



## Opposing view: Homicide rate was already declining

*Multivictim killings will occur even where stringent gun controls are adopted.*

By: Robert A. Levy - December 18, 2012

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Why not emulate Australia's rigorous gun control model in the United States?

For starters, it hasn't worked. Twelve years after the new regulations were implemented, *Time* reported on new research suggesting the new regime "was a waste of public money and has made no difference to the country's gun-related death rates." The homicide rate had been declining before the 1996 ban; its post-ban decline has merely been a continuation of that trend. Indeed, not one other country that has banned guns has lowered its murder rate.

That doesn't mean our existing gun controls are optimal. Early detection and treatment of mental illness might lead to firearms access restrictions that the most ardent gun rights advocates could support. But regulations must be fashioned with great care, not simply as a formulaic response to the Newtown tragedy. Multivictim killings — heart-rending and horrifying — are but a fraction of 1% of all murders in the United States, and they will sadly occur even where stringent gun controls are imposed.

Here's the overriding principle: The Supreme Court has affirmed an individual right to bear arms for self-defense and other purposes. Such rights are not absolute. But the court's decisions mean that government must show its proposed regulations will enhance public safety.

Yet 18 national studies in peer-reviewed journals establish that right-to-carry laws, for example, reduce violent crime; 10 studies indicate no discernible effect. No reliable evidence indicates that such laws increase crime.

The burden-of-proof point was central to a ruling this month by the U.S. Court of Appeals overturning the Illinois ban on concealed carry: "The theoretical and empirical evidence (which overall is inconclusive) is consistent with concluding that a right to carry firearms in public may promote self-defense. Illinois had to provide us with more than merely a rational basis for believing that its uniquely sweeping ban is justified by an increase in public safety. It has failed to meet this burden."

By all means, let's re-evaluate our gun laws in the aftermath of last week's disaster. But there are significant costs when rights are compromised. Let's be sure the ends justify the means.