

Media Misinformation About Arming Teachers

Misinformation can be deadly, especially when it comes to issues like school shootings. This is because it can build support for policies that increase fatalities and generate opposition to reforms that can save lives.

Despite these high stakes, a wide array of media outlets have spread fictions about violence, firearms, and armed security in the wake of the armed rampage that killed 17 students and teachers at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

Value of Deterrence

Shortly after the Parkland massacre, [President Trump said](#):

- "A "gun free" school is a magnet for bad people."
- "Highly trained, gun adept, teachers/coaches" would be a "great deterrent" to school shootings.
- "If a potential "sicko shooter" knows that a school has a large number of very talented teachers (and others) who will be instantly shooting, the sicko will NEVER attack that school."

After reporting the last of these statements, the *Washington Post* [countered](#), "Some criminologists have questioned that reasoning, pointing out that some people who plan to commit mass shootings are prepared to die in the process." Likewise, the *New York Times* editorial board [wrote](#) that "many deranged mass murderers expect to die themselves during their killing sprees. It's almost laughable to believe that the president's proposal would deter them."

Those arguments are refuted by a central fact of criminology and the [events of Parkland](#), in which the murderer abandoned

his weapon, snuck out of the school, and "surrendered without resistance" to a lone policeman.

Criminology research has proven that lawbreakers often attack soft targets or easy prey. In the words of the textbook [*Forensic Science: Advanced Investigations*](#), "Very often, a criminal chooses a target based on the vulnerability of the victim." The academic book [*The Psychology of Criminal and Antisocial Behavior: Victim and Offender Perspectives*](#) says it like this: "Predators, irrespective of their end game, are exceptionally good at identifying the weak members of the herd."

Even terrorists who "want to die" are deterred by security, because they "fear failure" and "desperately do not want to die for nothing," explains [David Grossman](#), a former West Point psychology professor and internationally [renowned authority](#) on the mindsets of killers. "Our goal," says Grossman, "is to win a battle in the minds of millions of potential terrorists in our nation, who are asking the key questions: Can I succeed? Can I get a body count?"

In sum, the claim that armed guardians don't serve as deterrents is demonstrably false. This does not mean that every potential killer will be deterred, especially if security measures are inadequate. This leads to the next point.

Effectiveness of Armed Guards

Another common fiction circulated by media outlets is that armed security is not an effective means of protecting students. As proof of this, they point to school shootings where armed guards were present, but the killers inflicted large death tolls. For example:

- The *Star-Ledger* editorial board [claims](#): "There were 50 armed cops at Virginia Tech that day in 2007, but one guy with anxiety disorder murdered 33 people with two

handguns and 400 rounds of ammo. There are 45,000 well-armed soldiers at Fort Hood, but a disturbed Army psychiatrist killed 13 people and injured 32 more with two handguns."

- In an article entitled "How Do We Prevent School Shootings?" PolitiFact [writes](#): "But two of the deadliest school shootings" Columbine and Virginia Tech" occurred despite the presence of armed police. Columbine had an armed school resource officer, while the morning of the shooting at Virginia Tech, five officers plus the police chief were present on campus."

Starting with the most outlandish canard in the statements above, there were not "45,000 well-armed soldiers at Fort Hood." This is because the Department of Defense prohibited soldiers on the base from carrying weapons except for official duties. As reported in a *Los Angeles Times* [article](#) about the shooting:

Service weapons are checked daily and are usually only allowed to be removed from an arms room for training on a range or maintenance. Personal weapons must be kept locked and registered with the base provost marshal.

This disarming of soldiers on military bases can be traced to a directive issued by the George H. Bush administration [in 1992](#) and implemented by the Clinton administration [in 1993](#).

Also, there were not "50 armed cops at Virginia Tech" on the day of the shooting. Per the official [Virginia government report](#) on the massacre, "only 14" officers were on duty at the time it occurred, including "5 on patrol and 9 in the office including the chief." More importantly, the report explains that the campus population included 26,370 students and "131 major buildings spread over 2,600 acres."

In other words, each patrol officer was responsible for protecting the lives of about 5,000 students, 25 buildings,

and 500 acres. Such security is easily defeated, because killers only need to wait until the guards leave their intended victims.

In comparison, the Superdome in New Orleans has a seating capacity of [73,208 people](#) and more than "[900 public safety personnel](#)" are on duty in the stadium and surrounding area during "large events such as football games." This includes "armed public safety officers, non-armed game day security guards along with officers from the Louisiana State Police, New Orleans Police Department and Orleans Parish Sheriff's Department." These figures amount to one security personnel for every 80 people" or about 60 times more security per person than provided to the students at Virginia Tech.

Trump's plan to arm [one out of five](#) teachers accords perfectly with the Dome's ratio of 80 to 1. The average [pupil/teacher ratio](#) in public schools is 16 to 1, amounting to one armed teacher for every 80 students.

Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School had about [3,200 students](#) and [one armed guard](#) during the massacre. This is about 40 times less security per person than the Dome. Columbine had about [1,900 students](#) and one armed guard, or 24 times less.

Florida Governor Rick Scott has [announced plans](#) to place a "law enforcement officer in every public school" and "at least one law enforcement officer for every 1,000 students" in larger schools "by the start of the 2018 school year." This would leave these students with roughly 12 times less security per person than football fans.

Large crowds "like those found in schools, concerts, and sporting events" are prime targets for mass murderers. Token security "like that provided in Parkland, Columbine, and Virginia Tech" is not the same as proper security.

Effectiveness of Armed Teachers

Perhaps the most common media deceit about this issue is that armed teachers would make schools less safe. A broad array of facts about policing and firearms belie such claims, but media outlets routinely ignore these facts, and instead, promote false rhetoric to the contrary. For example:

- CNN legal analyst Jeffrey Toobin [stated on air](#) that Trump's plan to arm teachers "is an insane idea" and added, "Does anybody remember their teachers? Do you think we should give all of them guns?"
- CNN's Anderson Cooper gave Democratic Senator Chris Murphy unchallenged airtime to say this is "an insane idea that will make our schools less safe not more safe." To make certain more people would hear this, Cooper then [tweeted](#) Murphy's statement to his 1.2 million followers.
- NBC News published an [article](#) entitled "Trump's Proposal to Arm Teachers Panned by Experts as a "Colossally Stupid Idea". The article quotes only "experts" who are opposed to Trump's plan and says: "The experts added that even with proper firearms training, to expect a teacher "to be able to shoot down an attacker and not accidentally injure anyone else" is unrealistic.

However, empirical facts show that people with recreational handgun experience shoot as accurately as police. Furthermore, law-abiding civilians use guns to prevent an enormous amount of violence every year, far exceeding the number of accidents.

In 2015, the *International Journal of Police Science & Management* published a [study](#) on the risks of "deadly police shootouts." This involved testing "the level of shooting accuracy demonstrated by law enforcement recruits upon completion" of "their firearms training in comparison with novice" recruits who had not yet received this training. The study found:

- "no difference" in accuracy at any distance between

recruits who had completed law enforcement or military handgun training and those who only had "recreational" handgun experience.

- trained officers were "only 10% more accurate" than recruits with "minimal/no experience" at ranges of 3 to 15 feet, which is where a "majority of gunfights and critical situations will likely" occur.

On average, police officers receive [71 hours](#) of firearms instruction in their initial academy training and [less than 15 hours](#) per year thereafter. They also get very little real-world experience with firing guns. Contrary to public perception, a 2017 Pew poll [found](#) that "only about a quarter (27%) of all officers say they have ever fired their service weapon in the line of duty. This is significant, because such skills deteriorate over time.

Per a [report](#) commissioned by Canada's Department of National Defense about the "retention and fading of military skills," "one can expect proportionately large degrees of skill loss after only moderate amounts of time. This has been confirmed in numerous studies examining retention of military tasks."

Trump is [proposing](#) that a select group of "highly adept" and "highly trained" teachers be armed "if they really have that aptitude." Given the above data on police handgun accuracy and training times, such teachers could easily match and exceed the firearm skills of many officers.

Even civilians "who rarely have regular, formal training" save far more lives with guns than are lost in accidents. This is another area where many media outlets have [grossly misled](#) their audiences, but some key facts are:

- U.S. civilians use guns to [stop lethal violence](#) more than 100,000 times per year, while there are less than 600 fatal [firearm accidents](#) per year.
- A [2013 study](#) ordered by [President Obama](#) and conducted by

the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council found that:

- "Almost all national survey estimates indicate that defensive gun uses by victims are at least as common as offensive uses by criminals, with estimates of annual uses ranging from about 500,000 to more than 3 million."
- "Studies that directly assessed the effect of actual defensive uses of guns (i.e., incidents in which a gun was "used" by the crime victim in the sense of attacking or threatening an offender) have found consistently lower injury rates among gun-using crime victims compared with victims who used other self-protective strategies."

Again, the data above applies to the general public, not a highly selective, rigorously vetted, and thoroughly trained group of professionals. These facts point to the conclusion that such teachers would be very effective in protecting the lives of students.

Costs of Arming and Training Teachers

Trump's [reasons](#) for arming certain teachers instead of hiring more guards are that "it would be much less expensive," and schools wouldn't look like an "armed camp" with "security guards standing all over the place, loaded up with guns." Yet, some media outlets are spreading claims that Trump's proposal is too expensive:

- Daily Beast editor-in-chief John Avlon [stated](#) on CNN that training teachers "costs money. You've got a situation where a lot of teachers in this country buy homeroom supplies. So all of the sudden we're going to be finding money for them to be trained up to use a weapon in a classroom full of kids."
- [The Guardian](#) gave op-ed space to Ross Barkan, a

journalist and candidate for the New York State Senate, who wrote: "Training these teachers alone could cost the federal government hundreds of millions. That's before the government starts purchasing pistols for each of these militarized educators."

Even under a high-cost scenario where teachers receive far more training than police and are paid at a rate of \$50 per hour for their training time, the annual cost of equipping, training, and supervising these teachers would be less than 1% of current government spending on K"12 schools. This figure is based on the following data:

- 100 hours per year of training, compared to the police average of [less than 15 hours](#) per year and [71 hours](#) of initial academy training
- \$50 per hour to pay teachers for their time spent training, which is about the same as [average teacher compensation](#) including salary and benefits
- \$25 per hour for the training
- \$1,000 per year for training ammunition
- \$455 every five years for a [semi-automatic 9 mm handgun](#) with night sights and three 15-round magazines
- \$1,000 per year for ongoing, rigorous background checks and supervision

These costs [tally to](#) \$9,620 per armed teacher per year. In the 2014-15 school year, public K"12 schools employed [3,132,351 teachers](#), enrolled [49,178,890 students](#), and spent an average of [\\$13,119 per student](#). Pulling all these figures together, if one out of five teachers were armed, [the costs](#) would be:

- \$6.0 billion per year.
- 0.9% of government spending on K"12 schools.
- 0.1% of federal, state, and local government spending.

"Weapons of War"

The final media deception (covered in this article) is that

teachers armed with handguns would be helpless against criminals armed with "weapons of wars" like the AR-15 used by the Parkland shooter. A Google News search for *Parkland AR-15* ("weapon of war" OR "weapons of war") yields thousands of [results](#).

Once again, this widespread storyline is at odds with the facts.

The AR-15 used by the Parkland killer is not a weapon of war. It is a [semi-automatic](#) firearm, which fires [one bullet](#) each time the trigger is pulled. In contrast, the book [Military Technology](#) explains that the "most common military" firearms are fully "automatic rifles and machine guns" that fire multiple bullets "with a single pull of the trigger." The key advantage of fully automatic guns is that soldiers can "point the weapon in the general direction of" their enemies and mow them down en masse. The book notes that these firearms have "made war a far more deadly business."

The U.S. Armed Forces' "weapon of choice" is a [Colt M4 Carbine](#) rifle, which changes from semi-automatic to fully automatic with the flip of switch. This weapon comes in two models, one that fires as long as the trigger is held and another that fires a set number of bullets or "burst" with each pull of the trigger.

A federal law called the [National Firearms Act](#) effectively bans the vast majority of civilians from owning fully automatic firearms. Since 1934, this law has [strictly regulated](#) the sale and ownership of such guns. Furthermore, a 1986 revision to the law banned all fully automatic firearms except for those grandfathered under previous law. In January 2016, the Department of Justice [reported](#) "there is no evidence that" any legal owner of a firearm covered by this act was convicted of using these guns to commit a crime from 2006 through 2014.

Semi-automatic AR-15s look like fully automatic military rifles, but their inner workings are [essentially the same](#) as common guns owned by law-abiding citizens. Hence, the gun control lobby has sought to conflate these weapons in the minds of the public. In 1988, the newly formed [Violence Policy Center](#) (which would grow to become the nation's "most effective" gun control organization) published a booklet entitled [Assault Weapons and Accessories in America](#). In its conclusion, Josh Sugermann, the founder and current executive director of this organization, strategized how the "new topic" of "assault weapons" will "strengthen the handgun restriction lobby for the following reasons:"

The weapons' menacing looks, coupled with the public's confusion over fully automatic machine guns versus semi-automatic assault weapons" anything that looks like a machine gun is assumed to be a machine gun" can only increase the chance of public support for restrictions on these weapons.

Instead of exposing this deceit, the media has [participated](#) in it by labeling semi-automatic guns as "assault rifles" and by uncritically quoting people who call them "weapons of war." This is how journalists and editors use their platforms to broadcast propaganda. They also do this by quoting truths and then casting doubt on them, as they did with Trump's statements on deterrence.

Contrary to the rhetoric that AR-15s have no practical use but killing people in droves, a 2011 article in [Outdoor Life](#) states:

Regardless of what you think or how you feel about using semi-automatic guns for hunting, autoloaders and AR-style rifles are becoming more common in [hunting] camps and virtually every major manufacturer is producing these guns in calibers heavy enough to drop deer, hogs and bears.

People also use AR-15s for home defense. A 2015 article in the magazine [*Tactical Life*](#) summarizes the views of eight firearm experts about the weapon they use to defend their home. Three of these individuals use an AR-style rifle, four use a semi-automatic handgun, and one uses both.

Likewise, an AR-15 was used by a former NRA instructor to [*stop the carnage*](#) in the 2017 church shooting in Sutherland Hills, Texas. Yet, [CNN](#), [USA Today](#), [NPR](#), [Business Insider](#), [CBS Chicago](#), and the [New York Times](#) all ran stories that described the hero's AR-15 simply as a "gun" or "rifle" (Hat tip: [Carl Arbogast](#)). In vivid contrast, these same media outlets described the killer's AR-15 as a "military-style rifle" ([CNN](#), [USA Today](#), [NPR](#), [Business Insider](#), [CBS Chicago](#), [New York Times](#)).

AR-15s have certain advantages over semi-automatic handguns, such as:

- [greater accuracy](#), especially at long distances.
- [higher bullet velocity](#), which typically means [worse wounds](#).
- more standard ammunition capacity ([30 rounds](#) per magazine versus [15 or 17](#) for a Glock 9 mm). However, with practice a Glock magazine can be swapped out in [one second](#).

On the other hand, handguns have [certain advantages](#) over AR-15s, including:

- greater maneuverability, which is crucial in locations like hallways and around corners.
- better concealability.
- more portability.

The AR-15 certainly has more firepower, but depending upon the environment, the handgun can provide a strategic edge.

Furthermore, Trump's plan to arm one of five teachers gives

them the crucial tactical advantages of numerical superiority and quick response times. As detailed in a [2014 report](#) by the Police Executive Research Forum:

- confronting an active shooter with only one officer is "quite dangerous," and some police "departments require that officers wait until a certain number of officers have arrived" before entering an active shooting scene.
- "on average, it takes police three minutes to arrive on the scene, and another few minutes to locate and stop the shooters. So for at least the first few minutes of an attack, the potential victims are on their own."
- "in a sparsely populated area there may be only one or two deputies on duty in a county that's hundreds of square miles. It may take several minutes for that first deputy to arrive, and if he waits for backup, it could be a half-hour or more for them to get there."
- "the major message that we have for civilians is, "You are not helpless. What you do matters. And what you do can save your own life and the lives of others." Our research found that many times, active-shooter attacks stopped because potential victims took action to stop the shooter directly, or they made it more difficult for the shooter to find targets."

Summary

Trump's proposal to protect the lives of schoolchildren by arming selected teachers and amply training them is consistent with the following facts of criminology security policing firearms and active shooter incidents:

- Adequate armed security is a major deterrent to would-be murderers.
- The students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School had 40 times less security per person than the Superdome provides to sports fans.
- Arming one of five teachers would give children similar

- protection to sports fans or one guard per 80 students.
- Police receive an average of 15 hours per year of firearm training and recreational shooters fire just as accurately as police.
 - Well-trained teachers would be as proficient with firearms as police.
 - Generally untrained civilians save far more lives with guns than are lost in accidents.
 - A high-cost estimate for Trump's proposal that includes giving teachers much more firearms training than police is less than 1% of public school spending.
 - The AR-15 used in Parkland and other shootings is not a weapon of war but a semi-automatic rifle.
 - AR-15s have more firepower than handguns but handguns have an edge in maneuverability.
 - Arming one of five teachers would give them a major advantage of strength in numbers.
 - The reality of police response times means that the actions of civilians are often vital to saving lives in active shooter incidents.

Nevertheless many major media outlets are ignoring these facts while propagating claims that are contradicted by them. Given that the lives of schoolchildren and teachers hang in the balance twisting the truth or hiding from it could have deadly outcomes.

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