

Does Gun Control Have Any Effect on Crime?

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### Abstract

Gun control does not have any effect on crime. It is important for some to realize that infringing on the American people's right to bear arms will not deter or stop crime. Criminals do not view whether it is legal or illegal for guns to be owned or carried. They care about committing crimes because that is what they do as criminals. Carrying guns as a means of self-defense is vital to an individual's wellbeing and safety. Studies have shown that gun control in other countries resulted in the opposite of what many believe, that gun control reduces crime. The ability to possess and carry firearms has also proven to be a tool against crime and criminals. Even if gun control laws became stricter, criminals will still find a way to acquire firearms whether through illegal purchases or even gun smuggling. Criminals will always have a means of obtaining firearms, and without the ability to carry or possess guns, innocent people will be affected by criminals. Gun violence is not the issue. What needs to be looked at is the culprit's state of mind or what may be influencing their behavior such as psychological factors and the use of drugs or alcohol. The harsh reality is that it is easy to blame guns as a reason for crime when in all reality it is not gun control that affects the amounts of crimes that are committed, rather it is the individual who is committing the crime that is to blame.

Since the Columbine school shooting in 1999, one of the most debated topics in this country has been gun control. Should the government create policy limiting access and the public's ability to possess guns? If so, what effect will it have on crime in this country? Are weapons the cause of crime and incidents or are the individuals which possess these guns at fault? Many studies have been conducted in comparison to other countries that have stricter gun laws and gun control showing that crime has not dropped with increased gun control measures, nor has it affected a decline in homicide rates. Other reports have shown that countries that have more lenient gun policies have been able to thwart criminals from committing crimes against armed citizens. Enacting strict gun policies would create an environment where crime rates would rise. Guns are only a tool used in killing people and assisting in crimes. The real issue comes down to individuals that have guns that should not. Criminals and their actions are responsible for crimes that involve guns. Crime rates will not drop with stricter gun policies because guns are not the reason for crimes and murder, criminals are and so are the mindsets or mental states that people have when committing crimes. By enforcing stricter gun laws, creating policies, and taking guns out of the hands of law abiding citizens, these measures create a society of defenseless and unprotected citizens. If responsible US citizens maintain the ability to carry guns defensively criminals would be less inclined to commit crimes against them.

There are a great number of Americans who feel that reformed gun control laws will ultimately drop the rate at which crimes and murder occur. But in comparison from a global stand point, there are plenty of countries that have a zero gun tolerance that maintain a much higher crime rate than what exists in the United States.

We have seen that while American gun ownership is quite high, many other developed nations (e.g., Norway, Finland, Germany, France, Switzerland, Greece, Denmark) with

high gun availability yet murder rates as low as, and often much lower than, developed nations where guns are far fewer. For example, Luxembourg, where handguns are totally banned and ownership of any kind of gun is minimal, has a murder rate 10 times higher than gun-dense Norway and Germany where handguns are legal and gun ownership in general is very high (Kates and Mauser, 2006).

Kates and Mauser's research show that even with the presence of gun control measures there will continue to be murders as well as crimes being committed. As of 2002, Kates and Mauser's research show that Russia maintains the highest murder rates of established countries and also has one of the strictest gun control policies. Their research shows that "Russia had a 20.54 per 100,000 murder rate with a 4,000 rate of gun ownership. On the other side, Finland had a 1.98 per 100,000 murder rate with a 39,000 rate of gun ownership" (Kates and Mauser, 2006). It would appear that crime, particularly murder, has thrived in a country that has a strict regulation in regards to guns while a country that has a more lenient policy has fewer homicides. It appears that crime increases when criminals know that their victims are unable to possess firearms to protect themselves.

Gun control is not the issue in this country. The issue stems from the ability of criminals to obtain firearms illegally. Even with a legitimate policy restricting gun sales and possession, criminals will still find ways to get their hands on firearms. Even with policies in the United States requiring background checks for gun purchases, the government will not be able to limit a criminal's ability to attain guns. Koper and Mayo-Wilson's research show how police agencies try to limit the amount of guns that are transferred into a criminal's hand and they state that activities include "disrupting the illegal supply of firearms through investigation of illicit gun trafficking, gun theft, and suspicious activities by retail gun dealers" (Koper and Mayo-Wilson,

2006, p. 228). The evidence found shows that even with gun control, criminals will continue to find ways to obtain guns. No matter the laws or policies put in place, guns will always be available due to trafficking and illegal purchases. Criminals do not care about laws. In Mexico, firearms possession is almost non-existent as an average citizen. Policies are so strict that a small amount of the population in Mexico is able to possess guns. However, cartels still manage to obtain firearms, most of which are classified as “assault rifles,” even with such strict gun policies in place. The same holds true for criminals in America. Criminals will find ways to purchase firearms illegally.

Although buyers can legally obtain firearms in the United States, many weapons are also available from illegal, unregulated sources. In actuality, it appears that few federally-licensed dealers engage in firearm trafficking, suggesting that many “crime guns” or those suspected to have been used in a crime, come from other, illicit sources (Mehalko, 2012).

When thinking about controlling guns in this country, there should be a focus more geared towards keeping the guns out of the hands of the individuals who are unauthorized to possess them. There needs to be more done to keep firearms out of the hands of convicted felons rather than disarming the population that use them as a form of personal or home defense.

There are ways to combat criminals and their attempts at committing crimes against the people of this country. Citizens that have the ability to legally possess firearms either through concealed carry practices or open carry policies could thwart or deter criminals from committing crimes against people and establishments. Crime rates would drop due to a criminal’s thought process and how they view themselves and their success rate of committing crimes. A criminal would have to second guess robbing somebody with knowledge that that individual may have a

weapon of their own and a “would-be” victim could feasibly defend themselves. A criminal would have to look at the possible outcome of trying to commit a crime against someone with a gun because it creates a dilemma. “Can I commit this crime without being hurt myself” would become part of the criminals thought process.

Using cross sectional, time-series data for U.S. counties from 1977 to 1992, we find that allowing citizens to carry concealed weapons deters violent crimes and it appears to produce no increase in accidental deaths. If those states which did not have right-to-carry concealed gun provisions had adopted them in 1992, approximately 1,570 murders; 4,177 rapes; and over 60,000 aggravate assaults would have been avoided yearly (Lott and Mustard, 1997).

What is clearly shown through this study is that when law abiding citizens are armed and able to defend them self and their loved ones, crime is deterred and to a certain extent controlled. With that being said, how many lives are actually being saved each year due to law-abiding citizens carrying a firearm for self-defense? One study suggested “other surveys imply that private firearms may be used in self-defense up to two and a half million times each year, with 400,000 of these defenders believing that using the gun “almost certainly” saved a life”(Lott and Mustard, 1997). The only thing that is going to stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun. A criminal is less likely to attack someone if they know that person is carrying a gun themselves.

Guns do not commit murder and commit crimes, individuals do. Guns amongst other things such as knives, bats, and other everyday items are merely tools. For an individual to say an item is to blame for crime or murder is negligent. Instead, focus on the person and the mindset that they may be in, or in a shorter sense, the “psychological” status of the ones committing the crime. In Australia, a country in which firearms are no longer allowed to the public, a study was

conducted and findings indicated that “85% of firearm deaths are triggered by distress, as opposed to crime” (Dudley, Cantor, and de Moore, 1996) The study conducted by Dudley and de Moore showed how psychiatric issues, mental disorders, and history of substance abuse play a prominent role in misuse of firearms which could create a bias towards guns and ownership. Stricter gun laws such as no-carry policies are not the answer, instead the system in which is used to conduct the background check should have requirements to monitor people trying to obtain guns with a history of psychological disorders and/or chemical/substance abuse. As Dudley, Cantor, and de Moore’s research shows,

If firearm owners are representative of the community, then 15-20% suffer from a psychiatric disorder at any time. While a modest increase in risk of firearms misuse exists for this group, especially those with a history of substance abuse or violence, concern also arises regarding those with mental disorders who access firearms because owners have not secured them. No uniform definition or way of verifying self-reports exists for gun license applicants regarding these issues (Dudley, Cantor, and de Moore, 1996).

Guns do not create crime. Guns are tools that can be improperly used by individuals that show signs of psychological issues and/or disorders that commit crimes. Once again, gun control is not the issue. The issue comes down to who has a gun that should not. Is it logical to put the blame on a vehicle used in a fatal car accident, or the driver that was impaired by alcohol? Is it logical to blame someone being stabbed with a steak knife on the tool that was used or the individual who used it? Focus is too often centered on the tool that was used rather than the state of mind the individual who committed the crime may be in.

Should an individual's right of self-defense be infringed because of certain incidents that occur by a select few? In the day we live in, mass shootings have occurred. These situations have driven the anti-gun train. As heinous and horrible as these situations are, gun control would do little if anything to prevent them. The individuals that commit these crimes and actions are determined to commit these acts in whatever capacity that they can. Kleck, (1999) argues that "more broadly, mass killings and other premeditated murders are the very worst examples for buttressing a case in favor of gun control because they involve the perpetrators most strongly motivated and able to evade the controls." By taking away the right to bear arms, the victims in these mass murders never had a fighting chance. If anybody had a gun on them in these situations, would there have been mass casualties? Possibly, but all things aside, an armed individual with malicious intent is only going to be stopped by another armed person looking to protect others.

The debate over gun control will be ongoing and at the head of this debate will always be the effect of crime in regards to guns. What needs to be considered is not how to control guns but how to stop the criminals from obtaining them. Psychopaths and criminals are going to find ways to wreak havoc on society and without law-abiding citizens that are armed, who is going to stop them? As evidence suggests, gun control does not stop crime. Criminals, by their nature, will always find a way to harm people and commit crimes whether guns are a factor or not. Countries with the strictest gun policies and laws still have some of the highest rates of crime while those that have the most lenient policies see lower rates of crime. If you look at our country, the cities with the highest crime rates are cities like Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles. These cities have something in common. They have the strictest gun policies in the nation. It could be that criminals in these cities know that citizens that are residing in these areas are just living their

lives and cannot protect themselves by possessing firearms. This creates innocent and helpless targets. In closing think about this question. Is gun control going to stop a criminal from breaking the law, committing crimes, or even committing murder? Gun control will not reduce crime. As proof from other countries' strict gun laws has shown, gun control does not affect crime.

Criminals thrive on the unarmed and with stricter gun laws the criminal's job becomes easier.

Policies and laws that exist in other countries show that crime is going to be committed no matter what gun laws exist. It could also be argued that the countries that have applied strict gun laws are less effective against criminals causing their crime rates to skyrocket. Countries with more lenient gun control policies have shown a more positive impact on crime rates. Guns do not kill people, bad people with guns do. Crimes will always occur, with or without the use of guns.

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