

Let's Stop Blaming Law-Abiding Gun Owners

In the corner of the room near my desk are two .22-caliber rifles, a 20-gauge shotgun, and a BB gun. The single shot .22 was my father's when he was a boy, the six shot .22 was the gift of a friend, and the shotgun was given me as a teenager and hasn't had the trigger pulled in 50 years. The history of the BB gun is more of a mystery, but I suspect it's the one I gave to my oldest son on his eleventh birthday.

Other than shooting the BB gun in the backyard from time to time with some of the grandkids, I last handled a firearm, a 9 mm SIG, five years ago at a range. I discovered I'd lost my abilities as a marksman.

When I was a boy, my brother and our friends often played war. We typically used sticks as our rifles and swords, launching dirt clods and rocks at one another. At the age of seventeen, I went hunting for the first and only time in my life. I shot nothing.

During the eighteen months I attended West Point, I qualified as an expert shooting an M14 rifle. During my second summer there, we fired M16s, pistols, grenade launchers, artillery, LAWs (light anti-tank weapons), M60 machine guns, and even tank cannon at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

I am laying out these qualifiers before writing about guns for several reasons. First, given the opportunity, I enjoy shooting. Hitting a target is fun. Second, as you can see from the information above, I nonetheless take little interest in firearms or shooting. I have friends who enjoy hunting or shooting at a range, but those activities have no appeal for me. Third, none of my boyhood friends, none of my West Point

classmates, and none of these hunters have ever shot up a school or church.

Before looking at the value of firearms, let's examine a few statistics.

The gun homicide rate in the United States [has declined](#) nearly 50 percent in the last twenty-five years.

In the 1950s, there was one [mass shooting](#). From 2000 to 2009, there were 28. Before 1960, a mass shooting typical involved family members or criminal activity. Since then, most mass shootings have taken place in the public square where the victims are often strangers.

In 2018, *Science Daily* [reported](#) that "more people have died or been injured in mass school shootings in the United States in the past 18 years than during the entire 20th century."

Why the plunge in homicide by firearms versus the rise in mass killings?

Some claim that the increased firepower of "assault rifles" has led to this increase. If you look over the articles above, however, and other similar ones, we find that many of these massacres take place with handguns and ordinary rifles.

What does factor into this increase in mass killing is the number of mentally unstable people who commit these acts. The figures in this regard vary, depending on which source you visit, but it is clear that a large number of mass murders take place not because of guns, but because mentally ill people use guns to kill others.

And if guns in and of themselves are so deadly, then why do so many Americans own or want to own a gun?

Here are four reasons:

Sport. Some people simply enjoy shooting for shooting's sake. A friend of mine and his brother take great pleasure in target practice using both handguns and rifles.

Hunting. In the past thirty years, I have lived in western North Carolina and in Virginia. In both places, many people enjoy hunting and use the meat for their family and friends. Despite what some might contend, this hunting, particularly of deer, helps control the animal population. Given how many dead deer are lying along the roadsides here, and how many people I know whose cars have suffered damage from deer, I can only wish for more hunters.

Self-protection. Many people own firearms and concealed carry permits to protect themselves and their loved ones. Guns are the Great Equalizer, leveling the differences between the intruder who is 6'3" and the homeowner who is 5'6", or between a petite woman and a medium-sized man. Google "more women buying guns," and you'll find an array of sites examining the upswing in female ownership of firearms. The number one reason both men and women buy guns is for self-protection.

The last line of defense against dictatorship. This is the point no one likes to address. Nonetheless, the Second Amendment to the Constitution was intended in part as a check against both exterior enemies and the new Federal government. As Venezuelans know well, it's hard to fight an oppressive government with rocks and brickbats as your weapons.

Law-abiding gun owners are neither wackos nor evil. Even the Dalai Lama acknowledges the necessity of guns at times. Once a student asked him if firing back at a school shooter was justified. "If someone has a gun and is trying to kill you," the Dalai Lama [said](#), "it would be reasonable to shoot back with your own gun."

Of course, being the Dalai Lama, he did advise trying to wound your assailant.

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