

# Gun ownership

[Law](#), [Crime](#)



Imagine spending a quiet evening at home or attending a friendly church service. I am sure you would not expect to be threatened or attacked by a criminal, especially in the main place where you expect to have peace of mind but that is exactly what happened to an elderly woman in Arizona. When she realized an intruder was breaking into her home she used her handgun to fire two shots, which scared him away (Rocky Mountain News, 2008). In Colorado, an armed man opened fire in a church killing two people and threatening to kill more when he was shot by an armed volunteer security officer (Rocky Mountain News, 2007).

In these situations, when a criminal decided to infringe on another's right to privacy and safety, and law enforcement was not around, law abiding citizens were able to stand up and protect themselves using their registered handguns and essentially saving their lives. One does not have to think too hard to imagine the state these citizens might have been in if the Second Amendment did not protect the right of the people to keep and bear arms. Although guns are used in some violent offenses, the fact remains that it is an American's constitutional right to own a firearm.

Stricter gun laws will not promise a decrease in violent crimes in the United States, and may put the lives of innocent citizens in greater danger. To understand why owning a firearm is so important to the American people, one must first understand the history of gun ownership. The Second Amendment to the United States Constitution states " a well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed. " Although there is some

debate over whether the Second Amendment empowers citizens with the right to keep and bear arms,

Gun Ownership 3 Americans cannot ignore the history of the ownership of weapons prior to, and including gun ownership. Before there were firearms, under the reign of Alfred the Great, all English citizens were required by law to own arms for fear of being overthrown during the British oppression. By the thirteenth century, the law had been changed to specify the arms as the long bow. In 1623 recognizing the need for self defense and hunting, Virginians were not even allowed to travel unless they were properly armed.

In 1658, each colony household had to have a functioning firearm, and in 1673, the law stated that if a person was too poor to purchase a firearm, he would be provided one by the government (The subcommittee on the Constitution, 1982. ) The founding fathers recognized an individual's right to safety and defense making the right to bear arms a constitutional right. Times have changed, but the need to protect onesfamilyand possessions still exists. According to the Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, people in America use a handgun to defend themselves every 13 seconds.

Does that mean that citizens have turned trigger happy as some would counter argue? No. In fact, according to the FBI, only in 8% of the cases does the victim harm the attacker. In less that one in one thousand does the attacker die. In aninterviewconducted by J. Neil Schuman (1993), Gary Kleck, Ph. D, a criminology and criminal justice professor at Florida State University conducted a survey of 4, 978 homes in the United States. Kleck found that when law enforcement is not around, 92% of American citizens reported that firing a warning shot scared off potential attackers.

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Dr. Kleck's research confirms that " American civilians commonly use their privately-owned firearms to defend themselves against criminal attacks and that such defensive uses significantly outnumber the criminal uses of Gun Ownership 4 firearms in America" (Schuman, 1993, ¶1). A person has a right to feel safe in his or her own home, and legal firearm ownership achieves this for many citizens. More guns in America does not equate to more violent crimes. An estimated half of all American households has at least 1 gun owner (Cook, P. & Ludwig, J.

, 1997. ) The number of right-to-carry states has increased from 10 in 1987 to 38 today (NRA, 2008). The National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) approved 60. 4 firearm transactions between 1994 and 2004 (The Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2006) however, violent crime rates dropped 1. 8% in 2007 according to the FBI. In right-to-carry states, the total violent crimes rates were down by 21% compared to other states. Florida issued the most gun permits and experienced the greatest decline in violent crime on a state-by-state basis in 2006.

This chart shows a decline in violent crime since 1994, reaching the lowest rate ever in 2005. Years (The U. S Department of Justice, 2006) Gun Ownership 5 Gun Bans are ineffective because criminals will find a way to evade the law. In D. C. where handguns are banned, 137 people were killed as a result of firearm violence in 2006 (Lanier, 2007). In Britain, following a complete gun ban, firearm offenses increased 40% between 1997 and 2000 (Murray, 2001). In the United States it is illegal to possess and sell controlled substances yet, we are still combating drugs in this country.

According to the D. E. A. , there were 5, 636, 305 drug seizures in 2007. The estimated number of arrest for drug abuse violations amongst adults has continued to rise from 1970-2006. The “ war on drugs” in this country is proof that criminals will continue to break the law and the best way to combat criminal activity is with a strict enforcement of the law and stricter penalties. Changing the Constitution by incorporating stricter gun control will hurt the innocent law abiding citizens of America, not the guilty criminals that will continue to obtain guns illegally.

Guns are used as self-defense for many citizens. According to the Albuquerque Tribune (2008), more women are acquiring guns especially single women reporting that they feel safer owning a firearm for protection. According to Kleck (1999), there have been 20 studies conducted that have found when criminals attempt an attack on an unsuspecting victim if the victim has a gun the aggressor is far less likely harm or injure them. In addition some convicts have reported if they suspected persons may be armed, they would be far less likely to initiate an attack on that individual.

Guns are being sold at alarming rates in black markets all over the world. Disarming citizens will only make them a target to those criminals who have no intention on abiding by the law. Gun Ownership 6 Some laws have been put in place to prevent persons suspected of criminal activity from purchasing guns such as conducting criminal background checks prior to gun purchases, but this is not enough to solve the problem. The solution is not stricter gun laws, but harsher penalties for those who break the law. Criminals need to be held accountable for illegal guns.

Same as the concept with the death penalty, harsher penalties will deter gun offenses. The A. T. F states that out 70, 000 guns traced each year, 50, 000 of them involve offenses many of which are not prosecuted (Moore, 1997). This is a rather high number of offenses. If criminals see illegal gun charges as a serious offense, than maybe others will get the picture. According to the statistics, more citizens in America with firearms do not equal more crime. Studies have shown a dramatic increase in violent crimes where gun laws are stricter and a decrease where the gun laws are more lenient.

Criminals are less likely to attack innocent people if they feel they may be armed. One could assume that the increase in gun ownership has had a significant impact on the decline in the national violent crime rate. What we also know is that criminals are such, because they have no respect for the law, and whether guns are illegal or legal, they will find a way to obtain them victimizing the innocent. Instead of stripping American citizens of their constitutional right, more effort should be put towards punishing those who break the law by enforcing the laws currently in place.

This is the best way to bring American communities a step closer to ensuring the safety of our law abiding citizens.

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