



Written by [Thomas Sowell](#) on December 18, 2012

Gun Control Zealots' Invincible Ignorance

Must every tragic mass shooting bring out the shrill ignorance of “gun control” advocates?

The key fallacy of so-called gun control laws is that such laws do not in fact control guns. They simply disarm law-abiding citizens, while people bent on violence find firearms readily available.

If gun control zealots had any respect for facts, they would have discovered this long ago, because there have been too many factual studies over the years to leave any serious doubt about gun control laws being not merely futile but counterproductive.



Places and times with the strongest gun control laws have often been places and times with high murder rates. Washington, D.C., is a classic example, but just one among many.

When it comes to the rate of gun ownership, that is higher in rural areas than in urban areas, but the murder rate is higher in urban areas. The rate of gun ownership is higher among whites than among blacks, but the murder rate is higher among blacks. For the country as a whole, handgun ownership doubled in the late 20th century, while the murder rate went down.

The few counter-examples offered by gun control zealots do not stand up under scrutiny. Perhaps their strongest talking point is that Britain has stronger gun control laws than the United States and lower murder rates.

But, if you look back through history, you will find that Britain has had a lower murder rate than the United States for more than two centuries — and, for most of that time, the British had no more stringent gun control laws than the United States. Indeed, neither country had stringent gun control for most of that time.

In the middle of the 20th century, you could buy a shotgun in London with no questions asked. New York, which at that time had had the stringent Sullivan Law restricting gun ownership since 1911, still had several times the gun murder rate of London, as well as several times the London murder rate with other weapons.

Neither guns nor gun control was not the reason for the difference in murder rates. People were the difference.

Yet many of the most zealous advocates of gun control laws, on both sides of the Atlantic, have also been advocates of leniency toward criminals.

In Britain, such people have been so successful that legal gun ownership has been reduced almost to the vanishing point, while even most convicted felons in Britain are not put behind bars. The crime rate, including the rate of crimes committed with guns, is far higher in Britain now than it was back in the days when there were few restrictions on Britons buying firearms.



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In 1954, there were only a dozen armed robberies in London but, by the 1990s — after decades of ever tightening gun ownership restrictions — there were more than a hundred times as many armed robberies.

Gun control zealots' choice of Britain for comparison with the United States has been wholly tendentious, not only because it ignored the history of the two countries, but also because it ignored other countries with stronger gun control laws than the United States, such as Russia, Brazil and Mexico. All of these countries have higher murder rates than the United States.

You could compare other sets of countries and get similar results. Gun ownership has been three times as high in Switzerland as in Germany, but the Swiss have had lower murder rates. Other countries with high rates of gun ownership and low murder rates include Israel, New Zealand, and Finland.

Guns are not the problem. People are the problem — including people who are determined to push gun control laws, either in ignorance of the facts or in defiance of the facts.

There is innocent ignorance and there is invincible, dogmatic and self-righteous ignorance. Every tragic mass shooting seems to bring out examples of both among gun control advocates.

Some years back, there was a professor whose advocacy of gun control led him to produce a “study” that became so discredited that he resigned from his university. This column predicted at the time that this discredited study would continue to be cited by gun control advocates. But I had no idea that this would happen the very next week in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.

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