer find that, although of course we have it available because it did happen and it was a thing.

But here we are a couple years out of the pandemic. Public health has a public image problem. There was a real lack of trust that got degraded even further as a result of everything that happened during the pandemic. That's a whole other podcast, obviously. But now I think it is the time to explain what we mean when we say that gun violence is a public health problem.

And that doesn't just mean we have to think about preventing it and not just responding to it with the police, right? Because that is often how it was discussed. We call it a public health problem so that we can really focus on prevention and not just responding with a criminal justice response, putting people in prison. We need to talk about public safety. And gun violence is an issue of public safety and public health and collective well-being because if we don't respond to it and prevent it,

then our health gets worse because of all the exposure, because of the ripple effects that I just talked about.

So it's not just something to be dealt with through the public health apparatus, like the CDC, like researchers, like prevention groups. But it should be understood as: If we want Americans if we want their health to be better as a collective, we need to reduce gun violence. If we want to reduce chronic illness, which the current administration has said it is a major part of what its approach is gonna be in Health and Human Services, then gun violence is a key part of doing that. It is not just an issue of crime, it's not just an issue of the public health CDC apparatus, but it actually gets us to where we all want to go, which is being a healthier nation and a healthier group of people. If we want to exercise more and eat better and use less substances and sleep better, reducing gun violence is a pathway towards making that happen.

And so I think, when it comes to reframing, it is the responsibility of researchers and practitioners and people like me to really say, look, this is not about making value judgements. This is not about demonizing people who own guns or people who use guns. It's about establishing a kind of baseline rules of engagement for the best way that we can all agree to make ourselves healthier by reducing gun violence, which I think most people want. And that there are ways that we can do this that are politically feasible, working across the aisle. And when we reframe it that way, I think it's really hard to deny the things that we need to do to get there.

Lizzy: I love that framing and I really, I love that you had the chance to say all that out straight from the horse's mouth, I hope. And for our final question, just to finally build off of that, I try to leave us in a place where, maybe our guests can kind of say something actionable for our listeners.

What does the research and your knowledge drive you to believe is possible to achieve some of the things that we've talked about? So we know if there's going be this lack of infrastructure and a rolling back of some of the good things that helped us, but it seems like there's a lot that folks can do or at least advocate for and better understand maybe at that local community level.

And so I'm interested in, if you don't mind just your prescription a little bit. What does someone who's listening to this podcast, is agreeing with you and saying, “I like these messages and I wanna help make sure that gun violence continues to decline or is kept at bay even against some of these forces that are acting on it.” What might that person do or what might a smart city invest in or a state that still is thinking this way, unencumbered by some of the changes at the federal level, do that you think could matter.

Daniel: Sure at the individual level, I start with this always and people react differently. But it's vote in the way that is going to support the kind of work that needs to get done. So vote for your local politicians all the way up to the federal level for the people that are going to put the money where it needs to go, prioritize gun violence reduction, and make sure that best laws and the most comprehensive laws get put in the state.

I live in New Jersey and we're very lucky to have a really strong infrastructure for public safety. We have an office called the VIVA Office, which is responsible for putting money where it needs to go, and filling the holes where the federal government is kind of lacking. We have really, really strong gun laws and that is due in large part to the politicians that have been able to make those successful, including funding and helping to fund our gun violence research center. You cannot deny that there is a political aspect to this, that if we want to get things done, we have to vote for the right people and get the wrong people out, who are not doing that kind of work.

But there are other things to do beyond just voting I think in kind of advocating for just politicians in particular. We know what works in terms of violence reduction, and it is this combination of policing, of kind of community grassroots organization and health care kind of public health.

And so we need to build a kind of system that allows all of these to play together. And so I think advocating for, if you don't have it in your state, an office of gun violence reduction or gun violence prevention, there are more and more states even in the current climate. New York just passed one very recently that are

building these specific offices. And the reason those are so important is because they can bring advocacy and research and public policymakers kind of all in the same room with all these different stakeholders, to actually get stuff done. The hardest thing to do in any kind of public policy space is to get people to work together for a long period of time to get them over the finish line. And so we need central offices where that can happen to allow these spaces to really flourish over time and get the stuff that needs to get done. So I would say advocating for those kind of offices and the comprehensive gun laws that are necessary to reduce violence in your particular state.

The last thing I would say is these kind of micro interactions between people. We have become very, very polarized where we think about gun control versus gun rights, and that there are only two groups and one group demonizes the other, and it makes a conversation on this stuff really, really difficult.

But what I found in my work here at the Gun Violence Research Center is the best work comes when people actually just talk to each other and realize that on the issue of gun violence, they have way more in common than they would've ever imagined. That a gun owner who has 37 guns all over their home and somebody who really, really wants to make sure that gun safety is a priority, the Venn diagram of their overlap is usually pretty strong. They want safe firearm storage. They want requirements to make sure that people are trained and using their guns correctly. And it's those kind of areas of common ground, when you're just having a conversation with somebody, or if you're kind of getting into an online space and you're talking about these issues, rather than using that demonizing, polarizing language that frankly just makes people angry and turns them off, trying to find that common ground, that is gonna be the way forward, not just in terms of all the stakeholders I've talked about today to move policies, but the everyday people to have the conversations to then work together and advocate for something better in the future.

Lizzy: Thank you so much for that, Dr. Semenza. I'm really, really glad that I got to talk to you today and I think there's a lot for people to take away here, so I appreciate you.

Daniel: Thank you so much for having me.

Lizzy: And thank you for listening. For more on Professor Semenza's work, check out our show notes at scholars.org/nojargon. No Jargon is the podcast of the Scholars Strategy Network, a nationwide organization that connects journalists, policymakers, and civic leaders with America's top researchers to improve policy and strengthen democracy. The producers of our show are Wendy Chow and Dominik Doemer. Our audio engineer is Peter Linnane. If you liked the show, please subscribe and rate us on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your shows. You can give us feedback on X, formerly known as Twitter, @NoJargonPodcast, or at our email address nojargon@scholars.org.