

For **personal defense**, **9mm** is **generally the better choice** for most people.

9mm Advantages

- Greater muzzle energy.
- Wider selection of proven defensive ammunition.
- Typically better penetration and expansion performance.
- Larger magazine capacity in similarly sized firearms.
- More common and usually less expensive for practice.

.380 ACP Advantages

- Less recoil in many guns.
- Often available in very small, lightweight pistols that are easy to conceal.
- Can be a good option for people with hand-strength or recoil-management concerns.

The Trade-Off

The biggest benefit of .380 isn't that it's more effective—it's that people may be willing to **carry and shoot a smaller .380 pistol more consistently**. A .380 you carry and shoot well is far better than a 9mm left at home.

My Practical Recommendation

- Choose **9mm** if you can comfortably control it and practice regularly.
- Choose **.380 ACP** if recoil, hand strength, or concealment requirements make a 9mm difficult to use effectively.

Popular modern defensive loads have improved .380 performance, but 9mm remains the standard defensive caliber for most law enforcement agencies and armed citizens because it generally offers a better balance of stopping effectiveness, capacity, recoil, and cost.

If you're deciding between specific pistols (for example, Ruger LCP Max vs. SIG P365, Shield Plus, Glock 42 vs. Glock 43, etc.), I can compare them directly.