



11350 Random Hills Road, Suite 800, Fairfax, Virginia 22030 Phone (703) 934-6101 Fax (703) 352-3678

fff@fff.org www.fff.org

Gun Control Misses the Target **by Scott McPherson**

In the aftermath of the Washington-area sniper killings, editorial pages and ambitious politicians alike are clamoring for more gun-control laws. This is hardly surprising, given that the professed connection between guns and crime is practically an article of faith.

But what if guns really have nothing to do with violent crime? What if even the most restrictive gun-control measures don't work, or even make things worse? The facts suggest that may be closer to the mark.

Gun-control proponents have long pointed to countries such as England as evidence for their claims. Look across the Atlantic, they say. England doesn't have the crime and violence that the United States has. Surely this must be related to the low availability of firearms. America should learn from its more-civilized cousins.

However, not only does that assertion now appear to be a misfire, but it purposely avoids comparisons that show the "guns cause crime" fallacy for what it is. It also keeps Americans from pursuing real solutions to the crime problem. This mixture certainly provides firepower for the gun-control agenda, but it will continue to make for terrible public policy.

Let us look at England then. Since the British government banned virtually all private gun ownership in 1997, crime has skyrocketed. Violent crime has more than doubled in the last five years. England's overall crime rate actually leads Western nations — including the United States.

Even the UK's historically low homicide rate is under fire. While violent crime has been falling for the past 10 years in America, murders in England are increasing. Twenty years ago there were 8.7 homicides in the United States for every homicide in England, a startling disparity that gun-

control supporters never failed to celebrate as proof of their cause. Today, that ratio has dropped and has been as low as 3.5 to 1, but the gun-control movement is strangely silent about that.

Something else gun-control zealots conveniently omit from their discussion of crime and violence is Switzerland. In that peaceful little mountain country the average household contains three guns, comparable to the situation in Texas. From the age of 20, Swiss males are required to keep an assault rifle for purposes of national defense. The Swiss government actually sells surplus military rifles to the citizenry, and a permit to carry a concealed handgun is easily obtained. Despite that nation's "love affair" with firearms, Switzerland enjoys the lowest crime rate in Europe.

If guns cause crime, someone forgot to tell the Swiss. If gun control is the answer to violence, someone forgot to tell the English.

More guns, less crime

Back on this side of the pond, towns such as Kennesaw, Georgia, put gun-control arguments to the test, and again they are shown to be of a very low caliber. For the past 20 years, residents of this Atlanta suburb have been required by law to keep a gun in their home. The result is two decades of steadily falling crime rates, over and above national and state trends.

The research of award-winning criminologist Gary Kleck suggests that as many as 2.5 million times per year — about 5,000 times per day — Americans use guns to defend themselves. In fact, private citizens kill more felons than the police. Yale Law School senior research scholar John Lott showed in his book, *More Guns, Less Crime*, that states allowing their citizens to carry concealed handguns have lower rates of murder, rape, and assault.

The truth is, armed citizens discourage crime, and disarmed people are easy prey for violent thugs. Instead of promoting the same failed paradigm of the last 30 years, perhaps it would be wiser for gun-control advocates to investigate other reasons for America's crime "epidemic." A likely candidate is our highly destructive war on drugs, which breeds a large and vicious criminal class, misdirects police resources, and fills prisons with nonviolent drug users while returning violent criminals to the streets.

If we have learned anything both from our own experiences and from events overseas, it is that the only effect guns have on crime is to make people worse off when they aren't around. Gun control may provide catchy sound bites at election time, but it misses the target by a long shot.

Scott McPherson is a policy advisor at The Future of Freedom Foundation.

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