

## Gun Control's Golden Opportunity

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As a result of Saturday's tragedy in Tucson there have been renewed calls for tighter gun control laws across the nation. Arizona is one of the most gun-friendly states in the union, causing some on the left to conclude that if the Grand Canyon State had tighter controls on gun ownership, six lives would have been saved and Representative Gabrielle Giffords wouldn't be lying in a hospital bed. There's more here than just the usual sort of Monday morning quarterbacking that occurs whenever a tragic event touches the nation's heart. Gun control advocates have suffered defeat after defeat and the majority of the nation today clearly supports the right of private citizens to bear arms and to defend themselves, their loved ones and their property. Second amendment opponents would like to reverse those trends and, for some, Jared Loughner's rampage this weekend offers a golden opportunity to press forward with their old agenda.

*The New York Times* led the charge with two editorials. [On Sunday](#), the *Times* noted that Arizona's "gun laws are among the most lenient, allowing even a disturbed man like Mr. Loughner to buy a pistol and carry it concealed without a special permit." The paper went on to say that "Arizona should lead the nation in quieting the voices of intolerance, demanding an end to the temptations of bloodshed, and imposing sensible controls on its instruments." Warming to the subject, on Tuesday, the *Times* [urged](#) lawmakers to pass new gun control laws in the wake of the Arizona shootings, even though lawmakers wouldn't find that easy to accomplish. "To do so, they will need to stand up to the National Rifle Association and its allies, whose lobbying power continues to grow despite the visceral evidence that the groups have made the country a far more dangerous place," the *Times* editorial warned.

While the *Times* is offering pabulum to the left, there's little of intellectual nutritional value there. To their credit, the editorial board at the *Grey Lady* stayed away from the knee-jerk "blame the tea party, the GOP, Rush, Palin and Fox" reaction that permeated through so much of the left in this particular editorial. So, why then bring up "quieting the voices of intolerance" – whoever they are – when the editors acknowledge that Loughner's "paranoid Internet ravings about government mind control place him well beyond usual ideological categories"? Further, the *Times* may believe that there is "visceral evidence" that the NRA and other second amendment champions have made America a far more dangerous place, but there's not much in the way of actual evidence. Any dispassionate consideration of gun ownership versus crime – including violent crime – demonstrates that one cannot establish a consistent relationship of any kind between the two and that the ability of law-abiding individuals to defend themselves helps reduce crime in most cases.

There are all kinds of ways to analyze gun laws versus crime rates, but it's exceedingly clear that the worst crime rates are found in the poor sections of large cities like New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. For decades, big cities have experimented, and continue to experiment, with gun control laws. It hasn't made a bit of difference. On the other hand, the states with the lowest crime rates are "right to carry" states. And why not? The bad guys aren't rocket scientists, but they're smart enough to understand it's a whole lot safer to break into an old couple's house if you don't have to worry about grandpa packing heat. [According to the Cato Institute](#), guns are used for self-defense purposes about two million times each year, which is three to five times more than the estimated number of violent crimes committed annually using guns.

[Europe provides another useful look](#) into the relationship between guns and crime. The nations that have the three highest murder rates in Europe – Russia, Luxemburg and Hungry - have some of the lowest gun ownership rates on the continent. (Four percent of Russian citizens own guns, while the numbers drop to two percent in Hungry and zero in Luxemburg). In nations like Germany, Norway, France and Finland, where gun ownership rates among private citizens exceed thirty percent, the murder rate drops substantially. If that data doesn't definitively prove a direct correlation between gun ownership and reductions in violent crime, it at least disproves the converse: the proposition that violent crime increases when more citizens own firearms.

There are aspects of the gun control issue that some Americans might want to continue to discuss. Bans on so-called assault weapons are popular in some quarters, for example. Finding new ways to identify and get help to deranged individuals like Jared Loughner should obviously be a priority. But there is simply no reason to believe that widespread gun control in America would work or that Americans would support efforts to impose the kind of restrictions on owning firearms that the left dreams of. What happened in Arizona last weekend is a tragedy, but tragedies happen in every corner of the globe, from the most totalitarian regimes to the freest of societies. Americans are not about to surrender their right to bear arms and defend themselves because one twisted individual misused that right. The left can dream of an America without firearms, but it's hard to see how Americans would ever allow that particular nightmare to come true.

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