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Twelve facts about guns and mass shootings in the United States

Posted by Ezra Klein on December 14, 2012 at 2:07 pm

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When we first collected much of this data, it was after the Aurora, Colo. shootings, and the air was thick with calls to avoid “politicizing” the tragedy. That is code, essentially, for “don’t talk about reforming our gun control laws.”

Let’s be clear: That is a form of politicization. When political actors construct a political argument that threatens political consequences if other political actors pursue a certain political outcome, that is, almost by definition, a politicization of the issue. It’s just a form of politicization favoring those who prefer the status quo to stricter gun control laws.

Since then, there have been more horrible, high-profile shootings. Jovan Belcher, a linebacker for the Kansas City Chiefs, took his girlfriend’s life and then his own. In Oregon, Jacob Tyler Roberts entered a mall holding a semi-automatic rifle and yelling “I am the shooter.” And, in Connecticut, at least 27 are dead — including 18 children — after a man opened fire at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

If roads were collapsing all across the United States, killing dozens of drivers, we would surely see that as a moment to talk about what we could do to keep roads from collapsing. If terrorists were detonating bombs in port after port, you can be sure Congress would be working to upgrade the nation’s security measures. If a plague was ripping through communities, public-health officials would be working feverishly to contain it.

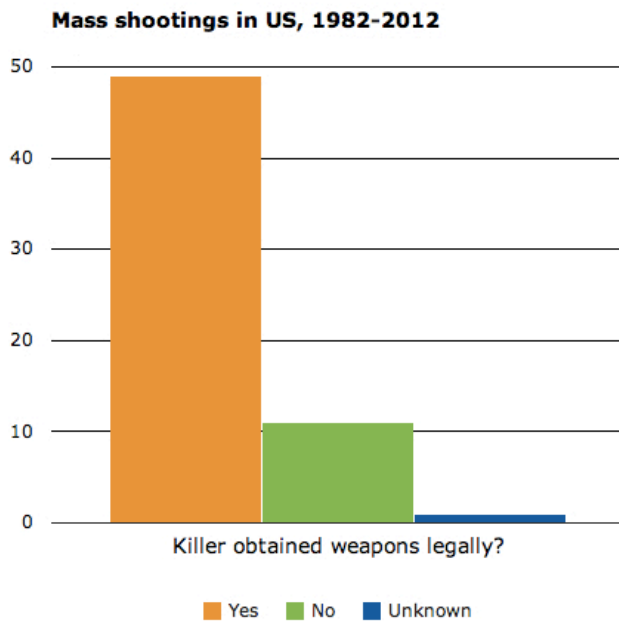
Only with gun violence do we respond to repeated tragedies by saying that mourning is acceptable but discussing how to prevent more tragedies is not. “Too soon,” howl supporters of loose gun laws. But as others have observed, talking about how to stop mass shootings in the aftermath of a string of mass shootings isn’t “too soon.” It’s much too late.

What follows here isn’t a policy agenda. It’s simply a set of facts — many of which complicate a search for easy answers — that should inform the discussion that we desperately need to have.

1. Shooting sprees are not rare in the United States.

Mother Jones has tracked and mapped every shooting spree in the last three decades. “Since

1982, there have been at least 61 mass murders carried out with firearms across the country, with the killings unfolding in 30 states from Massachusetts to Hawaii,” they found. And in most cases, the killers had obtained their weapons legally:



2. 15 of the 25 worst mass shootings in the last 50 years took place in the United States.

Time has the full list [here](#). In second place is Finland, with two entries.

3. Lots of guns don't necessarily mean lots of shootings, as you can see in Israel and Switzerland.*

As David Lamp [writes](#) at Cato, “In Israel and Switzerland, for example, a license to possess guns is available on demand to every law-abiding adult, and guns are easily obtainable in both nations. Both countries also allow widespread carrying of concealed firearms, and yet, admits Dr. Arthur Kellerman, one of the foremost medical advocates of gun control, Switzerland and Israel ‘have rates of homicide that are low despite rates of home firearm ownership that are at least as high as those in the United States.’”

**Correction: The info is out-of-date, if not completely wrong. Israel and Switzerland have tightened their gun laws substantially, and now pursue an entirely different approach than the United States. More details [here](#). I apologize for the error.*

4. Of the 11 deadliest shootings in the US, five have happened from 2007 onward.

That doesn't include Friday's shooting in Sandy Hook, Connecticut. The AP put the early [reported](#) death toll at 27, which would make it the second-deadliest mass shooting in US history.

5. America is an unusually violent country. But we're not as violent as we used to be.

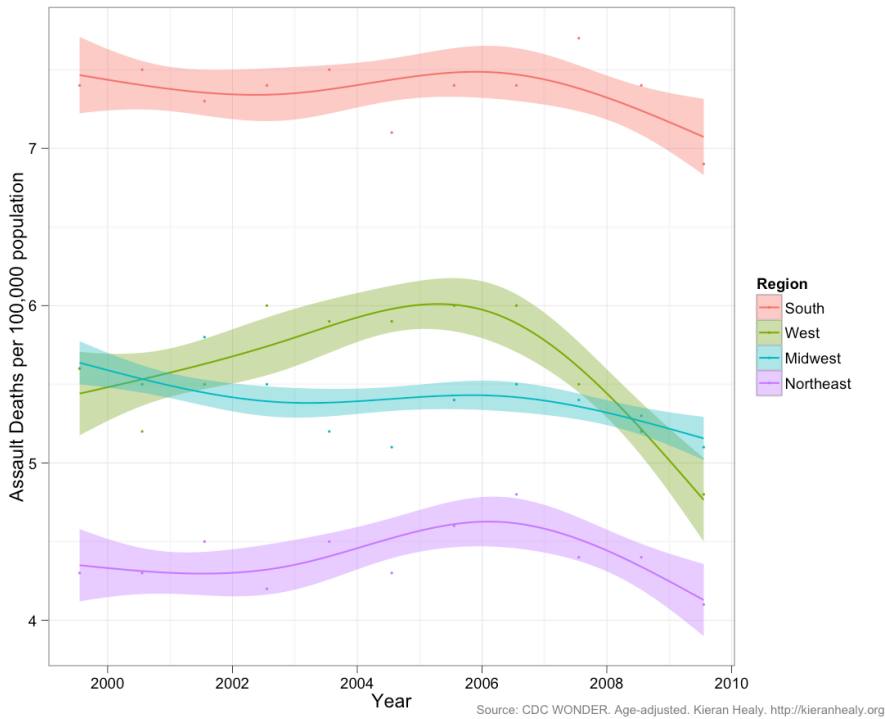
Kieran Healy, a sociologist at Duke University, made this [graph](#) of “deaths due to assault” in the United States and other developed countries. We are a clear outlier.



As Healy writes, “The most striking features of the data are (1) how much more violent the U.S. is than other OECD countries (except possibly Estonia and Mexico, not shown here), and (2) the degree of change—and recently, decline—there has been in the U.S. time series considered by itself.”

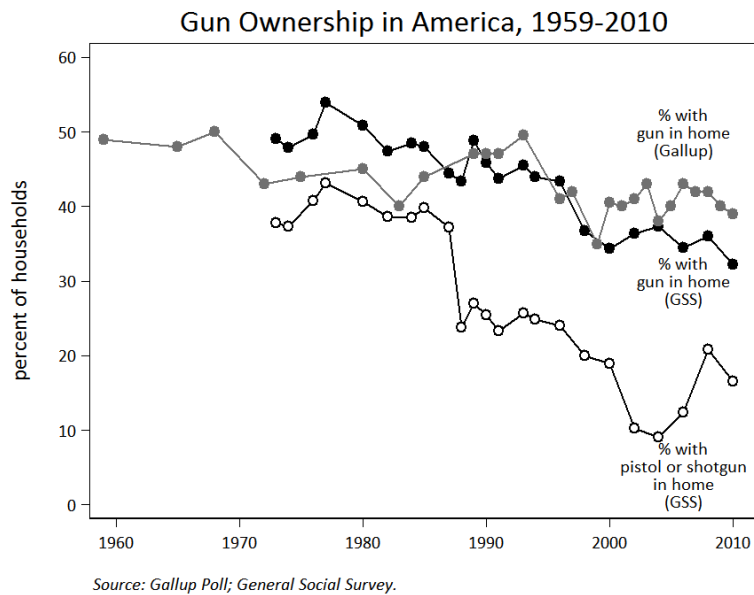
6. The South is the most violent region in the United States.

In a subsequent [post](#), Healy drilled further into the numbers and looked at deaths due to assault in different regions of the country. Just as the United States is a clear outlier in the international context, the South is a clear outlier in the national context:



7. Gun ownership in the United States is declining overall.

“For all the attention given to America’s culture of guns, *ownership of firearms is at or near all-time lows*,” writes political scientist Patrick Egan. The decline is most evident on the General Social Survey, though it also shows up on polling from Gallup, as you can see on this graph:



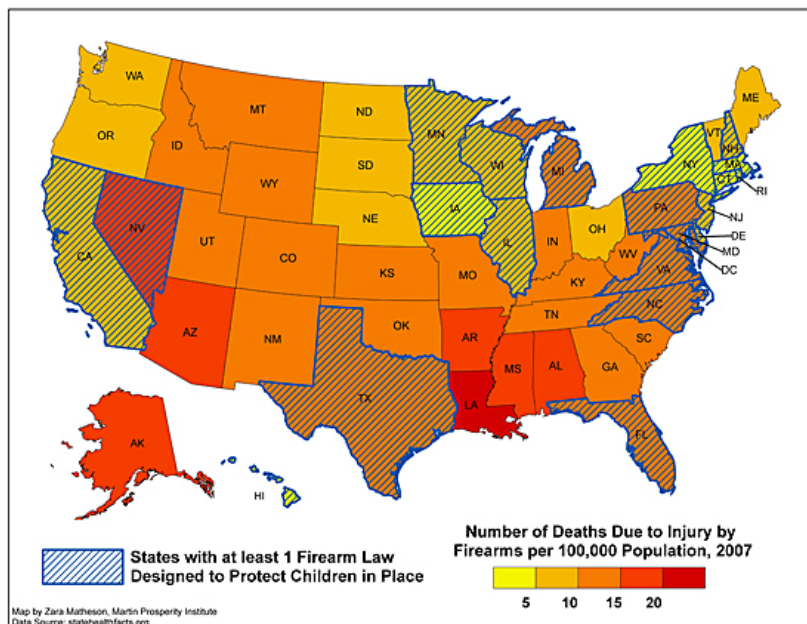
The bottom line, Egan writes, is that “long-term trends suggest that we are in fact currently experiencing a *waning* culture of guns and violence in the United States. “

8. More guns tend to mean more homicide.

The Harvard Injury Control Research Center assessed the literature on guns and homicide and found that there's substantial evidence that indicates more guns means more murders. This holds true whether you're looking at different countries or different states. Citations [here](#).

9. States with stricter gun control laws have fewer deaths from gun-related violence.

Last year, economist Richard Florida [dove deep](#) into the correlations between gun deaths and other kinds of social indicators. Some of what he found was, perhaps, unexpected: Higher populations, more stress, more immigrants, and more mental illness were not correlated with more deaths from gun violence. But one thing he found was, perhaps, perfectly predictable: States with tighter gun control laws appear to have fewer gun-related deaths. The disclaimer here is that correlation is not causation. But correlations can be suggestive:



“The map overlays the map of firearm deaths above with gun control restrictions by state,” explains Florida. “It highlights states which have one of three gun control restrictions in place – assault weapons’ bans, trigger locks, or safe storage requirements. Firearm deaths are significantly lower in states with stricter gun control legislation. Though the sample sizes are small, we find substantial negative correlations between firearm deaths and states that ban assault weapons (-.45), require trigger locks (-.42), and mandate safe storage requirements for guns (-.48).”

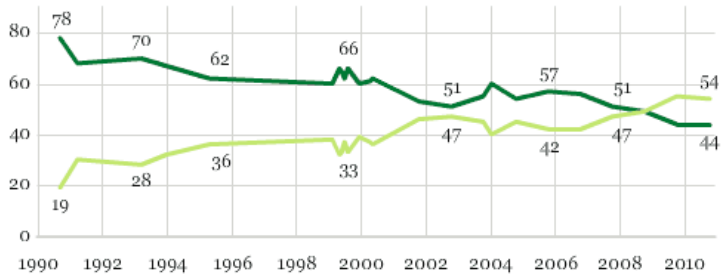
10. Gun control, in general, has not been politically popular.

Since 1990, Gallup has been asking Americans whether they think gun control laws should be stricter. The answer, increasingly, is that they don't. “The percentage in favor of making the laws governing the sale of firearms ‘more strict’ fell from 78% in 1990 to 62% in 1995, and 51% in 2007,” [reports](#) Gallup. “In the most recent reading, Gallup in 2010 found 44% in favor of stricter laws. In fact, in 2009 and again last year, the slight majority said gun laws should either remain the same or be made less strict.”

Gun Laws

In general, do you feel that the laws covering the sale of firearms should be made more strict, less strict, or kept as they are now?

■ % More strict ■ % Less strict/Kept as now

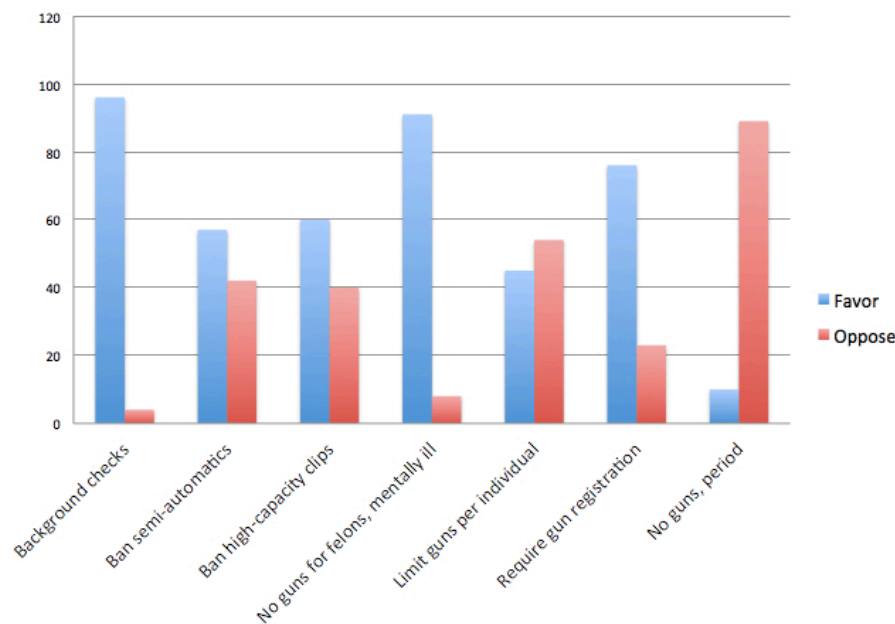


GALLUP

11. But particular policies to control guns often are.

An August CNN/ORC poll asked respondents whether they favor or oppose a number of specific policies to restrict gun ownership. And when you drill down to that level, many policies, including banning the manufacture and possession of semi-automatic rifles, are popular.

Public supports many gun control policies

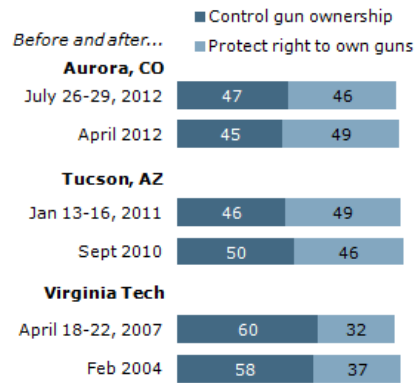


12. Shootings don't tend to substantially affect views on gun control.

That, at least, is what the [Pew Research Center](#) found:

Shootings Don't Shift Views on Gun Control

What do you think is more important?



PEW RESEARCH CENTER July 26-29, 2012.



View Photo Gallery —An official with knowledge of a shooting at a Connecticut elementary school says 27 people are dead, including 18 children.

Note: This post has been updated and expanded since first being published.



Roe v. Wade in charts



Obama's post-crisis presidency



No, U.S. power transitions aren't special



For Obamacare, four more (uncertain) years

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OH, A WISE GUY, EH? wrote:
1/21/2013 5:43 PM MST

Want some GRRRRRRRRREAT reading, then read, More Guns, Less Crime, by John Lott
I think he was an anti-gun professor, until he did some fact checking and found out that the title of his book is TRUE! I think he had a bunch of students help in the research, that eventually changed his mind, as the FACTS spoke the TRUTH. Not something today's news knows how to do. Report the TRUTH!
The Criminal doesn't think about the law, until he is wounded, or killed by a law abiding person, carrying their gun. Notice I said KILLED, not MURDERED! When someone kills someone in self defense, they are killed. When a criminal is killed in the same way, they are KILLED! When that CRIMINAL MURDERS someone, they knowingly MURDERED, and deserve the Death Sentence. In interviews I've seen, the criminal doesn't usually go where they think, or know that someone has a gun to defend themselves.
He was a professor in, or around Chicago. Maybe Obama should have taken a class from this Professor, who honestly believes in telling the TRUTH! Not Obama's style, telling the TRUTH!
Obama should be charged with MURDER for his, and A.G. Eric Holder for his, "FAST and FURIOUS" gun SCAM, to use the evidence, that guns from Mexico, came from America! DUH! Obama/Holder wanted to skew the murder numbers that they actually allowed, but were ready to swear that they didn't know about it.
They should be tried as Terrorist, and be hung for Treason, or let them go and live at Git mo, Cuba for the rest of their days. They have created TERROR for Hundreds of MURDERED Mexicans, and some MURDERED Americans! They took an Oath of Office, to defend America, from terrorist, foreign or Domestic, and are the TERRORIST that allowed so many people to be MURDERED, by their KNOWING HAND! They may as well have pulled the trigger on each person MURDERED, by THEIR "FAST AND FURIOUS" GUNS!
But the main stream media has given them a pass, to do whatever they want to do, in BREAKING THE LAW, IN THE NAME OF THE LAW!

Like Liked by 1 reader · Reply · Share · Flag



BeninMD wrote:
1/21/2013 7:52 AM MST

There are more guns in the US, but fewer people that own guns. The people who own guns are simply buying more guns.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/20...>

<http://www.statisticbrain.com/gun-ownership-statis...>

Like · Reply · Share · Flag



AjentOranje responds:
6:43 AM MST

False. Not a single shred of evidence to prove that. There is no national gun registration database, so how do you know how many people own guns?

You really think 8,000 people are joining the NRA every day because they already owned guns or are

new buyers? Most of the guns and ammo flying off the shelf are from first time gun buyers and owners. People who owned one or two AR's aren't going to hoard more AR's at 3x the price, only first time buyers would because they want to get one before they are banned.

Like Liked by 1 reader · Flag

Add your thoughts...



ketal wrote:

1/18/2013 10:01 PM MST

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/20...>

Like · Reply · Share · Flag



ketal responds:

1/18/2013 10:10 PM MST

More guns tend to mean more homicide.

The Harvard Injury Control Research Center assessed the literature on guns and homicide and found that there's substantial evidence that indicates more guns means more murders. This holds true whether you're looking at different countries or different states.

Like Liked by 2 readers · Flag



jwerbock responds:

1/18/2013 10:53 PM MST

Ketal, those who would agree with you don't need to be told this. Those who don't agree aren't listening. But the real problem is not in convincing pro gun folks how dangerous guns are. That is the work of Sisyphus, eternally rolling a boulder up a hill only to have it roll back down the other side. The real problem is how to get gun owners to assume full responsibility for the damage done when an unsecured weapon is used in the commission of a crime or tragic accident. We need a federal law holding us liable for being negligent toward our responsibilities regarding our guns. We are law abiding citizens but we can get lazy and complacent, just like everyone, and forget just how incredibly dangerous these small and easily portable weapons can be. Since we are law abiding, the simplest solution is a federal liability law. We already know that rights come with responsibilities. But some of us need forceful reminders of the responsibility that comes with the right to bear arms. We do not have a right to leave such incredibly dangerous items laying around the house just for our convenience. That is negligence in the first degree, and if one of our weapons ends up killing someone, we are accessories to a capital crime. Come on, members of the Party of Personal Responsibility, step up to the plate here. No, it won't eliminate inner city gun violence, nor gangland turf war shoot outs. It will, however, bring down the body count from all those instances of domestic violence escalating into gun violence, sudden impulse suicides, the awful tragedy of a child finding a loaded weapon, and the relatively rare instance of an Adam Lanza getting his hands on weapons and becoming a mass shooter.

Like Liked by 2 readers · Flag



thoeni responds:

1/19/2013 12:49 AM MST

ketal

Goes hand in hand with high poverty and illiteracy.

Like Liked by 1 reader · Flag



biznesschic responds:

1/19/2013 12:50 PM MST

jwerbock, I agree with you, however, we must also hold those who would sell a gun to a criminal or

someone who has gone through the mental health system liable also. That is why we need a federal data base in which these sorts of people are identified. If you sell a gun at a show, or over craigslist, you must be liability, if you fail to identify these people on such a list.

Like · Flag



a.x. Perez responds:
1/19/2013 10:07 PM MST

So it was wrong of the BATFE to order gun dealers to sell guns to the Mexican drug cartels since the plan was to trace how guns were smuggled by seeing what crime (Meaning murder) scenes they turned up at? Lousy grammar, but I think a good question.

Like · Flag

Add your thoughts...



ghendric wrote:
1/18/2013 4:08 AM MST

I think these "facts" are flawed and don't take in the whole picture on violent crimes and only looks at gun violence. The fact is, more people die from car accidents than they by guns in the US. Our crime rate is lower per 100,000 people than it is in the UK where guns are banned. I have a friend who went to the UK to work for a while and he's already been robbed twice in the few months he's been there. So you people can just go ahead and give up your guns like good little victims would and I'll just keep my guns..

Like · Reply · Share · Flag



SKDES responds:
1/19/2013 7:45 PM MST

These facts are... factual.

1) "More people die in car accidents..". ACCIDENTS, ghendric. Very few (although still too many) of the 31,000 annual US firearm deaths are accidents. And with a car, you can transport people or stuff. With a gun, you can only make holes in things, animals or people.

2) The US has the HIGHEST homicide rate in developed countries.

<http://chartsbin.com/view/1454>

The TOTAL homicide rate in the US is 5.22 per 100,000, the HIGHEST rate for all developed countries (1.67 in Canada, 1.57 in the UK, 1.23 in Australia...).

In addition, the US has the HIGHEST rate of FIREARM related deaths in all developed countries.

Actually the only countries that have a higher rate of firearm related deaths are El Salvador, Jamaica, Honduras, Guatemala, Swaziland, Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, and Panama

source : **<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/Tenth-CTS-full.html>** , or for a easier to read table, **http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_firearm-related_death_rate**

3) What is your source when you say "Our crime rate is lower per 100,000 people than it is in the UK"? One anecdote proves nothing.

Like · Flag



a.x. Perez responds:
1/19/2013 10:09 PM MST

These are almost all countries where people are fighting over who gets to provide drugs for america's street gangs to sell.

Like · Flag

AjentOranje responds:



6:51 AM MST

@SKDES - Where do you Liberals get your lies from? There are not 31,000 firearm deaths in the US. Absolutely false. There is only 16,000 TOTAL deaths to ALL causes in the country, how can gun deaths be more than the total number? The total murders in this country in 2011 was 12,600.... of which 8,583 were due to firearms.

source: <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-...>

Like · Flag



AjentOranje responds:
6:52 AM MST

@a.x. Perez - Really? The UK, Australia and Sweden are all clamoring to sell the US gangs drugs? LOL

You arent very bright.

Like · Flag

Add your thoughts...



John.Stacey wrote:
1/17/2013 7:13 PM MST

The Canadian solution to gun control is to charge \$420 to write 2 exams and pay for PAL Without a PAL you simply cannot own a firearm in Canada. Even air rifles over 500 fps are considered firearms in Canada whereas anyone can own a 1200 fps air rifle in most of USA. The exams focus on safety. Are 3 categories of firearms. "Non-Restricted" (rifles and shotguns with barrels over 18" as commonly used by hunters and farmers. "Restricted" (basically handguns with barrels over 4 1/8" and not using prohibited .25 or .32 ammo). "Prohibited" are any guns not fitting into first 2 categories, those with fully automatic actions, modified from original, small crossbows, tazers and "fake" replica firearms). The "fake" firearms may sound silly, but can cause troubles to police at a crime scene. Process takes 6 weeks to 6 months. Then have to pass screening of provincial OPP police (state police), federal RCMP police (FBI) and world police (Interpol). In addition applicant must prove written consent of any spouses both current and ex. This only has to be done once for life with an \$80 licence renewal fee every 5 years.

While it might seem at first glance this is pretty effective control, it is not. It penalizes the law-abiding. Criminals ignore the fact murder is illegal so why should they obey gun controls? Mentally unstable will carry out their crazy death missions regardless of any legal controls. Public paranoia about controls seems the best friend firearms industry has ever had.

Though existing and even newly proposed USA gun laws are virtually nothing compared to Canada, guns (and cars) don't by themselves go around killing people per se, it is societal values and mentality that dictates the outcome. Unfortunately that cannot be legislated. Benefits might accrue, however, by placing controls or limits on the real culprits, senseless violent video games, TV shows and movies and upholding those non-secular traditional religious values upon which this great society was founded

Like · Reply · Share · Flag



ThinkThink2 wrote:
1/17/2013 5:59 PM MST

Shooting sprees are not rare in the United States.

15 of the 25 worst mass shootings in the last 50 years took place in the United States.

The South is the most violent region in the United States.

More guns tend to mean more homicide.

States with stricter gun control laws have fewer deaths from gun-related violence.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/20...>

Like Liked by 1 reader · Reply · Share · Flag



AjentOranje responds:
6:53 AM MST

Sure, if you exclude all the mass shootings and murder in South America, Central America, Africa and Asia.

Like · Flag

Add your thoughts...



Dare2bme wrote:
1/17/2013 3:26 PM MST

This is an unbelievably bias article. Can you make it just a tad more obvious? Though I appreciate the effort put into it, I think you should continue your research of statistics. The photo gallery at the end is almost as shameful as Obama shielding himself with children. He couldn't sell his gun control package of its own merit, he had to use props.

Like Liked by 1 reader · Reply · Share · Flag



ThinkThink2 wrote:
1/17/2013 7:47 AM MST

Shooting sprees are not rare in the United States.

15 of the 25 worst mass shootings in the last 50 years took place in the United States.

The South is the most violent region in the United States.

More guns tend to mean more homicide.

States with stricter gun control laws have fewer deaths from gun-related violence.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/20...>

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polytope wrote:
1/16/2013 10:51 PM MST

Problem with Fact 1: The title is a straight out lie...60 occurrences over 30 years in a population of 300+ million is remarkably rare! In fact, drowning in a small swimming pool presents a much larger hazard for our nation's young people than being gunned down by a psycho with a firearm. Also, the graph in Fact 1 is your first misunderstanding of the relationship between correlation and causality.

Problem with Fact 2: This fact does not in any way indicate that mass shootings are commonplace in the United States. Is pointed out above, they are incredibly rare. Yes, they are more common in the USA than other countries but they are still orders of magnitude from being a common event.

Problem with Fact 3: I don't even know what to make of this one. Basically, Israel and Switzerland used to have lax gun control AND low numbers of firearm related fatalities. Now, Israel has tight gun control and low numbers of firearm related fatalities. Is that correct? If so, what conclusion am I supposed to draw from this? Yay for peaceful Switzerland, I guess.

Problem with Fact 4: This appears to be your first somewhat correct use of statistics, but alas, it is too good to be

true. First of all, a sample size of 11 is way too small to draw any sort of conclusion. Second of all, your arbitrary cut-off of 11 is very suspicious. After all, you already pointed out there have been 60 mass shootings in the last 30 years. So, maybe you could look at all 60 of these and see if there is some kind of trend which can be observed to see if the severity of shootings is increasing with time/legislation/whatever else you want to look at. please get back to me if you do something interesting like this.

Problem with Fact 5: I assume that leaving off Mexico and Estonia was done for flair/panache, which is silly really. I did notice, though, that the USA assault death rate continued to decline at a similar rate even after the assault weapon ban ended in 2004. Interesting...

Like Liked by 3 readers · Reply · Share · Flag



polytope responds:
1/16/2013 11:21 PM MST

Finally, the photo gallery at the end is a rather emotional and manipulative way to end this article about "facts."

Like Liked by 3 readers · Flag



SelenaC responds:
1/17/2013 9:10 AM MST

And look at Facts #2 & #4 in relation to #7. So, let me get this straight: There are more shootings in the last 50 years, half of the 11 deadliest have happened in the last 5 years, but yet for the last 50-60 years gun ownership has DECREASED?

You would think they would take into account the fact that for the last few years dealing with a financial disaster (while funding a long-term war) as reason why the country might be a little more violent? Did they not notice in graph #5 that there was a spike in assault deaths in the 70s (wasn't there a recession then?) and a minor one in the late 80s (wasn't there a minor recession then?) and now we're seeing more violent deaths now (isn't there a recession now?)

Perhaps gun ownership (which by their own admission is waning) isn't the problem. Perhaps it's the fact that so many of us are losing our jobs and homes and are feeling helpless to stop it.

Like Liked by 3 readers · Flag



ghendric responds:
1/18/2013 4:14 AM MST

Its the heart of the man that murders, not the gun. The gun is just a tool. Maybe they should ban Hollywood for brainwashing us all with sex and violence. If anything needs regulated, its them...

Like · Flag



theonlyBigBadWolf responds:
1/18/2013 12:24 PM MST

"remarkably rare!" Swimming pools???? R U KIDDING ME????

If your child was murdered with a gun maybe you would change your mind!!!!

Like Liked by 1 reader · Flag



Jcrich responds:
1/18/2013 10:25 PM MST

If you child drown in a pool you would change yours.

Like Liked by 1 reader · Flag

Add your thoughts...



ketal wrote:
1/16/2013 7:07 PM MST

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/20...>

Like Liked by 1 reader · Reply · Share · Flag



ketal wrote:
1/16/2013 6:50 PM MST

you're right .

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/20...>

Like · Reply · Share · Flag



Rhodes444 wrote:
1/16/2013 4:28 PM MST

"I, _____, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God."

I took this oath in 1982 served my country VOLUNTARILY for 8yrs & I live by its principles to this day. I do not second guess, circumvent or subvert its meaning, intent or the people who made it. To subjugate/relegate the differences of a flintlock of their day to an AR-15 of our day is no different than an arrow to a flintlock of their day. We have technology as our advancement from those days but not the wisdom. There is no difference between weapons diametric today, that wasn't present during our founding fathers days. Flintlocks, cannons, mortars to their slingshots, spears & arrows. Naval armada's to their canoes. Once again our unwavering change is our wisdom with the advancement of technology. My grandfather once told me about choices & used the Taj-Mahal as the example. The Taj-Mahal is beautiful & full of splendor but what if a camel walked thru right before you came in & took a big heaping dump right in the middle of the room? Would the story you tell your friends later be of the beauty & splendor or the steamy pile of dung & its smell? The Constitution is our Taj-Muhal. You can ether view it for its beauty & splendor or view it for the few (percentage to overall population) camels (criminals & crazed killers) that have defecated upon it. Its all perspective. I just don't agree that the problem gets solved by dissolving rights to law abiding citizens because of the actions of criminals & mental nutbags.

I do however believe in full background checks for ALL firearm sales w/ periodic upgrade checks & OUTRAGEOUSLY stiffer penalties for firearm related crimes.

Like · Reply · Share · Flag



Eric M. wrote:
1/16/2013 1:17 PM MST

Someone didnt take a statistics class. The gun ownership has been on the decline but shootings and homicides are on the uprise. That means that the more people with guns, the less likely there will be shootings and homicides. And as you already mentioned, lots of guns dont mean lots of shootings. They should make a "Gun Control" class mandatory in college so that people can actually understand and see the benefits that guns can offer society. If you outlaw guns or put so many restrictions on them then the only people who will have guns are the ones obtaining them illegally and who are not using them for their intended purpose of protection (defense) or hunting.

Like Liked by 1 reader · Reply · Share · Flag



Devdogg responds:
1/16/2013 1:51 PM MST

Those are percentages of Americans, and the population is growing.

Like · Flag

Add your thoughts...



Jason.T. wrote:

1/16/2013 11:36 AM MST

Would it be possible to change the default slide at the end of this article to something else. While a powerful picture it is also quite possibly the worst day in this woman's entire life. It unnecessarily trumps all of the good data above it in an emotional sense. We need to focus on facts as that will ultimately shift the debate...seeing her at the end has an adverse effect when sharing this article with others I've found.

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