

Larry Elder: How often are guns used in self-defense?

By LARRY ELDER / Best-selling author and radio talk-show host

About the tragedy in Aurora, Colo., rapper/actor Ice-T made more sense – and has a better understanding of the Second Amendment – than gun-control proponents.

Asked by a London news anchor about America's gun culture, Ice-T said: "Well, I'd give up my gun when everybody does. Doesn't that make sense? ... If there were guns here, would you want to be the only person without one?"

Anchor Krishnan Guru-Murthy, Channel 4 News: "So do you carry guns routinely at home?"

Ice-T: "Yeah, it's legal in the United States. It's part of our Constitution. You know, the right to bear arms is because that's the last form of defense against tyranny. Not to hunt. It's to protect yourself from the police."

Anchor: "And do you see any link between that and these sorts of (Aurora-type) incidents?"

Ice-T: "No. Nah. Not really. You know what I'm saying, if somebody wants to kill people, you know, they don't need a gun to do it."

Anchor: "It makes it easier, though, doesn't it?"

Ice-T: "Not really. You can strap explosives on your body. They do that all the time."

Anchor: "So when there's the inevitable backlash of the anti-gun lobby, as a result of this instance, as there always is –"

Ice-T: "Well, that's not going to change anything. ... The United States is based on guns."

Security experts say a determined killer, willing to give up his own life, cannot be stopped. The odds, however, can be shifted in favor of the victims and would-be victims. How?

In Pearl, Miss., a gunman who killed two students and wounded seven at a high school was stopped by an assistant principal, who rushed to his car and got his gun. The assistant principal, running back with his .45, spotted the rifle-carrying shooter in the parking lot. Ordering the teen to stop, the vice principal held his gun to the shooter's neck until police arrived.

In Salt Lake City, a man purchased a knife in a grocery store, walked outside and stabbed and critically injured two men. He was threatening others, when a store patron with a concealed weapons permit drew his gun, forced the attacker to the ground and held him until police arrived.

In Grundy, Va., a disgruntled student on the verge of his second suspension at Appalachian School of Law shot and killed the dean, a professor and a fellow student. Two students, both off-duty peace officers, ran to their cars, retrieved their guns and used them to halt the attack.

No one knows whether Aurora would have turned out differently had there been an armed patron or two inside the theater. But at the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting, where 32 people died, there was a no-guns policy – just as, apparently, at the movie theater in Aurora.

For a guaranteed blank stare, ask gun-control proponents how often Americans use guns to defend themselves. They can't tell you, because they don't ask.

Suppose a guy goes to a baseball game. "Honey," his wife asks afterward, "who won the game?" The husband says, "The Dodgers scored four runs." What's missing? Obviously, the wife still knows nothing about the outcome because she knows only one-half of the equation. Well, how can one responsibly discuss "how many people die because of guns" without discussing the other half of the equation – how many people would not be alive without their defensive use of a gun?

So, how often do Americans use firearms for self-defense?

Criminologist Gary Kleck estimates that 2.5 million Americans use guns to defend themselves each year. Out of that number, 400,000 believe that but for their firearms, they would have been dead.

Professor Emeritus James Q. Wilson, the UCLA public policy expert, says: "We know from Census Bureau surveys that something beyond 100,000 uses of guns for self-defense occur every year. We know from smaller surveys of a commercial nature that the number may be as high as 2 1/2 or 3 million. We don't know what the right number is, but whatever the right number is, it's not a trivial number."

Former Manhattan Assistant District Attorney David P. Koppel studied gun control for the Cato Institute. Citing a 1979-1985 study by the National Crime Victimization Survey, Koppel found: "When a robbery victim does not defend himself, the robber succeeds 88 percent of the time, and the victim is injured 25 percent of the time. When a victim resists with a gun, the robbery success rate falls to 30 percent, and the victim injury rate falls to 17 percent. No other response to a robbery – from drawing a knife to shouting for help to fleeing – produces such low rates of victim injury and robbery success."

When asked if additional gun laws would be beneficial or have no effect, most Americans, like Ice-T, get it. They oppose shifting power to the criminal. And they don't need the National Rifle Association to tell them: The only people willing to abide by additional gun laws are the law-abiding.