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Can Gun Control Reduce Crime? Part 2

by Benedict D. LaRosa

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 an unknown prophet who said, "Those who hammer their guns into plows, will plow for those who don't."

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