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US Weighs Gun Access as a Civil Rights Focus Under Trump

By Myles Miller

(Bloomberg) -- The US Justice Department's top civil rights official said the division is considering making gun rights a formal priority, in a significant shift from its traditional focus.

Assistant Attorney General Harmeet Dhillon said in an interview with Bloomberg that the department is reviewing whether certain state and local gun control measures infringe on citizens' rights.

"The Second Amendment is one of the constitutional rights we are committed to defending," Dhillon said. "We're adding that to our analysis where states are violating constitutional rights."

She declined to name specific jurisdictions under review but added, "I think it's all pretty obvious where people's rights are being violated."

Cities including New York have maintained some of the nation's strictest gun-permitting laws, despite a Supreme Court decision striking down the state's "proper cause" requirement in 2022. That rule required gun permit applicants to show special justification for self-protection, which the court ruled unconstitutional.

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The consideration of gun rights as a new priority for the Civil Rights Division is already reflected in an investigation launched in March. The government is looking into the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department over delays in issuing concealed-carry permits. The US says the inquiry will examine whether the delays constitute a pattern of Second Amendment violations.

The Sheriff's Department said in a statement in March that it is "committed" to processing the applications "in compliance with state and local laws to promote responsible gun ownership."

Historically, the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division has prioritized voting rights enforcement, housing and employment discrimination cases and police oversight. Notable actions include consent decrees targeting major city police departments and enforcement of federal voting protections. Expanding the division's mandate to cover gun rights would be a major change.

Since Dhillon took office this year, the Justice Department has made campus antisemitism, religious expression and banning transgender women in women's sports central priorities, reflecting goals of President Donald Trump's administration.

--With assistance from [Nacha Cattani](#).

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