



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on December 21, 2015

Do Guns Really Kill As Many Americans As Cars?

News reports of a study published last week claim that for the first time in more than 60 years, guns kill as many Americans as do cars. The author of the study, Garen J. Wintemute, M.D., M.P.H., is an emergency department attending physician and professor at UC Davis Health System in Sacramento, California. He is also an anti-gun crusader with a long track record of pushing his agenda for more and more gun control. This recent study seems to be his next attempt at disarming law-abiding citizens.



Wintemute's [biography](#) on the UC Davis website describes him as "a renowned expert on the public health crisis of gun violence and a pioneer in the field of injury epidemiology and prevention of firearm violence." It also says:

Dr. Wintemute has conducted and published findings from numerous studies on gun accessibility, connections between gun ownership and violence, and related topics. He has testified before Congress and served as a consultant for the National Institute of Justice; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms; and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Wintemute seems to revel in using mass shootings — and their subsequent media coverage — to get his message out. Right after the Sandy Hook school shooting in December 2012, he was [interviewed](#) by Sasha Abramsky for *The Nation*. He told her:

Firearms are readily available. We have created "global gunning," much as we have created global warming. We have made a whole series of policy decisions that have made the widest possible array of firearms available to the widest possible array of people for use in the widest possible array of circumstances. And we are paying the price for those decisions; or, in this case, our children are paying it for us.

He went on to advocate not only banning certain weapons, but confiscating those already "in circulation."

But we need to understand there are millions of those guns in circulation in the US already. Unless we are willing to recover those weapons, we are going to continue to pay the price for the decisions we have made over the last thirty to fifty years.

Of course a plethora of drugs have already been made illegal and that has done nothing to stop criminals from growing, manufacturing, buying, selling, or using them. Likewise, banning guns will not stop criminals from having and using guns. But it will prevent law-abiding citizens from defending themselves against those criminals.

Wintemute has made a career of decrying gun ownership and demanding gun control and the forced disarming of law-abiding citizens. His [study](#) published last week — *The Epidemiology of Firearm Violence in the Twenty-First Century United States* — has received wide coverage by the media. In the



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midst of [calls for greater gun control](#) after the ISIS-inspired attack in San Bernardino earlier this month, the 20 page report — made up of statistics, charts, and graphs — has been reported with attention-grabbing (and misleading) headlines:

- The *Washington Post*: [Guns are now killing as many people as cars in the U.S.](#)
- *Mother Jones*: [What Kills More Americans: Guns or Cars?](#)
- The *Kansas City Star*: [Guns, cars are killing Americans at equal rates](#)

It has been said that figures don't lie, but sometimes liars figure. It is not so much that the data is misleading as that *the data is being reported in a way that is misleading*. The claim that the number of deaths by firearms and the number of deaths by automobiles are equal in 2015 is based on some assumptions. And some omissions.

One of the assumptions is based on the fact that 2012 is the last year for which data are available, so the claim is based on predicting a trend by extrapolating the numbers. As Wintemute says in the introduction to his report, "During the ten years from 2003 to 2012, the most recent year for which data are available, 313,045 persons died from firearm-related injuries in the United States." He then goes on to "predict" that in 2015, the numbers of those killed by guns and cars will be the same.

While this may be correct, it is still a prediction instead of a fact. As *Bloomberg* reported, "Shooting deaths in 2015 will probably rise to almost 33,000, and those related to autos will decline to about 32,000, based on the 10-year average trend." Words and phrases such as "probably" and "based on the 10-year average trend" are exactly what they seem: educated guesses.

The claim also fails to take into account the number of people killed by firearms while committing a violent crime. When either police or private citizens use firearms to defend themselves or others, it often causes the death of the criminal or criminals, but also save lives that would have been lost if the criminal or criminals had been able to succeed in killing others. Gun Owners of America — an organization based in Springfield, Virginia that is dedicated to preserving the rights of law-abiding citizens to "keep and bear arms" — has [taken the time to drill down into the data](#) about the real use of firearms in America. The organization says:

Law-abiding citizens use guns to defend themselves against criminals as many as 2.5 million times every year — or about 6,850 times a day. This means that each year, firearms are used more than 80 times more often to protect the lives of honest citizens than to take lives.

Of those 6,850 times per day that law-abiding citizens use guns to defend themselves from attackers, only about eight percent of the time is the attacker killed or wounded. That means that about 548 times per day (or 200,000 time per year), someone who needed to be shot gets shot.

According to statistics from 2010, [about 14 percent of people who were shot died as a result of it](#). Wintemute's study shows that in 2012, "there were 32,288 deaths from firearm violence in the United States." What he does not show is how many of those deaths were criminals who were shot while committing a violent crime. If even *five percent* of the criminals shot by law-abiding citizens died as a result of being shot, that would account for 10,000 of Wintemute's 32,288 deaths in 2012. Since lives were saved as a result of those shootings, that would also need to be factored in. Of course those factors do not support his agenda of more gun control.

Another interesting point: Even if one accepts Wintemute's numbers and their implications, one has to realize that for at least 60 years automobiles have killed more people than guns every year, and scarce



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few of those deaths were the result of law-abiding citizens using cars to defend themselves against an attack by a violent criminal. Yet there have been no calls for “vehicle control.” Why the difference? Since even Wintemute admits that automobiles have historically been responsible for more deaths than have guns, why is the focus — now and always — on getting guns out of the hands of private citizens (note that none of the proposed “gun-control” legislation seeks to disarm the state)? The obvious answer is that a disarmed populace is a compliant populace.

Wintemute may work in a hospital emergency department and see the aftermath of shootings, but he does not work in law enforcement and see the carnage left behind when citizens who do not have guns become the victims of criminals who do. The best response to an armed criminal — [according to many in law enforcement](#) — is an armed citizenry. These professionals and experts in the field of crime have urged citizens to get a concealed carry permit and arm themselves.

Just be sure to buckle up on your way to the gun store. You wouldn’t want to wind up being a statistic.



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