



Grass Roots North Carolina

GRNC

Forum for Firearms Education

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Nine Myths of Gun Control

Myth #1 "Guns are only used for killing"

Compared to about 35,000 gun deaths every year, 2.5 million good Americans use guns to protect themselves, their families, and their livelihoods - there are 65 lives protected by guns for every life lost to a gun - five lives are protected per minute - and, of those 2.5 million protective uses of guns, about 1/2 million are believed to have saved lives.

Myth #2 "Guns are dangerous when used for protection"

US Bureau of Justice Statistics show that guns are the safest and most effective means of defense. Using a gun for protection results in fewer injuries to the defender than using any other means of defense and is safer than not resisting at all. The myth that "guns are only used for killing" and the myth that "guns are dangerous when used for protection" melt when exposed to scientific examination and data. The myths persist because they are repeated so frequently and dogmatically that few think to question the myths by examining the mountains of data available. Let us examine the other common myths.

Myth #3 "There is an epidemic of gun violence"

Even their claim of an "epidemic" of violence is false. That claim, like so many other of their claims, has been so often dogmatically repeated that few think to question the claim by checking the FBI and other data. Homicide rates have been stable to slightly declining for decades except for inner city teens and young adults involved with illicit drug trafficking. We have noticed that, if one subtracts the inner city contribution to violence, American homicide rates are lower than in Britain and the other paragons of gun control.

The actual causes of inner city violence are family disruption, media violence, and abject poverty, not gun ownership. In the inner city, poverty is so severe that crime has become a rational career choice for those with no hope of decent job opportunities.

Myth #4 "Guns cause violence"

Homicide

For over twenty years it has been illegal for teens to buy guns and, despite such gun control, the African-American teenage male homicide rate in Washington, DC is 227 per 100,000 - 20 times the US average! The US group for whom legal gun ownership has the highest prevalence middle aged white men, has a homicide rate of less than 7 per 100,000 - about half of the US average.

If the "guns-cause-violence" theory is correct why does Virginia, the alleged "easy purchase" source of all those illegal Washington, DC guns, have a murder rate of 9.3 per 100,000, one ninth of DC's overall homicide rate of 80.6? Why are homicide rates lowest in states with loose gun control (North Dakota 1.1, Maine 1.2, South Dakota 1.7, Idaho 1.8, Iowa 2.0, Montana 2.6) and highest in states and the district with draconian gun controls and bans (District of Columbia 80.6, New York 14.2, California 12.7, Illinois 11.3, Maryland 11.7)? The "guns-cause-violence" and "guns exacerbate violence" theories founder. Again, the causes of inner city violence are family disruption, media violence, and abject poverty, not gun ownership.

Accidents

National Safety Council data show that accidental gun deaths have been falling steadily since the beginning of this century and now hover at an all time low. This means that about 200 tragic accidental gun deaths occur annually, a far cry from the familiar false imagery of "thousands of innocent children."

Suicide

Gun bans result in lower gun suicide rates, but a compensatory increase in suicide from other accessible and lethal means of suicide (hanging, leaping, auto exhaust, etc.). The net result of gun bans? No reduction in total suicide rates. People who are intent in killing themselves find the means to do so. Are other means of suicide so much more politically correct that we should focus on measures that decrease gun suicide, but do nothing to reduce total suicide deaths?

Myth #5 The "Friends and Family" fallacy

It is common for the "public health" advocates of gun bans to claim that most murders are of "friends and family." The medical literature includes many such false claims, that "most [murderers] would be considered law abiding citizens prior to their pulling the trigger" and "most shootings are not committed by felons or mentally ill people, but are acts of passion that are committed using a handgun that is owned for protection."

Not only does the data show that acquaintance and domestic homicide are a minority of homicides, but the FBI's definition of acquaintance and domestic homicide requires only that the murderer knew or was related to the decedent. That dueling drug dealers are acquainted does not make them "friends." Over three-quarters of murderers have long histories of violence against not only their enemies and other "acquaintances," but also against their relatives. Oddly, medical authors have no difficulty recognizing the violent histories of murderers when the topic is not gun control – "A history of violence is the best predictor of violence." The perpetrators of acquaintance and domestic homicide are overwhelmingly vicious aberrant with long histories of violence inflicted upon those close to them. This reality belies the imagery of "friends and family" murdering each other in fits of passion simply because a gun was present "in the home."

Myth #6 "A homeowner is 43 times as likely to be killed or kill a family member as an intruder"

To suggest that science has proven that defending your self or your family with a gun is dangerous, gun prohibitionists repeat Dr. Kellermann's long-discredited claim: "a gun owner is 43 times more likely to kill a family member than an intruder." This fallacy, fabricated using tax dollars, is one of the most misused slogans of the anti-self-defense lobby.

The honest measures of the protective benefits of guns are the lives saved, the injuries prevented, the medical costs saved, and the property protected. Not Kellermann's burglar or rapist body count.

Only 0.1 % (1 in a thousand) of the defensive uses of guns results in the death of the predator. Any study, such as Kellermann's "43 times" fallacy, that only counts bodies, will expectedly underestimate the benefits of gun a thousand-fold. Think for a minute. Would anyone suggest that the only measure of the benefit of law enforcement is the number of people killed by police? Of course not. The honest measures of the benefits of guns are the lives saved, the injuries prevented, the medical costs saved by deaths and injuries averted, and the property protected. 65 lives protected by guns for every life lost to a gun.

Kellermann recently downgraded his estimate to "2.7 times," but he persisted in discredited methodology. He used a method that cannot distinguish between "cause" and "effect." His method would be like finding more diet drinks in the refrigerators of fat people and then concluding that diet drinks "cause" obesity.

Also, he studied groups with high rates of violent criminality, alcoholism, drug addiction, abject poverty, and domestic abuse. From such a poor and violent study group he attempted to generalize his findings to normal homes. Interestingly, when Dr. Kellermann was interviewed he stated that, if his wife were attacked, he would want her to have a gun for protection. Apparently, Dr. Kellermann doesn't even believe his own studies.

Myth #7 "The costs of gun violence are high"

The actual economic cost of medical care for gun violence is approximately \$1.5-billion per year - less than 0.2% of America's \$800-billion annual health care costs. To exaggerate the costs of gun violence, the advocates of gun prohibition routinely include estimates of "lost lifetime earnings" or "years of productive life lost" - assuming that gangsters, drug dealers, and rapists would be as socially productive as teachers, factory workers, and other good Americans - to generate inflated claims of \$20-billion or more in "costs." One recent study went so far as to claim the "costs" of work lost because workers might gossip about gun violence.

What fraction of homicide victims are actually "innocent children" who strayed into gunfire? Far from being pillars of society, it has been noted that more than two-thirds of gun homicide "victims" are drug traffickers or their customers. In one study, 67% of 1990 homicide "victims" had a criminal record, averaging 4 arrests for 11 offenses. These active criminals cost society not only untold human suffering, but also an average economic toll of \$400,000 per criminal per year before apprehension and \$25,000 per criminal per year while in prison. Because the anti self-defense lobby repeatedly forces us to examine the issue of "costs," we are forced to notice that, in cutting their violent "careers" short, the gun deaths of those predators and criminals may actually represent an economic savings to society on the order of \$4.5 billion annually - three times the declared "costs" of guns. Those annual cost savings are only a small fraction of the total economic savings from guns, because the \$4.5 billion does not include the additional savings from innocent lives saved, injuries prevented, medical costs averted, and property protected by guns.

Whether by human or economic measure, we conclude that guns offer a substantial net benefit to our society. Other benefits, such as the feeling of security and self-determination that accompany protective gun ownership, are less easily quantified. There is no competent research that suggests making good citizens' access to guns more difficult (whether by bureaucratic "red tape," taxation, or outright bans) will reduce violence. It is only good citizens who comply with gun laws, so it is only good citizens who are disarmed by gun laws. As evidenced by jurisdictions with the most Draconian gun laws (e.g. New York City, Washington, DC, etc.), disarming these good citizens before violence is reduced causes more harm than good. Disarming these good citizens costs more - not fewer - lives.

Myth #8 Gun control will keep guns “off the street”

Vicious predators that ignore laws against murder, mayhem, and drug trafficking routinely ignore those existent American gun laws. No amount of well-meaning, wishful thinking will cause these criminals to honor additional gun laws.

Advocates of gun control rarely discuss the enforceability of their proposals, an understandable lapse, since even police-state tactics cannot effectively enforce gun bans. As evidence, in Communist China, a country whose human rights record we dare not emulate, 120,000 banned civilian guns were confiscated in one month in 1994.

Existent gun laws impact only those willing to comply with such laws, good people who already honor the laws of common decency. Placing further impediments in the path of good citizens will further disproportionately disarm those good people - especially disarming good, poor people, the people who live in the areas of highest risk.

If “better” data is forthcoming, we are ready to reassess the public policy implications. Until such time, the data suggest that victim disarmament is not a policy that saves lives. What does save lives is allowing adult, mentally-competent, law-abiding citizen access to the safest and most effective means of protection - guns.

Brady I and Brady II

The extremists at Handgun Control Inc. boast that “23,000 potential felons” [emphasis added] were prevented from retail gun purchases in the first month of the Brady Law. Several jurisdictions have reviewed the preliminary Brady Law data which resulted in the initial Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF) overestimated appraisal of the “success” of the Brady Law.

The Virginia State Police, Phoenix Police Department, and other jurisdictions have shown that almost every one of those “potential” felons were not felons or otherwise disqualified from gun ownership. Many were innocents whose names were similar to felons. Misdemeanor traffic convictions, citations for fishing without a license, and failure to license dogs were the types of trivial crimes that resulted in a computer tag that labeled the others as “potential” felons. In transparent “governmentese,” BATF Spokesperson Susan McCarron avers, “we feel [the Brady Law has] been a success, even though we don't have a whole lot of numbers. Anecdotally, we can find some effect.”

Even if the preliminary data had been accurate, that data only showed about 6.3% of retail sales were “possible” felons - consistent with repeated studies showing how few crime guns are obtained in retail transactions. A minuscule number of actual felons have been identified by Brady Law background checks, but the US Department of Justice is unable to identify even one prosecution of those felons. In such circumstance, the minimal expected benefit of the Brady Law diminishes to no benefit at all. The National Institute of Justice has shown that very few crime guns are purchased from gun dealers. 93% of crime guns are obtained as black market, stolen guns, or from similar non-retail sources. Since none of Handgun Control Inc.'s Brady I or Brady II suggestions impact on the source of 93% of crime guns, their symbolic nostrums cannot be expected to do anything to reduce crime or violence.

Residential gun dealers

The press and broadcast media have vilified low-volume gun dealers, pejoratively named “kitchen

table” dealers, yet the claim that such dealers are the source of a “proliferation of guns on our streets” is contradicted by data from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF). Those data show that 43% of gun dealers had no inventory and sold no guns at all. In fact, Congressional testimony before enactment of the Firearms Owner Protection Act of 1986 (FOPA) documented that the large number of low-volume gun dealers is a direct result of BATF policy. Prior to FOPA the BATF prosecuted gun collectors who sold as few as three guns per year at gun shows, claiming that they were unlicensed, and therefore illegal, gun dealers. To avoid such harassment and prosecution, thousands of American gun collectors became, at least on paper, licensed gun dealers. Now the BATF and the anti-self-defense lobby claim BATF does not have the resources to audit the paperwork monster it created. Reducing the number of gun dealers will only ensure that guns are more expensive - unaffordable to the poor who are at greatest risk from violence, ensuring that gun ownership becomes a privilege of only the politically connected and the affluent.

Instead of heaping more onerous restrictions upon good citizens or law-abiding gun dealers who are not the source of crime guns, is it not more reasonable - though admittedly more difficult - to target the real source of crime guns? It is time to admit the futility of attacking the supply of legal guns to interdict the less than 1 % of the American gun stock that is used criminally. Instead, we believe effort should focus on targeting the actual "black market" in stolen guns. It is equally important to reduce the demand for illicit guns and drugs, most particularly by presenting attractive life opportunities and career alternatives to the inner-city youth that are overwhelmingly and disproportionately the perpetrators and victims of violence in our society.

Myth #9 “Citizens are too incompetent to use guns for protection”

Nationally good citizens use guns about seven to ten times as frequently as the police to repel crime and apprehend criminals and they do it with a better safety record than the police. About 11 % of police shootings kill an innocent person - about 2% of shootings by citizens kill an innocent person. The odds of a defensive gun user killing an innocent person are less than 1 in 26,000. Citizens intervening in crime are less likely to be wounded than the police.

We can explain why the civilian record is better than the police, but the simple truth remains - citizens have an excellent record of protecting themselves and their communities and NOT ONE of the fear mongering fantasies of the gun control lobby has come true.

“Treat cars like guns”

Advocates of increased gun restrictions have promoted the automobile model of gun ownership; however, the analogy is selectively and incompletely applied. It is routinely overlooked that no license or registration is needed to "own and operate" any kind of automobile on private property. No proof of “need” is required for automobile registration or drivers' licensure. Once licensed and registered, automobiles may be driven on any public road. Every state's licenses are given "full faith and credit" by other states. There are no waiting periods, background checks, or age restrictions for the purchase of automobiles. It is only their use - and misuse - that is regulated.

Although the toll of motor vehicle tragedies is many times that of guns, no "arsenal permit" equivalent is asked of automobile collectors or motorcycle racing enthusiasts. Neither has anyone suggested that automobile manufacturers be sued when automobiles are frequently misused by criminals in bank robberies, drive-by shootings, and all manner of crime and terrorism. No one has suggested banning motor vehicles because they “might” be used illegally or are capable of exceeding the 55 mph speed limit, even though we know “speed kills.” Who needs a car capable of three times the national speed limit? “But cars have good uses” is the usual response. So too do guns have good uses, the protection of as many as 2.5-million good Americans every year.

Progressive reform

Complete, consistent, and constitutional application of the automobile model of gun ownership could provide a rational solution to the debate and enhance public safety. Reasonable compromise on licensing and training is possible. Where state laws have been reformed to license and train good citizens to carry concealed handguns for protection, violence and homicide have fallen. Even unarmed citizens who abhor guns benefit from such policies because predators cannot determine in advance who is carrying a concealed weapon.

Fear mongering and the gun control lobby

In opposing progressive reforms that restore our rights to self-protection, the anti-self-defense lobby has claimed that reform would cause blood to run in the streets that inconsequential family arguments would turn into murderous incidents, that the economic base of communities would collapse, and that many innocent people would be killed. In Florida, the anti-self-defense lobby claimed that blood would run in the streets of "Dodge City East," the "Gunshine State" --but we do not have to rely on irrational propaganda, imaginative imagery, or political histrionics. We can examine the data.

Data, not histrionics

One-third of Americans live in the 22 progressive states that have reformed laws to allow good citizens to readily protect themselves outside their homes. In those states crime rates are lower for every category of crime indexed by the FBI Uniform Crime Reports. Homicide, assault, and overall violent crime are each 40% lower, armed robbery is 50% lower, rape is 30% lower, and property crimes are 10% lower. The reasonable reform of concealed weapon laws resulted in none of the mayhem prophesied by the anti-self-defense lobby. In fact, the data suggest that, providing they are in the hands of good citizens, more guns "on the street" offer a considerable benefit to society - saving lives, a deterrent to crime, and an adjunct to the concept of community policing.

As of 12/31/94, Florida had issued 188,106 licenses and not one innocent person had been killed or injured by a licensed gun owner in the 6 years post-reform. Of the 188,106 licenses, 17 (0.0001 %) were revoked for misuse of the firearm. Not one of those revocations was associated with any injury whatsoever. In opposing reform, fear is often expressed that "everyone would be packing guns," but, after reform, most states have licensed fewer than 2% (and in no state more than 4%) of qualified citizens.

Notwithstanding gun control extremists' unprophetic histrionics, the observed reality was that crime fell, in part, because vicious predators fear an unpredictable encounter with an armed citizen even more than they fear apprehension by police or fear our timid and porous criminal justice system. It is no mystery why Florida's tourists are targeted by predators - predators are guaranteed that, unlike Florida's citizens, tourists are unarmed.

Those who advocate restricting gun rights often justify their proposals "if it saves only one life!" There have been matched state pair analyses, crime trend studies, and California county-by-county research demonstrating that licensing law-abiding, mentally-competent adults to carry concealed weapons for protection outside their homes saves many lives, so gun prohibitionists should support such reforms, if saving lives is truly their motivation.

The right

Importantly, the proponents of the automobile model of gun ownership fail to note that controls appropriate to a privilege (driving) are inappropriate to a constitutional right (gun ownership and use). Let there be no doubt. The Supreme Court has repeatedly acknowledged an individual right

to keep and bear arms. It is specifically the "weapons of war" - militia weapons - that are protected. The intent of the Second Amendment was to insure that, by guaranteeing the individual right to arms, a citizen militia could always oppose a tyrannical federal government. That the Supreme Court has acknowledged the right, but done little to protect that right, is reminiscent of the sluggishness of the Supreme Court in protecting other civil rights before those rights became politically fashionable. Need we be reminded that it has taken over a century for the Supreme Court to meaningfully protect civil rights guaranteed to African-Americans in the Fourteenth Amendment?

Besides Second Amendment guarantees of the pre-existent right to keep and bear arms, there are, Ninth, Tenth, and Fourteenth Amendment, as well as "natural right" guarantees to self protection.

Since 1980, of thirty-nine law review articles addressing the Supreme Court case law and history of the right to keep and bear arms, thirty-five support the individual right view and only four support the "collective right only" view[39] (and three of these four are authored or co-authored by employees of the anti self defense lobby). One would never guess such a legal and scholarly mismatch from the casual misinterpretations of the right in the medical literature and popular press. The error of the gun prohibitionist view is also evident from the fact that their "collective right only" theory is exclusively an invention of the twentieth century "gun control" debate - a concept of which neither the Founding Fathers nor any pre-1900 case or commentary seems to have had any inkling.

California and Concealed Weapons

California has been studied and we discover that the counties that have the lowest rates of concealed weapon licensees have the highest rates of murder and the counties with the highest rates of concealed license issuance have the lowest rates of murder.

It has also been noted that current California law gives considerable discretion to police chiefs and county sheriffs regarding the issuance of Concealed Weapon Licenses. Particularly in urban jurisdictions, abuse of that discretion is common. The result? In many jurisdictions only the affluent and politically connected are issued such licenses. In California few women and virtually no minorities are so licensed, even though poor minorities are the Californians at greatest risk from violence.

Conclusion

The police do not have a crystal ball. Murderers, rapists, and robbers do not schedule their crimes or notify the police in advance, so the police cannot be where they are needed in time to prevent death and injury. They can only arrive later to count the bodies and, hopefully, apprehend the predators. There have been state-by-state analyses, county-by-county research, and crime trend studies. All the research shows that allowing good citizens to protect themselves outside their homes is a policy that saves lives. The anti-self defense lobby advances many proposals in hopes that it will "save only one life." Reform of concealed carry laws is a policy that saves many lives, so it is a policy that should be supported by the gun control lobby, if saving lives is really their interest.