The Accessibility of Guns Leads to Gun Crime

*Guns and Crime, 2012*

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The question often arises: Would Americans be safer if more people owned guns? The answer is a definite No. More guns just means more gun crime and deaths. After all, firearm injuries are the second leading cause of injury death in the United States, and the rate of gun-related deaths among US children under the age of fifteen is nearly twelve times higher than that among children in twenty-five other industrialized nations combined. Furthermore, there is no credible evidence that permitting citizens to carry concealed firearms reduces crime. There is, however, evidence that permissive concealed carry laws may actually increase crime. It should be obvious that easy access to deadly weapons is responsible for the deaths of too many Americans.

Let's be honest about the purpose of a firearm. It is not a decoration for the wall of your den or a trinket to display for your friends. It is a device created for the sole purpose of killing a person or an animal. Let's put aside the matter of whether you own a rifle for use in hunting animals. What remains are handguns. Handguns are designed specifically to kill people with maximum efficiency. So here's the critical question Americans need to ask: Are we, our loved ones and our community safer if we and our neighbors own handguns? Let's try to answer that question in a FAQ [frequently asked questions] format.

*How common are deaths and injuries from handguns in America?*

Firearm injuries are the second leading cause of injury death in the U.S., and have killed more than 28,000 Americans each year since 1972.

In a single year, 2007, guns took the lives of 31,224 Americans in homicides, suicides and accidental shootings. This is more than 85 gun-related deaths a day—three deaths every hour of every day. Furthermore, about 70,000 Americans were treated in hospital emergency rooms for non-fatal gunshot wounds in 2007. Guns were the third leading cause of injury related deaths nationwide in 2007 following motor vehicle accidents and poisoning.

In the first seven years of the Iraq War, 4,400 soldiers were killed. Almost as many civilians are killed with guns in the U.S. every month.

*Well, don't other countries have a problem similar to ours?*

The United States has by far the highest rate of gun deaths—murders, suicides and accidents—among the world's 36 richest nations.

U.S. homicide rates are 6.9 times higher than rates in 22 other populous high-income countries combined, despite similar non-lethal crime and violence rates. The firearm homicide rate in the U.S. is 19.5 times higher.

The overall firearm-related death rate among U.S. children under the age of 15 is nearly 12 times higher than that among children in 25 other industrialized nations combined.
All right, I understand that there is a human cost to gun violence, but is there also an economic cost that affects me as a taxpayer?

Firearm-related deaths and injuries result in estimated medical costs of $2.3 billion each year—half of which are borne by U.S. taxpayers.

Regions and states with higher rates of gun ownership have significantly greater rates of homicide.

Once all the direct and indirect medical, legal and societal costs are factored together, the annual cost of gun violence in America amounts to $100 billion.

I have heard that if the majority of people own guns, criminals would be frightened and crimes would be prevented. So, if there are more gun owners in my state than in surrounding states, members of my family should be safer. Is this true?

Regions and states with higher rates of gun ownership have significantly greater rates of homicide than states with lower rates of gun ownership.

Gun death rates are seven times higher in the states with the highest gun ownership compared with states with the lowest household gun ownership.

States with the highest levels of gun ownership have 114 percent higher firearm murder rates and 60 percent higher total homicide rates than states with the lowest gun ownership.

My sister is divorcing her husband and they are fighting over custody of the kids. Her husband owns a handgun. Is she in greater danger from domestic violence because of the gun?

Abused women are five times more likely to be killed by their abuser if the abuser owns a firearm.

Firearms were used to kill more than two-thirds of spouse and ex-spouse homicide victims between 1990 and 2005.

I worry about my kids, too. Are they in greater danger because we have a gun in our house? Their friends’ parents also own guns. Should I worry about that, too?

Guns cause the death of 20 children and young adults (24 years of age and under) each day in the U.S. Children and young adults (24 years of age and under) suffer over 41 percent of all firearm deaths and non-fatal injuries.

From 2001 through 2007, over 4,900 people in the United States died from unintentional shootings. Over 1,750 victims of unintentional shootings between 2001 and 2007 were under 25 years of age.

The firearm-related suicide rate for children between the ages of 5 and 14 years old in the United States is
nearly 11 times higher than that in 25 other developed countries.

A U.S. Secret Service study of 37 school shootings in 26 states found that in nearly two-thirds of the incidents, the attacker got the gun from his or her own home or that of a relative.

But people say having a gun in our house is necessary for protection. If someone breaks into our house, shouldn't we have a gun to defend ourselves? And, if we shoot someone like that, isn't it a "justifiable homicide" rather than a crime? Surely having a gun in our house makes us safer?

A gun kept in the home is 22 times more likely to be used in an unintentional shooting, a criminal assault or homicide, or an attempted or completed suicide than to be used to injure or kill in self defense. Rather than conferring protection, guns in the home are associated with three times the risk of homicide by a family member or intimate acquaintance.

There is no credible statistical evidence that permissive concealed carry laws reduce crime.

There were 13,636 Americans who were murdered in 2009. Of this, only 215 were killed by firearms in shootings by private citizens that law enforcement determined were justifiable homicide.

From 2001 through 2007, over 4,900 people in the United States died from unintentional shootings. Over 1,750 victims of unintentional shootings between 2001 and 2007 were under 25 years of age.

Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords [was shot] and a federal judge [was] murdered in Tucson, Ariz., [January 2011] by an armed psychopath. Wouldn't it have been better if bystanders had concealed weapons to kill him before he was able to fire so many bullets?

Permitting the carrying of concealed firearms does not appear to reduce crimes. There is no credible statistical evidence that permissive concealed carry laws reduce crime. There is evidence that permissive concealed carry laws generally will increase crime.

Isn't it true that gun dealers must do background checks to prevent selling guns to known criminals and people with psychiatric illnesses?

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms reviewed over 1,500 of its investigations and concluded that gun shows are a "major trafficking channel," associated with approximately 26,000 firearms diverted from legal to illegal commerce. Gun shows rank second to corrupt dealers as a source for illegally trafficked firearms.

It is estimated that over 40 percent of gun acquisitions occur in the secondary market. That means that they happen without any background check whatsoever.

There is reason to feel optimistic that good sense may prevail, and Americans will finally recover from their long, unwholesome romance with guns. The NRA [National Rifle Association] promoted notion that "packing heat" is as American as apple pie is coming under attack. Experts are questioning the wisdom of
easy access to deadly weapons that has caused the death and misery of so many Americans. It is becoming obvious that we need the same restrictions on gun ownership as exist in almost every other civilized country.

Let’s conclude with a story that you might very well read in the *Wheeling News-Register*, Feb. 24, 2015: The NRA has lobbied mightily and has finally convinced the West Virginia State Legislature to pass an unrestricted concealed carry law; most citizens now carry their pistols every day for self-defense. It is the final round of the Big East Basketball tournament in Morgantown pitting WVU [West Virginia University] against its closest rival, Pittsburgh. In the stands, a drunken student, enraged by a taunt he has heard, draws his weapon and fires several shots. Hundreds in the stands duck for cover while reaching for their loaded weapons. Dozens rise up and start firing at the person they believe to be the shooter. A few guess right and bring him down. Many others guess wrong, and shoot instead the first person they see with gun in hand. In the ensuing crossfire, several students die and many others are injured.

**Further Readings**

**Books**
- Brian Doherty *Gun Control on Trial: Inside the Supreme Court Battle Over the Second Amendment*. Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 2008.
- Mark Pogrebin, N. Prabha Unnithan, Paul Stretesky *Guns, Violence, and Criminal Behavior: The


Periodicals and Internet Sources


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