



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on March 11, 2019

Media Tout British Medical Journal Study's Anti-gun Conclusions, While Ignoring Study's Limitations

When the *British Medical Journal* (*BMJ*) released the results of [its study of gun violence](#) on March 6, its conclusions matched the media's anti-gun narrative. Immediately, members of the media breathlessly reported them without noting the study's limitations. From The Hill: "States with stricter gun control regulations have fewer mass shootings: study." From Yahoo: "State by state, more gun ownership equals more mass shootings, study shows." From Vox: "Study: where gun laws are weaker, there are more mass shootings."



To his credit German Lopez, in his 10-page analysis of the *BMJ* report for Vox, did mention that the study's conclusions were tentative and that more work needed to be done to confirm them. Deep into his article, on page five, Lopez wrote:

This is also just one study. As the authors acknowledge, there isn't much research into how levels of gun ownership and weaker gun laws influence mass shootings. It's possible that as more studies come out with different or more rigorous methodologies, the results could differ.

One need only read the *BMJ* study itself to conclude that the mainstream media were too quick to jump to conclusions just because they bolstered their anti-gun narrative. The *BMJ*'s lead investigator is Paul M. Reeping, a second-year student at Harvard majoring in infectious disease epidemiology. He joined five others in concluding: "The permissiveness or restrictions of state gun laws is associated with the rate of mass shootings in the U.S. States with more permissive gun laws and greater gun ownership have higher rates of mass shootings."

That was the lede promoted by Vox, The Hill, Yahoo, and others. What was missing in the reporting was this from Reeping, et al:

There are several limitations in our study.... The potential for omitted variable biases ... remain and future analyses are encouraged to build on our work.... In addition, the state-restrictiveness score we use has not been validated.

This treatment of a study with questionable conclusions matching the anti-gun narrative of major voices in the media is not a singular occurrence. In 2016 a criminology professor at the University of Alabama, Adam Lankford, published a study concluding that roughly one-third of all the mass shootings in the world take place in the United States. This lit up the anti-gun media long before anyone was able to take the time to examine the study and question the data supporting it.

But John Lott, president of the Crime Prevention Research Center, did just that and concluded that Lankford's study overstated his results *by a factor of ten*. Lott redid Lankford's study using the best data available (Lankford refused to reveal his data sources) and found instead that the United States



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had less than three percent of the world's mass shootings over a 15-year period. As Lott noted,

If you fix the data, you get the opposite result from him [Lankford]. He has the United States way out there, all by itself in terms of mass public shootings. He's simply wrong.

The United States, when I go through this, ranks 58th in the world in the rate of mass public shootings and 62nd in the world in terms of murders from mass public shootings.

Columnist Marilyn vos Savant noted, "Proofs are excellent lessons in reasoning. Without logic and reasoning, you are dependent on jumping to conclusions or — worse — having empty opinions."

For the anti-gun media, not checking the footnotes for disclaimers in the *BMJ* study leads to the same empty opinions.

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