



Written by [Thomas Sowell](#) on April 2, 2013

Guns Save Lives

We all know that guns can cost lives because the media repeat this message endlessly, as if we could not figure it out for ourselves. But even someone who reads newspapers regularly and watches numerous television newscasts may never learn that guns also save lives — much less see any hard facts comparing how many lives are lost and how many are saved.

But that trade-off is the real issue, not the Second Amendment or the National Rifle Association, which so many in the media obsess about. If guns cost more lives than they save, we can always repeal the Second Amendment. But if guns save more lives than they cost, we need to know that, instead of spending time demonizing the National Rifle Association.

The defensive use of guns is usually either not discussed at all in the media or else is depicted as if it means bullets flying in all directions, like the gunfight at the OK Corral. But most defensive uses of guns do not involve actually pulling the trigger.

If someone comes at you with a knife and you point a gun at him, he is very unlikely to keep coming, and far more likely to head in the other direction, perhaps in some haste, if he has a brain in his head. Only if he is an idiot are you likely to have to pull the trigger. And if he is an idiot with a knife coming after you, you had better have a trigger to pull.

Surveys of American gun owners have found that 4 to 6 percent reported using a gun in self-defense within the previous five years. That is not a very high percentage but, in a country with 300 million people, that works out to hundreds of thousands of defensive uses of guns per year.

Yet we almost never hear about these hundreds of thousands of defensive uses of guns from the media, which will report the killing of a dozen people endlessly around the clock.

The murder of a dozen innocent people is unquestionably a human tragedy. But that is no excuse for reacting blindly by preventing hundreds of thousands of other people from defending themselves against meeting the same fate.

Although most defensive uses of guns do not involve actually shooting, nevertheless the total number of criminals killed by armed private citizens runs into the thousands per year. A gun can also come in handy if a pit bull or some other dangerous animal is after you or your child.

We need to recognize the painful reality that, regardless of what we do or don't do about gun control laws, there will be innocent people killed by guns. We can then look at hard facts in order to decide how we can minimize the number of needless deaths.

But that is not the way the issue is presented by many in politics or the media. Every story about an





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accidental shooting in the home will be repeated again and again, while a thousand stories about lives saved by defensive uses of a gun will never see the light of day in most newspapers or on most television newscasts.

More children may die in bathtub accidents than in shooting accidents, but you are not likely to read that in most newspapers or see it on television newscasts. Some in the media inflate the number of children killed by counting as children the members of criminal teenage gangs who shoot each other in their turf fights.

Many seize upon statistics which show that Britain has stronger gun control laws than the United States and lower murder rates. Yet they ignore other countries with stronger gun control laws than the United States, but which have much higher murder rates, such as Brazil, Russia and Mexico.

Even in the case of Britain, London had a much lower murder rate than New York during the years after New York State's 1911 Sullivan Law imposed very strict gun control, while anyone could buy a shotgun in London with no questions asked in the 1950s.

Today, virtually the entire law-abiding population of Britain is disarmed — and gun crimes are vastly more common. Gun control laws make crime a safer occupation when victims are unarmed.

The gun control crusade today is like the Prohibition crusade 100 years ago. It is a shared zealotry that binds the self-righteous know-it-alls in a warm fellowship of those who see themselves as fighting on the side of the angels against the forces of evil. It is a lofty role that they are not about to give up for anything so mundane as facts — or even the lives of other people.

Thomas Sowell is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305. His website is www.tsowell.com. To find out more about Thomas Sowell and read features by other Creators Syndicate columnists and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate Web page at www.creators.com.

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