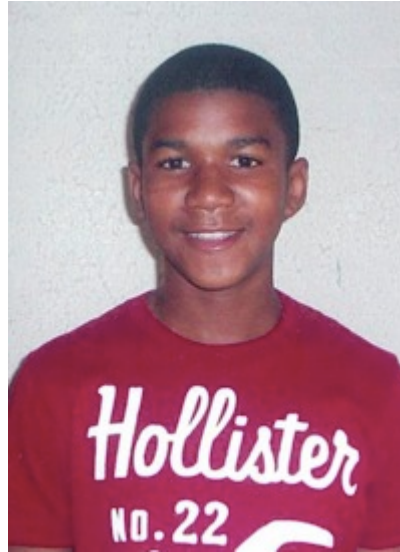




Written by [Alex Newman](#) on March 24, 2012

Anti-Gun Zealots Exploit Florida Tragedy

Activists and some officials are now taking aim at Florida's gun-control regulations, especially the "Stand Your Ground" law allowing potential victims to respond to serious threats with deadly force if necessary. But according to experts, attorneys, and the legislation's sponsors, the widely supported law should probably not even apply in this case based on the information available thus far.



On February 26, Martin, who is black, was walking through a gated residential complex at night after purchasing a bag of Skittles and some Iced Tea. On the way to his father's house, he was allegedly confronted by local neighborhood patrol chief George Zimmerman, a Hispanic.

What exactly happened next remains the subject of dispute. But 911 tapes cited in media reports and other available evidence suggest Zimmerman — who was studying criminal justice at a local college — may have pursued the teenager after informing police that a black male covering his head with a hoodie was acting suspiciously.

Zimmerman was told not to intervene by police, who reportedly said they were on the way. He then [allegedly used](#) a derogatory term for blacks, according to some interpretations of the police audio tape, and claimed "they always get away." His attorney and other experts [denied](#) that any racially charged statement was made.

Moments later, Martin — who was unarmed — was fatally shot in the chest. Zimmerman, who reportedly suffered some minor injuries during a scuffle, claimed he was acting in self-defense and was not immediately arrested by local law enforcement. But the teenage boy's family and legions of activists across America say the shooting was a murder and should be prosecuted as such.

After the shooting, a broad coalition of organizations known for exploiting tragedies for political gain immediately sprang into action. For example, the anti-gun rights group known as the Brady Campaign — as has become typical — latched onto the tragic death to renew its criticism of the Second Amendment's protection of the right to keep and bear arms.

"This tragic shooting represents the National Rifle Association's vision for America," claimed Brady Campaign boss Dan Gross in a [statement](#). "Trayvon's life has been lost not because of an accident, but because of the easy access to a gun by a violent person permitted by a state with weak gun laws."

Supporters of gun rights blasted the largely discredited Brady Campaign for exploiting the tragedy in what critics called yet another example of despicable political opportunism by anti-liberty extremists. Others noted that jurisdictions with the strictest gun-control laws — Chicago, Washington, D.C., New York, and others — have far higher murder rates than Florida.



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More than a few political opportunists also used the tragedy to attack the popular “Stand Your Ground” law, despite the fact that even Zimmerman’s attorney has said it does not apply in the case. The legislation, signed into law by then-Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, protects people acting in self-defense.

"A person who is not engaged in an unlawful activity ... has no duty to retreat and has the right to stand his or her ground and meet force with force, including deadly force if he or she reasonably believes it is necessary to do so to prevent death or great bodily harm to himself or herself or another or to prevent the commission of a forcible felony," the law states.

Of course, the law, which exists in various forms in more than 20 states, does not allow anyone to actually pursue a person. And Craig Sonner, Zimmerman’s lawyer, told the press that “Stand Your Ground” is not even relevant to the tragedy in Sanford, Florida.

"In my legal opinion, that's not really applicable to this case," Sonner was [quoted as saying](#). "This is self-defense, and that's been around for forever — that you have a right to defend yourself. So the next issue [that] is going to come up is: was he justified in using the amount of force he did?"

Despite the fact that Zimmerman is not even relying on the law, anti-self-defense zealots and more than a few mainstream media outlets are waging a fierce campaign to have it overturned. The anti-Second Amendment group “Floridians for Gun Safety” is seeking to have it undone in the 2013 legislative session.

"I think it's a poorly written law that's had some consequences that people are just starting to figure out," claimed Art Hayhoe, the anti-gun organization’s executive director. “This case is a classic case of what's wrong with 'Stand Your Ground.' We're going for repeal."

Supporters of the law point out that it serves as a powerful deterrent to criminals, who are more likely to think twice about attacking if their would-be victims can legally defend themselves. But opponents believe those victims should be forced to risk their lives and flee from would-be killers or rapists instead.

A Florida prosecutor employed by citizens and taxpayers to help enforce the state’s laws — not write them or lobby against them — has been quoted in numerous media reports blasting “Stand Your Ground.” Despite the fact that the law specifically excludes individuals engaged in illegal activity, state attorney Willie Meggs in Tallahassee [complained](#) to the *New York Times* that gang members might try to use it.

But Florida Republican lawmaker Dennis Baxley, who sponsored and helped author the law, announced that he stands firmly behind it. He also pointed out that, despite the false impression created by some deceptive activists, it does not protect people who confront and pursue their targets as allegedly occurred in the Martin case.

“When a law-abiding citizen is confronted with attack, he should be able to defend himself,” Baxley was quoted as saying by the *Tampa Tribune*. “But [Zimmerman] was told by police he shouldn't pursue. Once he did that, he was on thin ice as far as this statute is concerned."

And despite isolated incidents where someone might try to misuse the law, Baxley said it was better to err on the side of protecting individuals facing threats. "That's good public policy. I think we have a good statute and I would hate to lose anything in it that protects people from harm," Baxley said. “It saves lives."

Baxley, who now serves in the state Senate, also expressed frustration with activists trying to remove



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legal protections for potential victims. "You have to look at the big picture," he explained. "We can sit for hours and armchair-quarterback this, but when a victim is under attack he only has seconds to think. They have to know we're going to be with them, that they can protect their lives and their families. It's frustrating to me when I see the anti-gun lobby use this to attack the law."

Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, who signed "Stand Your Ground," agreed that the law was probably not even applicable to the Zimmerman case as well. "In this particular case based on my limited knowledge, it appears to me that this law does not apply to this circumstance," he was [quoted as saying](#). "Stand your ground means stand your ground, it doesn't mean chase after somebody who has turned their back."

A Florida Grand Jury will likely begin reviewing the evidence in the case next month, and Florida Gov. Rick Scott [formed](#) an independent panel to review the "Stand Your Ground" law. Zimmerman has not yet been taken into custody or charged.

Multiple investigations into the shooting are ongoing as protests demanding Zimmerman's arrest continue to grow. And the Obama administration's Department of Justice is reportedly seeking to unconstitutionally make the killing into a federal issue by claiming it may have been motivated by "hate."

Photo of Trayvon Martin: AP Images

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