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Getting Rid of Guns

Americans are nearly unanimous about the need to reduce mass shootings, but not about needing more gun control. That's because evidence shows fewer guns mean more deaths.

From the print edition of The New American

In the aftermath of the latest school shooting in Florida, multiple groups around the country are clamoring for more gun-control measures, putting together protests, marches, and school walkouts to put pressure on legislators to do something to reduce gun crimes.



Many students are getting on board with these protests, and their motivations are understandable because everyone except crazies wants to keep kids safe.

Because gun owners are also generally parents, everyone should be on the same page — in agreement to do something to reduce the number of mass shootings that happen in this country, while still acknowledging that in our relatively free society, no action will eliminate mass shootings altogether. (Even though some people are mean enough or crazy enough to kill indiscriminately, that doesn't mean they aren't clever enough to skirt any laws meant to stop them.)

Many murders even happen in U.S. prisons, where the convicts are under near full-time scrutiny by guards. According to the U.S. Department of Justice's study entitled "Mortality in Local Jails and State Prisons, 2000-2013 — Statistical Tables," approximately 22 inmates in local jails die of homicide each year, and 295 commit suicide. *Three* out of every 100,000 jail inmates will die of homicide. That compares to a homicide rate in the U.S. populace at large of 4.9 per 100,000 people. If you can't stop murders in prison by banning weapons, you certainly can't stop them in society at large. Add to the figure on jails the fact that about 54 inmates in state prisons also die by homicide each year — again about three out of every 100,000 prisoners — and 184 per year die of suicide. Plus there are homicides in federal penitentiaries.

America as a whole also has a murder rate of 3.2 per 100,000 without counting homicides done with guns.

Percentage-wise, the United States has a particularly violent underclass — a cultural issue; our country has more homicides in prisons, where prisoners are monitored by cameras and guards and where prisoners have no ready access to weapons (they must improvise weapons from items the authorities deem safe), than some countries as a whole experience. As was mentioned, about three out of every 100,000 prisoners in the United States fall victim to homicide. That is a much higher figure than the total homicide rates across most countries in Europe. According to the United Nations' Office on Drugs



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and Crime, Norway has .56 homicides per 100,000 people, Sweden has 1.55, the U.K. .92, Italy .78, Austria .51, France 1.58, Germany .85, and Switzerland .69. Interestingly, target shooting is the national pastime in Switzerland, and young men — as part of the country's militia — *must* keep military weapons in their residences, and its homicide rate is among the lowest in Europe (and most of its violent crime is committed by foreigners).

The question becomes, "Though we can't prevent all mass murders, what measures would dramatically reduce mass shootings?"

Both the National Academy of Sciences and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control — anti-gun groups — set out to find the most useful gun-control measures by scrutinizing the world's gun-control laws. Both came to the same conclusion: Not one gun-control measure in the world actually reduced violent crime and murders. None. The *New York Post* had this to say about the report by the Academy of Sciences: It issued a 328-page report entitled *Firearms and Violence: A Critical Review* on gun-control laws in December 2004, "based on 253 journal articles, 99 books, 43 government publications, a survey that covered 80 different gun-control measures and some of its own empirical work [and] the panel couldn't identify a single gun-control regulation that reduced violent crime, suicide, or accidents."

For students, who should be being taught to make decisions based on "logic" and "rational thought," these studies should end any efforts to get rid of certain types of guns in order to reduce murders, especially mass shootings, for if no gun-control law can be shown to be effective at reducing violence and murders, they are not beneficial; rather, they are merely intrusive, onerous, and un-American.

But there are always responses ready against those who note the failure of gun-control laws: Skeptics question the studies' conclusions, often claiming other studies have had opposite findings; they claim there isn't anything else to try; or they push the idea that if such a law even stopped one mass shooting, it would be worth any inconvenience or loss of freedom.

Unfortunately for innocent victims of murderers, the rationalizations are wrong. First, the studies showing that gun-control laws don't reduce violent crime are correct, as we can see by looking at some countries with very strict gun-control laws, such as Mexico, Brazil, and South Africa. In Mexico, according to a review of statistics by the UN's Office of Drugs and Crime entitled "Intentional Homicides (Per 100,000 People) — Country Ranking," despite strict gun laws, the murder rate is more than three times greater than in the United States (and kidnapping is so common that many businessmen actually make regular payments to criminal organizations not to kidnap them). Moreover, criminal gangs in that country are so brazen about ignoring gun laws that they regularly assassinate police officers, and they even break into police stations and prisons, with guns blazing, to help inmates escape. Mexico's gun-control laws are very stringent: Citizens must go through background checks that include criminal history, mental history, physical health, any past drug addictions, and provide a detailed reason to own a gun; and then citizens are restricted as to the types of weapons and the calibers of cartridge available (including banning the calibers associated with most "assault rifles").

Brazil, which since 2004 has required gun applicants to offer a good reason to get a gun and to renew a gun license every three years and has used that law to essentially forbid citizens from having guns, has a homicide rate of 26.7 people per 100,000, and there are an estimated nine million unregistered firearms in the country.

South Africa — which generally prohibits semi-automatic weapons of all types and requires passing a



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very in-depth background check, and in which civilians must establish a good reason to own a weapon *and* the sale of guns between individuals is prohibited *and* the number of cartridges one may possess is limited by law — has a murder rate of 34.3 per 100,000 people.

The United States is presently 84th in the world in homicide rates, with 4.9 murders per 100,000 people. However, that tells only part of the story since U.S. gun laws vary from one locality to another, and most murders in this country are done by gangs in cities that have very strict gun control, such as Detroit, which in 2013 had 45 murders per 100,000 people. There are also Chicago, Oakland, Los Angeles, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and more. These cities also have some the highest rates of violent crime overall. On the other hand, many areas of the United States that have very lenient gun laws have lower murder rates than the European countries that gun controllers always cite as evidence that gun control works.

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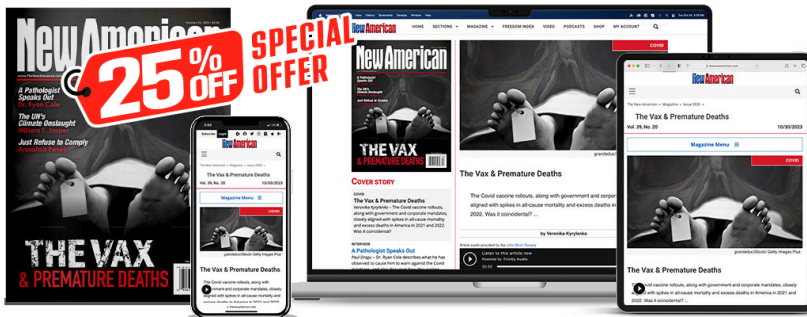
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