

Can Gun Control Reduce Crime?

In the wake of the shootings at Columbine High School in April 1999 and other schools across the country, there has been a chorus calling for more gun-control measures to prevent similar incidents and to control crime in general. Setting aside the obvious emotional response that such tragedies always engender, is it realistic to expect that more gun-control laws will make our schools and streets safe? To answer that question, we need to understand the relationship between gun control and crime control.

The cry for gun control to solve crime problems, although not new, is finding greater acceptance today among Americans. Throughout most of our history, people armed themselves in response to increased danger from criminals, bandits, marauding Indians, invaders (British in 1814 and Pancho Villa in 1916), or abusive government (as in the case of the American Revolution and the Civil War), a move considered normal and rational until recently.

Today, there are numerous well-funded lobby groups, such as Handgun Control, Inc. (renamed the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence in 2001), the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, and Million Mom March, that advocate the disarming of Americans as a means to prevent and reduce crime. These organizations use tragedies such as Columbine to focus public attention and influence public opinion in their favor.

At the opposite end of the gun-control spectrum are such organizations as the National Rifle Association, Jews for the Preservation of Firearms Ownership, and Gun Owners of America, which believe that gun control is an ineffective crime-fighting tool.

Who is right? With the assumption that history is a better guide than good intentions, let's consider the arguments pro and con and draw our own conclusions.

Despite over twenty thousand gun laws at the federal, state, and local levels, gun-control advocates insist that guns are still too readily available. They point to statistics that indicate that violent crime is down since the Brady Law (February 1994) and the assault-weapon ban (September 1994) went into effect. For example, a 1999 study by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice, shows that violent juvenile crime by minors 10-17 years old was down 30 percent between 1994 and 1998, the lowest since 1988.

Gun-control proponents advocate everything from gun-free zones, waiting periods, background checks, limited-capacity magazines, safe-storage regulations, gun registration, owner licensing, and owner-only locks to banning firearms entirely from the hands of everyone but the military and police.

On the surface, it seems logical to conclude that making guns more difficult to obtain will keep them from the hands of criminals. But what does the record of past gun-control measures show?

John Stossel reported correctly in the October 22, 1999, edition of ABC's 20/20 that despite the headlines, schoolyard killings are down 50 percent since 1992. Gun-rights advocates point out that crime began declining two years before the Brady and assault-weapon laws went into effect, because of increased imprisonment rates and improved prosecution, as well as the increase in the number of States passing right to carry laws.

Gun-control advocates look at guns only as a means to harm others even though they are more often used to prevent injury. According to a 1995 study entitled "Armed Resistance to Crime: The Prevalence and Nature of Self-Defense with a Gun" by Gary Kleck and Marc Gertz, published by the Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology at Northwestern University School of Law, **law-abiding citizens use guns to defend themselves against criminals as many as 2.5 million times every year.**

That means that firearms are used 60 times more often to protect the lives of honest citizens than to shoot with criminal intent. Of these defensive shootings, more than 200,000 are by women defending themselves against sexual abuse. About half a million times a year, a citizen carrying a gun away from home uses it in self-defense. Again, according to Kleck and Gertz, "Citizens shoot and kill more criminals than police do every year [2,819 times versus 303]." **Moreover, as George Will pointed out in an article entitled "Are We a Nation of Cowards?" in the November 15, 1993, issue of Newsweek, while police have an error rate of 11 percent when it comes to the accidental shooting of innocent civilians, the armed citizens' error rate is only 2 percent, making them five times safer than police.**

Other studies give similar results. "Guns in America: National Survey on Private Ownership and Use of Firearms," by the Clinton administration's Justice Department shows that between 1.5 and 3 million people in the United States use a firearm to defend themselves and others from criminals each year. A 1986 study by Hart Research Associates puts the upper limit at 3.2 million.

Those studies and others indicate that often the mere presence of a firearm discourages an attacker in a life threatening encounter. Criminologist John Lott from the University of Florida found that more than **98 percent** of the time when people use guns defensively, simply brandishing a firearm is sufficient to cause a criminal to break off an attack. Lott also found that in less than 2 percent of the cases is the gun actually fired.

Guns stop crime

Long before those studies, history records what happened when the Cole Younger gang of eight tried to hold up the bank in Northfield, Minnesota, in 1876. They were recognized by a citizen who sounded the alarm. The gang was shot to pieces by armed civilians as

they exited the bank. Two were shot dead, two wounded, and Cole Younger was captured. Jesse James and his brother Frank escaped, though Jesse was wounded. It wasn't the police but rather armed citizens who thwarted the gang's attempt to rob the bank.

When Pancho Villa attacked Columbus, New Mexico, in March 1916 with more than 600 men, he did so in the early morning, catching everyone by surprise. Although his men damaged a great deal of property, only 17 Americans died, 8 of whom were soldiers from a nearby army post. Because the civilians were well-armed, 94 of Villa's men were killed and an unknown number wounded, despite the surprise attack.

As nationally syndicated columnist Thomas Sowell has pointed out, shooting sprees are usually stopped "by the arrival on the scene of other people with guns," whether police or private individuals.

In 1997, assistant principal Joel Myrick used a gun to stop a violent teen who was shooting up his school in Pearl, Mississippi. He succeeded in preventing a massacre, but was prosecuted for having a gun within 1,000 feet of a school. (Go figure!)

In an article published in the August 3, 1999, edition of the San Antonio Express-News, Sowell recounts an incident that occurred in July 1999 at a shooting range in San Mateo, California, where a man armed with a handgun took three hostages. A note said he was going to kill the hostages and then himself. An employee took a gun from the range and shot the gunman, freeing the hostages.

Sowell, who is African-American, correctly points out that gun-control laws don't control guns, "They disarm potential victims. Why do you think they disarmed slaves? Because if slaves had been armed, that would have been the end of slavery."

Several years before the Columbine shootings, Congress imposed a school-zone gun ban which prohibited firearms within 1,000 feet of any school, under the mistaken belief that potential killers obey gun-control laws. That law didn't deter the two perpetrators of the Columbine massacre, but it did get Joel Myrick in trouble.

Gun control advocates argue that the police are there to protect us from criminals and the military from invaders. But in 1992, the National Guard and police refused to engage hoodlums during the Los Angeles riots, effectively abandoning people to their fate. Nevertheless many Korean merchants successfully used firearms with high-capacity magazines, which Congress has since banned, to fend off rioters. Their stores still stood after the riots.

After passage of the 1968 gun-control act, the number of robberies jumped from 138,000 in 1965 to 376,000 in 1972, while murders committed with guns increased from 5,015 to 10,379 in the same period. According to the Census Bureau, the proportion of cases in which the murder weapon was a firearm rose from 57.2 percent to 65.6 percent.

Gun control and crime

In 1976, Washington, D.C., instituted one of the strictest gun-control laws in the country. The murder rate since that time has risen 134 percent (77.8 per 100,000 population) while the overall rate for the country has declined 2 percent. Washington, D.C., politicians find it easy to blame Virginia's less-stringent gun laws for the D.C. murder rate. Yet Virginia Beach, Virginia's largest city with almost 400,000 residents, has had one of the lowest rates of murder in the country — 4.1 per 100,000.

In New York City, long known for strict regulation of all types of weapons, only 19 percent of the 390 homicides in 1960 involved pistols. By 1972, this proportion had jumped to 49 percent of 1,691. In 1973, according to the New York Times, there were only 28,000 lawfully possessed handguns in the nation's largest city, but police estimated that there were as many as 1.3 million illegal handguns there.

In 1986, Maryland banned small, affordable handguns called Saturday night specials. Within two years, Maryland's murder rate increased by 20 percent, surpassing the national murder rate by 33 percent. Then Maryland passed a one-gun-a-month law. Yet between 1997 and 1998, 600 firearms recovered from crime scenes were traced to Maryland gun stores. Virginia, one of only two other states with a similar law, ranked third as a source of guns used by criminals in other states.

On the other hand, New Hampshire has almost no gun control and its cities are rated among the safest in the country. Across the border in Massachusetts, which has very stringent gun-control laws, cities of comparable size have two to three times as much crime as New Hampshire.

Vermont has the least restrictive gun-control law. It recognizes the right of any Vermonter who has not otherwise been prohibited from owning a firearm to carry concealed weapons without a permit or license. Yet Vermont has one of the lowest crime rates in America, ranking 49 out of 50 in all crimes and 47th in murders.

States which have passed concealed-carry laws have seen their murder rate fall by 8.5 percent, rapes by 5 percent, aggravated assaults by 7 percent and robbery by 3 percent.

Texas is a good example. In the early 1990s, Texas's serious crime rate was 38 percent above the national average. Since then, serious crime in Texas has dropped 50 percent faster than for the nation as a whole. All this happened after passage of a concealed-carry law in 1994.

What about the experience of other countries? In 1997, just 12 months after a new gun law went into effect in Australia, homicides jumped 3.2 percent, armed robberies 44 percent, and assaults 8.6 percent. In the state of Victoria, homicides went up 300 percent.

Before the law was passed, statistics showed a steady decrease in armed robberies with firearms. In 1998, in the state of South Australia, robbery with a firearm increased nearly 60 percent. In 1999, the assault rate in New South Wales rose almost 20 percent.

In England, which has the strictest gun-control laws of the developed nations and which had outlawed all handguns and most firearms, the Sunday Express of June 20, 1999, reported,

“In recent months there have been a frightening number of shootings in Britain’s major cities, despite new laws [Firearms Act of 1997] banning gun ownership after the Dunblane tragedy. Our investigation established that guns are available through means open to any criminally minded individual.”

The Manchester Guardian of January 14, 1999, lamented that their city was being called “Gunchester.” Police sources were quoted as saying that guns had become “almost a fashion accessory” among young criminals. Some gangs are armed with fully automatic weapons. The police risk confronting teenagers on mountain bikes brandishing machine guns. A 1971 Cambridge University study showed that in heavily gun-controlled Great Britain, “the use of firearms in crime was very much less before 1920 when Britain had no controls of any sort.”

In fact, crime has increased so much in Australia, Canada, and Britain, all of which have strict gun-control laws, that the Wall Street Journal has since reported that the crime rate for burglary in America is now substantially lower than in those three countries.

Gun control abroad

In Switzerland, every draft-age male is required to maintain a firearm in his home, yet the Swiss murder rate is only 15 percent of the U.S. rate. An added benefit is that no foreign enemy has invaded Switzerland in centuries. Israel, which has the most heavily armed populace, has a negligible crime rate.

But the record of strict gun regulations in other countries is quite dismal. In 1929, the Soviet Union established gun control. From 1929 to 1953, about 20 million dissidents were rounded up and exterminated. In 1911, Turkey established gun control. From 1915 to 1917, 1.5 million Armenians were exterminated.

Germany established gun control in 1938. and from 1939 to 1945 13 million Jews and others were exterminated.

China established gun control in 1935; from 1948 to 1952, 20 million political dissidents were exterminated.

Guatemala established gun control in 1964, and from 1964 to 1981, 100,000 Mayan Indians were exterminated.

Uganda established gun control in 1970 — from 1971 to 1979, 300,000 people were exterminated.

Cambodia established gun control in 1956, and from 1975 to 1977 one million educated people were exterminated.

In a more recent example, the British Broadcasting Company reported on May 10, 2000, that the United Nations convinced the people of Sierra Leone to turn in their private weapons for UN protection during the recent civil war. The result was disastrous. The people ended up defenseless when UN troops, unable to protect even themselves, were taken hostage by rebels moving on the capital of Freetown.

Estimates run as high as 56 million people who have been exterminated in the 20th century because gun control left them defenseless.

The Columbine shootings

On Thursday, May 27, 1999, Darrell Scott, the father of Rachel Scott, a victim of the Columbine High School shootings in Littleton, Colorado, addressed a subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee. He pointed out that the first recorded act of violence occurred when Cain slew his brother Abel:

“The villain was not the club he used. Neither was it the ... the National Club Association. The true killer was Cain, and the reason for the murder could only be found in Cain’s heart.”

He went on to say,

“In the days that followed the Columbine tragedy, I was amazed at how quickly fingers began to be pointed at groups such as the NRA [National Rifle Association]. I am not a member of the NRA. I am not a hunter. I do not even own a gun. I am not here to represent or defend the NRA because I don’t believe that they are responsible for my daughter’s death. Therefore I do not believe that they need to be defended.”

He added,

“When something as terrible as Columbine’s tragedy occurs, politicians immediately look for a scapegoat such as the NRA. They immediately seek to pass more restrictive laws that erode away our personal and private liberties. We do not need more restrictive laws. Eric and Dylan [perpetrators of the Columbine massacre] would not have been stopped by metal detectors. No amount of gun laws can stop someone who spends months planning this type of massacre.... Political posturing and restrictive legislation are not the answers.”

Crime and gun control

Besides their inherent disregard for laws, criminals are protected from many of the requirements imposed upon law-abiding citizens. The U.S. Supreme ruled in the case of *Hayes v. U.S.* (390 U.S. 85, 1968) that because it would be incriminating, a criminal cannot be required to register a gun or be charged with possession of an unregistered gun. The Court said,

We hold that a proper claim of the constitutional privilege against self-incrimination provides a full defense to prosecution either for failure to register a firearm ... or for possession of an unregistered firearm.

According to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (BATF), 93 percent of the guns used in crimes are not obtained through lawful purchase, so waiting periods, registration, and licensing schemes don't work anyway.

Forensic psychologist Dr. Helen Smith has evaluated 5,000 mentally disturbed adults and children from Harlem to Tennessee. Her book, *The Scarred Heart* (Callisto Publishing Co., Knoxville, Tenn.), is based on her experience interviewing violent children and teenagers and reflects the findings of her national survey of violent and nonviolent youths aged 10-19. She labels many gun-control proposals as simply "feel-good solutions."

In conclusion, gun control is an ineffective tool in fighting crime and is counterproductive to that end because it leaves people vulnerable to criminals. Decades of gun control have done nothing to stop crime, save lives, or make our streets safer. People who use violence are not likely to feel constrained by gun-control laws. (As one theoretical criminal is purported to have said, "Laws is for the law-abiding, and we ain't, so they don't apply to us.")

Gun control and self-defense

People who obey gun-control laws are less able to defend themselves against those who don't obey those same laws. Moreover, there is no reason to believe that a war on guns will rid American society of guns any more than the war on drugs has eradicated drugs from our society. Those who wish to purchase illegal guns will be able to do so on the black market as easily as they purchase drugs.

The consequence of gun control is a society in which violent, anti-social people are armed while peaceful, law-abiding people are disarmed. Legislating gun safety results in greater safety for criminals only. Laws intended to keep guns from criminals end up keeping guns from some of the thousands of people who could use them to defend themselves and others daily, often without having to fire a shot.

Guns, which take innocent lives, also save innocent lives. A person left defenseless in time of need by a gun-control law feels no comfort at the thought that somewhere someone might not be killed because of that law. Registering automobiles and licensing

drivers has not prevented drive-by shootings, road rage, bank robberies, drug deals, or any crime in which automobiles are used. Perhaps the question should be, if you had to defend yourself, would you feel more comfortable with or without a gun?

Common sense dictates that inanimate objects, such as guns, are not responsible for human behavior. We don't hold a match responsible for arson or a camera responsible for pornography. We rightly hold the people who misuse these tools liable. The same should be true for guns. As a judge stated in the 1878 Arkansas case of *Wilson v. State*,

“If cowardly and dishonorable men sometimes shoot unarmed men with army pistols or guns, the evil must be prevented by the penitentiary and gallows, and not by a general deprivation of constitutional privilege.”

If we don't heed the advice of that wise judge, we may find ourselves fulfilling the prophecy of Thomas Jefferson, who said, *“Those who hammer their guns into plows, will plow for those who don't.”*

Crime Statistics in the United States...

National Crime Statistics (According to the FBI)

- One property crime happens every 3.2 seconds.
 - One burglary occurs every 14 seconds.
 - One violent crime occurs every 22.8 seconds.
- One aggravated assault occurs every 38 seconds.
 - One robbery occurs every 1.2 minutes.
 - One forcible rape occurs every 5.9 minutes.
 - One murder occurs every 32 minutes.
- There were over 1.96 million burglaries in 2008.
- There were 89,000 forceable rapes committed in 2008.
- There were 1,382,012 violent crimes committed in 2008.

According to a United States Department of Justice report:

- 38% of assaults & 60% of rapes occur during home invasions.
- 1 of every 5 homes will experience a break-in or home invasion.
- There are over 8,000 home invasions per day in North America.

[Baum et al., (2009). “Stalking Victimization in the United States.”]

- 3.4 million people over the age of 18 are stalked each year in the United States.
 - 2/3 of stalkers pursue their victims at least once per week.
 - 46% of stalking victims fear not knowing what will happen next.
 - 29% of stalking victims fear the stalking will never stop.
- 76% of intimate partner femicide victims have been stalked by their intimate partner.
 - 67% had been physically abused by their intimate partner.
- 89% of femicide victims who had been physically assaulted had

also been stalked in the 12 months before their murder.

- 79% of abused femicide victims reported being stalked during the same period that they were abused.
- 54% of femicide victims reported stalking to police before they were killed by their stalkers. *Restraining Orders have NOT been proven effective in most stalking incidents.*

The Police are NOT obligated to protect you.

The Police investigate crimes AFTER they occur...

On June 27, 2005 in the case of *Castle Rock v. Gonzales*, the Supreme Court found that Jessica Gonzales did NOT have a constitutional right to police protection, even in the presence of a restraining order. By a vote of 7-to-2, the Supreme Court ruled that Gonzales has no right to sue her local police department for failing to protect her and her children from her estranged husband.

You, and you alone, are responsible for your personal safety and that of your family. Life is not fair. You must acquire a level of knowledge, training, skills, and a mindset that will ensure your chance of survivability, "when things go bump in the night."

