

# Gun control and mass shootings

**There's no way to fully prevent crazed and evil people from doing bad things. But however difficult this may be to swallow in Europe, the evidence is simply too strong that gun ownership reduces crime**

**By Daniel J. Mitchell**

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Well, another loser killed a bunch of people, this time in Santa Barbara, California - which gives gun control zealots an opportunity to seize upon the tragedy to recycle their calls to restrict private firearms ownership and otherwise erode the Second Amendment.

But I'm not too worried that they'll succeed. The [evidence is simply too strong](#) that gun ownership reduces crime. The research shows that [criminals are less aggressive](#) when they fear potential victims may be armed.

Moreover, they don't even have practical proposals. Here's [some of what Jacob Sullum wrote](#) for *Reason*.

None of the items on the anti-gun lobby's wish list makes sense as a response to the crimes of Elliot Rodger, the 22-year-old college student who murdered Martinez's son and five other people on Friday night.

...The Isla Vista massacre, which took place in a state with firearm laws that are among the strictest in the nation, exposes the false promise of policies that aim to prevent violence by limiting access to weapons.

...The only specific policy Gross mentioned was "expanded background checks." But California already has those: All gun sales in that state, including private transfers, must be handled by licensed dealers, and every buyer has to be cleared by the California Department of Justice...

Sullum continues:

Rodger passed those background checks because he did not have a disqualifying criminal or psychiatric record. ...Yes, Rodger was depressed, socially isolated, and desperately lonely. But how many people who fit that description become mass murderers? The difficulty of predicting which of the world's troubled oddballs will turn violent is the reason "expanded background checks" cannot stop this sort of crime.

Good point. Heck, if getting rejected by the opposite sex was a predicate for mass murder, I would have been a potential killer in high school.

So what might have worked? Perhaps, in a leftist fantasy world, outright confiscation of 300 million guns. Though that would lead to [massive civil disobedience](#). Not to mention they would have to impose controls on knives and cars.

One can imagine policies that might have stopped Rodger, but they are neither practical nor constitutional. If the government not only banned guns but somehow managed to confiscate the 300 million or so Americans already own, that would have put a damper on Rodger's plans, although he used knives to kill half of the victims who died and used his car to injure others.

And here are [some excerpts](#) from analysis by the invaluable John Lott. He starts by observing that the already-existing gun control rules in California were utterly ineffective.

As usual, the media news stories got fundamental facts wrong here. Of particular interest, half the people killed here were stabbed to death. Also, you won't hear this in the news, the magazines that the killer used were also apparently limited to holding no more than 10 rounds (note that the Sheriff said that all the magazines were legal under California law). Obviously neither point fits the gun control check list.

More important, the anti-gun policies in California may have made it easier for the killer.

Santa Barbara County, where the attack occurred, is essentially a gun-free zone. As of February 2014, there were only 53 individuals with a concealed handgun permit in Santa Barbara County. With an adult population of 337,000, that is a rate of just 0.016 percent.

The few people allowed to carry are undoubtedly politically well connected individuals who were unlikely to have been in the part of town where this attack occurred. As we have seen over and over again, these multiple victim killers deliberately select locations where victims are unlikely to be able to defend themselves.

Indeed, in [another article](#), Lott notes that the nutjob carefully planned his attack to minimize the chances of being stopped by a law-abiding person with a gun.

Rodger spent over a year and a half meticulously planning his attack. His 141-page "manifesto" makes it clear that he feared someone with a gun could stop him before he was able to kill a lot of people.

...Deterrence matters. As my research with Bill Landes at the University of Chicago found, letting people defend themselves doesn't just prevent these attacks from occurring, it also limits the harm should the attack occur. At some point, the fact that virtually all these mass shootings take place where victims are defenseless is going to have to matter.

To be sure, there's no way to fully prevent crazed and evil people from doing bad things. But public policy can tip the scales in one direction or the other.

That's why we should focus on [policies that discourage bad guys by changing their cost-benefit calculations](#), such as making it easier for victims to defend themselves. Not that I expect our statist friends to grasp this economic insight; it seems gun control is a faith-based policy.

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