

## The Seven Myths of Gun Control

*Richard Poe*

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Does the press have an anti-gun bias? Yes, says Brent Bozell, chairman of the Media Research Center. A study by the Center found that television news stories calling for stricter gun laws outnumbered newscasts opposing such laws by a ratio of 10 to 1.

In other words, we are hearing only one side of the story. No wonder so few Americans are equipped to debate the issue of guns intelligently.

"Where the press is free, and every man able to read, all is safe," wrote Thomas Jefferson in 1816. But when the press aligns itself with special interests - such as the anti-gun lobby - critical information is censored, and liberty itself hangs in the balance. "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free ... it expects what never was and never will be ..." warned Jefferson.

Ignorance about guns and gun rights has reached pandemic proportions. Children are not taught the history or meaning of the Second Amendment in school, nor do they learn later as adults. Most of what Americans think they know about guns is false. The anti-gun hysteria now sweeping our nation draws on several deeply erroneous assumptions. I call them the Seven Myths of Gun Control. They are:

### **Myth #1 -- Guns increase violent crime.**

Just the opposite is true. Experts have found that criminals tend to avoid physical confrontation, when they fear their victims may be armed. But when strict

gun laws are imposed, criminals become bolder and more violent, confident that their victims are defenseless.

Australians learned this lesson the hard way. When a madman slaughtered 35 people at a Tasmanian resort in 1996, the government responded by banning most firearms. More than 640,000 guns were seized from law-abiding citizens.

The result was a sharp increase in violent crime. In the two years following the gun ban, armed robberies rose by 73 percent, unarmed robberies by 28 percent, kidnappings by 38 percent, assaults by 17 percent and manslaughter by 29 percent, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

The same thing happened in England. The government cracked down on guns following a 1996 massacre of schoolchildren in Scotland. A terrifying crime wave ensued. The U.S. Department of Justice announced, in 1998, that the rate of muggings in England had surpassed that in the U.S. by 40 percent. Assault and burglary rates were found to be almost 100 percent higher in England than in the United States.

In his book More Guns, Less Crime, Yale Law School economist John R. Lott points out that most criminals, in America, choose empty houses to burglarize. They avoid late-night break-ins, because, as many convicts have explained to researchers, "that's the way to get shot." Hot burglaries - in which the criminal enters while people are home - account for only 13 percent of all U.S. burglaries.

But in countries with strict gun control, such as England and Canada, criminals enter houses at will, without worrying whether anyone is home. The hot burglary rate in those countries is nearly 50 percent.

After studying 18 years' worth of crime statistics from around the United States, Lott concluded that "states experiencing the greatest reductions in crime are also the ones with the fastest growing percentages of gun ownership."

On average, Lott found that violent crime dropped by 4 percent for each 1 percent increase in gun ownership. The most dramatic improvement came in states that allowed citizens to carry concealed handguns. States enacting such laws between 1977 and 1994 experienced an average 10 percent reduction in murders and a 4.4 percent drop in overall violent crime during that period.

### **Myth #2 -- Pulling a gun on a criminal endangers you more than the criminal.**

Gun bashers claim that if you draw a gun during a mugging, the mugger will probably take it away from you. But the facts say otherwise. According to surveys by Gallup, the *Los Angeles Times* and other national polling organizations, Americans use guns to defend themselves between 760,000 and 3.6 million times each year. In 98 percent of those cases, simply brandishing the gun was enough to scare off the attacker.

### **Myth #3 -- Guns pose a special threat to children.**

Gun haters argue that firearms pose a unique danger to children. But statistics do not support this claim. Only 200 children - aged 14 and younger - died from gun accidents in 1995. That same year, 2,900 children died in car crashes, 950 drowned and 1,000 died of burns. "More children die in bicycle accidents each year than die from all types of firearm accidents," Lott observes. Yet, there is no national outcry to bar children from using bicycles.

### **Myth #4 -- The Second Amendment applies only to militiamen.**

Gun prohibitionists argue that the Second Amendment confers a right to bear arms only on duly enrolled members of a state militia. But that is not what the document says. It specifically grants the right to keep and bear arms to "the people".

"The phrase `the people' meant the same thing in the Second Amendment as it did in the First, Fourth, Ninth and Tenth Amendments -- that is, each and every free person," writes constitutional scholar Stephen Halbrook in his book That Every Man Be Armed.

Even Harvard law professor Laurence Tribe - a gun-control advocate known for his liberal views - admitted, in the 1999 edition of his book American Constitutional Law, that the Second Amendment confers an individual right on U.S. citizens to "possess and use firearms in the defense of themselves and their homes."

### **Myth #5 -- The Second Amendment is an obsolete relic of the frontier era.**

Gun bashers say that the Second Amendment has outlived its usefulness. They argue that pioneers needed guns to fight Indians, redcoats and grizzly bears. But we don't face such threats today. So why do we need guns?

In fact, the framers of the Constitution were not greatly concerned about Indians, redcoats and grizzly bears. But they worried deeply about the possibility that some future government might strip the people of their rights. The best insurance against this, they believed, was to make sure that the people were armed.

"The supreme power in America cannot enforce unjust laws by the sword," said Noah Webster, "because the whole body of the people are armed..."

Guns will become superfluous to Americans only when

our lives and liberty no longer need defending. That time does not appear to be coming soon.

**Myth #6 -- We should treat guns the same way we treat cars, requiring licenses for all users.**

When you apply for a firearms license, the government may or may not grant it. And, having granted it, the government may later choose to revoke it. What that means is that you never really had a right to bear arms, in the first place. A right, by definition, cannot be withheld or denied. As Thomas Jefferson put it, "I have a right to nothing, which another has a right to take away."

Consider the right to freedom of religion. Like all freedoms, religious liberty creates problems. It allows murderous fanatics such as Jim Jones and Marshall Applewhite to create killer cults like the Peoples' Temple and Heaven's Gate.

A government licensing program might prevent such tragedies. Anyone starting a church could be subjected to psychiatric screening, his beliefs and doctrines vetted by a board of experts. Cult killings would likely diminish. But freedom of worship would be dead.

How about freedom of speech? Think of all the pornography, hate speech and conspiracy theories that could be eliminated by denying "speech licenses" to undesirable web geeks. Hillary Clinton has actually proposed something along these lines. Arguing that cyberspace is too free, she suggests that the Internet needs an "editing or gate keeping function" to control its content.

But, aside from Hillary, most Americans understand that requiring licenses for the exercise of basic constitutional liberties is a bad idea.

There is no doubt that life is more orderly in a police state. But our country was founded on the principle that freedom takes precedence over order. As Thomas Jefferson put it, "I would rather be exposed to the inconveniences attending too much liberty, than those attending too small a degree of it."

**Myth #7 -- Reasonable gun-control measures are no threat to law-abiding gun owners.**

Anti-gun activists argue that reasonable gun-control measures, such as waiting periods, one-gun-a-month limits, trigger locks, "smart" technology and so on, do not threaten the rights of legitimate gun owners.

But this argument presumes that guns will only be used for sport. And, indeed, most gun-control activists recognize no other legitimate use for firearms. "To me, the only reason for guns in civilian hands is for sporting purposes," says Sarah Brady, chairman and founder of Handgun Control Inc.

Perhaps for that reason, many gun-control measures now on the table seriously impede the use of firearms for self-defense.

Take "smart" guns. They only work when the user wears a special ring or wristband with a magnetic actuator or radio transponder. Let's say you wake up in the dead of night. Your husband is on a business trip, and there's a serial rapist standing in your bedroom. This is not the time to be fumbling around in the dark, undoing the trigger lock and trying to remember where your husband put the transponder.

Waiting periods can also be deadly. News reports show that many women have been killed, because the Brady Law prevented them from obtaining guns immediately, when they were threatened by stalkers.

As for one-gun-a-month rules, these prevent people from stocking up quickly on arms during times of emergency. When riots or natural disasters strike, looting and brigandage present a real danger. People have a right, in such situations, to stockpile arms for their families, neighbors and employees.

None of these arguments will persuade the gun haters, of course. Their crusade is driven by ideology, not reason.

But fair-minded Americans should seek out the facts. Our freedom was bought at too high a price to let it slip away through ignorance and apathy.

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