

Why aren't US politicians learning from New Zealand?

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Twenty-four hours had not passed after a horrific terrorist attack by a white supremacist on innocent worshipping Muslims, and members of the New Zealand government announced that they were planning to ban semi-automatic assault rifles and introduce tighter gun control laws. While some might claim that this move will diminish New Zealanders' sense of freedom and safety — but the data suggests the exact opposite.

My story about guns begins from my childhood, when my dad bought us a pellet gun. It wasn't a lethal firearm — but it was a tool that helped us develop hunting skills and understand firearm safety. And as we spent our summers hunting rabbits, birds, and engaging in target practice with old Coca Cola cans on the five-acre former farm that was our home, we never suffered an injury as a result of firearm negligence.

I still remember when my older brother wrote to us from US Marine Corps bootcamp to tell us that he'd earned the expert rifleman badge for his firearm. It was the highest possible award that the Marines offered. He would go on to earn this award five times during his five-year active duty enlistment. He was thrilled and we were happy for him. Indeed, we felt like we were on the journey with him, because his expertise and training with guns had begun years before he enlisted in the Marine Corps, with the gifting of that pellet gun.

But nearly 30 years later, the gun conversation in America is very different. Including suicide deaths, over 40,000 Americans die each year due to guns. We can make many valid arguments about the need for better mental healthcare for veterans when 22 commit suicide a day, or even for combating gang violence in inner cities nationwide. These are undoubtedly very important issues. But what they have in common is the way in which they are exacerbated by the unrestricted availability of guns to criminals, domestic abusers, violent felons, and violent men in our country.

Those who oppose responsible gun legislation claim that gun laws won't work because criminals will still find a way to get guns. By such logic we shouldn't have any laws at all because, after all, criminals will break them. I'll ask such critics to consider that no one law is perfect, however we can enact meaningful legislation to ensure criminals have a much more difficult time acquiring a gun — while the rest of us law-abiding citizens can still access them as the Constitution guarantees. Who can honestly claim that domestic abusers and violent felons deserve easy access to firearms?

Meaningful gun laws work, and the world is the evidence. After the 1987 Hungerford mass shooting left 16 dead, England enacted meaningful gun reform. England has experienced one

mass shooting since.

After the 1995 Port Arthur mass shooting left 35 dead, Australia enacted responsible gun legislation. Australia has experienced zero mass shootings since.

After the Dunblane Primary School mass shooting left 18 dead, Scotland enacted meaningful gun reform. Scotland has experienced zero mass shootings since.

And after the 2009 Winnendon school shooting left 16 dead, Germany enacted responsible gun legislation. Germany has experienced only one mass shooting since.

Meanwhile, extrapolating data from GunViolenceArchive.org, which documents every shooting and mass shooting in America, since the 1999 Columbine shooting that left 14 dead, America has enacted zero meaningful pieces of gun reform legislation. America has since experienced over 5,000 mass shootings, including hundreds of school shootings in which children died.

Responsible gun laws don't curb freedom, happiness, safety, and national peace — they support freedom, happiness, safety, and national peace. Let's take the five countries mentioned in this discussion, for example. Each are developed western societies with comparable economies, living standards, and demographics.

Yet each ranks well ahead of America in the freedoms, happiness, safety, and peace that its citizens enjoy. The Cato Institute's annual human freedom index reports that on personal freedoms, Australia ranks 4th, the United Kingdom ranks 8th, Germany ranks 13th, and the United States is 17th. The World Happiness Report states that Australians rank 10th in happiness, Germans rank 15th, Americans rank 18th, and the British rank 19th. And when it comes to the World Safety Index, Australians are the 12th safest worldwide, Germans are 13th safest, the British are 35th safest, and Americans are only 49th safest. Finally, looking at the Global Peace Index, Australia ranks 13th, Germany ranks 17th, the British rank 57th, and the United States ranks an astounding 121st — ahead of only 42 countries.

If more guns truly meant more freedom, safety, happiness, and peace, America would lead each of these categories. But instead we lag far behind. Each of these vital components to a thriving democracy are stifled when guns fall into the hands of terrorists and extremists — but they thrive when people petition their governments to enact responsible gun laws.

So where does New Zealand rank in all this? New Zealand ranks first in the world on human freedom, eighth in the world in happiness, third in the world in safety, and second in the world in peace. It's no surprise, therefore, that New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and the government has a whole has promised comprehensive and responsible gun legislation to ensure its citizens remain free, happy, and safe.

The Kiwis are committed to the same ideals my father taught my siblings and I when we were kids: use guns responsibly, and you will enjoy the freedoms, happiness, safety, and peace that comes with that comes with that ownership. Why isn't our American government — and our American president — happy to say the same?