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Disarming the Myths Promoted By the Gun Control Lobby

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As much as gun control advocates might wish otherwise, their attacks are running out of ammo. With private firearm ownership at an all-time high and violent crime rates plunging, none of the scary scenarios they advanced have materialized. Abuse of responsibility by armed citizens is rare, while successful defensive interventions against assaults on their lives and property are relatively commonplace.

National violent crime rates that soared for 30 years from the early 1960s began to decrease markedly since 1993. Last December the FBI reported that murder and other violent crime rates fell again by 6.4% during the first half of 2011 compared with the same period in 2010. A Gallup poll indicates that "Americans' preference regarding gun laws is generally that the government enforce existing laws more strictly and not pass new laws."

Caroline Brewer of the anti-gun Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence has reported that "The research we've seen indicates fewer and fewer people owning more and more guns." Yet one can only wonder where they are getting that information. In reality, public support for personal gun ownership is growing. According to Steve Sanetti, president of the National Shooting Sports Foundation, a trade group that represents about 7,000 firearms manufacturers and related companies, in 1959 some 70% of the American public favored handgun bans, whereas today that number has flipped. This support is reflected in the marketplace. Sanetti observes that the \$4.1 billion gun industry "has had nineteen months of growth in an otherwise anemic economy."

Recognizing these positive trends, most states now issue permits allowing qualified law-abiding people to legally carry handguns outside their homes. Unprecedented numbers are becoming licensed to do so, now totaling an

estimated 10 million Americans, contributing, in turn, to a dramatic growth in gun sales.

A record of more than 1.5 million background checks for customers looking to purchase a firearm were requested by gun dealers to the National Instant Background Check (NICS) system last December. About one-third of these occurred during the six weeks before Christmas. They had previously recorded a 49% rise in background checks during the week before President Obama was elected in 2008 compared with the same week one year earlier.

The Brady lobby is upset that there has been no progress in leveraging tighter gun control legislation following the shooting January 8, 2010 rampage that killed 6 people and injured 13, including Democratic Representative Gabrielle Giffords. That tragic incident raised serious questions about background checks after it was determined that the accused shooter, having previously exhibited erratic behavior, legally purchased the weapon he "allegedly" used from a store.

The National Rifle Association clearly agrees that guns should not be sold to individuals found to have serious mental problems, although many states fail to provide mental health records to the federal computerized background check system. According to a November, 2011 report by the Mayors Against Illegal Guns (MAIG), 23 states have shown "major failures" in complying, and four (Alaska, Delaware, Idaho and Rhode Island) submit no records at all. (Although murder has been in decline in [New York](#) and other major cities for years, a Pepsi and Honda Super Bowl advertisement spot featured New York Mayor [Michael Bloomberg](#) and [Boston's](#) Thomas Menino on a couch calling for stricter government measures to curb illegal gun sales.)

Dennis Henigan, the Brady group's acting president, told *Reuters*: "Really it is a national disgrace that the only piece of gun-related legislation to come to a vote since [Tucson](#) was this legislation that would have enabled dangerous concealed carriers like Jared Loughner to carry their guns across state lines." Referring to a proposed "National Right-to-Carry Reciprocity Act of 2011" (H.R. 822) which has passed the House of Representatives but stalled in the Senate, the resolution would require states to recognize one another's concealed carry permits the same way they recognize one another's driver's licenses. The intent is to eliminate confusion and potential legal problems for traveling gun owners.

As pointed out in a recent paper titled "Tough Targets" released by the Cato Institute, "The ostensible purpose of gun control legislation is to reduce firearm deaths and injuries. But authors Clayton E. Cramer and David Burnett believe these restrictions put law-abiding citizens at a distinct disadvantage to criminals who acquire guns from underground markets since it is simply not possible for police officers to get to every scene where intervention is urgently needed. They also document large numbers of crimes...murders, assaults, robberies...that are thwarted each year by ordinary persons with guns.

A widely-known study conducted by Gary Kleck and Marc Gertz in the 1990s found that there were somewhere between 830,000 and 2.45 million U.S. defensive gun uses annually. A National Crime Victimization Study (NCVS) which asked victims if they had used a gun in self-defense found that about 108,000 each year had done so. A big problem with the NCVS line of survey reasoning, however, is that it only includes those uses where a citizen kills a criminal, not when one is only wounded, is held by the intended victim until police arrive, or when brandishing a gun caused a criminal to flee.

For these reasons, the Cato researchers investigated published news reports which much more often reveal how Americans use guns in self-defense. The data set is derived from a collection of nearly 5,000 randomly selected incidents published between October 2003 and November 2011. Still, the authors also recognize limitations with this approach, since many defensive incidents are never reported by victims, or when they are, never get published. In fact, the overwhelming majority of the successful self-defense outcomes are those where the defendants' guns are presented but never fired.

Most of the actual self-defense shootings in the Cato study didn't involve concealed carry licenses, but more typically had to do with responses to residential invasions. Of these, 488 involved home burglaries. In addition, there were 1,227 incidents where intruders were induced to flee the scene by armed inhabitants, circumstances that might otherwise have resulted in injurious assaults including rapes and murders. There were 285 news accounts indicating that the defender had a concealed weapon license, which in the majority of these incidents took place outside a home or place of business. Pizza delivery drivers were common robbery targets.

Whereas gun control proponents often argue that having a gun put people at risk because a criminal will take it away and use it against them, it seems the reality is more often to be the reverse situation. The Cato data contains only 11 stories out of 4,699 where a criminal took a gun away from a defender, but 277 where the intended victim disarmed the bad guy, although the authors acknowledge that these event reports may be printed more frequently due to newsworthiness.

Still, it should also be remembered that the threatened party often has more motivation to fight back than a criminal hoping for an easy score. There were 25 news reports where armed rape attack victims ultimately got the upper hand, and 65 where this occurred in carjacking attempts.

Then there is the argument that more private gun ownership will lead to more accidents because the average citizen isn't sufficiently trained to use a weapon defensively. While gun accidents do occur, the Cato study indicates that they are the most overstated risks. There were 535 accidental firearms deaths in 2006 within a population of almost 300 million people. Although every lost life is tragic, the proportion is not particularly startling.

On the other hand, *Newsweek* has reported that law-abiding American citizens using guns in self-defense during 2003 shot and killed two and one-

half times as many criminals as police did, and with fewer than one-fifth as many incidents as police where an innocent person mistakenly identified as a criminal (2% versus 11%).

Finally, on the subject of public safety, just how well have gun bans worked in other countries? Take the number of home break-ins while residents are present as an indication. In Canada and Britain, both with tough gun-control laws, nearly half of all burglaries occur when residents are present. But in the U.S. where many households are armed, only about 13% happen when someone is home.

Doesn't this comparison offer some indication that criminals are getting the message? Don't you wish those bent on eliminating our Second Amendment rights would also?