

STÉPHANE BEAUDIN

THE PROGRESSIVE'S GUIDE TO BECOMING PRO-GUN

COME SIT AT THE PRO GUN TABLE
WE HAVE BACON!

(AND APPROPRIATE KOSHER, HALAL AND VEGAN ALTERNATIVES)



Nagaika Publishing

The Progressive's Guide to Becoming Pro-Gun

Stephane Beaudin

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Introduction

There are a lot of Progressives I like, they are typically well informed and/or use careful methodology in their reasoning, and are at least funny. People like Rachel Maddow, Bill Maher or John Stewart (I will not mention Stephen Colbert, everyone knows he is a true Conservative), people, like a lot of my personal friends, as well as people I interact with on social media. I like these people, and it pains me to hear them talk about firearms. Their lack of knowledge of the subject either leads them to erroneous reasoning on policy issues, or damages the credibility of their conclusions. After reading this text, you will have an understanding of how firearms work, how they are intended to be used, what is involved in using firearms to protect oneself from violence, what truly measurable results we can ascertain from recent gun control initiatives and the moral argument for individual firearm possession. This text, especially in its technical parts, deliberately avoids synonyms. This makes it a little less fun to read, but accelerates mastering the proper vocabulary.

I don't spend any time here debunking gun control arguments. First, it's like shooting fish in a barrel, too easy. It gets redundant and boring very fast. What I do here is present positive proof of my arguments, quantitatively when possible. When I use quantitative evidence, I will systematically avoid anything that resemble a study, and concentrate on raw data, from sources that are unlikely to contaminate it. When I use subjective sources, I use pro gun control leaning sources.

What I absolutely do not engage in is the current game that seems to have replaced constructive debating, a game I call "Search for the Biggest Asshole". In this game, both sides of an argument try to disprove the other's credibility by pointing out the Biggest Assholes who defend it.

Now, repeat after me:

I am not my opinions.

Your opinions are not your identity, you will not be killed by changing your mind. I won't lie to you, it is not going to help your social life if you do, because people do invest their identity into their opinions, and get really angry when you challenge them. On most issues, my positions tend to be closer to the Progressive point of view, being pro gun with Progressives is just as socially abrasive as defending gun control with Conservatives. But being pro gun is not my identity, it is my opinion, one I will change if I ever find evidence to support a change, something I have been searching for years without success.

Because I am a nice guy, I am making this guide for you. Forget Ted Nugent, Alex Jones and the idiots from the NRA, this is me (who the hell is this guy anyway?) talking, I am a reasonable guy, and I know about this stuff. You want a discussion on gun policy, let's start by understanding the subject. This is for you, it is:

The Progressive's Guide to Becoming Pro-Gun

1-The moral argument for guns.

There is no freedom without freedom to choose your axioms. Thus, the axioms you have chosen may lead you to different conclusions, which does not mean either of us is wrong. After all, an axiom is something that cannot be proven yet we accept as true, and found reasoning upon. All reasoning must start from axioms. Unless you can find flaws with my logic or my facts, my conclusions must be considered valid, even if your equally valid conclusions are different, unless you assume the right for yourself to dictate axioms to others.

Now, a foundation of the anti-gun reasoning is that “**guns are made to kill people**”. While there is the whole sport and hunting rationale, here, I will start by saying it is true guns are made to kill people, and **that is why people need them.**

First thing first, while there are some spiritual people who believe that all violence is bad, even in self defense, a position I fully respect even if I do not share it, it is usually understood that violence is destructive. When an individual or a group is acting violently, there are occasions where applying violence to this individual or group will stop their aggression, and thus the total destruction will be less than if it had been allowed it to continue. This is why we arm police officers, this is why we have armies.

It is also understood that an individual has the **right to life** and the **right to freedom.**

The right to life is really interesting, it does not mean you have the right to not die (that would be silly), it means you have the **right to not be killed**, the right to freedom does not mean you can do anything you want, it means you have the **right to not be enslaved** either permanently or temporarily (as in sexual assault for instance). The right to life is a little different from the others, if your right to free speech, or your right to protection from abusive confiscation or practically any other right is violated, you can go before the courts, have a judge order the violation to stop, evaluate the prejudice you suffered, and order that the damage be repaired. Society provides us with a framework to peacefully resolve disputes. The right to life cannot function by the same rules, **if someone succeeds in killing you, the damage is immediate, permanent, and it is irreparable.** As for the right to freedom, if you are enslaved (dragged somewhere and forced to do another’s bidding under threat of violence and death), you, by definition will have no access to due process to restore your rights (unless your kidnapper somehow allows you to consult an attorney). A right is meaningless if measures to protect it are forbidden. Just as you cannot make a law restricting freedom of speech, you cannot make a law preventing someone whose freedom of speech right is violated from going before the courts. And any law barring people from the ability to prevent being killed is inherently a violation of the right to life.

Now, does that mean people need guns to protect their life? Well, as a tool, what does a gun allow? It allows killing from a distance. Is it credible to prevent murderers from having guns? Well, there are guns in the US and Canada now, and we don't really know how many, so trying to get rid of them would most likely take multiple generations. Unless we start by disarming the police and the military, guns could be stolen from these organizations, guns can be smuggled, and guns can be made.

Is there another way to stop someone killing you from a distance, aside from firearms? At distances between arm's length and maybe 10-15 feet, chemical sprays and tasers might work (that is a very big "might", these less lethal options are much less reliable than firearms), any further, you are screwed.

That, and **guns are made specifically to kill**. If you accept the notion of self defense, and the notion properly applied force can prevent larger harm, you accept that individuals can be placed in conditions where they need to kill another human. This is serious business, you do it because the consequences of failing to do so would be catastrophic. You take care of serious business with the proper tools. Would you be at ease leaving your car in a garage where the mechanic just has a pocket multi-tool? If he's smart, resourceful and really strong, he might be able to do just about any job with that thing, but it will be slow, frustrating, and every bolt and screw is going to get mauled in the process.

OK, at this point, I am starting to hear "why am I not running away", "why am I not trying to reason with this guy"... There is a pyramid of self protection options, obviously, you should start with mastering the lower levels that will help you more often than the very top, which is lethal force. At the base of the pyramid, the most important self defense skill of all:

Making people feel good about themselves.

Then you want to know **How to identify dangerous individuals and situations, and avoid them.**

Then, the ability to **De-escalate aggressive behavior.**

Then, the ability to **Assert yourself.**

Followed by the ability to **escape and evade.**

Then, comes the ability to **physically restrain someone.**

Only when all this has failed does the use of **lethal force** come into play.

Despite your best efforts, training and preparation, all of these are skills, and anytime you use a skill, there is a chance you will not succeed. It is also quite possible that an attacker will enter your awareness already in such an escalated violent state all the lower levels of the pyramid cannot be used.

Now, I hear "well, this kind of situation is really rare why would you feel the need to be equipped for that?" Well, obviously, at the individual level, violence is a **Black Swan** event (at the social level it is a statistical value), what we know about Black Swan events is that they happen (**might** not happen to you, but they will happen), and the impact of Black Swan events dwarfs everything else that spanned between them. Owning or carrying a gun, like

What about 3D printers?

There is a lot of talk about 3D printers today, that distracts us from the fact the tools needed to make modern firearms the old fashioned way are readily available, and it would cost less to purchase the equipment to become a gun maker than to become an auto mechanic today. In fact, in northern Pakistan, people have been making modern firearms for decades, often in workshops with no electricity.

insurance, is essentially gambling, but instead of paying to win, you pay to not lose (choosing not to be capable of defending yourself is also gambling). Now, the question is, considering that in all things, we are always playing the odds, **it is reasonable to forbid people betting on selected probabilities?** And even more preoccupying, is it reasonable to demand people restrict their “bets” only to currently available probabilities? We live in a period of remarkably low violence (the cause of which is not understood), and under such a set of probabilities, most people would calculate that the investment involved in becoming capable of using lethal force is not worth it, and that is fine for those who make that choice. But remember, this is a double bet, a first bet that you will not hit the currently small bad odds, and a second bet, that the odds will stay the same forever.

“But violence is a problem of culture, we have to start somewhere to change culture”. Culture is partially responsible for violence, it is a stretchy variable that fluctuates through geography and time. If it was the lone variable, this would be a strong argument for declawing individuals. Unfortunately, this is not true. This is like the rape issue, we have all seen the posters with women complaining their school is teaching them how to not get raped instead of teaching men to not rape. Certainly, there is a cultural component to rape, like all violence, and education will take care of that component, but there is another fraction that is not susceptible to education. The current clinical term is “**anti social personality disorder**” they are most often called “**psychopaths**”, I will use the term “**sociopaths**” that I find more descriptive. The sociopath is an individual that has limited or no empathy for other humans, they comprise, depending on who you ask, anywhere between 2 and 20% of the population. Without empathy, others become things. If you tell a sociopath not to rape women because they are just like them, and they should be treated the way you want to be treated yourself, it is just as absurd to his mind as if you said to not eat a sandwich, because it has feeling just like you, and you would not like it if someone ate you.

Now, because sociopaths view others like things, the only way they are capable of interacting with others is on the basis of power. Thus, sociopaths are drawn to positions of power like magnets. The less talented will become criminals. In a self defense situation with a sociopath, trying to de-escalate them, or empathize with them is useless, you can either scare them away (which can be subtle, just by having an attitude suggesting you are not the easiest target) or physically neutralize them. Not understanding the fundamental issue of sociopaths in society will make people say things like “cowards use guns, a real man uses his fists” and other such nonsense. There is something called “**social violence**”, which is basically primate chest thumping, and if you think this is what I mean by violence, of course guns are a crazy idea, the notion that one of the drunken uncles at the Christmas party who get into fistfights with each other every year would one day pull a gun is completely stupid. But this is not what I am talking about when I talk of violence, I am talking about someone who wants to shoot you, to stab you, or to literally bludgeon you until your whole head caves in, someone who thinks of you as meat. This is a completely different animal from the drunk brother in law who thinks you look down on him because you have a nicer house and is “going to show you who’s a real man”.

There is another really important thing to know about sociopaths, there are natural, full time sociopaths (we don’t really know what makes someone a sociopath), but things like the **Milgram experiment**, and the **Stanford prison**

Black Swans

A type of phenomenon described by Nassim Nicholas Taleb in the book “**The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable**”. The term Black Swan is used to describe an event that cannot be predicted based on evidence provided by past experience. It postulates very rare, unpredictable events occur much more often than expected. While the exact type of unpredictable event that will occur cannot be predicted, observation of such events in the past suggests their impact is much larger than the scale of the “normal” events that occur between the anomalies. Taleb suggests that the reliable patterns we can find between Black Swans are much less significant to our lives than the impact of the Black Swans themselves. He suggests a behavior model he calls “**Antifragility**” to allow individuals and groups to minimize the negative impacts of Black Swan events and increase the probability to gain from them.

experiment show that otherwise normal people, in certain institutional contexts, can be made to think and behave as sociopaths. They will thus carry out the violent, dehumanizing policies of the institution.

So, we know the least talented sociopaths tend to become criminals, what do others do? With luck, they become surgeons, the position satisfies their need to feel powerful, and them seeing humans as just meat makes them good at what they do. Unfortunately, many of them go anywhere they can find power, they become priests, teachers, police officers, executives or politicians, among others.

And this brings us to the fundamental moral question:

Can individual self ownership (freedom) exist without individual capacity for violence?

The opposite of individual self ownership is slavery. Slavery, in turn, is a situation where one is placed before the choice between compliance or death. The fundamental question that the gun control debate asks is

“can the individual really delegate the means to resist enslavement to others, and still really own himself?”

The sad reality is that, once you have delegated the means to resist enslavement, your freedom is entirely and forever dependent on the continued good will of those you have entrusted with it. Is there any group worthy of such trust? Remember, if you entrust people with protecting your freedom, they have power over you. Now, you may initially find people who are worthy of this trust, but who is irresistibly attracted to power in all its forms? That’s right, sociopaths, these people who think you are just a thing they should be allowed to use and dispose of. Delegating the protection of your freedom to others is basically playing Russian roulette with that freedom, one of those chambers has a bullet in it, and eventually, you will lose. This will be true as long as sociopaths exist within humanity.

Thus, the ability to use violence effectively, including access to weapons like firearms is **fundamental to human dignity**.

The following question is usually “where does it stop, do we let people have artillery, or nerve gas, or cruise missiles?” There are a number of answers to this question. In the context of the 2nd amendment of the US Constitution, it is not clear that such items are not protected in the context of militia activity. When you look at it through the prism of the right to life (right not to be killed), however, the answer become clear. If someone tries to kill you, with most means, including a firearm, a firearm can be a good tool to prevent being killed. However, using a howitzer, even if your would be killer is using a howitzer himself, will not be a useful way to prevent being killed (a bunker, or at least a trench will be more useful, operating a howitzer and identifying targets for it requires a significant number of people, also). There are items that have usefulness in the context of warfare, but not of personal protection. If someone is trying to kill you with a roadside bomb, having bombs of your own will not help you stay alive. Another valid argument is that things like explosives, as well as chemical, biological and radiological agents pose an **inherent risk**, explosives degrade and become unstable, and containers can degrade and start leaking. Thus, explosives and NBC (Nuclear, Biological, Chemical) agents are dangerous without human intervention, even forgetting them poses a risk for the community, it is thus reasonable to regulate them. This is not the case with firearms, even in a fire, at most one bullet will be fired in a dangerous way, and only under very specific conditions. Typically, an abandoned, forgotten firearm will rust away (over months or decades, depending on the item and the conditions) with no danger to anyone. The only way they can be truly dangerous is through human intervention.

2-Gun policy, what do we know?

I avoid studies, the conclusions of the study alone can never be trusted. You first have to read the whole thing. That usually means forking out \$40 to some academic paper website. You have to peel through the methodology, every detail of statistical technique, the rationale behind every omission, normalization and adjustment. If questionnaires were used to obtain information, you will need to harass the authors to get the full text of these questionnaires, and the list of people they were sent to, as well as who did not return them. You will need to see the raw data, which you will probably have to steal from the authors. Then you have to track where the money came from to pay for the study, which means hiring private investigators to go through the author's finances, as well as full professional and financial histories of close family and friends. If, after all this research, the study still says something similar to what the authors claim in the conclusions, you still have to go through that same process with every study that is quoted by the authors!

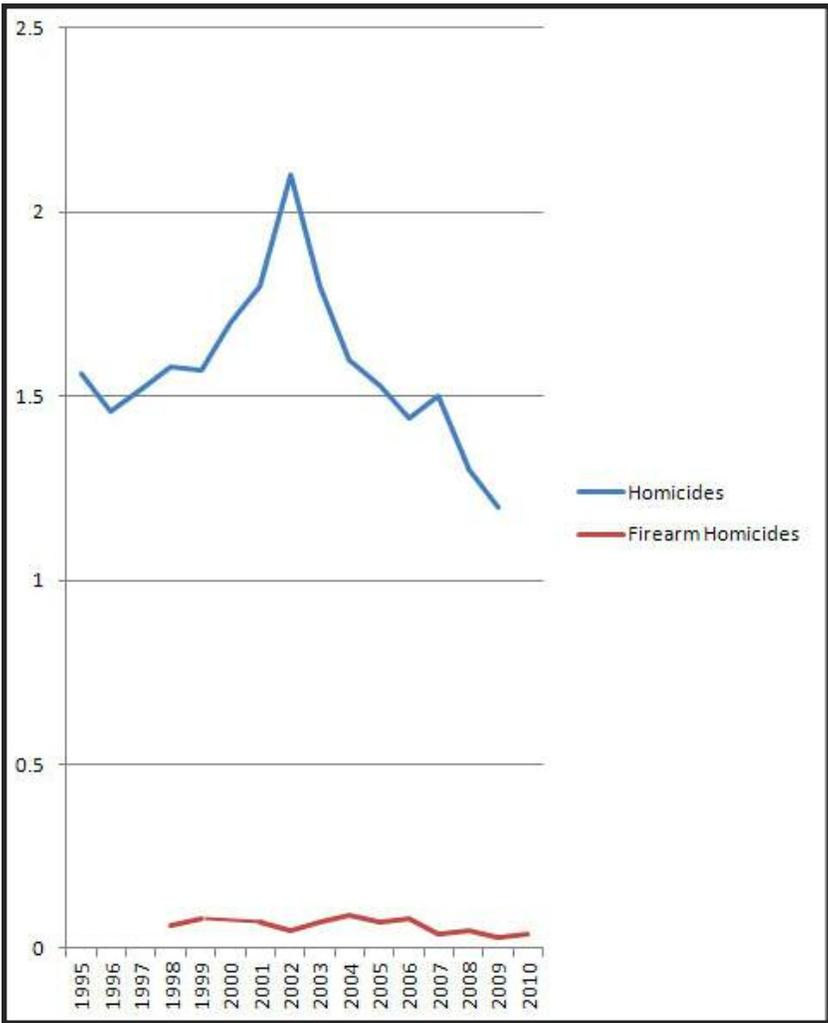
Thus, here, I will use raw data from official sources as much as possible. I will use data that allows for the isolation of variables, so we can know what cause is generating what effect. And I will be looking for patterns rather than anecdotes. It is, for instance, useless to say Japan has less gun deaths than the US, because there is no way to ascertain if their legislative structure has anything to do with that. What I find relevant, and you may disagree with me, is not if we change the level of gun violence, but if we change the absolute level of violence. If less people get shot to death, but more people get stabbed to death, that, to me, is not a win. But maybe you think not smelling your murderer takes away something valuable from the experience?

So, I will be looking at 3 cases, Canada (where I live), the UK and Australia. Why? Because all 3 nations implemented strong gun control measures in the 90s, and quality data is available. For the UK, and some quantities for Australia, I will use data from GunPolicy.org, because the government published data is a train wreck. GunPolicy.org uses data from multiple sources, some much less reliable than others, I try to stick with data that came straight from government sources. It is significant to note that gunpolicy.org's partners and contributor organizations are mainly gun control advocacy groups. For Canada, the published data starts in 1974, two years after the implementation of the Firearms Act, the first significant gun control law in the country. Thus there are trends I am attributing to this law, and there is a slim chance this is incorrect, due to the absence of "before" information.

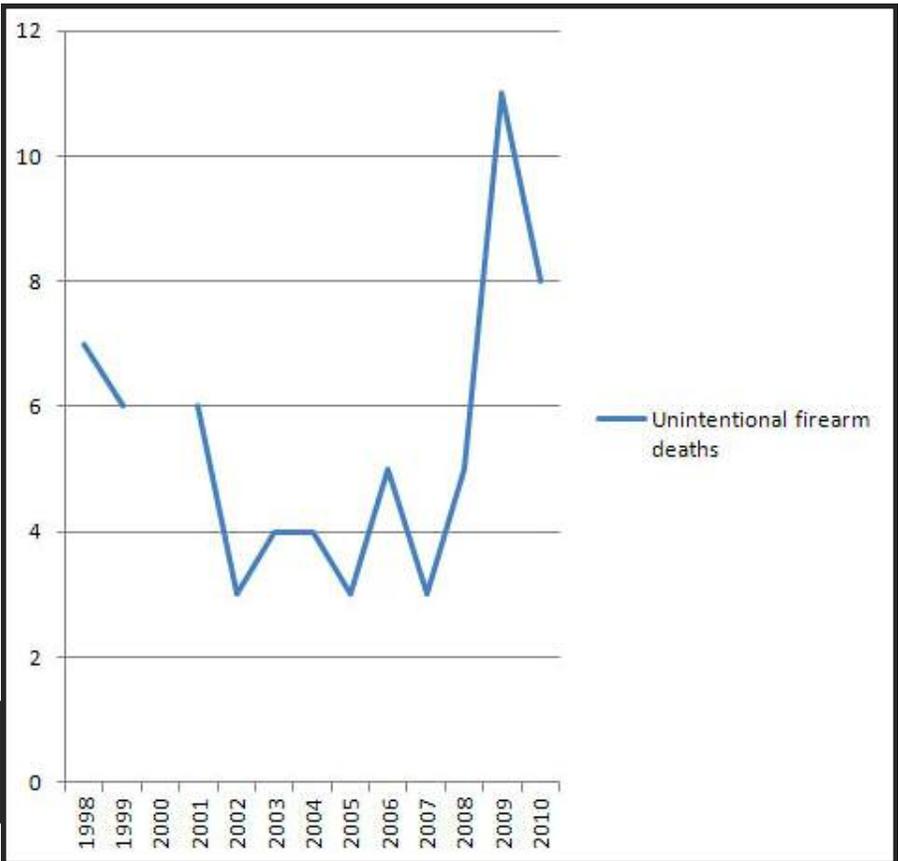
Case 1 the UK:

The chart gives a pretty clear picture. Laws were changed in 1998, many types of firearms were banned, including all handguns. Firearms homicide numbers are only available from 1998, so “before” data is unavailable, making this the least reliable graph I show. Firearms were never a significant component of the total homicide rate in the UK, and you can see both the total and the firearms homicide rate have not been positively affected by the law. Available suicide data does not span a long enough time to be useful. Accidental death data, however, shows a downward trend that may or may not be attributable to the new laws (data does not extend before 1998) is sharply reversed in 2007, for no apparent reason I could find. The numbers are so low, however, any observable trend is near meaningless.

Homicide rate (per 100 000) in the UK, 1995-2010, data for 2000 unavailable. Source: gunpolicy.org



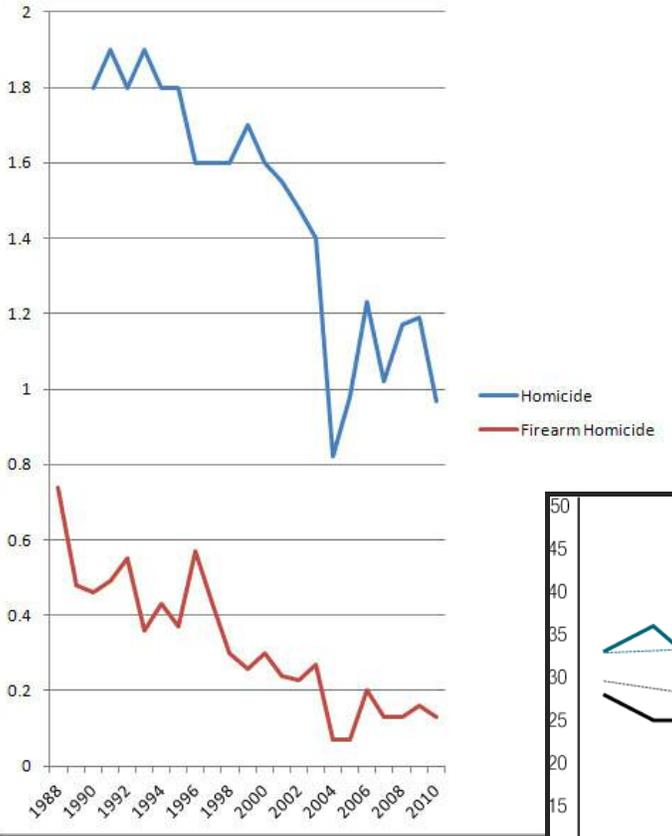
Accidental firearm deaths in the UK, 1998-2010, data unavailable for 2000. Source: gunpolicy.org



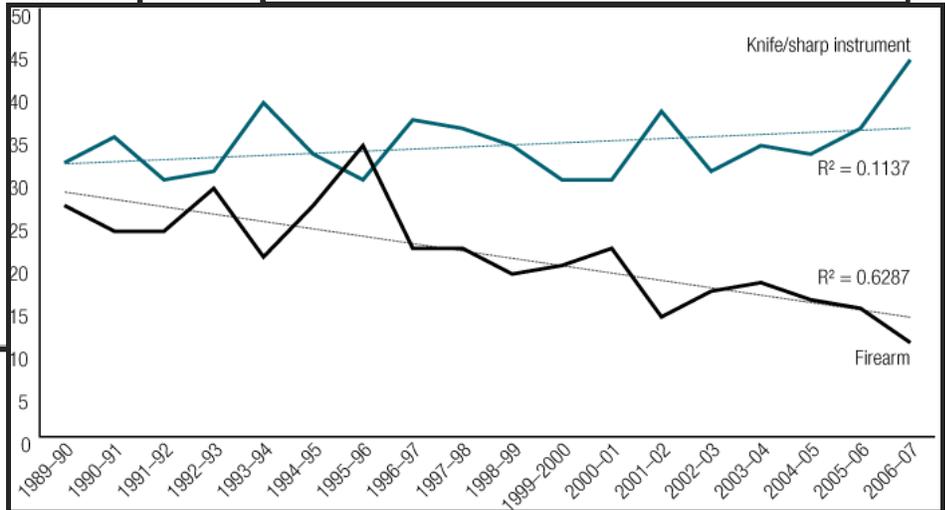
Case2 Australia:

The first chart, comparing total homicide with firearms homicide is quite revealing. There is a steep downwards trend in homicides since the late 80s-early 90s, and this trend seems to drive a much slower decline in firearms homicides. It is clear, however, from the proportions, that it is not the fall in firearms homicides that is driving the fall in homicides, thus the opposite relationship is more likely. Very strict gun control measures were enacted in 1996, after the Port Arthur mass shooting. This event shows as a visible spike in the firearms homicide rate. When we see the spike as the outlier it is, we can observe that before and after the legislation, the firearms homicide trends are quite constant, suggesting the legislation had little if any effect on firearm homicides. The second chart is even more interesting. We can see that in 1996, fatal shootings and stabbings, that had been intertwined until then, start to diverge. As shootings fall, stabbings rise in a perfect mirror to the firearm death decline. This suggests another very important conclusion, desire to kill, not weapon availability is the critical variable. The third chart compares total suicides to firearm suicides. What we see here is that firearm suicides have been in steady decline, starting well before the 1996 laws, and, as a distinct phenomenon, firearm suicide has been indifferent to general suicide trends as well as to legislative efforts. Accidental firearm deaths in Australia do not seem to have been affected in any meaningful way by the 1996 legislation. They fall sharply in 2006 for no reason I could identify. As in the UK, the numbers are so low any observable trend is near meaningless.

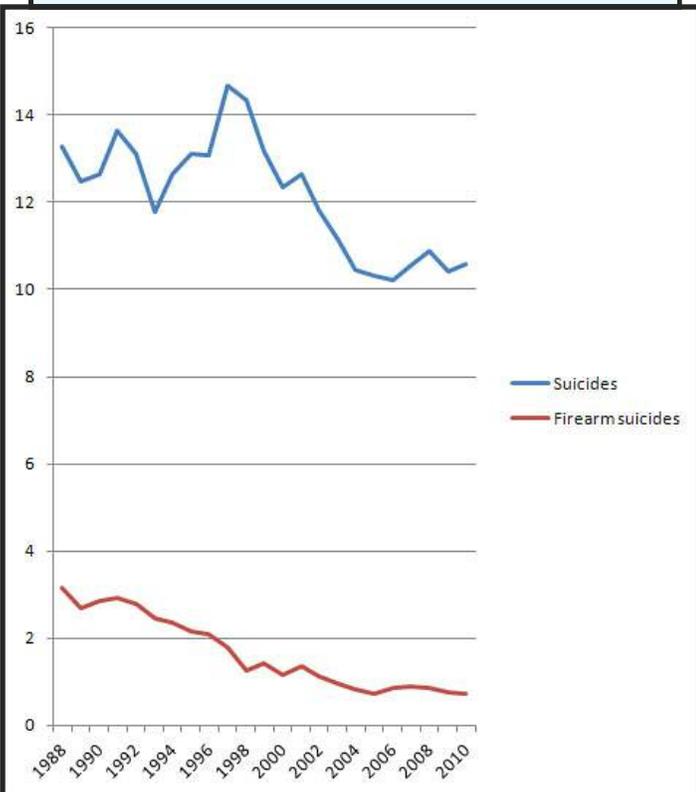
Homicide rate (per 100 000) in Australia, 1989-2010. Source: gunpolicy.org



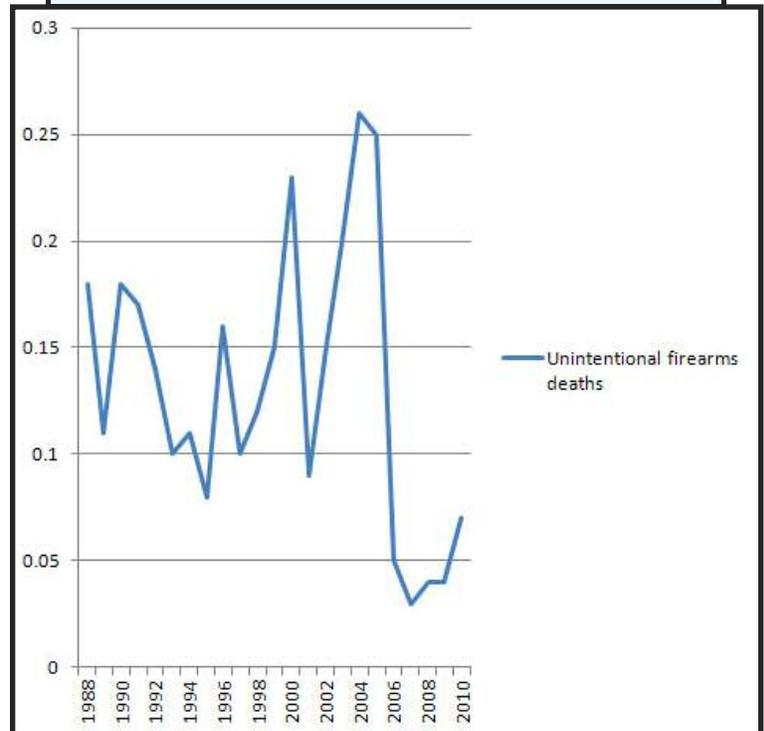
Homicide trends, by method, Australia, 1989-2007. Source: Australian Institute of Criminology



Suicide rate (per 100 000) in Australia, 1989-2010. Source: gunpolicy.org

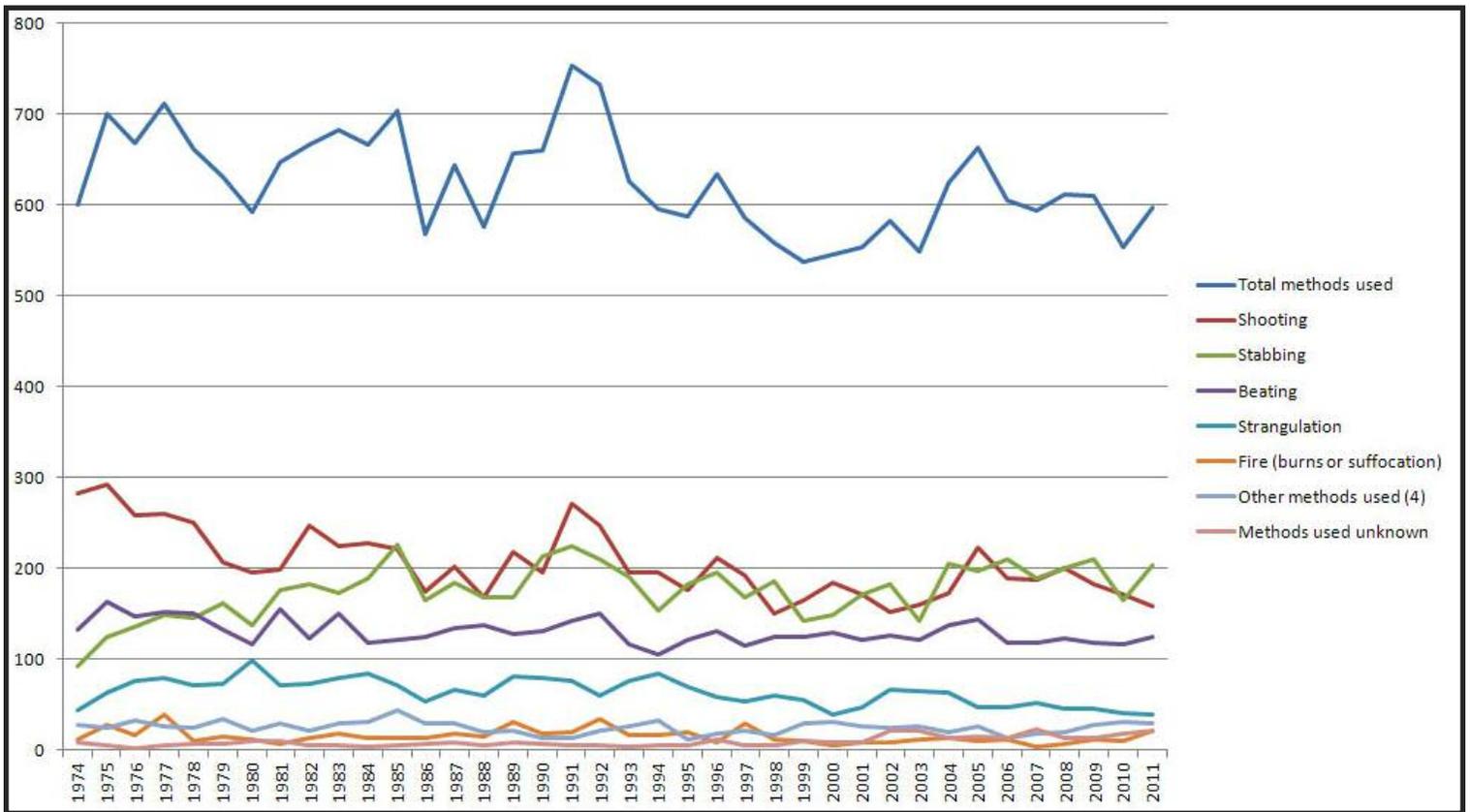


Accidental firearm death rate (per 100 000), Australia, 188-2010. Source: gunpolicy.org



Case 3 Canada:

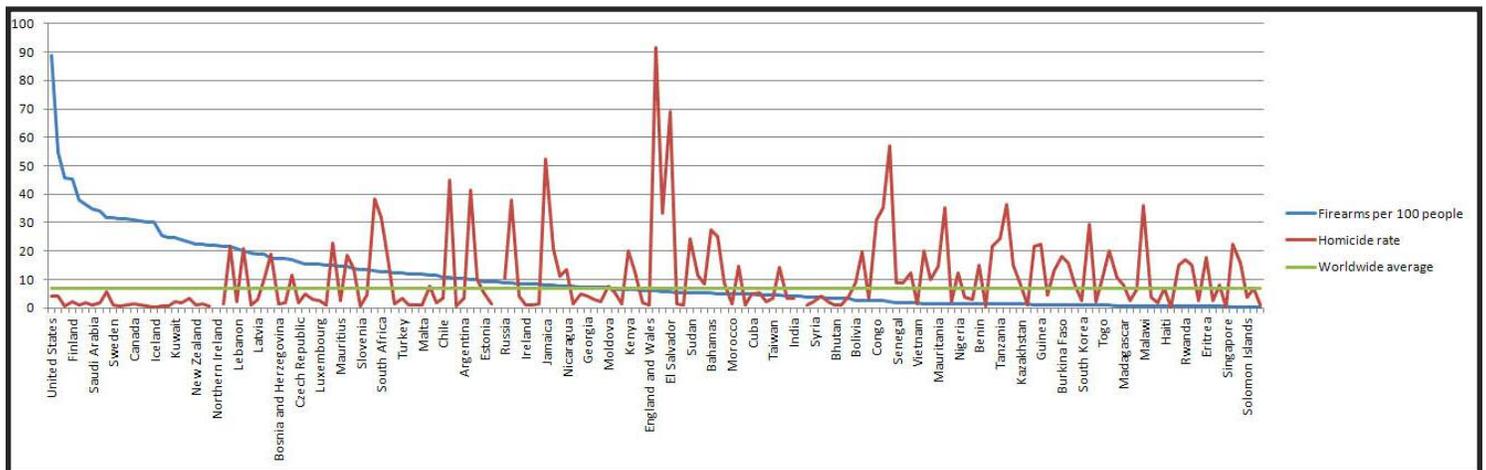
This one is my favorite, first, because I live here, second, because the data spans a longer time (1974-2011), it contains the complete information of total homicides, as well as homicide by method. And, it is taken straight from the official source, Statistics Canada table CANSIM 253-002 rather than from GunPolicy.org. This is thus the most reliable graph I am showing. The relevant points here are 1972 (slightly off the graph, unfortunately), the year of implementation of the Firearms Act, the first significant gun control legislation in the country, then, 1991, with the reform of the Firearms Act that made gun control much more stringent, as well as 1995, the year the long gun registry was implemented. Of particular note, the period between 1974 and 1985. We can see a fall in firearm homicide, most likely from the effects of the 1972 law (this is the only firearm specific event, all other variations in firearms homicides are also seen in other methods, thus, all but this one are “homicide in general” events). Pay close attention to the relationship between shootings and stabbings before and after 1985. 1974-1985 sees a slow fall of shootings, and a sharper rise in stabbings, the same mirroring phenomenon we saw in Australia. After 1985, the two causes merge at about 1/3 of homicides each, and stay merged until present day. We can see no fall in homicide rates that correlates to legislation, and no firearm homicide drop correlating to legislation either, unless you insist on seeing the sharp, narrow spike in homicides for 1991 as statistically significant. Further proof of the lack of relevance of the 1991 legislation on the end of this spike can be found with the stabbings and beatings curves that follow the same profile as the firearms and total homicides curves. Available suicide data does not span enough time to be useful.



Homicides, by method in Canada, 1974-2011. Source: Statistics Canada, table CANSIM 253-002

What is obvious from this data is that firearm availability and the severity of gun control laws have little, if any impact on homicide or suicide rates. These measures do not save lives. When firearms are not available, people who decide to kill, be it others or themselves, use **other means with the same level of success**.

Gun control legislations are based on the intuition that, since firearms are designed to kill, and are very effective at their purpose, reducing access to them should increase public safety. This intuition is disproven by the data we have seen, but it seems that the counter intuitive motion that guns increase public safety might not be as farfetched as thought. If we align nations in order of diminishing firearm ownership, an odd phenomenon appears. In most of the chart, even at the lowest levels of firearm ownership, we see very little pattern, with nations having extremely high murder rates, like Honduras, next to nations with very low murder rates, like the UK. That is until you get to a little over 1 firearm for 5 people, at this threshold, homicides suddenly flatline under the average. No nation with more than 1 gun for 4.5 inhabitants has a homicide rate over the global average, yet, there is significant socio-economic diversity in this group, there are rich countries, poor ones, with varying levels of legislative oversight, and geographically, Europe, Oceania, Asia and the Americas are represented in this group.



Homicide rates (per 100 000) vs. firearms per 100 inhabitants. Not all nation names are shown in the graph. Data is missing for Northern Ireland, Transnistria and Burma. Sources: homicide rates, UNODC, Firearms per 100 inhabitants, Small Arms Survey.

This typically leads to the question “what about mass shootings? You can’t kill as many people as you can with a semi automatic rifle with any other means.” The answer to this seems insensitive, it is nonetheless true. All death is a tragedy to those it affects, all violence is traumatic to those it affects. That being said, mass shootings are not a socially relevant phenomenon, their entire relevance is the result of media bias. When a phenomenon kills a lot of people, it is news. Cancer and cardiovascular disease get media attention, because viewers understand that is what they are most likely to die from. There are a whole lot of things, however, that kill only a few people per year. Diseases too rare to deserve their episode of House, hammer homicides, and mass shootings, for example. What makes mass shootings different? People who die in these events die in clusters. There are plenty of things that kill way more people, but they kill them one at a time, all over the place. With mass shootings, you get multiple deaths at the same place, at the same time. The media is indifferent to these other causes of death, but mass shootings get picked up, because they are concentrated death, and are thus magnetic to viewers. The 24 hours news for profit industry must sell (mainly pharmaceutical) ad time to survive, and commercial imperatives lead them to the lurid and morbid more certainly than to the significant. [This Mother Jones article](#) gives one of the highest death counts I could find for the phenomenon, in the last decade, mass shootings killed 261 people according to them. This is an average of 26 deaths per year. Some years have more than 70 deaths, others, 0. Is it tragic for those it affects? Absolutely! Is it a phenomenon worthy of national preoccupation? Absolutely not! More than 10 times as many people drown in boating accidents, one in 5 are children. This issue does not deserve the level of attention

it is getting, we need to get a grip. We live in democracies, and that means we have to think and act like grownups, or else we disqualify ourselves from wielding authority as the People. If, and when mass shootings ever start killing more people than bare hands (726 homicides in the US in 2011), which would require the problem to grow 28 times larger than it currently is, we can start taking this phenomenon somewhat seriously. There would not be any reason to panic, yet, but we would be justified in paying attention.

Strangely, there is another type of bias that affects this issue. The proponents of gun control, for obvious reasons, want to convince us that violence levels are very high, in order to make us feel threatened, and demand action from legislators. The strange thing, however is that pro firearm organizations also promote this idea that violence is high, and we should feel threatened. That is due to the fact firearm advocacy groups like the NRA represent firearms owners, but also the firearms industry. The firearms industry needs people to be scared so they will buy guns. Thus, on both sides of the issue, you have a shrill message of fear, but is it factual? Absolutely not, violence in North America is not very high. The slightly higher rates in the USA are driven almost entirely by organized crime, gang on gang violence (75% of homicides, according to some sources), and is concentrated in small urban pockets. For the overwhelming majority of Americans, the threat of violence, especially homicide, is very low, and falling steadily since the early 90s. Ending the “war on drugs” is more likely to have an immediate, permanent and major effect on homicide rates than any gun control measure.

3-Why, when and how would I use a gun?

Laws and morals vary with geography and individuals, so this part will try to thread the area of greatest overlap if we made a Venn diagram of this.

Typically, a firearm can be used in a situation where the information you have at your disposal indicates your life, or that of someone else, is in immediate danger. Usually, it is also authorized in situations like kidnapping attempts, because when you have been kidnapped and secured, there is nothing stopping the perpetrator from killing you, thus, threat of kidnapping is very similar to threat of death (in both the US Declaration of Independence and the Canadian Charter of Rights, the Right to Life and to Freedom are mentioned in the same article). Notice I said “information at your disposal”. Sometimes, the time between initial perception of danger, and the projected moment when you would be killed can be very short, like less than a second short. Under such conditions, the volume of information you can process is limited, and you must decide based on what you have.

Typically, it is not seen as reasonable to use a firearm when someone is threatening to come back tomorrow and kill you, when someone is destroying or stealing property or when they are “in your face”. It may or may not, depending on jurisdictions, be viewed as reasonable to shoot someone who you are detaining in a citizen’s arrest (thus, someone who you actually saw committing a crime) and is trying to escape. Remember, if you shoot someone in a way you consider to be lawful and justified, you are the one who is stuck with the task of proving it was justifiable, so you need to be as certain as you can be that not shooting would have worse consequences than shooting.

Now, here is the part gun enthusiasts often don’t understand, they think being able to hit a static target at a long distance is all the skill they need to succeed. If this was true, the greatest warriors in pre-firearm history would have been butchers and lumberjacks, and no one would have thought to invent fencing. If you are involved in a violent situation with a firearm, there are 4 possible conditions: The opponent(s) can be either **close** or **far**, and they are either **engaging** you or not. Close means they can touch you, or get close enough to touch you before you can use your firearm, far, obviously, means they are too far to touch you, or get to you before you use the weapon. The opponent(s) is engaging you if he is actively striking, grabbing, or shooting at you. You would use a firearm on someone who is not engaging you if they were coming towards you to engage, or if they were engaging someone else.

So the 4 possible situations are close and engaging, close and not engaging, far and engaging, and finally far and not engaging. Only the last one, far and not engaging, has any resemblance to what people do at the range. In all 3 other situations, the skillset to survive and succeed has more in common with martial arts than with target shooting. You need, as you are getting shot at, and/or wrestled, and/or stabbed, and/or beaten to: Get your firearm, point/aim it, make sure no one is behind your opponent, fire the weapon, hit a part of him that will stop him while

simultaneously protecting yourself from damage and preventing your firearm being taken away from you.

Weapons can help in self-defense. They are tools, and like all tools, they allow you to do things that are difficult or impossible with the human body alone, like changing the tire on a car. But while all cars have jacks and tire irons in the trunk, a lot of people can't change a flat because they either don't know how, or are too weak. Surviving violence, if it ever affects you, will demand skill, as well as mental and physical ability. A weapon can help, but the weapon alone is not enough. And even though a lot of people can't use them properly, if at all, that has never been seen as a reason to stop including jacks and tire irons in cars.

4-What do guns do?

A firearm (gun is technically more appropriate to describe large artillery pieces, it is a semantic difference similar to that between “ship” and “boat”) is a device to launch small objects at high speeds to damage objects, and injure or kill living organisms. Aside from sport, hunting or dissuasive use, there are technically 3 ways to use firearms:

1-Directed or aimed fire. This is the usage most people are familiar with, you find a target you want to damage or destroy, you direct your firearm in that direction, and fire with the intent of hitting the target.

2-Suppressive fire. With suppressive fire, you shoot in the general direction of your target(s). You intent is not to hit, damage or destroy them (if it happens, it is usually considered a lucky bonus), but rather to force the people you are shooting at to hide. While they are hiding, they are not shooting at you, thus, you are free to move. They are also not moving to a position from which it is easier to kill you. Depending on the context, you can use this mobility to escape or to position yourself to shoot at these individuals using directed fire. This type of shooting is what fully automatic fire on light weapons is for.

3-Beaten zones. If you have an automatic weapon on a steady enough base (like a tripod or vehicle mount), you can make what is called a “beaten zone”, an area where there are too many bullets flying to want to stay there. You can make a beaten zone so no one wants to enter an area, or you can make it so that people in that area have a choice between leaving and being shot. It is typically a tool used to control critical parts of a battlefield.

This is actually very important. When you understand these facts about the ways firearms can be used, you realize that scary things like fully automatic fire, are really of little use for an individual who wants to use a firearm offensively (you might get more injured, but less fatalities, for physical reasons, the difficulty in keeping the weapon steady, as well as psychological reasons, under stress, it is quite difficult to let go of the trigger while there is a lot of noise going on). Fully automatic fire is good defensively to allow an individual to escape from an attacker (with suppressive fire), or offensively, in the context of a well trained group (4 or more) that works tactically together (something unusual in crime).

Now, how do firearms accomplish their goal? First, surprisingly, they make a lot of noise. This noise has been shown to scare people and make them feel helpless. When people are scared, they run away or they hide more often than they try to fight. That is why firearms won battles at a time when bows and arrows were still deadlier. Second, bullets transfer energy very rapidly. Bullets are small and rather light, but fast, so most materials, including living tissue, break apart when hit by bullets. When you talk about the “**power**” of a firearm, remember it is a relative (to the point of near uselessness) term. A very small very fast very stable bullet will penetrate very deep, which is good if you are shooting at someone behind cover (it might get through wood, or cinderblock, body armor, or a car door), but if your target is not behind cover, the bullet will go through the person, leaving little of

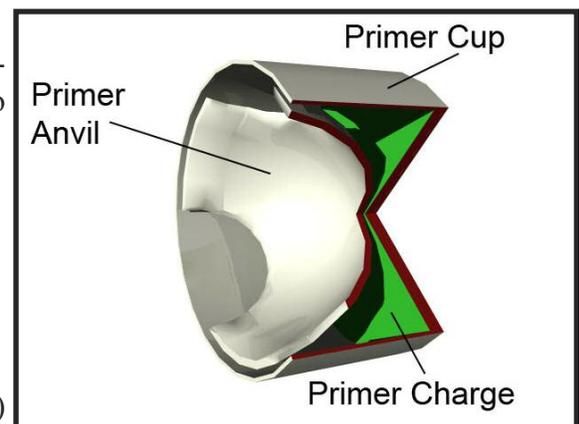
its energy (and potentially hitting someone behind the target), this will injure, but not immediately affect him as much as a larger, slower or less stable bullet that might not penetrate cover, but will leave a larger proportion of its energy in the body. When you talk about power, you see it is variable by situation (the light high velocity round may be weaker than a heavier slower one if no cover is present, the heavier, slower round may be inadequate if cover is present), it is also relative in scale, a very powerful (in context) pistol round will always be very weak compared to a rifle round, for example.

When we talk about “**firepower**” (a comparative term, again), you talk of the combination of the firearm’s munitions ability to make a louder noise, make it more often (in the same time period), reach targets behind cover and rapidly affect individuals who are hit.

5-How do guns work?

Aside from a few exotic exceptions, modern firearms use cartridges made of 4 parts.

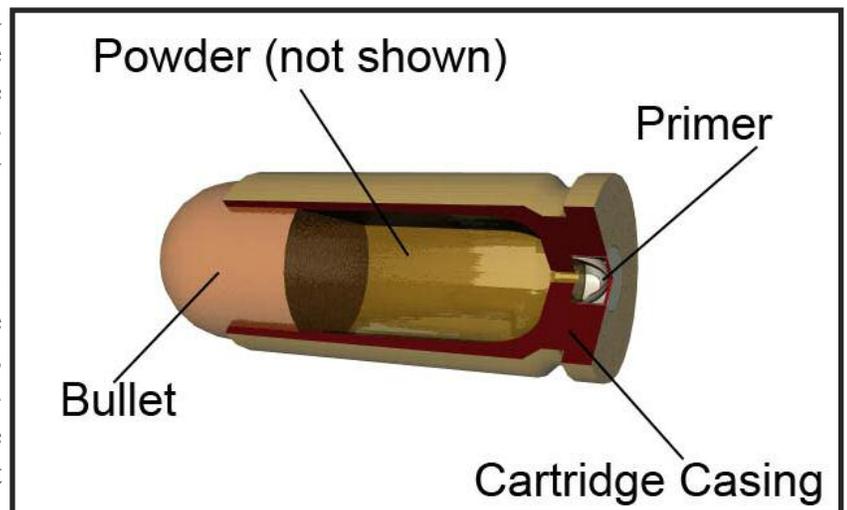
1-A primer. A small cup containing an impact sensitive explosive. When this cup is struck violently, the explosion sends a flame to fill the cartridge casing



2-The cartridge casing. Usually made of (and sometimes called) brass but sometimes of other metals, it is the container that holds everything together. The primer will be seated at the base of the casing, the powder will be held within it, and the bullet will be seated at the other end.

3-The powder. This will be a granulated substance that is flammable, and provides the oxygen it needs to burn. It will be ignited by the flash flame from the primer, burn rapidly in a reaction that converts the solid granules into many times its volume in hot gas.

4-The bullet. The pressure inside the cartridge casing from the expanding gasses of the burning powder will push the bullet out from its seat at the top of the casing. The bullet is the actual weapon, it is the object that causes damage to the target, everything else in the weapon is just a delivery system.



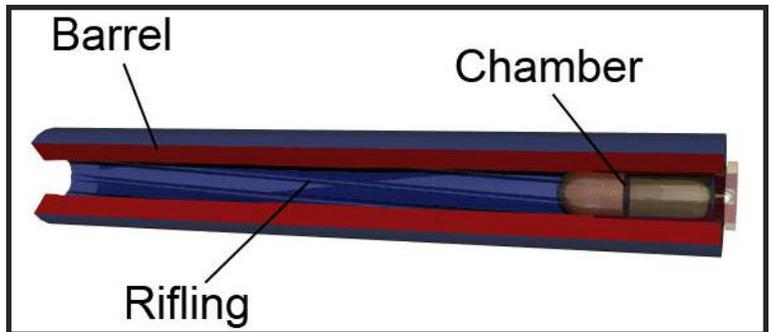
There are some variants to this, most notably the shotgun shell, in which most of the casing is made of a flexible material, and the projectiles are seated within a cup wrapped inside this flexible shell. When only one projectile

is present, it is called a slug, larger multiple projectiles are called buckshot and smaller multiple projectiles are called birdshot, based on the type of game they are intended for in hunting.

If you were to ignite a cartridge on its own, the result would be more or less as dangerous and predictable as an exploding can of hairspray. The bullet, being usually much heavier than the casing (lead is a lot heavier than brass) would probably not accelerate much, the casing, however, would most likely accelerate enough to cause injury over a short distance (being light and not very aerodynamic, a flying casing will lose its speed rapidly).

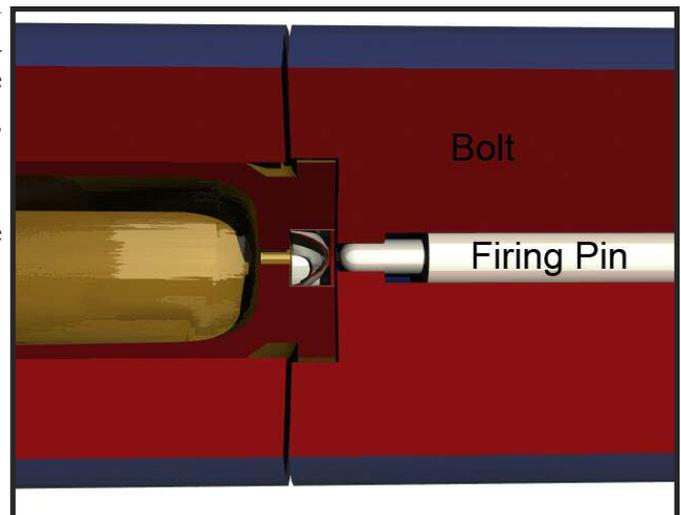
To be useful as a weapon, a firearm needs at least 3 more components:

1-The barrel. This is basically a pipe through which the bullet will be guided, as well as into which the powder can continue to burn, the gases continue to expand, and thus continue accelerating the bullet. A spiral pattern (**rifling**) is usually machined into the barrel (except in shotguns that have smooth barrels), this spiral causes the bullet to rotate along its axis, providing it with gyroscopic stabilization, making the trajectory much more predictable. Another feature will be machined in the base of the barrel, called the chamber (except in revolvers, where multiple chambers are machined into a cylinder that rotates to align with the barrel). The chamber is machined to the dimensions of the cartridge casing.



2-The bolt. This is the part that closes the barrel behind the chamber and the cartridge casing. Without a bolt, igniting the powder would simply cause the cartridge casing to be shot out of the back of the barrel like a rocket, and the bullet to get stuck uselessly inside the barrel.

3-The firing pin. This is the part that strikes the primer, typically through a hole in the bolt.



At this point, you have a very minimalist single shot firearm, to go beyond this basic functionality, you need to understand the 6 stages of operation of a firearm (4 in some submachineguns) and how we can make them happen in a smooth and fast way.

1-Feed. You need to get a cartridge into the chamber. The most basic way to do this is by hand, like in Joe Biden's beloved double barreled shotgun. Aside from being slow, this requires fine motor control that is often unavailable under stress. To remedy this, firearms now usually use **magazines**. A magazine is a device that contains cartridges, as well as keeps them in position to be fed into the chamber, usually by a motion of the bolt (Not counting some recent models, the exception is once more the shotgun that typically uses a tube magazine under the barrel, feeding thus becomes a somewhat contrived sequence of extracting the shell from the tube magazine, positioning it with a lever, then finally feeding it with the closing of the bolt). Because proper positioning of the car-

tridges for feeding requires a fair amount of precision, and small deviations can cause the firearm to jam, early firearm magazines were **internal magazines**. An internal magazine is a part of the firearm, and can thus be adjusted and tested at the factory to insure reliability. To accelerate filling internal magazines, that otherwise need to be filled one cartridge at a time, a device called a **clip** was created. A clip is just that, a small metal clip you can hook cartridges to, typically 5 at a time, and fill the internal magazine by placing the clip above the magazine, usually at a spot made for the clip, and press the cartridges in. This is better than inserting cartridges one by one by hand with frozen wet fingers, but still very clumsy. More reliable mass production made the **detachable magazine** possible. A detachable magazine allows a secured firearm to be quickly loaded, as well a faster reloading when the magazine's ammunition is expended. I will spare you a description of belt feeding.

2-Lock. Unless you are using a submachinegun that uses an "open bolt" mechanism (these use the inertia of a heavier bolt instead of locking), once your cartridge is chambered, the bolt needs to lock in place to prevent catastrophic malfunction of the weapon. If it could fire unlocked, it would become possible for the cartridge to be partially out of the chamber while the gasses are still expanding, either because the cartridge did not seat itself in the chamber properly, or because the recoil pushed the bolt and the cartridge back too soon. This causes the cartridge casing to explode, possibly injuring the shooter or bystanders, possibly damaging the firearm, and almost certainly making it inoperable without a time consuming repair. The locking mechanism will immobilize the bolt, as well as prevent firing if locking is not complete.

3-Fire. Exerting force on the firing pin in order to ignite the primer. In non automatic firearms, this will happen when the trigger is pulled. In automatic firearms, the first cartridge will be fired upon pressing the trigger, but then, as long as the trigger is pressed, the weapon will fire when the bolt locks (unless, again, this is an open bolt submachinegun).

4-Unlock. Unlocking the bolt, this can be done manually with the diverse mechanisms of non semi/fully automatic firearms, or it can happen automatically, using the recoil or the gas pressure from the fired cartridge.

5-Extract. Extraction is pulling out the used cartridge casing from the chamber. Typically, a hook on the bolt (the extractor) will pull on the casing, either from manually pulling back the bolt, or by the continuation of the action of recoil or gases that started with unlocking.

6-Eject. Near the end of the bolt's travel, a mechanism will push the spent cartridge casing out of the firearm., making space for the cycle to start over with a new cartridge being fed.

These functions can be distributed in various ways depending on design. In a semi automatic pistol, for instance, there is typically a lower part called the frame, that is simultaneously the grip, the housing for the trigger mechanism and for the magazine, and you have the slide, that houses the barrel, the bolt and the firing pin. In a rifle or shotgun, you typically speak of either a housing or a **receiver**. Trigger mechanism, barrel, bolt and magazine, all the vital components are housed in or attached to the receiver. For ease of maintenance, the receiver is sometimes split in two parts, the upper and lower receiver. The upper part is where the barrel is attached, where the bolt travels, where all the actual cartridge related events take place. The lower usually holds the trigger mechanism and the magazine well (the space where the magazine is inserted and held). In most countries, the legal identification required for a firearm is a serial number, usually expected to match, on both the barrel and the receiver. In some instances, lower receivers are regulated, and need their own serial number because the trigger mechanism is housed there. Thus the configuration of the lower receiver is what determines if the firearm is a semi automatic version built for the civilian market, or a fully automatic version built for military use.

Now we have a fully functioning firearm, what we need is a way to make it useable by a human. We need a place to hold it, with access to the trigger and safeties and other controls, a means of aiming, and in the case of rifles and shotguns, some sort of stock to shoulder the firearm. Let us start with the stock, because this is what will determine everything else.

A traditional stock starts with a grip sloping down from the receiver, then expands into the shoulder part. This configuration has the advantage of allowing the cheek to rest on the stock and the eye to be level with the top of the receiver and the barrel. The disadvantage of this configuration is that the offset between the stock and the barrel amplifies the sensation of recoil. This means such a firearm takes longer to master, and this mastery is more difficult to attain for smaller or weaker people. Furthermore, at equal levels of skill, firing multiple shots with the same accuracy will always be slower with this configuration, because the firearm will be moved more by the recoil.



The in line stock forms a straight line between the barrel and the shoulder, resulting in a firearm that is easier to control, especially by smaller, weaker shooters. The disadvantages are that the eye level is higher over the barrel, offering less protection for the head when shooting from behind cover, and that a separate grip is now needed, commonly known as a “pistol grip”.



In spite of the fault of being an extra part, the pistol grip can be placed in a more optimal position to operate the firearm’s different controls, like the safety/fire selector, bolt release and the magazine release, making it easier to operate under stress. Because of this ergonomic advantage, you sometimes find pistol grips on rifles that have traditionally sloped stocks, like the AK family.

As far as aiming and other accessories, the diversity is too great to cover, and a lot of firearms I see today look too much like disco Christmas trees for my taste.

I do want to take a minute to talk about the methods of aiming, and the categories of equipment for these methods.

The simplest is “**point and shoot**”. Lots of different techniques here, but the basic principle (if I do it properly) is, first, I identify a target (eyes mid range focus), I look at what is behind (eyes far range focus), if it is safe, I point the weapon, either using my peripheral vision or my body awareness and fire. This can be learned relatively easily and is very fast, but the range is limited.

Then you have lasers, reflex sights and various other “**red dot**” systems. The same initial principle applies, identify target, clear what is behind him, then I shoulder (or just raise the barrel if the stock was already in my shoulder), and when the light dot overlaps the target, I fire. A bit slower, but more accurate, longer range, but not a very long range.

Scopes are also popular, they offer long ranges, but finding the target can be tricky, because of the magnification, The larger the magnification, the less the picture in your scope can be coordinated with your peripheral vision. They are also prone to fogging up in certain temperature conditions.

Then you have the traditional **iron sights**. They can be very accurate (not as long range as a proper scope, however), but are the slowest to use, especially considering the eye focus travel needed, identify the target (mid range focus), clear what is behind (long range focus), then focus on the front sight (near focus), align with the rear sight, finally overlap front sight on target.

So, based on what we know now, what is an **assault weapon**? It is a semi-automatic rifle, usually with an in line stock and a pistol grip. Certainly, this allows for faster shooting, but it also, critically, allows for use by smaller, weaker people. Is it accurate to call it an “assault” weapon? Technically, yes, because when you restrict such a rifle to semi-automatic operation, you diminish its usefulness in providing suppressive fire, thus, its defensive potential has been reduced in comparison to its fully automatic military equivalent. The offensive potential of the weapon is however intact. Legislative intent leans towards also limiting the magazine capacity of firearms. This further reduces the ability of the weapon to provide suppressive fire, as this relies on the volume, but also the continuity of shooting, but it does nothing to reduce casualties in a mass shooting scenario. The pause for reloading does not give much time to escape or charge a shooter, but it does allow the shooter to reset his mind to proper **fire control**, which increases his potential for deadliness. Without significant training, controlling your fire, even under moderate stress is very difficult, and as long as shooting is uninterrupted, control gets more and more difficult. Having to press the trigger with each shot does give a small but significant reset, reloading allows the shooter to reset his mind and body more completely, and thus achieve much better fire control.

6-Conclusion

Now, you know what you need to make your mind on the subject in an informed way. There are a few cases in which people will still support gun control, perhaps you base your conclusions on evidence I have not seen (in which case I would very much like you to forward it to me), or you may base your reasoning on a different set of axioms than me (in which case, I wonder what makes your axioms superior to mine), or you can choose to believe in weaker evidence, or in outright lies. Or, you can admit to yourself that your position is entirely about you hating guns, and the type of people who have them. In this case, you also have to accept you are in the same category of humans as the Westboro Baptists.

If you still do support gun control, unless you can provide compelling proof my arguments are false, you are asking people to surrender what they believe to be a fundamental human right. You are asking something a large number of sensible people consider an attack on fundamental human dignity. Before we can even start talking about compromise, you have to offer proof there would be benefits. The intuition less guns would lead to less violence does not cut it, and looking at “gun violence” in isolation does not cut it either. Show me credible raw data that indicates the measures you desire have real, significant effects on violence as a whole. Then, we can have a real conversation.

And for all you reasonable individuals who realize there is no reasonable argument in favor of gun control, when you are ready to start training to use that new firearm to protect yourself and your loved ones, remember to get proper training, first in safety, then, from a guy like me who will teach you to use that weapon with the same level of skill people who carried swords cultivated.



About the author

Who am I to tell you about policy and firearms? This is a political portrait of me, so you can spot my biases more easily. It is followed by my credentials on the subject of firearms and violence.

While I consider myself an Anarchist, I consider Anarchy to be a limit condition we should strive for, not something we can just spontaneously make happen.

I think evidence shows the opportunities offered by a community are a more significant predictor of success than individual attitude (this is why, I believe, there are no African Internet billionaires).

I think government is still currently the best concept we have to manage much of the effort to create these community offered opportunities.

I think government as it currently exists, as an unresponsive institution that answers internally only to the will of technocrats and externally only to special interest groups is worse than useless, as well as unlawful.

I believe in rugged individualism, as long as the weak can find protection, and access to the resources to become strong and self reliant themselves.

Offering help to people who need it, I believe, is something the government should be involved in. This help, however, should not come in the form of treating everyone as special needs children.

I don't think laws should exist to protect people from themselves, unless they have individually been identified as needing that help.

I don't think laws should be made that punish people for actions that have not caused a victim.

I don't think laws should be made for the sake of people's feelings, especially if they are going to affect other groups than that whose feelings are being addressed.

I think markets are a fine process, but they are not beneficial in all fields, and sometimes malfunction.

I believe markets should not be the sole operating process in fields and areas where the incentives punish the consumer (no one consumes healthcare when they are healthy, no one buys expensive police equipment when there is no crime, and no one buys expensive military equipment when they have no enemy).

I believe markets should not be the sole process in fields and areas where the consumer cannot shop when he needs the product or service (you don't shop for taxi cabs, for ambulances, for firemen, for hospitals, for running water or for the street you walk on).

Markets are not god like sentient superior creatures we must worship and serve, they are just a generally effective way of creating prosperity.

Thus, Liberals, Conservatives (social and fiscal) and Libertarians think I am wrong, which suggests I might be on the right track.

Now, for my credentials.

I have four years of military experience (Canadian military), I have training and experience as a gunsmith, I am certified as an instructor in a martial art that includes work with firearms (Russian Systema). I have worked and trained with firearms my whole adult life. I have studied the phenomenon of violence for the last 30 years. That is the short form of my credentials, don't hesitate to ask if you need more details.

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systema@nagaika.org

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