



decades.

Gun controllers propose that gun sales occurring outside of licensed stores, such as at gun shows or between private individuals, should be subject to buyer background checks. It takes only a moment to see that that requirement would make no one safer. How would it be enforced? Informal sales by definition are beyond the view of the authorities. It's already against the law for convicted felons to possess firearms. Does anyone believe that restriction is effective? Again, someone determined to commit murder will get a gun without a background check. But having people believe otherwise may keep them from adopting sensible precautions.

[James Alan Fox](#), a professor of criminology at Northeastern University, points out another problem with background checks: "Most mass murderers do not have criminal records or a history of psychiatric hospitalization." Furthermore, let's remember that Lanza took guns from his mother, a legal gun owner.

Nothing the gun controllers can think of will keep guns away from those who intend to do harm.

Unfortunately, some opponents of gun control try to take people's minds off guns by blaming shootings on mental illness. If people with mental problems could be more easily locked up, goes the argument, we'd all be safer. This is an especially dangerous idea. As Fox writes, "Certainly, people cannot be denied their Second Amendment rights just because they look strange or act in an odd manner." But that is what some people seem to want.

Proposing to lock people up (even in a



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purported hospital) before they have been convicted of a crime mocks the principles of justice we routinely pay lip service to. (True, these principles have been violated routinely in the “war on terror.” Our task, however, is to stop this outrage, not make it more common.) Some commentators lament that it is not as easy to commit people as it used to be, but be careful what you ask for. Psychiatrists have no special skill at predicting who will be violent, and while they use terms like “mental disorder,” there are no objective tests for psychiatric “diseases.” Expanding the mental-health laws would save no lives, but it would jeopardize the freedom of people who pose no harm to anyone.

No legislative gimmick will prevent mass shootings. An open society is a risky society, and giving more power to our guardians only raises the ancient question: Who will protect us from our protectors?

In the end, there’s no substitute for taking self-defense seriously.

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