



Myth vs. Fact: Debunking the Gun Lobby's Favorite Talking Points

October 5, 2017

The gun lobby, led by the National Rifle Association (NRA), pursues a number of different policies in state legislatures across the country and in Congress, including eliminating permit requirements for concealed carry; expanding locations where guns may be carried; weakening regulation of the gun industry; and overriding duly enacted state laws that limit gun carrying. While each of these policies have different elements, all are united by a core set of dangerous and misleading arguments perpetuated by the NRA that more guns in more hands will lead to increased personal and community safety.

Below are some of the top NRA-promulgated myths and the facts that expose them as false.

Myth: Owning a gun makes you safer

Fact: Owning a gun puts you at heightened risk for gun violence

The NRA often argues that the United States is a dangerous place and that owning and carrying a gun is the only way to protect both oneself and one's family. While gun ownership is certainly one option for home defense, a growing body of data and research shows that owning a gun also increases the risk of a gun-related tragedy occurring in the home.

- Numerous studies have found that gun ownership increases the risk of both gun-related homicides and suicides.¹
- Guns in the home are particularly dangerous for victims of domestic violence. The presence of a gun in a home with a history of domestic violence increases the risk that a woman will be killed by 500 percent.²
- Guns intended for self-defense are commonly involved in fatal accidents. Studies have shown that across states, higher levels of gun ownership are linked to higher rates of unintentional firearm deaths.³

- Guns are used far more often in criminal homicides than in justifiable acts of self-defense. In 2014, for every self-defense gun homicide in the United States, guns were used in 34 criminal homicides.⁴

Myth: The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun

Fact: Armed citizens rarely successfully intervene to stop an active shooter

While the NRA actively perpetuates this idea that ensuring a fully armed citizenry is the best approach to stopping so-called bad guys before they are able to do too much damage, there is very little evidence suggesting that civilians can effectively serve this role. Armed citizens often lack training for high-stakes situations and can actually make a bad situation worse. A more effective approach to preventing gun deaths is to enact strong laws and policies to help keep guns out of the wrong hands and limit access to highly dangerous weapons of war.

- An FBI study of 160 active-shooting incidents from 2000 to 2013 found that only one was stopped by an individual with a valid firearms permit. In contrast, 21 incidents were stopped by unarmed citizens.⁵
- Armed citizens can worsen the outcome of a mass shooting. During the 2011 shooting in Tucson, Arizona, an armed bystander misidentified the perpetrator and almost shot the wrong person.⁶
- Expansive concealed carry permitting laws are linked to an increase in violent crime. A 2017 study by researchers at Stanford University found that, 10 years after enacting these laws, states experienced a 13 percent to 15 percent rise in violent crimes.⁷
- Using a gun for defense during a robbery has no significant benefits. A 2015 analysis by researchers at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health of the National Crime Victimization Survey found that the likelihood of sustaining an injury during a robbery was nearly identical between people who attempted to defend themselves with a gun and those who took no defensive action.⁸
- A gun is more likely to be stolen than used to stop a crime. According to a CAP analysis of the National Crime Victimization Survey, guns are nearly twice as likely to be stolen than to be used for self-defense.⁹

Myth: Mass shooters specifically target gun-free zones

Fact: A small percentage of mass shootings occur in locations where guns are prohibited

This is a corollary to the myth that so-called good guys need to carry guns to protect against prospective shooters. This myth is often used to try to stop legislative efforts to limit gun carrying in certain locations that are considered particularly sensitive or unsuitable for guns, such as schools, houses of worship, or government buildings. However, most of the incidents in the United States in which a single shooter kills four or more people—the FBI’s definition of a mass shooting—do not occur in locations where guns are banned but rather in private homes or public locations where individuals are free to carry guns. There is absolutely no evidence that mass shooters specifically seek out locations where guns are banned for acts of mass violence.

- Of the 156 mass shootings that occurred from 2009 to 2016, only 10 percent occurred in so-called “gun-free zones.”¹⁰ The majority of these shootings—63 percent—occurred in private homes.¹¹

Myth: Gun laws do not work because criminals do not follow the law

Fact: Gun laws are effective at reducing gun violence

The fact that some individuals will undoubtedly violate any given law is not a reason to eliminate such laws altogether. Strong gun laws—such as those requiring background checks for all gun sales; prohibiting certain dangerous people from buying or possessing guns; and limiting access to highly dangerous weapons of war—are effective at helping keep guns out of the wrong hands in order to prevent gun violence and save lives.

- A 2016 CAP study found that the 10 states with the weakest gun laws have an aggregate level of gun violence that is more than three times higher than the 10 states with the strongest gun laws.¹²
- Research by Everytown for Gun Safety found that states that require background checks for all handgun sales have significantly lower rates of intimate partner gun homicides of women; law enforcement officers killed with handguns; and gun-related suicides.¹³
- Two studies by the John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health demonstrated the impact of permit-to-purchase laws that include a background check requirement. When Connecticut implemented this law, gun homicides in the state fell 40 percent. When Missouri repealed a similar law, gun homicides in that state rose 25 percent.¹⁴

Endnotes

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- 3 Matthew Miller, Deborah Azrael and David Hemenway, "Firearm availability and unintentional firearm deaths, suicide, and homicide among 5-14 year olds" *Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery* 52 (2) (2002): 274–275, available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11426678>.
- 4 Violence Policy Center, "Firearm Justifiable Homicides and Non-Fatal Self-Defense Gun Use" (2017), available at <http://www.vpc.org/studies/justifiable17.pdf>.
- 5 Federal Bureau of Investigation, "A Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013," available at <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/fbi-releases-study-on-active-shooter-incidents> (last accessed October 2017).
- 6 *The Denver Post*, "Armed bystander's reaction in Ariz. Shootings illustrates complexity of gun debate," January 15, 2011, available at <http://www.denverpost.com/2011/01/15/armed-bystanders-reaction-in-ariz-shootings-illustrates-complexity-of-gun-debate/>.
- 7 John Donohue, Abhay Aneja and Kyle Weber, "Right-to-Carry Laws and Violent Crime: A Comprehensive Assessment Using Panel Data and a State-Level Synthetic Controls Analysis." Working Paper 23510 (The National Bureau of Economic Research 2017), available at <http://www.nber.org/papers/w23510>.
- 8 Evan DeFilippis and Devin Hughes, "Gunfight or Flight: New Study Finds No Advantages to Using a Firearm in Self-Defense Situations," *The Trace*, July 14, 2015, available at <https://www.thetrace.org/2015/07/defensive-gun-use-armed-with-reason-hemenway/>.
- 9 Center for American Progress analysis of the National Crime Victimization Survey. While guns were used for self-defense in 85,000 crimes per year from 2010 to 2015, roughly 162,000 guns are stolen each year.
- 10 Everytown For Gun Safety, "Analysis of Mass Shootings" (2017), available at <https://everytownresearch.org/reports/mass-shootings-analysis/>
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 Chelsea Parsons and Eugenio Weigend, "America Under Fire" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2016), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/guns-crime/reports/2016/10/11/145830/america-under-fire/>.
- 13 Everytown for Gun Safety, "Background Checks Reduce Gun Violence and Saves Lives" (2015), available at https://everytownresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Background_Check_FactSheet_web.pdf.
- 14 Daniel Webster, Cassandra Kercher Crifasi, and Jon S. Vernick, "Effects of the Repeal of Missouri's Handgun Purchaser Licensing Law on Homicides," *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 91 (3) (2014): 293–302; Daniel Webster, Cassandra Kercher Crifasi, and Jon S. Vernick, "Erratum to: Effects of the Repeal of Missouri's Handgun Purchaser Licensing Law on Homicides," *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 91 (3) (2014): 598–601.