

Facts About Firearms Policy Initiative

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GVPedia arms policymakers, advocates, and the public with facts and data to create evidence-based policy to reduce gun violence.

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MYTH: Americans use guns defensively millions of times a year

Fact: Evidence from the Gun Violence Archive reveals approximately 2,000 verified defensive gun uses annually

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott claims Americans use guns defensively approximately two million times a year to advance the myth that a good guy with a gun will keep us safe from a bad guy with a gun.
- Lott relies on flawed 1990s survey data which has results that are mathematically impossible.
- The best empirical evidence from the Gun Violence Archive reveals that there are approximately 2,000 verified defensive gun uses (DGUs) annually.

Lott's Claims:

In his 2020 book, *Gun Control Myths*, Lott claims: “Americans use guns defensively about 2 million times a year.” Lott has made similar claims over the past two decades.

Lott writes in his 2003 book, *The Bias Against Guns*, “It is particularly difficult for people to accept academic and private survey data on defensive gun use that show people using guns defensively anywhere from 1.5 to 3.4 million times a year.”

Lott's 1998 book, *More Guns Less Crime*, acknowledges the US Department of Justice's National Crime Victimization Survey that reports 110,000 defensive uses of guns during assaults, robberies, and household burglaries. However, Lott cites other surveys and polls that “imply that there are 760,000 defensive handgun uses to 3.6 million defensive uses of any type of gun per year.” Lott claims that a national survey he conducted in 2002 found that 95% of defensive gun use requires only brandishing a firearm to end the attack.

The Facts:

Lott's claim of approximately two million defensive gun uses annually [originate](#) from a series of surveys conducted by Gary Kleck and Marc Gertz in the early 1990s. Subsequent validity tests reveal that the survey numbers are mathematically impossible. Surveys of rare events such as DGUs exaggerate the frequency due to false positives. These surveys

suffer from severe false-positive issues, telescoping, and social desirability bias, in addition to other methodological problems that render the data useless.

For example, one of the surveys [indicates](#) that guns were used in self-defense 845,000 times during burglaries in the U.S. Yet at the time of the survey, there were 1.3 million burglaries annually where the occupant was home, and in only 33% where the occupants were awake at the time. Furthermore, at the time only around 42% of households owned firearms, meaning at most only 180,000 defensive gun uses are possible.

The best empirical evidence from the [Gun Violence Archive](#) reveals approximately 2,000 verified DGUs annually, a far cry from millions.

In 1997, conservative criminologist James Q. Wilson [wrote](#) in the New Republic that Lott's estimates are not reliable and researchers should rely on government surveys:

"Using the data compiled by the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) of 56,000 families, scholars have estimated that there are, at a minimum, between 65,000 and 80,000 defensive gun uses per year. Some estimates based on private polls suggest much higher defensive uses, ranging up to 1.5 or even 2.5 million. The data supplied by private polls are controversial, since so much depends on inferring society-wide effects from the answers of a tiny number of respondents. (If, to take a recent study, only 54 people out of 2,500 surveyed said they used a gun to defend themselves, then each of the 54 represents 68,000 Americans. Reporting errors--lies, exaggerations, poor memory--on the part of just a few people can have huge effects on the total number of defensive gun uses.) So consider instead the much larger and more reliable NCVS, conducted by the Census Bureau, according to which defensive gun uses in America are not trivial: 65,000 to 80,000 uses each year."

Despite NCVS estimates suffering from false positives and are likely to overestimate the number of DGUs, it is still much closer to the true number of DGUs compared to Lott's surveys.

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MYTH: Guns are used more often in self defense than to commit crimes

Fact: Each year in the U.S. approximately 40,000 people are fatally shot and tens of thousands more injured, compared to approximately 2,000 verified DGUs annually

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott claims guns are used in the U.S. five times more frequently in self defense than to commit a criminal act.
- Lott does an apples to oranges comparison using crime numbers from the National Crime Victimization Survey and flawed defensive gun use (DGUs) surveys that inflate defensive uses.
- Each year in the U.S., approximately 40,000 people are fatally shot and 30,000 suffer non-fatal gunshot injuries. In comparison, there are approximately 2,000 verified DGUs annually.

Lott's Claims:

Lott repeatedly claims that guns are used in the U.S. more often in self-defense than to commit crimes. In his 2020 book, *Gun Control Myths*, Lott writes, "Americans use guns defensively about 2 million times a year - about 5 times more frequently than guns are used to commit crimes."

Lott writes in his 2016 book, *The War on Guns*, "Without question, most researchers believe that guns are used more often in self-defense than in the commission of a crime."

The Facts:

Lott's assertion of the high prevalence of defensive gun use is [not backed](#) by any substantive evidence. No academic peer-reviewed studies examining the issue of DGU indicate that defensive gun use is more common than criminal gun use. Yet the false claim that there are millions of DGUs annually have led some pro-gun activists to claim that guns are used more often in self-defense than to commit crimes.

The fundamental flaw with this claim is that gun advocates compare inflated survey defensive gun use numbers from Gary Kleck with [National Crime Victimization Survey](#) (NCVS) crime numbers. The defensive gun use surveys use different and more dubious

methodologies from the NCVS. An accurate comparison requires comparing similar methodologies.

A 2013 Department of Justice [report](#) compared NCVS gun crime numbers to NCVS DGU numbers between 2007 and 2011. The DOJ report determined that more than nine times as many people are victimized by guns than are protected by guns. The study further found fewer than 1% of victims in all nonfatal violent crimes reported using a firearm to defend themselves during the incidents.

Two Harvard [surveys](#) found people in the U.S. were more than three times as likely to have a gun used against them than they were to defend themselves with a gun. “Even after excluding many reported firearm victimizations, far more survey respondents report having been threatened or intimidated with a gun than having used a gun to protect themselves. A majority of the reported self defense gun uses were rated as probably illegal by a majority of judges.”

A [2004 study](#) by Hemenway and Miller which focused on California adolescents found 13 times as many offensive gun uses as defensive. Yet another [study](#) focusing on gun use in the home found that a gun was more than six times more likely to be used to intimidate a family member than in a defensive capacity.

Empirical evidence from the Gun Violence Archive reveals approximately [2,000 verified DGUs annually](#). In 2019 alone, approximately 40,000 people in the U.S. were killed by firearms, tens of thousands were injured, at least 200,000 firearms were stolen, and hundreds of thousands of people were subject to abusive gun uses such as coercion, threat, brandishing, or intimidation. The comparison shows that guns are far more likely to be used to harm than to protect.

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MYTH: Guns are the safest and most effective way to prevent crime

Fact: Surveys found that a majority of self-reported defensive gun uses were both illegal and provided no social benefit.

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott claims guns are the safest and most effective way to stop a crime.
- Research shows defensive gun use when confronting a criminal has the same risk of injury as doing nothing in the situation, and is more dangerous to the defender than simply leaving the area.
- Surveys found that a majority of self-reported defensive gun uses were both illegal and provided no social benefit.
- The vast majority of academic research clearly indicates that gun ownership does not reduce a person's rate of victimization.

Lott's Claims:

In Lott's 2016 book, *The War on Guns*, he writes, "Having a gun is by far the safest course of action when one is confronted by a criminal."

Lott argues that guns are especially effective at stopping crimes against women. In his 2020 book, *Gun Control Myths*, Lott states, "women benefit much more than men from using guns in self-defense. The reason is simple - women tend to be physically weaker than the male criminals who attack them."

In a 2020 *Newsweek* article, Lott [writes](#), "Having a gun is by far the most effective way for people to protect themselves. That is particularly true for the most vulnerable, people who are relatively weaker physically (women and the elderly) and those who are the most likely victims of violent crime (poor blacks who live in high-crime urban areas)."

The Facts:

The vast majority of academic research has found that owning a gun does not make a person safer.

Using National Crime Victimization Survey data, David Hemenway and Sara Solnik [found](#) that “defensive gun use” (DGU) is more rare than gun advocates claim and rarely protects a person from harm.

During incidents where a victim used a gun in self-defense, the study found the likelihood of suffering an injury was 10.9%. Had the victim taken no action at all, the risk of injury was virtually identical: 11%. Furthermore, possessing a gun did not reduce the likelihood of losing property; 38.5% of those who used a gun in self-defense had property taken from them compared to 34.9% of victims who used another type of weapon, such as a knife or baseball bat.

The study also found that while the likelihood of injury after brandishing a firearm was reduced to 4.1%, the injury rate after those defensive gun uses was similar to using any other weapon and was still greater than if the person had run away or hid (2.4%) or called the police (2.2%). These [results](#) were similar to previous research on older NCVS data which showed that, while using a firearm in self-defense did lower a person’s risk of subsequent injury, it was less effective than using any weapon other than a gun.

A [pair of private surveys](#) conducted by Hemenway in 1996 and 1999, in which respondents were asked to describe DGUs in their own words, found that the majority of defensive gun uses were both illegal and provided no social benefit. When a gun is used in self defense, it is often part of an escalating hostile interaction — one in which both participants are likely to be responsible for the event that initially prompted the DGU. One male respondent who reported a defensive gun use described an incident as follows: “I was watching a movie and he interrupted me. I yelled at him that I was going to shoot him and he ran to his car.” Another respondent pulled out a gun to resolve a conflict with his neighbor: “I was on my porch and this man threw a beer in my face so I got my gun.”

It is not at all clear that cases such as these benefit the public — let alone constitute legitimate defensive gun use. After all, these incidents are substantially different from a situation in which a victim is taken by surprise, such as during a street mugging. Stories of criminal gun use posing as self-defense highlight that defensive gun use in aggregate is likely not beneficial for society. This is especially true when combined with studies that find defensive gun use is not more effective at preventing injury than other means of self-defense.

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"Past Summary Ledgers," [Gun Violence Archive](#) (accessed October 2020)

MYTH: U.S. homicide numbers are inflated compared to other countries because of defensive gun use

Fact: The gap between the number of firearm homicides and murders reflects John Lott's comparison of comprehensive CDC data with incomplete FBI data

Summary:

- Homicide is when one person kills another. Murder is homicide with intent.
- Researcher John Lott claims that international comparisons of firearm homicide rates makes the US look more deadly than it really is. Lott further claims that comparing murder rates is a more accurate depiction.
- Lott argues that the gap between the number of firearm homicides and firearm murders is the result of including gun homicides committed in self-defense with the firearm homicide rate.
- In reality, the gap between the number of firearm homicides and murders comes from Lott comparing comprehensive CDC data with incomplete FBI data.

Lott's Claims:

In his 2020 book, *Gun Control Myths*, Lott writes, "Homicides include not only murders, but also justifiable homicides in which civilians or law enforcement officers kill in self-defense. In the five years from 2011 to 2015, the US experienced 11,577 firearm homicides and 8,786 firearm murders. The gap between these two numbers is much larger in the US than in other countries. So, comparing homicide rates gives a more unfavorable impression of the US than if we looked only at murder rates." Lott continues by saying murder isn't a nationwide problem in the US but is "only a big problem in certain urban areas."

"People seem to think homicides and murders are the same thing. They're not," Lott said in a July 20, 2019 talk at FreedomFest Libertarian Conference. "The big difference is homicides are murders and justifiable homicides.... Justifiable homicides are cases where a police officer is being threatened by a criminal and has to kill the criminal, or a civilian uses a gun in self-defense. The United States has a lot more justifiable homicides than other countries. That would lower our rate by 20% or so. It would make a significant difference. The vast majority of countries don't report murders. They just report homicides."

Lott further claims that countries with high homicide rates don't report homicide data, therefore portraying the U.S. as a more dangerous country than it is. Lott additionally contends that the U.S. has a relatively high homicide murder rate compared to developed countries because the U.S. has a "much worse drug gang problem."

The Facts:

The gap Lott identifies between the number of firearm homicides and firearm murders does not come from excluding self-defense shootings. Instead, the disparity stems from his comparison of comprehensive data from the Center for Disease Control with incomplete data from the FBI. An examination of Lott's footnotes confirms that he obtained his homicide figures from the CDC and his murder figures from the FBI. Lott fails to mention that CDC's data is primarily from coroner reports. The FBI relies on voluntary reporting from local law enforcement. Many localities, and even entire states such as Alabama, opt out of reporting murder figures to the FBI.

"The FBI's less rigorous method was developed in the 1960s out of necessity when a single year of crime data was stored on seven or eight large reels of computer tape," [reports](#) the *Wall Street Journal*. In 1999, criminologist Michael Maltz from the Justice Department [published](#) a critique of the FBI's procedures, noting that poor procedures led to incomplete data. In the ensuing twenty years, the FBI has failed to adopt the recommendations made by Mr. Maltz in his seventy page report

Lott acknowledges the shortcoming with FBI's data in his 2016 book, *The Bias Against Guns*. He writes, "Many crime myths persist due to incomplete or inaccurate data reporting. Hundreds of 'justifiable homicides' are reported each year by the FBI, but many more homicides might fall into that category. Since many jurisdictions do not report data on 'justifiable homicide,' this makes the FBI's "total" essentially meaningless."

We address the "drug gang problem" portion of Lott's claim in a [separate entry](#).

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MYTH: Firearms in the home do not correlate to increases in homicide (Kellerman Study)

Fact: Arthur Kellerman's study demonstrates a firearm in the home is associated with an increase risk in homicide

Summary:

- In 1993, while at the University of Tennessee, Memphis, Arthur L. Kellerman, MD, now the Virginia Commonwealth University Senior Vice-President and CEO, and nine co-authors published a study that found “guns kept in the home are associated with an increase in the risk of homicide by a family member or intimate acquaintance.”
- The Kellerman study was designed to assess the relationship between keeping a gun in the home and the risk of being murdered by any weapon, not just the firearm kept in the home.
- Kellermann and his coauthors mention that in a subset of 14 cases, police reports stated that the murder weapon had been kept in the home in eight of those cases. Lott claims that eight out of a subset of 14 cases is equivalent to eight out of 444 cases.
- Researcher John Lott mangles Kellerman's conclusion by misleadingly claiming that only eight homicide victims out of the 444 homicide cases were killed with a gun that had been kept in the home, ignoring that those 8 cases were out of a subset of 14 cases, not the overall sample.
- Lott makes this misleading claim to detract from Kellerman's conclusion that a firearm in the home is associated with an increased risk of homicide by a family member or intimate acquaintance.

Lott's Claim:

Lott often targets a [1993 study](#) by Kellermann and nine co-authors which found that individuals who kept guns in the home were more likely to be victims of homicide than those who did not. Lott claimed that Kellermann fails to mention that only eight of the 444 homicides involved a gun kept in the house. Here are a few examples of Lott's claim:

- In his 2020 book, *Gun Control Myths*, Lott writes: “In one of the most well-known public health studies on firearms, Kellermann's ‘case sample’ consists of 444 homicides that occurred in homes... These studies make the ludicrous assumption

that if a gun owner died from a gun shot, then it was the gun in the home that killed that person. The paper fails to report that in only 8 of these 444 homicide cases was the murder weapon the gun that had been kept in the home."

- In a 2017 rebuttal to a *Scientific American* article by Melinda Moyer that criticizes Lott's research, Lott writes: "Moyer fails to note that, in fact, in only eight of these 444 homicide cases was the murder weapon a gun that had been kept in the home... If Moyer had even read the 1998 edition of *More Guns, Less Crime*, she would have learned this."
- In his 1998 book, *More Guns, Less Crime*, Lott writes: "There are many problems with Kellermann et al.'s paper that undercut the misleading impression that victims were killed by the gun in the home. For example, they fail to report that in only 8 of these 444 homicide cases could it be established that the "gun involved had been kept in the home." He also writes, "The fact that all or virtually all the homicide victims were killed by weapons brought into their homes by intruders makes this all the more plausible."

The Facts:

Lott's claim that only eight homicide victims out of 444 homicide cases were killed with a gun that had been kept in the home is blatantly false. Kellermann and his coauthors [mention](#) that in a subset of 14 cases, police reports stated that the murder weapon had been kept in the home in eight of those cases. "Needless to say, 14 is not equal to 444," Tim Lambert, a Computer Scientist at the University of New South Wales, [explains](#).

Lambert also disputes Lott's claim that nearly every homicide victim in Kellermann's study was killed by weapons brought into their homes by intruders. Kellermann's paper shows that only 14% of the homicide victims were killed by intruders. "By no stretch of the imagination can this be called 'all' or 'virtually all,'" Lambert says. "Lott grossly misrepresents Kellermann's study."

Lott further argues that the case-control method used by Kellermann is not an appropriate method of studying the risks of firearms in the home because other factors may cause a correlation between gun ownership and homicide. Lott's claim is false because Kellermann used multivariate analysis to control for dozens of other factors.

Even if Kellermann made the mistakes Lott claims, the study would still show that keeping a gun in the home increases the risk of being murdered. Moyer [writes](#) in her counter to Lott's 2017 rebuttal in *Scientific American*, "Lott criticizes me for omitting a detail about the Kellerman study that he considers important—but it is not. The study found the odds of being murdered nearly tripled among those who kept guns at home. Lott says it is important that most of these homicides did not involve the resident's gun. That is a straw man. The study was designed to assess the relationship between keeping a gun in the home and the risk of being murdered by any weapon. Murder victims are murder victims, regardless of weapon or means."

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MYTH: Gun owners shoot someone they know between five to eleven times each year after mistaking the person for an intruder

Fact: Gun owners shoot someone they know more than 28 times a year, on average, after mistaking the person for an intruder

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott claims that gun owners shoot someone they know after mistaking them for an intruder between five to eleven times each year.
- While still rare, about 29 people are reported to have been shot every year due to mistaken identity.

Lott's Claim:

In his 2020 book, *Gun Control Myths*, Lott claims that gun owners accidentally shoot between five to eleven people each year because they mistook them for intruders. Lott argues: "Does law-abiding gun ownership pose a risk to innocent neighbors? While there are no official government statistics on people accidentally shooting people they know (having mistook them for intruders), we used Nexis news searches from 2011 to 2013 to get a rough idea of the frequency of these cases. Though each incident garnered news stories in major US media outlets (USA Today, CNN, Fox News, New York Daily News), it is amazing how rare these cases are. We found eight such tragedies in 2013, eleven in 2012, and only five in 2011."

The Facts:

In reality, there are roughly four times as many shootings as Lott claims involving a gun owner mistaking a person they know for an intruder. The most accurate data on this particular aspect of gun violence comes from the nonpartisan nonprofit Gun Violence Archive (GVA), which compiles data from more than 7,500 police and media sources.

The Gun Violence Archive [identified](#) an average of 28.6 incidents per year in the United States:

- 31 cases in 2016
- 43 cases in 2017
- 19 cases in 2018
- 30 cases in 2019
- 20 cases in 2020

Combined, these cases resulted in 54 deaths and 91 injuries. Compared with nearly 39,513 gun deaths in 2019 alone, these figures are relatively small. However, the yearly totals are, on average, quadruple those found by Lott's research. It is also important to note that cases of mistaken identity might not be reported to the police or labeled as unintentional if the shooting isn't fatal (or the shooter missed), so GVA's number is almost certainly an undercount.

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MYTH: Only 17% of guns used to commit crimes in Mexico originate in the U.S.

Fact: A 2009 GAO [report](#) found that 87% of Mexican crime guns over the previous five years came from the U.S.

Summary:

- The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) data consistently shows that between 70% to 90% of guns recovered from crime scenes in Mexico originated in the United States.
- From 2007-2008, Mexican authorities seized 29,000 firearms. They sent 11,000 of those guns to the ATF for tracing. The ATF successfully traced 6,000 of the firearms, 90% of which originated in the U.S.
- From 2009-2014, Mexican authorities seized 158,560 firearms. They sent 104,850 guns to the ATF for tracing. The ATF found 73,684 firearms (or 70.3%) originated in the U.S.
- The ATF helps Mexico determine the origin of all the firearms submitted for tracing, not just the firearms initially sold in the U.S. The ATF also [provides](#) this service to 138 other countries.
- Researcher John Lott, however, claims that only 17% of guns used in crimes in Mexico originate in the U.S.
- Lott's claim is based on the unreasonable assumption that all untraceable and untraced firearms found in Mexico did not originate in the United States. Lott only uses the 2007-2008 data to support his claim.
- Lott does not use the larger 2009-2014 data set in his calculations. Even with Lott's unreasonable assumption about tracing, the larger data set disproves his 17% claim.
- The best available evidence shows that at least 70% of guns used in crimes in Mexico originated in the U.S.

Lott's Claim:

In his 2020 book *Gun Control Myths*, Lott attempts to refute the claim that between 70% to 90% of guns recovered from crime scenes in Mexico came from the United States. Lott states that only 17% of guns used in crimes in Mexico come from the U.S. He further states the large discrepancy stems from Mexican authorities selectively requesting that the ATF trace only the recovered guns that Mexican authorities believe originate in the U.S.

Lott makes a similar argument in a 2019 Wall Street Journal (WSJ) [article](#), claiming that only 17.6% of firearms seized by Mexican authorities could be traced back to the U.S. He claims an ATF study of data from 2009-2014 showing that 70% of crime guns in Mexico come from the U.S. was based on “a small subset of guns.”

In his WSJ article, Lott additionally references a different ATF report that says Mexico seized 29,000 guns from 2007-2008. Mexican authorities submitted 11,000 of those guns to the ATF for tracing. ATF was able to successfully trace 6,000 of those 11,000 guns. Of those 6,000 successfully traced guns, 90% came from the U.S. Lott concludes, “Thus by one estimate only about 17.6% of the firearms Mexico collected in total could be traced back to America.”

The Facts:

Lott’s claim in his 2020 book rests on the theory that Mexican authorities painstakingly examined every seized gun and chose only guns they believed to originate in the U.S. to send to the ATF for tracing. No substantive evidence exists to indicate that Mexican authorities attempted to send only guns of U.S. origin to the ATF for tracing, as the ATF’s purpose is to help Mexico uncover where all of the firearms submitted for tracing come from, not just the firearms initially sold in the U.S. The ATF also [provides](#) this service to 138 other countries.

This 2019 *Wall Street Journal* [article](#) written by John Lott provides more details on why Lott reached the conclusion that only 17% of guns used in crimes in Mexico originated in the United States. It is important to note that Lott cites two different reports, one which determined that 70% of crime guns in Mexico come from the U.S., and the other which estimated that 90% come from the U.S.

Lott’s cited sample size (6,000 out of 29,000) comes from a *Fox News* [interview](#) with an ATF agent. The ATF data from 2007-2008 successfully traced 6,000 of 29,000 total firearms seized. To reach the 17% statistic, Lott exploited the small sample size and made the unrealistic assumption that all of the untraceable and untraced guns did not originate in the United States.

In the Wall Street Journal article, Lott did not share the sample size of the study that found that 70% of guns used in crime come from the U.S., but the data comes from a 2016 U.S. Government Accountability Office [report](#) which has a much larger sample size than the 2007-2008 data. The report stated Mexican authorities seized 158,560 firearms from 2009 to 2014. Of those, 104,850 (66.1%) were submitted to the U.S. for tracing. Of the 104,850 traced firearms, 73,684 firearms (70.3%) originated in the U.S.

Lott does not dispute these official government figures. After citing the 70% statistic, he wrote, “That’s a small subset of guns.” Notice that Lott here does not cite the sample size and specific numbers as he did with the 90% report. It is unreasonable to suggest that 66%, or 104,850 firearms, is a “small subset.” Even if we were to accept Lott’s unfounded assumption that none of the 53,710 untraced firearms came from the U.S., the result would be 46.5% of Mexico’s crime guns originating in the U.S. This is still significantly higher than Lott’s false 17% statistic.

ATF data has consistently shown that most firearms seized by Mexican authorities originated in the United States. In addition to the two reports cited by Lott, a 2009 GAO [report](#) found that 87% of Mexican crime guns over the previous five years came from the U.S.

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MYTH: Americans do not have more mass shootings than other countries

Fact: Approximately 29.7% of worldwide public mass shootings by single perpetrators were committed in the U.S.

Summary:

- In 2019, researcher John Lott and Carlisle Moody, an economist at the University of William and Mary, attempted to refute University of Alabama criminology professor Adam Lankford's, finding that 31% of global public mass shootings occurred in the U.S.
- Public mass shootings have a number of definitions. Both Lott and Lankford in this debate use a basic definition of four or more killed in a single incident. They then exclude various categories such as terrorism, gang violence, and battles over sovereignty, but differ on which specific shootings to exclude. For more details of other mass shooting definitions, see GVPedia's [Mass Shootings Report](#).
- According to the [FBI](#): "An active shooter is an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area." An active shooting can have any number of casualties.
- Lott and Moody claim that only 2% of global public mass shootings occurred in the U.S. Their conclusion is reached by broadening the definition of mass shooting to include group attacks by armed rebels, militia groups, and terrorists. Attacks by rebels, militias, and terrorists are usually categorized as terror attacks or battles over sovereignty, not mass shootings.
- Lankford responded by identifying roughly 1,000 foreign cases wrongly included in research by Lott and Moody which skew their results.

Lott's Claim:

In a March 2019 *Econ Journal Watch* [article](#), John Lott and Carlisle Moody dispute Adam Lankford's 2016 [study](#) which concluded that 31% of global public mass shootings occurred in the U.S. despite the U.S. having less than 5% of the global population.

Using their own database and unique definition of public mass shootings, Lott and Moody claim that 2% of the 2,818 cases of public mass shootings worldwide occurred in the U.S. The authors found that 61 public mass shootings occurred in the U.S. between 1998 and 2017, compared to 2,757 incidents in the rest of the world.

Lott made a similar claim on September 18, 2019 when he [testified](#) before the Joint Economic Committee of the United States House of Representatives and the Senate. He claimed that the U.S. had 2.16% of mass public shootings from 1998 to 2017, despite having 4.6% of the world's population.

The Facts:

Lott and Moody accuse Lankford of misleading readers by “defining and using terms in unconventional ways.” Although Lott claims to have followed the FBI’s definition of mass public shooting, the FBI does not have a definition for mass shootings. The FBI does, however, have a definition for active shooter incidents. The FBI [defines](#) an active shooter as “an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area.” Lott conflates the mass shooting definition with the active shooter definition, despite mass shootings and active shootings belonging to two different categories.

Lott and Moody exclude gang shootings in the U.S. to reduce the U.S. share of mass shootings. To inflate the international share of mass shootings, they include group attacks by uniformed soldiers, paramilitary groups, terrorist organizations, and massacres by large rebel groups. Another example that Lott includes, which is at odds with most definitions of mass public shootings, is an attack on an entire village on the Uganda-Kenya border by 300 Pokot raiders that resulted in many deaths, the burning of 200 houses, and theft of 300 head of cattle.

“Public mass shooters almost always attack alone,” Lankford writes in a March 2019 [response](#) to Lott. “This is common knowledge and has been consistently shown in previous research. Unfortunately, John Lott and Carlisle Moody ignore this fact.” In Lott’s study, 95% of U.S. incidents were committed by a single perpetrator (41 out of 43). In comparison, less than 7% of foreign attacks were committed by a solo attacker. An average of 22 perpetrators and a median of four perpetrators were involved in the cases in which Lott knew the number of attackers.

Using Lott and Moody’s own data, Lankford found that 29.7% of worldwide public mass shootings by single perpetrators were committed in the U.S. This means the U.S. has 6.6 times more public mass shootings committed by a lone gunman than the rest of the world.

Lankford notes the 29.7% figure is remarkably close to the 30.8% finding in his original 2016 article Lott attempted to refute.

Lankford concluded the article by highlighting a 2015 op-ed in the *NY Daily News* in which Lott [claimed](#), “After adjusting for America's much larger population, we see that many European countries actually have higher rates of death in mass public shootings.” Lankford notes that fact-checker Snopes criticized this research by Lott for using “inappropriate statistical methods” and giving a “false impression.”

Lott's Counter

Lott and Moody [responded](#) to Lankford in a March 2020 article by criticizing Lankford's definition of public mass shooting. Lott said that Lankford should not have included cases that occurred in non-public places or involved another crime such as a robbery. To support his claim, Lott cited his own study that Lankford previously refuted. Lott argued that lone-wolf shootings are very common in the U.S. due to culture and social alienation and not Lankford's claim of easy access to firearms in the U.S.

Rebuttal

In a March 2020 [rebuttal](#), Lankford explained that his original study focused exclusively on public mass shootings. Lott and Moody include “a small number of public mass shootings and a large number of group attacks by paramilitary fighters, armed rebels, militia group members, and terrorist strike teams.”

Lankford provided recommendations for readers to sort Lott and Moody's dataset to more accurately show the U.S.'s disproportionate share of global public mass shootings. Lankford found that Lott and Moody misrepresented roughly 1,000 foreign cases which skewed their results. Lankford concludes with two pages of points in which Lott and Moody made false claims, distortions, or errors, casting doubt on their credibility as researchers.

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MYTH: Europe and U.S. have similar rates of public mass shootings

Fact: Based on John Lott's own data, the U.S. has twice the rate of mass shootings compared to Europe, contradicting Lott's own claim

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott repeatedly claims that the United States and Europe have similar per capita rates of public mass shootings.
- Lott's dataset excludes mass shootings that are the result of robberies and gang violence which are common in the US, but includes terrorist attacks which make up a greater share of European incidents, thereby skewing his results.
- Based on Lott's own data, the US has twice the rate of mass shootings compared to Europe, contradicting Lott's own claim.

Lott's Claim:

In September 2019, Lott [testified](#) before the US Congress, saying that the European countries of France, Norway, Finland, and Switzerland had much higher rates of murder from mass public shootings than the US. For example, he claimed France's rate of mass public shootings was 49.7% higher than the US rate. He further claimed that the US ranks 66th in attack rate and 56th in murder rate from mass public shootings out of 101 countries.

Lott's testimony comparing European and US mass public shootings [appears](#) verbatim in a self-published 2020 paper. That paper updates Lott's 2018 self-published study of the same name. In the 2018 version of the paper, Lott's study of 97 countries found that the US ranked 64th in attacks and 65th in murder. In addition to Norway, Finland, France, and Switzerland, he includes Russia as a European country with at least 25% higher rates of murder from mass public shootings than the US.

During his February 2016 testimony before the Tennessee Senate, Lott [said](#), "Most people may not realize this, but the rate of mass public shootings in Europe is actually fairly similar to the rate in the United States. There is no statistically significant difference there, either in terms of the rate or fatalities."

The Facts:

Lott's claim that the U.S. and Europe have similar per capita mass shooting rates is contradicted by his own data. His data reports 25 mass shootings in the U.S. between 2009 and 2015. During the same period, Europe had 24 incidents and the European Union had 19. Taking into account population size, the U.S. had a rate of .078 shootings per million individuals. The U.S. rate is double the EU's rate of .038 and Europe's rate of .032 per million individuals. This contradicts his claim that the U.S. and Europe had similar mass shooting rates.

Rare events in countries with small populations distort statistical results. For example, Lott specifically names Norway as a country with a higher rate of mass shootings than the US. During the time period Lott chose to study, Norway had a single mass shooting resulting in at least 67 shooting deaths versus 61 mass shootings in the U.S. Due to Norway's small population, Lott attempts to claim that Norway has a higher rate of mass shootings and more fatalities. This is highly misleading since the U.S. had 60 times as many shootings as Norway. A 2018 Snopes [fact check](#) calls Lott's claim misleading and says it "uses inappropriate statistical methods to obscure the reality that mass shootings are very rare in most countries, so that when they do happen they have an outsized statistical effect."

Lott's dataset is misleading and distorts the common perception of a mass shooting. Lott excludes mass shootings that are the result of robberies and gang violence, but he includes terrorist attacks which make up a greater share of European incidents. This choice means that the 2015 Texas biker gang gunfight is excluded in his statistics, but the November 2015 Paris attacks, which accounted for more than one-third of Europe's mass shooting fatalities, are included.

Lott [told](#) the Washington Post Fact Checker that "If you are going to compare the U.S. to someplace else, if you are going to compare it to small countries, you have to adjust for population. Alternatively, compare the U.S. to Europe as a whole." Researcher Adam Lankford used Lott and Carlisle Moody's, own data from 1998-2012 (Moody is an economist at the University of William and Mary) to test this idea and found that "the United States was the site of more public mass shooters who attacked alone than all of Europe, even though Europe has more than twice the U.S. population."

Lott's Counter:

In a [rebuttal](#) to the ThinkProgress [article](#) coauthored by GVPedia's President Devin Hughes that initially uncovered Lott's erroneous claim about the U.S. and Europe, Lott argues that his numbers are accurate:

"The average incident rate per capita for the 28 EU countries is 0.0602 with a 95% confidence Interval of .0257 to .09477. The US rate of 0.078 is higher than the EU rate, but the difference is not statistically different. The average fatality rate for the 28 EU countries is 0.114, with a 95% confidence Interval of -.0244 to .253. The US rate of 0.089 is lower than the EU rate, but again the difference is not statistically significantly.

In Chapter 7 in *The War on Guns*, I show that from 2009 through 2015 (the first seven years of Obama's presidency), the fatality rate per million people was 0.58 in the EU and 0.62 in the US. The injury rate was 1.316 in the EU and 0.609 in the US."

Rebuttal:

The calculation for the per capita rate of shootings for the U.S., European Union, and Europe as a whole is straight forward: take the number of incidents and divide that by the population. Using Lott's own spreadsheet (with some slight rounding for populations):

US shooting rate: 25 incidents/323 million = .078 per million

EU shooting rate: 19 incidents/508 million = .038 per million

Europe shooting rate: 24 incidents/743 million = .032 per million

It is unclear how Lott arrives at an EU incident rate of .0602 incidents per million as he does not show his work, but one plausible explanation is that he is adding each country's incident rate, and then dividing by the number of countries within the EU. This approach however skews the results substantially (and is not the same thing as the EU incident rate), as it treats each country within the EU as having an equivalent population. This biases the results upwards due to small countries such as Norway having a high per capita shooting rate due to their small population.

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MYTH: Australia's gun buyback program had no benefits

Fact: Reputable academic studies find that Australia's buyback program was successful in reducing gun deaths

Summary:

- In 1996, 35 people were fatally shot and 25 were injured during the Port Arthur massacre in Australia. In the aftermath of that mass shooting, the Australian government created a firearm buyback program which resulted in the destruction of more than 650,000 firearms between 1996 and 1997.
- Researcher John Lott claims the resulting reduction of firearms from the buyback did not reduce firearm-related homicides or suicides in Australia.
- Lott's analysis is misleading, as his trend-analysis would require Australia to have a negative number of firearm homicides by 2008 and firearm suicides by 2014 to meet Lott's criteria for success.
- Reputable academic studies find that Australia's buyback program was successful in reducing gun deaths.

Lott's Claim:

In his 2020 book *Gun Control Myths*, Lott states, "looking at simple before-and-after averages of gun deaths in Australia is misleading" because firearm homicides and suicides had been falling since the mid-1980s. Since Australia's gun violence rates were falling before the gun buyback program and continued falling afterwards but at a slower rate, Lott claims the buyback law had no benefits. Lott adds that if the gun buyback program was successful, Australia would have experienced a "sudden drop in firearm homicides and suicides after the buyback."

During an Oct. 10, 2018 [presentation](#) at the Heartland Institute, John Lott included Australia's buyback program in his presentation on "false claims by gun control advocates." On May 19, 2018, Lott tweeted his claim that Australia's decline in gun violence became less steep after the buyback and added that Australia didn't have a gun ban since Australians could buy guns after the buyback. He claims that Australia's gun ownership rate is now higher than before the buyback.

In his 2016 book *The War on Guns*, Lott claims the total number of privately owned guns in Australia returned to 1996 levels by 2010. He writes, “It is very hard to look at the raw data on firearm suicides and homicides and see any benefits from Australia’s gun buyback.” He further says “Australia’s buyback program was only one experiment, and we can’t account for all of the other factors that may have come into play. The solution is then to look across many different states or countries and try to discern overall patterns.”

Lott [wrote](#) in a 2012 blog post that homicides did not fall until eight years after Australia’s reforms. He argues that “a more natural explanation for the drop at the eight year point would be the substantial increases in police forces that occurred at that time.”

The Facts:

In contrast to Lott’s claims, Australia’s 1996 reforms successfully reduced both firearm homicide and suicide rates. A 2010 [study](#) by Andrew Leigh and Christine Neill found that Australia’s firearm suicide rate fell by 74% and the firearm homicide rate fell by 35% to 50% in the decade after the buyback. The authors found no corresponding increase in homicides and suicides committed without guns. The study also found larger reductions in the firearm suicide rate in states with quick buybacks compared to states with slower buybacks.

Lott’s analysis is misleading. His own charts appearing in his 2016 and 2020 books betray his false claim. Lott’s chart labeled “Figure 42” shows that Australia would have had to have a negative number of firearm suicides by 2014 to meet Lott’s criteria for success. His other chart says that Australia’s reforms would be considered a success only if there were negative firearm homicides by 2008.

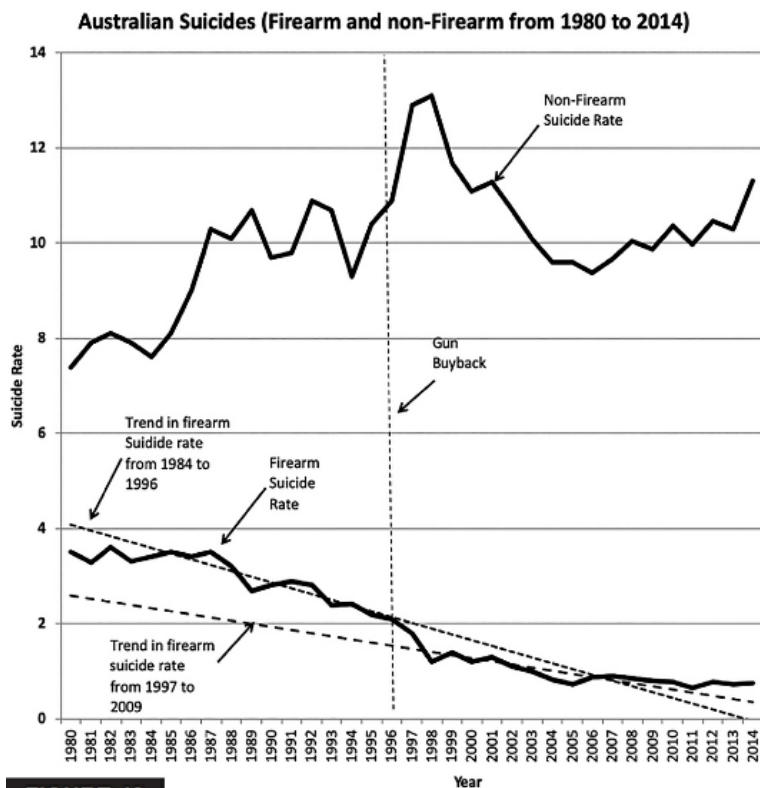
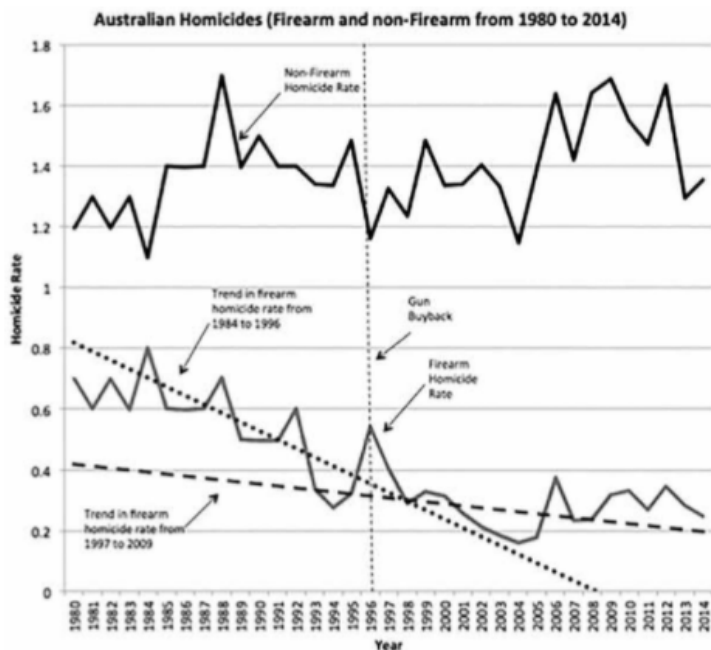


FIGURE 42



In a 2009 article, David Hemenway [explains](#) how a different study by two Australians with the pro-gun lobby made the same mistake as Lott when evaluating the effects of the gun buyback program. That study found that if the Australian firearm homicide rate had been zero in 2004, it would still indicate the buyback program and banning assault weapons had no effect. According to Hemenway, “the researchers made the assumption that the historical trend would have continued unabated. They made no effort to explain why the historical trend had been what it was, nor why they expected it to continue. The trend was downward.”

Australian researcher Rebecca Peters [wrote](#) in 2013 that “Overall, Australia’s reforms have proved a resounding success. We have not had another mass shooting since 1996, and the firearms mortality rate today is 1/100,000—less than half what it was then.” She notes that the National Rifle Association continues to misrepresent Australia’s successful program in an attempt to prevent new firearm regulations in the US. After the NRA released a video in 2000 claiming Australia was dangerous and overrun by criminals because of the reforms, Australia’s Attorney General wrote a letter of complaint to then-NRA President Charlton Heston.

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MYTH: Ninety-eight percent of mass shootings occur in gun-free zones

Fact: Twelve to thirteen percent of mass shootings occur where guns are prohibited

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott claimed that 98% or more of mass shootings from 1950 to the present occurred in gun-free zones.
- Lott's false claim is based on a basic error. For the period 1977–1997, Lott counts each individual mass shooting death as an entire mass shooting incident.
- Even after Lott corrected his mistake, he made a new claim that 94% of mass shootings occurred in gun-free places, which is also based on flawed data and contradicts other research that concludes that 12% to 13% of mass shootings occur where guns are prohibited.

Lott's Claim:

Since at least 2014, Lott has [claimed](#) that 98% or more of mass shootings from 1950 to the present occurred in gun-free zones. He argues that mass shooters target such areas because they know they won't face armed resistance. Therefore, Lott contends, the best way to stop mass shootings is to ensure that civilians are able to carry firearms in as many places as possible.

Lott has a [spreadsheet](#) on his website with his list of public mass shootings, which he defines as four or more victims killed but excludes incidents that occurred as a part of a different crime (such as robbery) and incidents in private residences. Between 1950 and 2018, Lott's database includes 320 public mass shootings. He divided them into three periods:

- 1950-1976 - 7 mass shootings
- 1977-1997 - 247 mass shootings
- 1998-2018 - 66 mass shootings

His claim of 98% has been repeated widely in pro-gun circles, including by Rep. Thomas Massie (R-KY) while introducing legislation to allow guns in schools. President Donald Trump repeated the claim at the 2018 NRA Convention.

The Facts:

Lott's claim that 98% of mass shootings occur in gun-free zones rests on a massive yet basic error. For the period 1977–1997, Lott counts each individual death in mass shootings as an entire mass shooting.

For example, Lott's own [spreadsheet](#) indicates that 14 mass shootings (defined by him as four or more people killed) occurred in Oklahoma in 1986. Yet there weren't 14 mass shootings in Oklahoma that year. There was [one](#) in which 14 people were killed (excluding the shooter).

Lott's error, which exaggerates the number of mass shootings between 1977 and 1997, disproves his claim that only two percent of mass shootings occur in places where firearms are allowed.

Lott's Counter:

While he made no public announcement, Lott revised his numbers on his website to correct the error. Rather than claiming [98% of mass shootings](#) occurred in gun-free-zones since 1950, Lott now claims that [94% of mass shootings](#) occurred in GFZs since 1950, and [89% since 1998](#). Lott repeated the 94% claim in a [January 2021](#) opinion piece in *Newsweek*.

Lott's updated and corrected numbers:

- 1950-1976 - 7 mass shootings (*no change*)
- 1977-1997 - 50 mass shootings (*down from 247*)
- 1998-2018 - 74 mass shootings (*up from 66, it is unclear where the additional 8 mass shootings come from for this time period*)

Rebuttal

Despite correcting the original error of counting each mass shooting death as one separate mass shooting incident, Lott's 94% claim still contains a significant number of errors. Those errors include misclassified shootings (e.g. Umpqua and Hialeah) and not adhering to his own mass shooting definition for cases from 1950–1976. Furthermore, his corrected data

does not include the August 2019 shootings in El Paso and Dayton, both of which occurred in areas that allow firearms.

Other research that looked at the relationship between mass shootings and gun-free zones contradict Lott's 94% claim. A [2016 study](#) by researchers from University of Massachusetts Boston, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, and Stanford University found that the vast majority of high-casualty mass shootings occur in places where guns are allowed or not explicitly banned. Between 1966 and June 2016, only 12% of US mass shootings involving six or more victims occurred in a gun-free zone, and only five percent occurred where civilian gun possession was prohibited.

Another study of US mass shootings involving four or more fatalities between 2009 and 2015 found that only 13% occurred in a gun-free place. "Successful civilian uses of guns to stop a mass shooting were incredibly rare and about as common as armed civilians being shot while attempting to respond to mass shooting incidents," the [study](#) states. The study also concluded that no evidence finds that right-to-carry laws reduce mass shootings or the number of shooting victims.

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MYTH: The FBI is biased against guns and skewed the results of a mass shooting report

Fact: John Lott's false claim about the FBI's Report stems from a fundamental mistake: the report studies active-shooting incidents while Lott discusses mass shootings and mass murders

Summary:

- In 2014, the FBI released a report identifying 160 active shooter incidents in the United States between 2000 and 2013.
- Researcher John Lott claims the FBI intentionally omits mass shooting incidents from earlier in the study period and includes too many incidents near the end of the study period to create the misconception that mass shootings increased over time.
- In reality, Lott's false claim stems from a fundamental mistake. The FBI report studies active-shooting incidents while Lott discusses mass shootings and mass murders.
- According to the [FBI](#): "An active shooter is an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area." An active shooting can have any number of casualties.
- Public mass shootings have a number of definitions. Lott uses a basic definition of four or more killed in a single incident, and then excludes various categories such as terrorism, gang violence, and battles over sovereignty. Lott's mass shooting definition differs from those of other academics (as the entry on international mass shootings highlights). For more details of other mass shooting definitions, see GVPedia's [Mass Shootings Report](#).

Lott's Claim:

In a 2014 *New York Post* article, John Lott accuses the FBI of playing politics and manufacturing an [upward trend](#) in mass shootings. He calls the original Sep. 2014 [FBI report](#) identifying 160 active shooter incidents between 2000 and 2013 "remarkably shoddy."

Lott claims that the study doesn't follow the FBI's previous definition of mass shooting which required four or more murders or its new definition of at least three murders. Lott writes, "While the FBI study discusses 'mass shootings or killings,' its graphs were filled with

cases that had nothing to do with mass killings.” In a 2015 *ACJS Today* article, Lott claims that mass public shootings have [risen only slightly](#) over the last four decades.

Lott made [similar attacks](#) on the FBI report for excluding certain incidents in a Nov. 2, 2020 article on his website. Lott claims in his 2020 book *Gun Control Myths* that “It appears the FBI is biased against including cases in which a concealed handgun permit holder stopped further carnage.”

The Facts:

Lott’s analysis of the FBI report published in the *New York Post* is full of errors. He claims that the FBI intentionally omits mass shooting incidents from earlier in the study period and includes too many incidents near the end of the study period to make mass shootings appear to have increased. However, Lott’s critique completely misses the entire point of the study: The FBI report examined active-shooting incidents, while Lott discusses mass shootings.

The study’s authors wrote a [rebuttal](#) in *ACJS Today* stating “Lott’s essential argument is a straw man; he accuses us of saying something that we did not and then attempts to show this is wrong.”

This is just one example of Lott referencing incidents that were rightfully excluded by the FBI authors because the incidents were not active shooting scenarios. Lott maintains a highly selective list of incidents on his website that “only includes cases where mass public shootings were stopped.” But this roster of prevented “mass public shootings” includes two [knife attacks](#) (neither of which had any fatalities), a Marine firing his gun in an [empty parking lot](#), and several robberies (a type of incident Lott excludes from his statistical analysis on international mass shootings, as well as in his books). Additionally, Lott lists “possible cases” including the [Tacoma Mall shooting](#), in which a permit holder confronted the shooter but was swiftly fired upon by him. The permit holder was left permanently paralyzed.

In his 2020 book *Gun Control Myths*, Lott claims “the problems with the reports continued during the Trump administration.” Lott further claims the FBI sometimes makes subjective decisions. Lott includes a list of shootings he believes the FBI unfairly excluded from the active shooter reports. However, four of the six shootings Lott uses as examples were the

result of arguments rather than planned active shooting scenarios. In the two other cases, a person armed with a firearm attempted to stop the shooter but was critically shot by the perpetrator.

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MYTH: Nearly all public mass shootings occur in gun-free zones

Fact: John Lott misclassified multiple mass shootings, falsely claiming several European and American incidents occurred in gun-free zones

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott claims that between 1950 and 2015, all but two public mass shootings in America took place in so-called gun-free zones where citizens were prohibited from carrying guns.
- Lott claims in the same time period that every public mass shooting in Europe occurred in a gun-free zone.
- However, Lott misclassified multiple mass shootings, falsely claiming several European and American incidents occurred in gun-free zones.
- The evidence suggests that shooters do not deliberately choose gun-free zones for their attacks. Instead, the evidence indicates that shooters usually choose locations with which they have a deep-seated emotional grievance or places they anticipate will have a crowd.

Lott's Claim:

In an Oct. 2015 [opinion](#) piece in *The Detroit News*, Lott repeats his claim that mass shooters prefer to attack places where guns are banned. Lott says shooters are concerned that armed guards or civilians carrying concealed guns will shoot back in defense. Lott writes, "Since at least 1950, all but two public mass shootings in America have taken place where general citizens are banned from carrying guns. In Europe, every mass public shooting has occurred in a gun-free zone." Lott [lists](#) the individual European mass shootings on his website.

The Facts:

Lott misclassified multiple mass shootings, falsely claiming several European and American incidents occurred in gun-free zones.

For example, Lott lists the Feb. 2015 mass shooting at the Družba restaurant in Uherský Brod, Czech Republic as occurring in a gun-free zone. Czech Republic allows nearly every physically fit adult without a criminal record to easily obtain a gun license. The country's

most popular gun license is for self-defense and allows for the concealed carry of two weapons anywhere except schools, court buildings, and some mass demonstrations. License holders are allowed to carry concealed firearms in bars and restaurants but must not be intoxicated. In fact, Uherský Brod's largest [employer](#) is firearms manufacturer CZUB

According to Czech [news reports](#), the shooter entered at least two restaurants but left before settling on Družba because it had the largest crowd. Lott's claim is false because the restaurant was not a gun-free zone and contrary to his theory, the perpetrator appeared more interested in a place with many victims rather than a place where victims were weaponless.

In another example, both his 2020 book *Gun Control Myths* and 2016 book *War on Guns* cite the 2014 mass shooting in Moncton, Canada as proof that mass shooters avoid places with guns. The perpetrator of the shooting, which claimed the lives of three Canadian policemen and injured two others, mocked gun-free zones on his social media. However, the shooter targeted only police officers. All of the police officers were armed, so this incident Lott cites undermines his claim.

Lott incorrectly states that only two or three mass shootings have occurred where civilians are allowed to carry firearms is also false. Lott contends that the Umpqua Community College (UCC) shooting in Oregon occurred in a gun-free zone, but Politifact [reports](#) that Umpqua permitted people with concealed-carry licenses to carry arms on campus. Furthermore, it was widely noted that several [students were armed](#) at the time of the shooting and the college "was never designated as a 'gun-free zone' by any signage or policy," a spokesperson for the college [told Politifact](#).

Lott also falsely claims the 2010 shooting at Yoyito-Cafe Restaurant in Hialeah, Florida occurred in a gun-free zone. Florida [law](#) allows concealed carry in restaurants, but not in bars or areas of the restaurant primarily devoted to the serving of alcohol. Yoyito-Cafe separates the bar area from the rest of the restaurant with a partition, allowing patrons to carry everywhere but the bar area. Further, the restaurant's menu clearly shows that the restaurant is primarily dedicated to serving food, not alcohol.

Lott's Counter:

In August 2016, Evan DeFilippis and GVPedia President Devin Hughes authored an article for Vox [outlining](#) several of Lott's misclassifications. Lott posted a rebuttal on his website that read: "DeFilippis and Hughes have another piece attacking Dr. Lott's new book *The War on Guns*," Lott [writes](#). "You will see that many of these claims have already been address [sic] in past responses, but as is very typical for DeFilippis and Hughes, they ignore responses that already exist and just assume that their readers won't check their claims."

Rebuttal:

Lott devotes a significant portion of his rebuttal to support his false claim that Umpqua Community College was a gun-free zone. While acknowledging that an Oregon appeals court ruled in 2011 that colleges could not prevent gun owners with concealed weapons permits from bringing their firearms to campus, he argues that UCC's employment policies and student handbook overrule state law.

In reality, Umpqua students frequently [carried guns on campus](#). "You are allowed to conceal and carry on that campus," said Umpqua student Jeremy Smith. Fellow student John Parker was actually concealed carrying on campus during the attack. "When I got into the room that was locked down, one of the professors asked if anyone was concealed carry. I raised my hand and said: 'Don't worry, nobody is coming through that door.'"

Lott also claims that DeFilippis, Hughes, and Everytown for Gun Safety are wrong about Yoyito-Café in Hialeah allowing firearms. Lott [writes](#) on his website, "Apparently, the restaurant was at the time a very popular venue for parties serving alcohol. If Bloomberg's group had checked, they would have found that it was a gun-free zone." Lott links to his old blog that has a [screenshot](#) of a "nightlife directory" that lists the restaurant as available for a party. Lott says this supports his argument that the restaurant made more than 50% of their revenue on alcohol, making it illegal to allow firearms. However, the restaurant's description on the directory highlights "dining" and "hearty menu," but not alcohol. "So long as you're wearing a shirt and shoes, you'll have a fine time dining at Yoyito's Cafe. It's casual, no-fuss atmosphere is what lures locals back, as well as their hearty menu selections that leave them satisfied."

Lott explains in his [rebuttal](#), "The organization of the bar in the center of the restaurant is also important for this determination. After it reopened, I called up the Café to check on these facts." Lott says he called the restaurant on June 10, 2010. However, he does not report asking if the restaurant allowed guns. He does ask what share of revenue they received from alcohol and concludes, "The restaurant does serve alcohol and because it is frequently used for parties its revenue from alcohol is actually above 50%... So this was technically a gun-free zone."

Lott recognizes that the organization of the bar is important because the bar could be a gun-free zone while the dining area allows guns, but does not mention how the cafe answered his questions. Lott's rebuttal does not provide new or convincing evidence to support his claim that mass shooters seek gun-free zones.

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MYTH: Mass shooters target gun-free zones

Fact: Mass shooters usually choose locations connected to a deep-seated emotional grievance or places where the shooter anticipates the presence of a large number of people

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott is one of the originators of the claim that “gun-free zones are a magnet for deadly attacks” (*More Guns, Less Crime*, 1999).
- Lott cites statements made in journals and on social media by three mass killers to support this claim.
- Lott misrepresents the writings of the Aurora and Isla Vista shooters to falsely claim they intentionally sought places that prohibited guns.
- The evidence suggests that shooters do not deliberately choose gun-free zones for their attacks. Instead, shooters usually choose locations connected to a deep-seated emotional grievance or places where the shooter anticipates the presence of a large number of people.

Lott’s Claim:

For over twenty years, Lott has repeated the claim that mass shooters deliberately and overwhelmingly target places where guns have been banned. In his 1999 book *More Guns, Less Crime*, Lott says, “Gun-free zones are a magnet for deadly attacks.” In his 2020 book *Gun Control Myths*, Lott says, “Mass public shooters avoid places where victims can defend themselves. That way, they can keep shooting until the police arrive.”

Lott supports this claim with statements made in journals and on social media by mass killers. For example, Lott claims the perpetrator of the 2012 Aurora movie theater shooting specifically targeted the Cinemark theater because it had a gun-free zone policy and he ruled out attacking an airport because of its “substantial security.”

Lott also cites statements in the rambling “manifesto” of the Isla Vista shooter who killed six and wounded 14 others near the University of California at Santa Barbara campus. In his 2020 book *Gun Control Myths*, Lott says the shooter “ruled out various targets where he thought that someone with a gun might be able to stop his killing spree.”

In a January 20, 2021 [opinion](#) article in *Newsweek*, Lott says, "The problem with gun-free zones, which ban law-abiding civilians from carrying, is that they don't scare off criminals. Indeed, just the opposite is true. Disarming everyone, including legislators or staffers, on their way to and from capitol buildings leaves them easy, attractive targets for prospective criminals and terrorists. The murderers have an incentive to disobey the law precisely because the law-abiding obey it."

The Facts:

The Aurora shooter did not choose the movie theater because he was concerned about armed resistance. Instead, he wrote that he chose the specific theater because it was "isolated, proximate, large" — qualities three other theaters in his immediate vicinity lacked. He also wrote that he decided against attacking an airport because he didn't want his motive to be construed as terrorism. Nowhere in his remarkably detailed notes does he mention civilians carrying firearms.

Evan DeFilippis and GVPedia President Devin Hughes conducted research into Lott's claim that the Aurora shooter selected the Cinemark movie theater because it prohibited firearms. Their findings were published by [Vox](#) in 2016. DeFilippis and Hughes determined Lott's contention is based on his own [unscientific search](#) using MapQuest and movies.com. Lott's search found that the Cinemark theater was the only theater that prohibited firearms out of the seven theaters showing "The Dark Knight" within 20 minutes of the killer's house. Meanwhile, the Arapahoe Crossings 16 theater was 21 minutes away and also posted signs forbidding guns.

Lott's claim is further undermined by his false assumption that any theater without a visible "No Weapons Allowed" sign must necessarily allow firearms. After calling theaters in Lott's data set, DeFilippis and Hughes learned that Esquire Theater, which is within the 20-minutes of the shooter's apartment, prohibits weapons as a matter of policy, but does not post signs. No publicly available evidence exists to indicate that the shooter searched for theaters that ban weapons within a certain radius of his home. No such call logs have been publicly revealed in the investigation and no notes are found in the shooter's journal about such research or calls. Contrary to Lott's belief that mass shooters are incredibly attentive to the minutiae of gun policy, no publicly available evidence in this case supports such a claim.

Similarly, Lott's claim that the Isla Vista, California shooter ruled out other targets because he was concerned about encountering armed civilians is contradicted by the shooter's own writings. The perpetrator makes it clear that it was police officers he was worried about encountering rather than a "good guy with a gun." The shooter wrote, "There would be too many cops walking around during an event like Halloween, and cops are the only ones who could hinder my plans."

The evidence suggests that shooters do not deliberately choose gun-free zones for their attacks, instead choosing locations where they have a deep-seated [emotional grievance](#) — or, in some cases, they simply go where the public is gathered and where police are likely to be absent.

Lott's Counter:

In a July 13, 2016 article on his website, Lott [responds](#) to the assertion that he misrepresented places as gun-free zones by stating: "Yes, an armed, identifiable off-duty officer was guarding the nightclub in Orlando, Fla., when the shooting took place last month, but [my point](#) is that such guards are the first people to be shot at. The benefit of civilian concealed carry is that killers don't know who might stop them."

The following month, Lott posted [a longer response](#) regarding gun-free zones on his website. Lott refers readers to his 2016 book *War on Guns*, which says, "The Batman movie killer, James Holmes, initially considered attacking an airport. In his diary, which was released in 2015, he explained his decision against targeting the airport because of 'substantial security.' He then selected the only theater within twenty minutes of his apartment that banned permitted concealed handguns. There were six other theaters he could have gone to. The one he picked wasn't even the one with the largest auditorium or the one closest to his home." In the response on his website, Lott adds, "The 20 minute distance was arbitrary, but the point is that of all the movie theaters that were somewhat close only one posted signs banning concealed handguns and that is the one that he went to."

In response to the argument that the Isla Vista shooter was concerned about encountering police, not armed civilians, Lott writes, "I agree that Elliot Rodger wanted to avoid police, just as I had noted that Holmes had wanted to avoid airport security. It is true that these individuals did not make specific statements about armed civilians. But the point of these

two references was to show that these two particular killers avoided places where people with guns might be able to stop them.”

Rebuttal:

Lott’s claim about armed guards requires a paradox that shooters are deterred by the **possibility** of encountering armed resistance by civilians potentially carrying concealed handguns, but are not deterred by the **certainty** of armed resistance that an armed guard provides. This is despite the fact that both the Aurora shooter and Isla Vista shooter write about not wanting to encounter armed security or police respectively, but making no mention in their writings about civilians carrying guns.

Additionally, while the Aurora theatre did have signs prohibiting firearms, in practice it was not a gun free zone as civilians carrying firearms were in the theatre that night. However, they could not safely return fire due to the chaos and darkness.

It is also worth pointing out that another case Lott touts as evidence for his gun free zone claim is the 2014 mass shooting in Moncton, Canada. The shooter had previously mocked the idea of gun free zones on social media, arguing that they were easy targets for bad guys. However, during his shooting he only targeted police officers, all of whom were armed, and he avoided nearby homes and businesses.

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MYTH: Right-to-carry laws prevent mass shootings and reduce crime

Fact: The evidence suggests that right-to-carry laws are associated with more mass shootings and gun deaths

Summary:

- Research John Lott claims that right-to-carry laws, which encourage the concealed carry of firearms, reduce crime and prevent mass shootings.
- Lott's findings on mass shootings are not supported by other academics, including Carlisle Moody, who has concurred with him on concealed carry laws in the past.
- The evidence suggests that right-to-carry laws are associated with more mass shootings and gun deaths.

Lott's Claim:

Over the last 30 years, many US states have lowered the requirements to carry a firearm in public by passing right-to-carry (RTC) laws. States that have RTC laws either do not require a permit to carry a concealed firearm or issue concealed carry permits on a "shall issue" basis, meaning authorities have little to no discretion to deny a permit.

In his 2003 book *The Bias Against Guns*, John Lott argues that right-to-carry laws deter public mass shooters more than other murderers and criminals because mass shooters are concerned about being stopped by an armed civilian. He explicitly states: "Right-to-carry laws reduce the number of people killed or wounded from multiple victim public shootings. Many attackers are completely deterred from attacking."

Lott's own analysis found that RTC laws were associated with significant reductions in the number of public mass shootings and in the total number of casualties from public mass shootings. Lott's study covers 1977 to 1997 and excludes certain types of incidents like shootings connected to other crimes such as robbery, drugs, and gangs. He excludes these incidents because Lott argues one can reasonably expect that people committing crimes will carry guns. Lott concludes that the passage of a RTC law "is the only gun law that appears to have any real impact" on public mass shootings.

The Facts:

Lott's analysis is based on a flawed model and is contradicted by many other studies.

In a summary of the evidence on the effects of concealed carry on mass shootings, [RAND](#), an American nonprofit global think tank, said Lott's regression "models had an unfavorable ratio of estimated parameters to observations (approximately one to eight), suggesting that the model may have been overfit, and thus the estimated effects of these laws may be poor indicators of their true effects. In addition, the model did not adjust for clustered standard errors. Together, **these shortcomings suggest that the model results may not accurately describe the true effects of shall-issue laws.**" (Emphasis added.)

Of the five studies examining concealed carry laws and mass shootings identified by RAND, only the Lott study found that shall-issue laws led to fewer mass shootings and casualties. For example, a [2002 study](#) by Grant Duwe, Tomislav Kovandzic, and Carlisle Moody examined RTC laws from 1977 to 1999 found "virtually no support for the hypothesis that the laws increase or reduce the number of mass public shootings." This is especially noteworthy since Moody is a frequent collaborator of Lott and generally agrees with Lott on other concealed carry issues.

Recent studies by Reeping, et al and Doucette, Crifasi, and Frattaroli have found that right-to-carry laws are associated with more gun violence including mass shootings, but are not an apples-to-apples comparison because the recent studies do not have the same focus as Lott's study. A 2019 study by Paul Reeping et al. found that a 10 unit increase in state gun law permissiveness, which includes RTC laws, was associated with a 11.5% [higher rate of mass shootings](#). Another 2019 study by Mitchell Doucette, Cassandra Crifasi, and Shannon Frattaroli found that passing a RTC law between 1992 and 2017 was associated with a 24% increase in firearm [workplace homicide](#) rates.

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MYTH: John Lott follows the FBI mass shooting definition

Fact: The FBI does not have a definition for mass shootings, and John Lott does not follow the FBI definition for active shootings either

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott claims in an Econ Journal Watch [article](#) and elsewhere to follow the FBI's definition of mass public shooting when arguing that 61 mass shootings occurred in the US compared to 2,757 mass shootings in the rest of the world between 1998 and 2017.
- This is impossible because the FBI does not have a definition for mass shootings. The FBI does however have an active shooting definition.
- According to the [FBI](#): "An active shooter is an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area." An active shooting can have any number of casualties.
- Public mass shootings have a number of definitions. Lott uses a basic definition of four or more killed in a single incident, and then excludes various categories such as terrorism, gang violence, and battles over sovereignty. Lott's mass shooting definition differs from those of other academics (as the entry on international mass shootings highlights). For more details of other mass shooting definitions, see GVPedia's [Mass Shootings Report](#).
- Lott's mass shooting dataset is misleading and distorts the common perception of a mass shooting by including foreign attacks with an average of 22 perpetrators.
- For more details on international mass shootings, see our entry titled: "[MYTH: Americans Do Not Have More Mass Shootings than other Countries](#)"

Lott's Claim:

In his 2020 book *Gun Control Myths*, Lott argues that only a small share of the world's public mass shootings occurred in the US. Lott claimed in his analysis, "We follow the FBI's definition of mass public shootings." The footnote to this claim says the same definition for public shooting was used in Lott and Landis (2001), Lott and Landis (2003), Lott (2010), and the work done by Lott's Crime Research Prevention Research Center.

In his Sept. 18, 2019 [testimony](#) before Congress, Lott also said "We follow the FBI's definition of mass public shootings." He then claims that 2,818 public mass shootings

occurred worldwide between 1998 and 2017, only 61 of which occurred in the United States. During this period, Lott claims the US had 4.6% of the world's population and just 2.16% of the mass public shootings.

The Facts:

The FBI does not have a definition for mass shootings which renders Lott's claim impossible. The FBI does, however, have a definition for an [active shooter incident](#), but Lott's definition of what constitutes a public mass shooting is at odds with this FBI definition. Furthermore, Lott's definition distorts the common perception of a mass shooting.

Lott excludes US mass shootings that are the result of robberies and gang violence, but includes terrorist attacks which make up a greater share of international incidents. As Lott explains in his 2020 book *Gun Control Myths*, his primary data source for international incidents is the Maryland Global Terrorism Database. The result is that Lott excludes US gang shootings and major events like the 2015 Texas biker gang gunfight, but includes incidents such as "300 heavily armed Pokot raiders attacked a village in the Suam subcounty, killing people, burning as many as 200 houses and stealing at least 300 head of cattle."

Researcher Adam Lankford used Lott and Moody's own data from 1998-2012 and [found](#) that "the United States had more than six times its global share of public mass shooters who attacked alone, and more than any other continent except Asia." Lankford argues that Lott and Moody ignore the fact that research consistently shows that public mass shooters almost always attack alone. "They include many forms of group violence in their analyses, such as massacres by hundreds of members of the Lord's Resistance Army, and group attacks by soldiers, uniformed troops, paramilitary fighters, armed rebels, and terrorist organizations."

Lankford's [analysis](#) finds that more than 95% of the public mass shootings Lott and Moody include from the US were committed by a single perpetrator, and zero incidents by more than two killers. In contrast, only seven percent of the foreign incidents counted by Lott and Moody involved a solo attacker. Of the foreign attacks where they knew the number of shooters, Lott and Moody's dataset had an average of 22 perpetrators and a median of four perpetrators per incident.

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MYTH: Universal background checks would not have stopped a single mass shooting

Fact: A strong universal background check system that includes a permit-to-purchase requirement could have prevented half of the deadliest US mass shooters from acquiring the firearms used in the attacks

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott claims that universal background checks would not have stopped a single mass shooting this century.
- At least six of the deadliest mass shootings since 2013 could have been prevented with a background check system that closes the loophole that allows the private transfer of firearms.
- A strong universal background check system that includes a permit-to-purchase requirement could have prevented half of the deadliest US mass shooters from acquiring the firearms used in the attacks.

Lott's Claim:

The second paragraph of John Lott's Sept. 18, 2019 testimony before Congress begins with a bold claim that "Universal background checks, meaning background checks on the private transfer of guns, have been mentioned for years by gun control advocates... But there has not been a single mass public shooting this century that such a law would have stopped."

Later in the testimony, Lott says universal background checks "would not have stopped any of the mass shootings we have seen in this century. And given that drug dealers are a major source of illegal guns, these laws aren't going to be any more successful in stopping criminals from getting guns than we have been in stopping them from getting illegal drugs."

The Facts:

Universal background checks would have stopped mass shootings this century. First, it is important to clarify terms. Lott claims that he used the FBI definition of public mass shooting to come to his finding, but this is impossible because the FBI does not have a definition for mass shootings. The FBI does, however, have a definition for an active shooter incident, but Lott's definition of what constitutes a public mass shooting is at odds with this FBI definition.

Furthermore, there are multiple definitions for “universal background checks.” The strongest type of universal background checks are permit-to-purchase laws such as the type seen in Massachusetts (which has one of the lowest gun violence rates in the country). A research report on mass shootings by Nick Wilson released the same month as Lott’s testimony found that “of the 27 deadliest shootings over the last six years where we could identify how the firearms were obtained, a federal licensing requirement may have prevented the shooter from acquiring the firearms used in 52% of the incidents. In these 14 incidents, 169 individuals were fatally shot and 131 individuals were shot and injured.”

Even if Lott is defining universal background checks as a weaker version that only stops the private transfer of guns, plenty of mass shootings have occurred that could have been prevented by closing the private sales loophole.

Eighteen days before Lott made this claim before Congress, a prohibited individual armed with a firearm obtained through a private sale killed seven people and injured 25, including three police officers in the Midland-Odessa area of Texas. The mass shooter attempted to purchase a gun in 2014 but failed a national criminal background check because he had been previously found mentally unfit by a court. On Oct. 8, 2016, the shooter bought an AR-15 style rifle from Marcus Braziel of Lubbock, Texas in a private sale without a background check. Braziel pled guilty in October 2020 to unlicensed firearms dealing and selling guns to at least four individuals prohibited from buying firearms.

A Dallas shooter who targeted police officers in July 2016 also exploited the private sale and gun show loopholes to avoid a background check. In November 2014, the shooter bought an AK-47-style rifle in a private sale in a Target parking lot. The other weapons were believed to be purchased at a gun show or online. The shooter’s history included sexual harassment and violence. He had a protective order filed against him, practiced military drills in the backyard, stockpiled explosives, and received VA treatment for his hallucinations and depression. Police report regularly responding to his panic attacks.

On August 8, 2015, a man in Texas handcuffed his ex-girlfriend to a bed and forced her to watch him kill her six children and husband before shooting her. The handgun and six pairs of handcuffs were purchased online without a background check through an unlicensed seller within two weeks of the shooting. His lengthy criminal record prohibited him from possessing firearms. He had convictions for aggravated robbery, auto theft, assault, possession of a controlled substance, and DUI. In addition, he was convicted of putting a

knife to the throat of his ex-girlfriend, threatening to kill her baby, and retaliation. He received a five year prison term for those crimes. Contrary to Lott's claim, universal background checks could have prevented this mass shooting by preventing the private sale.

Several mass shooters have been able to buy a firearm from a licensed dealer even though they should not have passed the instant background check. The current background check system has flaws and limitations, most of them a result of federal restrictions encouraged by the gun lobby. For example, the November 2017 Sutherland Springs Church Shooting that claimed the lives of 25 people was perpetrated by a man who obtained the AR-15-style rifle and four other guns from gun stores, despite his disqualifying criminal history from a domestic violence conviction during an Air Force court martial. The shooter's history included crushing his infant's skull, threatening to kill himself and his superior officers, threatening his wife with loaded and unloaded guns, physical and sexual assault, threatening to shoot his work place, and animal cruelty. The shooter was denied a permit to carry because of his history, but was still able to obtain multiple guns because the Air Force failed to submit records to the federal background check system. A unified universal background check system would have ensured the disqualifying information was available in the national database.

If a firearm background check is not completed within 3 business days, the gun seller is permitted (but not required) to sell the gun even if the check is not complete. This is called the default proceed rule but is now more commonly known as the Charleston loophole.

The 2015 Charleston AME Church shooter was also able to purchase a firearm despite being legally prohibited. Due to incorrect submission of data and the default proceed rule, the gun seller legally completed the sale before the background check was complete. Before purchasing the firearm, the soon-to-be Charleston AME shooter was arrested twice at a local mall and possessed Suboxone. Then-FBI Director James Comey said Roof's admission of a narcotics offense should have blocked the purchase of the handgun but "[t]he data was not properly entered in federal criminal justice computer systems."

Other mass shooters might have been stopped by a universal background check system that regulates ghost guns and online sales. For example, the 2013 Santa Monica College shooter used an AR-15-type semi-automatic rifle "ghost gun" he purchased online and completed at home. In October 2011, the California Department of Justice told the shooter

he was ineligible to purchase a firearm, so he built one using a kit he purchased without a background check online. Similarly, the 2017 Rancho Tehama Reserve perpetrator was out on bail and prohibited by criminal and civil orders from possessing firearms. Using kits he purchased, the shooter constructed two semi-automatic AR-15-type rifles which he used to kill five and injure eleven.

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Nick Wilson, "Raising the Standard for Gun Ownership: How Firearm Licensing Can Potentially Save Lives," [Guns Down America](#), Sept. 2019

"Seller of gun used in West Texas mass shooting pleads guilty," [Associated Press](#), Oct. 7, 2020

MYTH: Banning large capacity magazines will do nothing to reduce fatalities in mass shootings

Fact: A [2019 study](#) found that between 1990 and 2017, 64% of mass shootings involved LCMs. The study also found that shootings involving LCMs resulted in 62% more fatalities. States without bans on high-capacity magazine experienced more than three times as many mass shooting deaths.

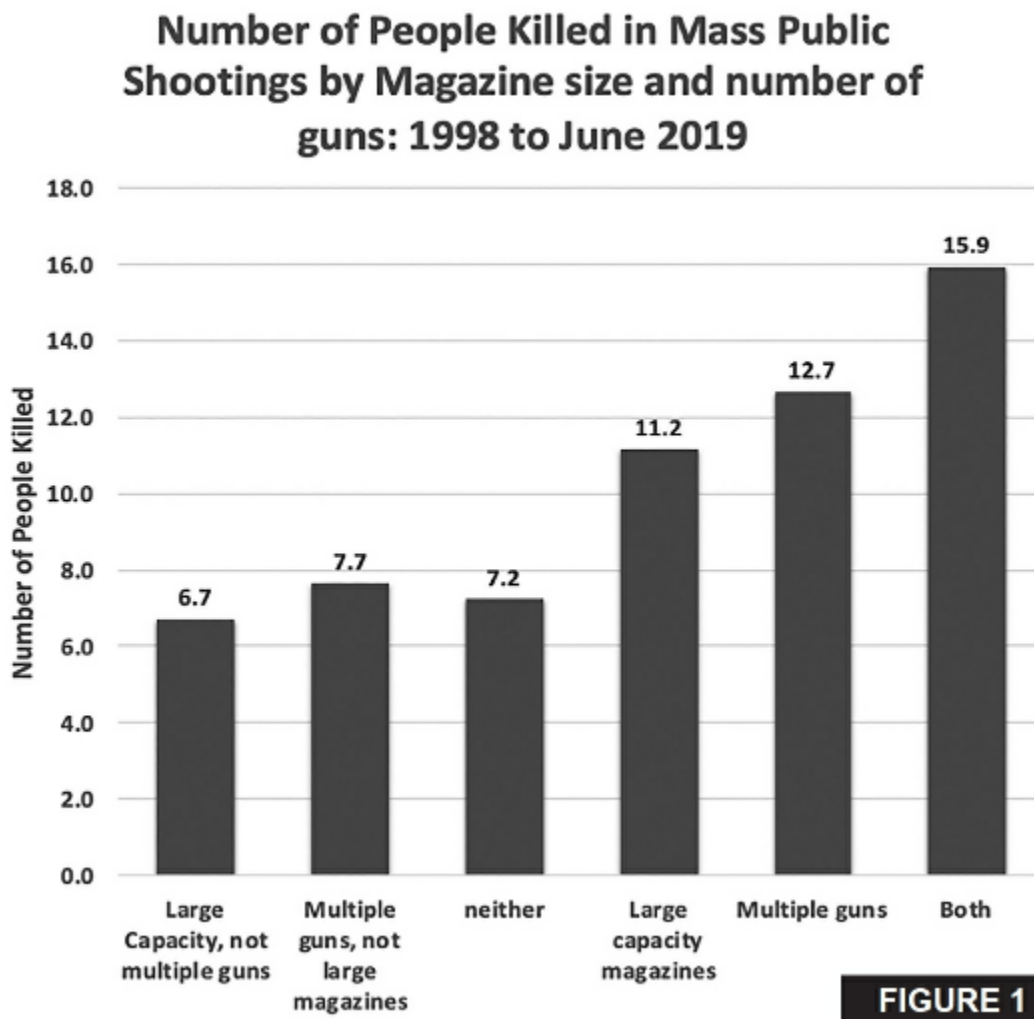
Summary:

- The Giffords Law Center says the [following](#) about large capacity magazines (LCMs), which interchangeable with the term high capacity magazines (HCMs): “Although the statutory definitions vary, magazines with a capacity of more than 10 rounds of ammunition are generally considered ‘large capacity’ magazines.”
- Researcher John Lott claims that large-capacity magazines, which hold more bullets than traditional magazines, “aren’t necessary for committing mass slaughter.” In his 2020 book *Gun Control Myths*, Lott claims that more people are killed in mass shootings involving multiple guns that are not large-capacity magazines than in mass shootings involving a single gun with a large-capacity magazine.
- Lott’s claim is misleading and relies on a confusingly labeled chart (see Figure 1 below under “Lott’s Claim”). When Lott compares shootings involving multiple guns and shootings involving LCMs, he excludes incidents in which the shooter had multiple guns and at least one of those firearms had an LCM. He places these shootings into a “Both” category.
- Lott’s own chart shows that the average number of people killed in mass public shootings involving multiple guns and large-capacity magazines (which he labels “Both”) have three more deaths per incident than the next deadliest category.

Lott’s Claim:

Lott downplays the impact of large-capacity magazines (LCMs) on mass shooting fatalities. In his book *Gun Control Myths*, Lott writes: “When you compare cases with multiple guns and no large capacity magazines, versus large capacity magazines and just a single gun, one finds that more people are actually killed in the former scenario (7.7 versus 6.7).” He continues by stating that “It’s not surprising that large magazines aren’t necessary for committing mass slaughter” and “...the results indicate that banning large capacity magazines will do nothing to reduce fatalities.”

Lott visualizes this claim in the following Figure 1 from Chapter 3 of his book.



The Facts:

Lott's claim and accompanying chart are misleading. Lott lumps together incidents in which the shooter had both large-capacity magazines and multiple guns together in a "Both" category. He then excludes those when comparing "Large capacity, not multiple guns" to "Multiple guns, not large magazines."

As Lott points out, there are different types of mass shootings. For example, a person planning to kill his family at their home might use a simple bolt-action rifle or handgun. If a mass shooter's objective is to indiscriminately shoot as many people as possible, the

weapon of choice is often at least one AR-15-style rifle with large-capacity magazines. LCMs allow attackers to fire more rounds consecutively without having to pause to reload. As Lott's chart shows, the average number of people killed in mass public shootings involving multiple guns and large-capacity magazines is more than twice as large as incidents with multiple guns but no LCMs.

Banning large-capacity magazine reduces the number of mass shootings and the number of people killed in high-fatality mass shootings. When a shooter stops to reload a gun, which does not happen when the shooter is using a large capacity magazine, a bystander has the opportunity to stop the shooter.

A [2019 study](#) found that between 1990 and 2017, 64% of mass shootings involved LCMs. The study also found that shootings involving LCMs resulted in 62% more fatalities. States without bans on high-capacity magazine experienced more than three times as many mass shooting deaths.

A [2018 study](#) of civilian active shooter incidents between 2000 and 2017 found that more people were injured or killed when semi-automatic rifles were used compared to other firearms. The higher rate of injured and killed is attributed to several aspects of assault rifles including ease of use, the ability to accept large-capacity magazines, and the ability to fire high-velocity bullets.

Large-capacity magazines and AR-15-style rifles are frequently discussed together because the standard magazine size for AR-15-style rifles is 20 to 30 rounds but they can hold up to 100-round magazines. AR-15-style rifles were used in most of the deadliest mass shootings in US history, including Orlando Pulse Nightclub (49 deaths, 53 injuries), Sandy Hook Elementary School (27 deaths, 2 injuries), Sutherland Springs Church (25 deaths, 20 injuries), and Parkland (17 deaths, 17 injuries).

Other examples of recent deadly mass shootings involving LCMs:

- In 2019, a shooter in Dayton, Ohio used an AR-15-style pistol and a drum magazine that held 100 rounds to fire at least 41 rounds in 30 seconds, killing nine and injuring 17. Seven people were killed in 2018 at the Borderline Bar and Grill in Thousand Oaks, CA by a man armed with .45 caliber Glock 21 semi-automatic pistol with an attached laser sight and seven high-capacity 30-round magazines.

- The 2017 Las Vegas shooter fatally shot 58 people and injured 422 at a country music festival using 24 firearms, including twelve AR-15-style rifles with 100-round magazines and bump stocks to allow more rapid firing.
- In 2016, a 20-year-old shot and killed five people ranging in age from 16 to 95 at a Macy's department store in Burlington, Washington, using a Ruger .22-caliber rifle with a 25-round magazine that belonged to his father.
- In 2013, the Santa Monica College shooter killed his father and brother, shot a female driver, and then shot and killed three more people and injured one other while carrying 40 high-capacity magazines capable of holding 30 rounds.

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MYTH: 99% of background check denials are errors

Fact: According to the FBI and the Department of Justice's Office of Inspector General, 99.8% of firearm background check denials are accurately denied

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott claims that more than 99% of background check denials result from errors in the federal background check system, meaning millions of people are wrongfully prevented from purchasing firearms.
- Federal law requires background checks for all sales and transfers of firearms involving a federally licensed firearms dealer. Falsifying information on the background check form is a crime.
- According to the FBI and the Department of Justice's Office of Inspector General, 99.8% of firearm background check denials are accurately denied.
- While some denials are prosecuted at the state level, at the federal level [more than 99%](#) are not due to severe underfunding of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) and the difficulty of prosecuting these cases.

Lott's Claim:

In a February 12, 2018 *New York Times* op-ed titled "Background Checks Are Not the Answer to Gun Violence," Lott claims that the federal background check system prevents "millions of law-abiding citizens from buying guns for protection" due to false denials. A false denial occurs when a person who should have passed the background check to purchase a firearm did not because of an error. Lott argues, "The background check system confuses the names of law-abiding individuals with those of criminals, resulting in thousands of 'false positives' every year."

Lott further asks, "Why didn't more of those denials lead to perjury prosecutions?" He argues that "a high percentage of cases are dropped because the applicant was wrongly denied clearance to buy a gun."

In a 2017 *Star Tribune* opinion piece, Lott claims "More than 2.4 million people have been denied gun purchases because of checks, but about 99 percent of those people are actually law-abiding citizens who happen to have similar names to the individuals we actually want to stop. More than 99 percent of the denials are mistakes!"

The Facts:

Lott falsely claims that millions of people are wrongfully prevented from purchasing firearms because of background check errors. This type of error is called a false positive, meaning a person was incorrectly identified as being a prohibited purchaser. Lott bases his claim on the low prosecution rate of National Instant Check System (NICS) perjury cases. (A perjury case stems from a person providing false information on the firearm background check form.) While the prosecution rate is low for NICS perjury cases, the reason is due to a critical lack of funding of the ATF and an overcrowded federal court system. The low prosecution rate is not due to false positives.

According to a September 2017 audit of the National Instant Check System (NICS) conducted by the US Department of Justice's Office of the Inspector General, 99.8% of background check denials were accurate. This finding was in line with the [FBI's own quality control estimate](#) of a 99.3–99.8% accuracy rate for 556,496 denied transactions from 2008 to 2014. This finding contradicts Lott's statement.

Lott's Counter:

When challenged on his background check denials claim during a congressional hearing, Lott argued that the OIG report could not be relied on because it used a non-random sample to examine background check denials (you can listen to the clip [here](#), with the pertinent portion starting at 1:34:15).

Rebuttal:

Lott misconstrues the way in which the OIG report sampled cases. The report is careful to include incidents under each type of background check denial category, to ensure the system doesn't have a problem in any subcategory. Beyond that, the sample is random.

Sources:

John Lott, *Gun Control Myths*, 2020

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John Lott, "In Second District race, a real difference in how to battle terror," [Star Tribune](#), Sep. 29, 2016

Devin Hughes and Jen Pauliukonis, "A Lott of Lies about guns in the New York Times," [GVPedia](#), Feb. 16, 2018

Office of the Inspector General, "Audit of the Handling of Firearms Purchase Denials Through the National Instant Criminal Background Check System," [US Department of Justice](#), Sep. 2016

"NRA actively worked to weaken gun law enforcement," [USA Today](#), Feb. 8, 2013

Myth: Child Access Prevention laws cost lives

Fact: The research consistently shows that safe storage laws prevent unintentional shootings and adolescent suicide

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott claims that Child Access Prevention (CAP) laws requiring individuals to secure their guns at home cost more lives than they save because, he says, they slow down access to a gun during a home invasion.
- The research consistently shows that safe storage laws prevent unintentional shootings and adolescent suicide.
- Enacting a federal CAP law with a felony penalty that holds gun owners accountable for safely storing firearms will help keep guns out of children's hands and prevent suicides and unintentional shootings.
- Lott cites only his own outdated research to make his claim. Other academic research does not support his claim.

Lott's Claim:

In his May 24, 2018 op-ed in *The Hill*, Lott [urges](#) readers to disregard Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick's advice that parents do a better job locking up their guns after an attack at Santa Fe High School. "We all want to do something, but everyone locking up their guns will cost more lives than it saves," Lott said.

Lott cites his own research to claim that "requiring individuals to lock up their guns in certain states made it more difficult for those people to successfully defend their families." He argues that Child Access Prevention (CAP) laws embolden criminals to murder, rape, and burglarize people in their homes because they "can't readily access a gun to protect themselves and their families."

Lott further claims that unintentional child shootings are rare, and those that do occur are the result "...of adult males in their mid-to-late 20s who have criminal histories. Many are drug addicts or alcoholics." In a 2014 Fox News op-ed criticizing an ABC News report on the risks of having guns in the home, Lott [claims](#) that two thirds of unintentional gun deaths involving young children "are not shots fired by other little kids but rather by adult males with criminal backgrounds."

The Facts:

Lott's most glaring errors surround his claim that safe storage laws cost lives by preventing defensive gun use. Lott cites only two studies: his own outdated [2001 study](#) in the *Journal of Law and Economics* and his 2003 book, *The Bias Against Guns*. His studies claiming that CAP laws increase crime rely extensively on dubious econometric practices.

Reliable research reveals that not only does a firearm in the home endanger children, but that strong CAP laws mitigate this risk and save lives by reducing both unintentional shootings and firearm suicides by youths.

A [2018 study](#) found that strong CAP laws were associated with significant reductions in all firearm injuries, including self-inflicted and unintentional shootings of children.

A [2005 study](#) found a reduction in firearm injuries in homes with children and teenagers that keep a gun locked and unloaded while storing ammunition in a separate locked location. Kellermann's often-cited [1998 study](#) found that for every time a gun is used legally in self-defense at home, there are "four unintentional shootings, seven criminal assaults or homicides, and 11 attempted or completed suicides."

Lott attempts to minimize unintentional child shootings by undercounting the shootings. Although Lott correctly notes that CDC data shows an average of 59 children are unintentionally shot and killed each year, he fails to disclose that researchers have conclusively revealed that this number is a significant underestimate. In 2016, the CDC [admitted](#) that its estimate is low because of discrepancies in how coroners label unintentional shooting deaths.

Lott falsely states that most fatal, unintentional shootings of children result from guns fired by adult males in their 20s who have criminal histories. According to National Violent Death Reporting System data compiled by the Harvard Injury Control Research Center, from 2003-2006, two-thirds of fatal unintentional shootings of children under the age of 14 were committed by other children. When self-inflicted, unintentional deaths are included, the figure rises to 74%.

Lott overestimates the frequency of defensive gun uses (DGUs). Empirical data compiled by the [Gun Violence Archive](#) reveal fewer than 2,100 verified DGUs annually. Further, Harvard

research indicates that in the rare circumstance a firearm is used in self-defense, it is [no more effective](#) at preventing injury than doing nothing.

Lott's Counter:

On his own website, Lott [reiterated](#) his claim that most unintentional gun deaths of children are a result of shots fired by adult males with criminal histories, in response to a May 2018 [op-ed](#) published in The Hill by GVPedia's founder Devin Hughes. He quoted his 2003 book *The Bias Against Guns*, "Of the fifty-six accidental gun deaths involving children under ten in 1998 and the thirty-one in 1999, only eight and six respectively were shot by another child or themselves. The same statistic for 1997 was only five."

Lott criticizes the articles Hughes references, saying they are "purely cross-sectional data." Lott says a third study supports his claim.

Lott [defends](#) his use of the CDC's data despite undercounting incidents by noting that other databases rely on news reports to identify cases and this is a "very poor approach."

Rebuttal:

Lott's counter cites his own 2003 book to undercount the number of unintentional child shootings and support his claim that most of these shootings involve criminal adults. Lott does link to a third study but, again, it's his own study with flawed methodology. The third study is his 1998 book *More Guns Less Crime*.

Recent research has shown that Lott's numbers severely undercount the extent of the problem. A 2016 Associated Press and USA Today [report](#) found more than 1,000 deaths and injuries from unintentional shootings from January 1, 2014 to June 30, 2016, ninety of whom were 3-year-olds.

According to the Children's Firearm Safety Alliance, 132 children ages 0-17 were killed and 216 were injured in 2017 - all as a result of a [child gaining access](#) to an irresponsibly stored firearm. Between 2016 and May 26, 2018, 137 toddlers (between the ages of zero and three) picked up a loaded, unsecured gun and pulled the trigger, resulting in the deaths of 51 children and two adults, and injuring 74 children and nine adults.

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"Past Summary Ledgers," [Gun Violence Archive](#) (accessed January 26, 2021)

David Hemenway and Sara Solnick, "The epidemiology of self-defense gun use: Evidence from the National Crime Victimization Surveys 2007–2011," [Preventative Medicine](#), October 2015

Myth: Gun bans always increase the murder rate

Fact: Since passing strong gun laws in the 1940s and 1950s, Japan experienced significant a decrease in its murder rate and now has one of the lowest murder rates in the world

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott claims that every city or country that has banned guns has subsequently seen murder rates increase.
- Since passing strong gun laws in the 1940s and 1950s, Japan experienced significant a decrease in its murder rate and now has one of the lowest murder rates in the world.
- The countries Lott claims experienced an increase in murder rates after banning guns all had other factors, such as civil wars, that increased the violence.

Lott's Claim:

In a Declaration of Support filed on Dec. 6, 2019 in the US District Court for the Southern District of California, John Lott claimed: "every place that has banned guns (either all guns or all handguns) has seen murder rates go up. Examples include Chicago, Illinois, Washington D.C., and island nations such as England, Jamaica, Ireland, Venezuela, and obscure places like the Solomon Islands."

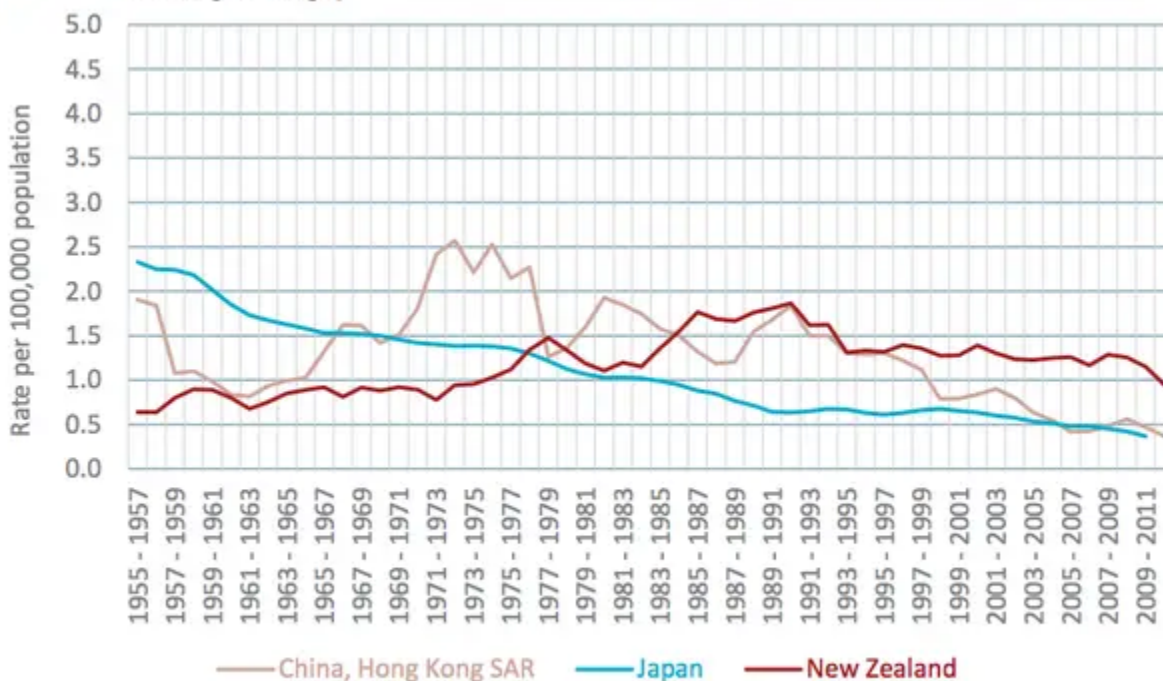
Lott cites his own original research available in the 2010 edition of his book *More Guns, Less Crime* and an April 2016 post on his website where he writes about individual countries. Lott states, "Regarding Japan, the point to make clear is that Japan has had a very low murder rate for as long as data is available, and more importantly, the guns were banned by private citizens. Some point to the drop in homicides after the 1958 gun law, but they ignore the 1946 regulations under the Allied Occupation and the 1950 Order that continued 'the general prohibition of possession of guns by civilians.' The issue here is to separate out whether it is gun control or something else different about Japan that is important, and unless you can see a change before and after there has been a change in gun control laws it is difficult to infer anything about the impact of gun control laws."

Lott repeats this claim in his 2020 book *Gun Control Myths*, "Gun control advocates such as Vox never mention that every single time that guns are banned - either all guns or all handguns - homicide/murder rates rise. This is a remarkable fact."

The Facts:

In 1946, the Japanese government banned the possession of firearms and swords by private citizens in principle, although the possession of hunting guns and artistic swords was permitted with a license. In 1958, changes were implemented to prohibit carrying guns and swords, regardless of whether the carrier was licensed. Murders in Japan have fallen by more than 75% since 1955, with no upward spikes as the chart below reveals. A 2006 study estimated gun ownership in Japan at 1 in 175 households. Today, Japan has one of the lowest homicide rates in the world and gun violence is exceptionally rare. In 2017, only three people were fatally shot. Lott's statement, "every place that has banned guns (either all guns or all handguns) has seen murder rates go up," is disproved by Japan.

Fig. 1.20: Homicide rate, selected countries, Asia and Oceania (1955-2012, three-year moving average)



Source: UNODC Homicide Statistics (2013) and WHO Mortality Database.

The countries Lott examined that saw increases in murder rates after banning guns had factors other than gun laws driving the violence.

- In England, a serial killer was apprehended a few years after the [Firearms \(Amendment\) \(No. 1 and 2\) of 1997](#) were passed. All of the murders committed by that serial killer were recorded as being committed in a single year which resulted in an increase in England's overall murder rate for that year. England also suffered from a terrorist attack, which elevated the murder rate but was not related to the gun law.
- Lott mentions Jamaica which experienced a deadly political civil war that was unrelated to its firearm laws.
- Similarly, Lott references Ireland as a case of murders spiking after a gun law, but ignores that the country was in a period of political turmoil called "[The Troubles](#)" that had nothing to do with its firearm laws.
- The Solomon Islands was in the middle of a civil war when its regulations were passed, but once the war was over and the island nation was able to enforce its ban. Even Lott's own data on the Solomon Islands shows a substantial reduction in violence.
- Lott mischaracterizes Venezuela's 2013 gun law as a gun ban, and Venezuela itself as an island. Venezuela's law, in fact, permitted gun owners to keep all their firearms if the owners registered them, despite a [statement](#) by Hugo Chavez's government that their ultimate aim was to "disarm all citizens." In a 2019 PolitiFact article, Professor Rebecca Hanson, an expert on crime in Venezuela at the University of Florida, stated, "The law, in reality, did not affect people's ability to access guns in any effective or long-term way." She explained that access to guns has increased since the law was passed in 2013 due to an active illegal gun market and lax enforcement of the 2013 law. NYU Professor Alejandro Velasco told PolitiFact that "the gun ban had almost no practical impact on people's ability to buy and keep (or use) weapons."

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Amy Sherman, "Fact-checking Matt Gaetz on gun bans in Australia and Venezuela," [Politifact](#), Aug. 19, 2019

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MYTH: The National Research Council (NRC) found no evidence that any gun violence prevention laws work

Fact: The goal of the NRC study was to scrutinize the quality of scientific data, not to make conclusions about firearm policy

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott has repeatedly claimed in a [number](#) of [articles since 2004](#) that a 2004 National Research Council (NRC) report written by a committee of 16 national experts could not find a single firearm regulation that reduced gun violence.
- The NRC and National Academy of Sciences responded to Lott with a letter saying Lott's column "contained significant errors."
- The NRC study was not about gun control (as Lott claims). The study was about "the quality of the data and research on firearms injury and violence."
- The goal of the NRC was to scrutinize the quality of scientific data, not to make conclusions about firearm policy.
- The only chapter in which the NRC panel used its own statistical analysis was on Right-to-Carry laws. With a vote of 15-1, the panel concluded there was insufficient evidence to claim that Right-to-Carry laws decreased violent crime.

Lott's Claim:

The National Research Council (NRC) is the operating arm of the National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Engineering. In a December 2004 *New York Post* opinion piece, John Lott claimed that a NRC report released earlier that month "couldn't identify any benefits of the decades-long effort to reduce crime and injury by restricting gun ownership. The only conclusion it could draw was: Let's study the question some more (presumably, until we find the results we want)." Lott also claims that "the panel couldn't identify a single gun-control regulation that reduced violent crime, suicide or accidents."

In a June 2015 [article](#) on his website, Lott makes a similar claim writing that the NRC "report examined seemingly every possible gun law that has been studied by academics, but the panel could not identify one single law that made a statistically significant difference." He argues that the NRC panel didn't find that right-to-carry laws reduce crime

because the committee ignored studies, members were biased in favor of gun control, and academics are pressured to not dissent.

The Facts:

The NRC and National Academy of Sciences penned a refutation of Lott's charges titled "[A Lott of misinformation](#)." NRC Executive Officer E. William Colglazier wrote, "Lott's column gave the clear impression that the study was about gun control. It was not. The study was about the quality of the data and research on firearms injury and violence. These data and studies are frequently used by both sides in the debate on gun control. It was the committee's task to make judgments about the quality of this scientific knowledge. The committee was not asked and does not offer any conclusions or comments on gun control policy."

Contrary to Lott's claim, the NRC report did not review every gun law. For example, permit-to-purchase laws were not examined despite strong evidence they reduce violence. Despite Lott's assertion that the panel concluded that no gun laws work, the panel examined studies demonstrating that broadening background check denial criteria had a beneficial impact but stated that this evidence was "suggestive rather than conclusive" due to the small number of studies and potential confounding factors.

The only chapter in which the NRC panel used its own statistical analysis was on Right-to-Carry laws. The NRC panel attempted to duplicate Lott's data model but, in doing so, repeated some of Lott's errors. With a vote of 15-1, the panel concluded there was insufficient evidence to claim that Right-to-Carry laws decreased violent crime. A [2014 study](#) by Stanford Professor John Donohue revealed that if the panel had corrected for those errors, they would have found substantial evidence that RTC laws increase crime. The rest of the NRC report consisted of commenting on the validity and quality of the data and studies. The NRC panel did not conduct its own statistical analysis to determine significance in any other chapter.

The lone dissenter in the NRC panel was James Q. Wilson. In response to this dissent, the panel wrote, "While it is true that most of the reported estimates are negative, several are positive and many are statistically insignificant. In addition, when we use Lott's trend model but restrict the out years to five years or less, the trends for murder become positive and those for other crimes remain negative. Therefore, the key question is how to reconcile the

contrary findings or, conversely, how to explain why these particular positive, or negative, findings should be dismissed.”

When the NRC report was published, Ralph Luker, an American historian, [wrote](#), “the NRC's report has been released and it is unfavorable to Lott. It remains to be seen whether the conservative American Enterprise Institute and the Federalist Society will withdraw their sponsorship of his work. Lott's liberal critics have quietly allowed due processes to work in his case.” Similarly, Stuart Benjamin, a professor of law at Duke, [wrote](#) the report “contains bad news for Lott: It concludes that ‘There is no credible evidence that ‘right-to-carry’ laws, which allow qualified adults to carry concealed handguns, either decrease or increase violent crime.’ They discuss Lott's research at some length and find it wanting... He staked his reputation on his claim that the data showed a decrease. So much for his reputation.”

In [counter arguments](#) to this evidence, Lott fails to provide new information.

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MYTH: Stand Your Ground laws reduce homicides

Fact: The most consistent finding of academic studies is that Stand Your Ground laws increase homicides and have no deterrent effect on crime

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott claims that a majority of studies find Stand Your Ground laws reduce homicides.
- Lott's own research concluded the laws were associated with a 9% reduction in murder rates.
- In January 2021, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine's spokesman said he relied on information provided by Lott when he decided to sign a Stand Your Ground bill into law.
- The most consistent finding of academic studies is that Stand Your Ground laws increase homicides and have no deterrent effect on crime.
- Academic research shows that Stand Your Ground laws exacerbate racial discrepancies when determining if a homicide is considered justifiable.

Lott's Claim:

During his March 8, 2017 [testimony](#) before the Minnesota House of Representatives, Lott claimed, "There's a number of studies that have been done linking Stand Your Ground laws to murder or homicide rates. There are about equal numbers of studies on both sides; slightly more find a benefit than find a bad effect."

On January 11, 2021, Lott's [website](#) said the Crime Prevention Research Center played a role in Ohio Governor Mike DeWine's decision to sign a Stand Your Ground bill into law. The post links to a [Sandusky Register](#) article that says "[DeWine] relied on information Lott provided in an opinion article he wrote published by the [\(Minneapolis\) Star Tribune](#) nearly four years ago. Lott said his research looked at data from all states with Stand Your Ground laws between 1977 and 2012, either through legislation or through court decisions. He said he found drops in murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault rates. 'On average, murder rates fell by about 1.5 percent annually during the first 10 years that the law was in effect,' he wrote."

During his Oct. 29, 2013 [testimony](#) before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights, Lott said, "In the third edition of my book *More Guns, Less Crime*, I provided the first published peer-reviewed study examining Stand Your Ground laws using national data. I found that they lowered murder rates by about 9 percent and that overall violent crime rates also declined." In response to claims that Stand Your Ground laws disproportionately harm Black men like Trayvon Martin and Jordan Davis, Lott claims, "white defendants are more likely to be convicted than black defendants... If there is any evidence that Stand Your Ground laws are applied with bias, it is that their application has been applied with bias against whites, not blacks. But it appears that all people benefit from these laws."

The Facts:

Lott falsely claims that a majority of studies indicate Stand Your Ground laws reduce homicides. Academic studies that have reviewed Stand Your Ground laws consistently find that these laws increase homicides and have no deterrent effect on crime.

A 2020 analysis by [RAND](#) of the academic literature on Stand Your Ground laws concluded that: "Evidence that stand-your-ground laws may increase total homicide rates is moderate, and evidence that such laws may increase firearm homicide rates is supportive."

According to a 2018 [GVpedia](#) analysis, the only study besides Lott's that found a beneficial effect from Stand Your Ground laws is a 2012 paper by [Ling Ren, et al.](#) that found a small decrease in burglaries in Houston (but not Dallas) after Texas implemented its Stand Your Ground law. In contrast, seven Stand Your Ground studies reviewing the laws in Texas and other states found that Stand Your Ground laws had harmful effects; two additional studies found mixed effects.

Contrary to Lott's claim that Stand Your Ground laws are applied with bias against whites, academic research [shows](#) that Stand Your Ground laws exacerbate [racial discrepancies](#) when determining if a homicide is considered justifiable.

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MYTH: Firearm registries never helped solve a crime

Fact: Hawai'i Police Department Chief Paul K. Ferreira: "Being able to verify the ownership of a firearm or where it has been transferred to has led to multiple calls for service being solved to include burglaries, theft and violent crimes."

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott [claims](#) that a firearm registration has never helped solve a crime, specifically referencing Chicago, Washington DC, Hawaii, and Pennsylvania.
- According to [Giffords Law Center](#), "[s]ix states and the District of Columbia require registration of some or all firearms. Hawaii and the District of Columbia require the registration of all firearms, California maintains a database of gun transfer records, and New York requires the registration of all handguns through its licensing law. Hawai'i, New York, and four other states also have a registration system for certain highly dangerous firearms, such as assault weapons. These states generally ban such firearms, but allow the continued possession of grandfathered weapons if they were owned before the ban was adopted and are registered."
- Chicago does not have a firearm registry, but a [2017 report](#) by the Chicago Police Department and Mayor's Office argued that a firearm registration system would help investigators identify violent criminals and protect lawful gun owners.
- Pennsylvania law prohibits a firearm registry, but Pennsylvania State Police maintains a database of handgun sale records that is used daily by law enforcement to solve firearm-related crimes.
- Hawai'i, the only state that requires all firearms to be registered, consistently has the lowest or second lowest gun death rate in the country. Both the Hawai'i Police Department and Hawai'i Attorney General's office told GVPedia that firearm ownership and transfer information are used daily to assist in solving crimes and conducting threat assessment for officers serving warrants, executing evictions, and responding to domestic violence calls. (Letter from Hawai'i Police Department Chief Paul K. Ferreira to Nick Wilson of GVPedia, March 15, 2021)
- GVPedia directly reached out to Washington, DC officials for specific cases in which their registries solved a crime. We are waiting for a response.

Lott's Claim:

In his 2020 book *Gun Control Myths*, Lott calls firearm registration systems a “lazy device for writers to solve crimes.” In the book, Lott argues that crime guns are rarely left at the scene, that crime guns are rarely registered to the perpetrator, and that police in Chicago, Hawaii, DC, Pennsylvania, and Canada “can’t point to any crimes that have been solved as a result of registration.” These claims with similar wording also appeared in his 2016 book, *The War on Guns*.

In a March 23, 2019 TribLive opinion piece, Lott [claims](#) that firearm “registration hasn’t worked in Pennsylvania or other places.” Lott supports this claim by referring to a 2001 lawsuit where he says the Pennsylvania State Police “could not identify a specific crime that had been solved through the registration system from 1901 to 2001, though they did claim that it had ‘assisted’ in a total of four cases but they could provide no details.” In that op ed, Lott also cites a 2013 deposition with the Washington, DC Police Chief and a 2000 Hawai’i State Senate hearing with the Honolulu Police Chief where they could not immediately recall a specific crime being solved with registration records. Lott posted much of the same language on his website two weeks later, and [adds the claim](#) “the real Chicago police have also been unable to point to real cases where registration has solved crimes.”

Lott had a slightly different position in his 2003 book *The Bias Against Guns*, where he argued “Registration laws may help the police solve crimes involving guns by providing them access to ownership records, but they drain police resources from other law enforcement activities...”

The Facts:

Lott specifically mentions law enforcement in Chicago, Pennsylvania, DC, and Hawai’i as being unable to point to a single crime solved as a result of firearm registration; however, Chicago and Pennsylvania do not have a registry. In the U.S., only Hawai’i and Washington, DC maintain a registry system of all firearms. California does not have a traditional registry but maintains a [central database](#) of gun transfer records that functions similarly to a registry. New York requires registration of handguns but not long guns.

A 2001 study by Dr. Daniel Webster, Dr. Jon Vernick, and Dr. Lisa Hepburn [concluded](#), “States with registration and licensing systems appear to do a better job than other states of keeping guns initially sold within the state from being recovered in crimes.”

A 2015 study by Dr. Garen Wintemute and Dr. Daniel Webster [found](#) that the “share of crime guns that originated from in-state retail sales in states with both [permit-to-purchase] policies and handgun registration was, on average, 37 percentage points lower relative to the comparison states lacking either policy.”

Chicago

Chicago does not require registration of firearms. A [2017 report](#) by the Chicago Police Department and Mayor’s Office details why a firearm registration system would help investigators identify violent criminals and protect lawful gun owners:

“A system to track lawful firearm transfers leading up to the illegal sale into the secondary market would greatly improve firearm investigations and help identify violent criminals. It would further protect lawful gun owners who never intended for their firearms to enter into the illegal gun market from unwarranted inquiry or investigation.

“A firearm registration system to track firearm transfers from one lawful owner to the next would provide an invaluable tool to investigators attempting to trace crime guns back to criminals. Importantly, it would take those who lawfully purchase guns at FFLs and sell them to legitimate buyers on the secondary market out of the investigation. If multiple transactions did in fact take place from the initial point of sale, law enforcement could proceed from the last lawfully recorded transfer. This would provide a substantial benefit to not only crime investigators, but also responsible gun owners who properly assess potential buyers before selling off a firearm on the secondary market. Further, it would aid in readily identifying straw purchasers whose firearms are purchased at an FFL for immediate sale into the illegal market, thus diminishing the flow of guns to violent criminals who use them in furtherance of senseless gun crimes.”

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania state law prohibits a firearm registry. The closest thing Pennsylvania has to a registry is a database of handgun sale records maintained by the Pennsylvania State Police. In a February 2, 2021 email to GVPedia, Pennsylvania Chief Deputy Attorney General for Gun Violence Brendan O'Malley wrote:

“State, local and federal law enforcement actively uses the Pennsylvania State Police’s handgun record of sale database on a daily basis to solve firearms related crimes and gun trafficking. [Here is just one example from last week.](#)”

Important to note there is not a firearm registry in Pennsylvania as that is prohibited specifically by law, but there is a searchable database of handgun sales and transfers which is a treasure trove of information for investigators to investigate illegal gun transfers.”

A September 2020 *Philadelphia Inquirer* [article](#) specifically mentions the handgun database as helping law enforcement dismantle a gun trafficking network linked to multiple shootings. Anthony McCrary purchased 35 guns over a two month period for the trafficking network led by three teenagers who were prohibited from purchasing guns. According to the article, “After checking the state’s electronic database of gun sales, they linked McCrary to what they described Thursday as an ‘alarming number’ of purchases from stores in Montgomery and Bucks Counties and Philadelphia.”

Pennsylvania’s database of handgun sale records helped identify a gun trafficking operation by Daniel Lucas who purchased 36 handguns to sell to others. According to a November 2020 *Philadelphia Inquirer* [article](#), Montgomery County District Attorney Kevin Steele’s office “began its investigation in September, when a routine scan of gun-purchasing records revealed Lucas’ surprising number of transactions, which the prosecutor said bore the ‘hallmark signs of straw purchasing.’”

Hawai’i

Hawai’i is the only state that requires all firearms to be registered and consistently has the lowest or second lowest gun death rate in the country. In a March 15, 2021 letter to GVPedia, Hawai’i Police Department Chief Paul K. Ferreira wrote, “In response to your

inquiry about whether the firearms registration process in Hawai'i County has been used to solve crimes or has resulted in prosecutions, firearm ownership or transfer information can lead to evidence that is vital to the prosecution of a crime.

"Firearms checks are used on a daily basis to confirm ownership of firearms recovered during the execution of search warrants, of firearms routinely found in the possession of suspects who are wanted for crimes, and firearms located within vehicles during traffic stops. Having the ability to access a person's firearms information prior to arriving at a domestic violence type call can provide vital information for threat assessment and officer safety. Being able to verify the ownership of a firearm or where it has been transferred to have led to multiple calls for service being solved to include burglaries, theft and violent crimes."

In a February 24, 2021 email to GVPedia, the Criminal Justice Division of the Department of the Attorney General of Hawaii wrote, "Hawaii requires a person seeking to purchase or acquire a firearm to apply for a permit from the police chief to ensure that the person acquiring a firearm in Hawaii is qualified to possess the firearm. In addition to obtaining a permit, Hawaii mandates the registration of all firearms purchased or acquired in Hawaii, transported into Hawaii, assembled from parts, or transferred from one person to another. As an added safeguard, Hawaii requires owners to report when a firearm is removed permanently from the State. This comprehensive system creates a record of the transaction(s) transferring ownership of the firearm, whether it be a pistol or revolver, or rifle or shotgun. The law also requires the transferor to verify that the recipient has obtained a permit to acquire a firearm, and, also to verify and record the identity of the recipient. Each county police department maintains its records of firearm transactions for its respective county, and all county police departments have statewide access to firearm information.

"Hawaii's firearm permit and registration system provides information to law enforcement agencies and the courts that assist in solving crimes and promoting public safety. By requiring each transfer of ownership to be documented, the county police departments may be able to trace the ownership of a firearm involved in a crime. Firearm ownership or transfer information can lead to evidence that is vital to the prosecution of a crime.

"The courts routinely order that firearms are to be surrendered by persons who have been disqualified from ownership of firearms upon being charged with or convicted of felonies

and certain misdemeanors, including domestic violence offenses. Also, a restraining or protective order, particularly a domestic violence protective order or gun violence protective order, will prohibit the possession of firearms. Law enforcement officers serving the protective order can verify whether the person being served owns firearms and account for its surrender. Additionally, when law enforcement serves warrants or execute evictions, the firearm registry can provide vital information for threat assessment and officer safety.”

Washington, DC

GVPedia directly reached out to Washington, DC officials for specific cases in which their registries solved a crime. We are waiting for a response.

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Daniel Webster and Garen Wintemute, "Effects of Policies Designed to Keep Firearms from High-Risk Individuals," [Annual Review of Public Health](#), March 2015

MYTH: Gun suicide is not more lethal than other means

Fact: Attempted suicides by firearms have an 82.5% fatality rate, versus a fatality rate of 4% for all suicide attempts

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott disputes the claim that easy access to guns contributes to suicide deaths because firearms are more lethal than other means.
- Lott cites a 1995 study to support his claim.
- Attempted suicides by firearms have an 82.5% fatality rate, versus a fatality rate of 4% for all suicide attempts. Firearms are the most lethal significant means of suicide.
- Suicide is impulsive and people typically use a mean that is readily at hand.

Lott's Claim:

A 2019 [Vox article](#) stated, "Guns allow people to kill themselves much more easily. Perhaps the reason access to guns so strongly contributes to suicides is that guns are much deadlier than alternatives like cutting and poison."

In Lott's 2020 book, *Gun Control Myths*, he responds, writing: "Vox gives a very misleading impression of the effectiveness of different suicide methods." Lott cites a [1995 study](#) of Los Angeles County suicides that found that being hit by a train and a gunshot to the head are similarly lethal, and suicide by train is half as painful as a self-inflicted gunshot. "The second problem with these numbers is that not everyone who attempts suicide wants to do so successfully," Lott continues. "So people's reticence can affect the success rate of the method. They may take a few extra pills, but not enough to actually kill themselves."

The Facts:

Lott brings up the relatively rare method of suicide by train. According to the [US Department of Transportation](#), there were 219 rail suicide fatalities in 2017, compared to an estimated 22,000 firearm suicides.

Suicide is impulsive and people typically use a means that is readily at hand. According to Pew Research Center, guns are present in 42% of U.S. households; therefore firearms are

readily accessible to many. Suicide by train and self-inflicted gunshot wounds are similarly lethal but guns are more accessible.

A [2001 study](#) found that 24% of individuals who attempted suicide took less than five minutes between the moment of decision and the suicide attempt and 70% of people took less than an hour. A [2009 study](#) found that 48% of patients reported that they attempted suicide within ten minutes of the first current thought of suicide. Firearms are particularly unforgiving and rarely afford a second chance.

Firearms are the [most lethal](#) significant means of suicide with an 82.5% fatality rate, versus a fatality rate of 4% for all suicide attempts. Even assuming a 100% substitution rate for suicide attempts, meaning the person attempting suicide uses a method other than firearms, the completed suicide rate would still decrease because firearms are more lethal. Contrary to Lott's claim, lethality as well as availability matter.

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MYTH: Gun ownership does not increase the risk of suicide

Fact: Research shows that gun ownership is a strong risk factor for suicide

Summary:

- Studies show that gun owners have a greater frequency of suicide death than non-gun owners and that strong gun laws are correlated to lower rates of suicide.
- Researcher John Lott claims that public health research fails to include gender imbalance (more males living in an area than females) as a risk factor to explain why gun owners have greater frequency of suicide deaths than non-gun owners.
- Lott's purported evidence is a 2001 study by Cutler, et al., which he claims shows that the disproportionate number of older, single men in rural areas is the primary cause for a higher suicide rate, not firearms or firearm laws.
- Lott misrepresents the Cutler study, which focused on youth suicide rates and makes no claims regarding a gender imbalance driving suicide rates among older men.
- A 2016 Harvard study concluded that if a confounder (other plausible factor) was missed regarding suicide rates as Lott suggests, the confounding factor would need to be responsible for increasing the risk of suicide by at least tenfold.

Lott's Claim:

In a March 2018 [post](#) on his website, Lott [criticizes](#) a Boston University School of Public Health report that concludes that states with stronger gun laws have fewer firearm deaths. Lott claims that gun control laws do not reduce gun deaths but "stricter gun control laws happen to be associated with other factors." Lott [describes](#) a paper by Cutler, Glaeser, and Norberg that he says "found that rural areas have both more gun ownership and a gender imbalance that leads to high numbers of older, single men. This, the authors argue, explains the greater frequency of suicide in rural areas, which also have higher gun ownership rates."

The Facts:

The [study](#) by Cutler et al. cited by Lott does not state that suicide rates are higher in rural areas because of a gender imbalance. In fact, the study is titled "Explaining the Rise in Youth Suicide" and does not explore the suicide rates of "older, single men" as Lott

contends. Lott misrepresents the study's findings to support his false claim that stronger gun control laws do not reduce gun deaths.

Research has consistently shown that [gun ownership](#) is a strong [risk factor](#) for suicide, typically showing a two to ten times increased risk of suicide for gun owners relative to non-gun owners. This finding holds true even after controlling for various characteristics that might be different between gun owners and non-gun owners such as demographic and psychopathological variables, suicidal ideation, and past attempts. Moreover, the increased risk of suicide to gun owners is not contained to the gun owner, but is [shared](#) by the spouse and children.

A 2016 Harvard study by Matthew Miller et al., [concludes](#) no other plausible factor (confounder) can explain the significant difference in suicide rates between gun owners and non-gun owners. The authors used a systematic review of the firearm-suicide literature and bias analysis to determine if "existing studies may have failed to account for the possibility that members of households with firearms differ from members of households without firearms in important ways related to suicide risk." The study concluded that if a confounder was missed as Lott suggests, it would have to be an order of magnitude higher than any known risk factor. Since "no such confounder has been found or even suggested," the study concludes that "unmeasured confounding alone is unlikely to explain the association between firearms and suicide."

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Matthew Miller and David Hemenway, "Guns and Suicide in the United States," [The New England Journal of Medicine](#), Sept. 4, 2008

MYTH: The National Research Council found no evidence that firearm availability is a risk factor for suicide

Fact: The National Research Council states: "Overall, the U.S. studies have consistently found that household gun ownership is associated with a higher overall risk of suicide."

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott claims that a 2004 National Research Council (NRC) report written by 11 national experts concluded firearm regulations do not reduce gun suicides because suicidal individuals will substitute another means of suicide such as suffocation or poisoning.
- The National Research Council is the operating arm of the National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Engineering.
- The NRC's summary of the research about firearms and suicide is the opposite of Lott's claim that owning a firearm is not a risk factor for suicide.

Lott's Claim:

In his 2016 book *War on Guns*, Lott focuses on the relationship between gun laws and suicide. He wrote that reporters too frequently write about the relationship between restricting gun ownership and suicide while ignoring "the National Research Council's research showing that suicidal individuals had merely 'substituted other methods of suicide.'"

In the same book, Lott writes, "A 2004 National Research Council report found that 'Some gun control policies may reduce the number of gun suicides, but they have not yet been shown to reduce the overall risk of suicide in any population.'"

The Facts:

To make the false claim that reporters ignore the NRC purported conclusions regarding the substitution of suicide methods, Lott takes part of an NRC quote, "substituted other methods of suicide," from the report out of context. The full NRC [sentence](#) reads: "The most important limitation is that these [two] studies do not indicate whether handgun purchasers would have substituted other methods of suicide if a gun were not available, and do not measure other factors, such as history of substance abuse, psychiatric illness,

criminal activity, or domestic violence, which might explain or modify a link between gun ownership and propensity for suicide."

The NRC quote does not refer to the dozens of studies examined by the NRC on the topic of suicide and firearms, but merely summarized the limitations of two studies that examined the connection between recent gun purchases and suicide.

The NRC's summary of the research about firearms and suicide is succinctly stated in this quote from the report: "Overall, the U.S. studies have consistently found that household gun ownership is associated with a higher overall risk of suicide."

A 2014 [meta-analysis](#) by Andrew Anglemeyer and two colleagues examined 16 studies on suicide. Anglemeyer, et al., found that gun availability tripled the overall risk of suicide. Contrary to Lott's claims about a suicidal person substituting another method if access to firearms are restricted, the meta-analysis found the overall risk of suicide tripled when a gun was available.

GVPedia identified 24 case-control studies conducted in the United States, all of which conclude that the presence of a firearm in the home is a strong risk factor for suicide. Those cases are as follows:

1. A [1988 study](#) by David Brent et al., identified availability of firearms in the homes as a risk factor for suicide.
2. A [1991 study](#) by David Brent et al., concluded that "The availability of guns in the home, independent of firearms type or method of storage, appears to increase the risk for suicide among adolescents."
3. According to a [1992 study](#) by Arthur Kellerman et al., "Ready availability of firearms is associated with an increased risk of suicide in the home."
4. According to a [1993 study](#) by David Brent et al., "prevention of suicide in this group [adolescents with no apparent psychiatric disorder] is probably best achieved by restriction of the availability of firearms, particularly loaded ones."
5. A [1993 study](#) by David Brent et al., concluded that "When pediatricians are faced with a suicidal adolescent, they should insist on the removal of firearms from the home. Pediatricians should also inform parents that the presence of firearms may be associated with adolescent suicide even in the absence of clear psychiatric illness."

6. A [1994 study](#) by David Brent et al, found that “suicide victims were more likely to have... a handgun available in the home.”
7. A [1997 study](#) by James Bailey et al., found that “Instead of conferring protection, keeping a gun in the home is associated with increased risk of both suicide and homicide of women.”
8. According to a [1997 study](#) by Peter Cummings et al., “within the first year after purchase, the relative risk of suicide was more than fivefold higher among those with a family history of handgun purchase.”
9. A [1999 study](#) by David Brent et al., found that the “availability of a gun, and past suicide attempt conveyed significant risk for suicide across all 4 demographic groups.”
10. According to a [1999 study](#) by Garen Wintemute et al., “The purchase of a handgun is associated with a substantial increase in the risk of suicide by firearm and by any method. The increase in the risk of suicide by firearm is apparent within a week after the purchase of a handgun and persists for at least six years.”
11. A [2000 study](#) by Seema Shah et al. concluded that “Two types of public health interventions to prevent adolescent firearm suicides are likely to be successful: (a) limiting household access to firearms, and (b) identifying adolescents at high risk of firearm suicide.”
12. A [2002 study](#) by Yeates Conwell et al., found that the “presence of a firearm in the home was associated with increased risk for suicide, even after controlling for psychiatric illness.”
13. According to a [2003 study](#) by Hsiang-Ching Kung et al., “access to a firearm increased the odds of suicide for both genders.”
14. A [2003 study](#) by Douglas Wiebe concluded that “Having a gun at home is a risk factor for adults to be shot fatally (gun homicide) or commit suicide with a firearm. Physicians should continue to discuss with patients the implications of keeping guns at home.”
15. A [2004 study](#) by Linda Dahlberg et al., concluded that “regardless of storage practice, type of gun, or number of firearms in the home, having a gun in the home was associated with an increased risk of firearm homicide and firearm suicide in the home.”
16. According to a [2004 study](#) by Edmond Shenassa et al., “we found that household access to firearms is associated with an increased risk of suicide by firearm... Even among those who are highly motivated to die, lack of access to firearms can lower suicide mortality. Even if all of those who committed suicide by firearm simply

switched to the next most lethal method, still a significant reduction in suicide mortality would occur.”

17. A [2005 study](#) by Hsiang-Ching Kung et al., found that suicide deaths among white and African American decedents were associated with firearm availability.
18. According to a [2005 study](#) by David Grossman, “The presence of a household firearm is associated with an increased risk of suicide among adults and adolescents. In a study of suicide attempters and completers, investigators found that 75% of the guns were stored in the residence of the victim, friend, or relative.”
19. A [2008 study](#) by Susan Sorenson and Katherine Vittes found that “suicide risk remains higher among gun owners and among those who live in a home with a gun... Our findings provide support for the idea that reducing access to firearms may be an effective way to decrease suicide.”
20. According to a [2008 study](#) by Mark Ilgen et al., “individuals with mental disorders were no more or less likely to have access to guns than others suggests that the previously established link between guns and suicide is unlikely to be solely explained by higher levels of gun access among at-risk individuals. Instead, at-risk individuals may simply be more likely to use the guns that they possess to harm themselves.”
21. A [2009 study](#) by Matthew Miller et al., found that “the empirical association between household firearm ownership and heightened risk of suicide, consistently reported in previous case-control and ecological studies is not explained by an inherently higher risk of psychopathology or substance abuse or dependence among gun-owning families.”
22. A [2011 study](#) by Joseph Logan et al., found that “Suicide is a complex phenomenon often resulting from multiple risk factors... [T]he most common mechanism or weapon used was a firearm.”
23. According to a [2011 study](#) by Marian Betz et al., “Our results underscore the importance of reducing a suicidal person’s access to firearms. For example, parents and spouses of people at high risk for suicide should be urged to temporarily store household firearms somewhere other than at home or to lock them securely out of the suicidal person’s reach until the situation improves.”
24. A [2012 study](#) by Katherine Hempstead et al., found that “firearms are disproportionately used in male suicides when physical health is listed as a circumstance... These findings have implications for prevention efforts, because restricting access to lethal means is an important aspect of suicide prevention.”

Regarding Lott's claim about the impact of firearm laws on overall suicide rates, it is true that at the time of the 2004 NRC's report the evidence was spotty. Since 2004, more research has been conducted on this topic. The evidence shows that [policies](#) such as [Permit to Purchase](#) laws and waiting periods do reduce suicide rates. [Extreme Risk Protection Orders](#) show promising signs of reducing suicides. And international [evidence](#) from Australia's sweeping firearm buyback program in 1996 reduced firearm suicide rates and found no evidence of substitution.

Lott's Counter:

In an August 30, 2016 response to a [Vox article](#) published the same day, Lott [accuses](#) the authors of omitting the following sentence in the NRC report: "It is not yet clear if the individuals who used a gun to commit suicide would have committed suicide by another method if a gun had not been available." Lott also quotes from the executive summary of the NRC report which stated no conclusion had been reached about the link between firearms and suicide.

In his response to the Vox article, Lott writes that a [survey](#) of "economists and criminologists who have done empirical research on firearms. This survey shows a 60%-to-40% margin believing that the presence of a gun in the home does not cause an increase in the risk of suicide. Economists overwhelmingly took this position, while criminologists agreed with it by a margin of only two-percentage points."

Rebuttal:

Lott fails to mention that he co-authored the survey he cites. The results of his survey are not consistent with other surveys of experts. A May 2014 Harvard Injury Control Research Center survey about [firearms and suicide](#) was completed by 150 firearms researchers, and found that 84% of respondents agreed that having a gun in the home increases the risk of suicide.

Sources:

John Lott, *War on Drugs*, 2016

John Lott, "Shooting Blanks," [New York Post](#), December 29, 2004

Firearms and Violence: A Critical Review, [National Research Council](#), 2005

Andrew Anglemeyer and Tara Horvath, "The Accessibility of Firearms and Risk for Suicide and Homicide Victimization Among Household Members," [Annals of Internal Medicine](#), January 21, 2014

Evan DeFilippis and Devin Hughes, "John Lott and the War on Truth: A Response to Lott's Continued Lies," [Armed With Reason](#), December 1, 2015

John Lott, "Response to Evan DeFilippis and Devin Hughes' claims at 'ArmedwithReaon' (sic) about my research," [John Lott blog](#), June 23, 2015

GVPedia, "[Gun Laws and Suicide](#)," October 28, 2017

GVPedia, "[The Denver Accord, Parts 1 & 2: Licensing and Registration Laws](#)," 2019

GVPedia, "[The Denver Accord, Part 3: Extreme Risk Protection Order](#)," 2019

Chapman S, Alpers P, Agho K, et al., "[Australia's 1996 gun law reforms: faster falls in firearm deaths, firearm suicides, and a decade without mass shootings](#)," *Injury Prevention* 2006;12:365-372.

Evan DeFilippis and Devin Hughes, "The bogus claims of the NRA's favorite social scientist, debunked," [Vox](#), August 30, 2016

John Lott, "Response To DeFilippis And Hughes Review Of The War On Guns," [Crime Prevention Research Center](#), August 30, 2016

"Results Survey #1," [Harvard Injury Control Research Center](#), May 2014

MYTH: Lott's survey of researchers is the largest of its kind, and shows most experts believe guns make people safer

Fact: Most researchers on gun violence find that guns do not make people safer

Summary:

- Based on his own survey of 120 researchers, researcher John Lott claims that most academics believe private gun ownership makes people safer and that eliminating gun-free zones would save lives.
- Lott claims his survey of experts was the largest of its type ever conducted.
- The Harvard Injury Control Research Center conducted larger surveys and a majority of experts concluded or agreed that a gun in the home increases the risk of suicide and more permissive concealed carry laws don't save lives.
- Lott's survey results are skewed because he included old articles, used biased search terms like "gun control," and included economists and criminologists who are not experts on the topic but share his political views. Lott excluded published experts.
- Of the 35 researchers with the most peer-reviewed articles in GPVedia's study database, only four have written articles consistently finding that gun control policies do not reduce violence: John Lott, Gary Kleck, Thomas Marvell, and Carlisle Moody.

Lott's Claim:

In his Sept. 18, 2019 testimony before Congress, Lott [claims](#) "Academic researchers broadly think that eliminating gun-free zones is a promising policy change that could save lives. Criminologists and economists are the most interested in that solution, while public health researchers tend to favor traditional gun control methods." Lott included a chart from a survey of researchers and claimed "The survey was the largest yet conducted, with a response rate of over 43%, or 120, from the 277 researchers."

Lott's written Congressional testimony fails to mention that the survey of criminologists, economists, and public health researchers was conducted by Arthur Berg, Gary Mauser, and Lott himself. The survey was conducted during February and March of 2019 and the resulting survey data was included in a [paper](#) published by Lott, et al, in the Winter 2019 journal, *Regulation*, a journal published by the CATO Institute, a libertarian think tank. Lott

prefaces the *Regulation* article by discussing a pair of articles appearing in the *New York Times* in 2017 which surveyed a panel of 32 experts about the effectiveness of a variety of policies at preventing [firearm homicides](#) and [mass shootings](#). Out of the 32 experts in criminology, economics, and public health interviewed for the New York Times story, only five said they opposed gun control policies.

Lott's 2019 survey asked 32 economists, 38 criminologists, and 50 public health researchers to assess the effect of certain gun policies on mass public shootings and murder rates. The public health researchers who were included in the survey "published at least one English-language empirical study on firearms in a peer-reviewed academic journal between January 2000 and December 2018." The criminologists and economists surveyed were drawn from a 2016 survey, the results of which were published in the Summer 2016 and "they had to have published at least one empirical study on firearms and violence in a peer-reviewed criminology journal (excluding forensics or injury publications) between January 2000 and December 2014."

The [previous survey](#) was conducted between 2014 and 2015 by John Lott and Gary Mauser and published in *Regulation* in 2016. The survey included 35 economists and 39 criminologists. Lott and Mauser said "economists from both the United States and Canada overwhelmingly believe that private gun ownership makes people safer." The authors explain that criminologists surveyed were largely split on the gun policies discussed. Lott and Mauser argue that "researchers, as a group, believe that guns are used more in self-defense than in crime; gun-free zones attract criminals; guns in the home do not increase the risk of suicide; concealed handgun permit holders are much more lawabiding than the typical American; and that permitted concealed handguns lower the murder rate." Lott summarizes the study in similar terms in his 2016 book *The War on Guns*.

While discussing the survey results in his 2020 book *Gun Control Myths*, Lott highlights how "criminologists and economists evaluated the *New York Times* proposals as being much less effective than did the public health researchers." Lott claims the *New York Times* results favored gun control policies because of "a heavy reliance on public health researchers." Lott [discounts](#) the quality of public health researchers and questions their motives because they believe in preventing violence, not just measuring it.

The Facts:

Lott's survey of experts is not the largest of its kind. A May 2014 Harvard Injury Control Research Center survey about [firearms and suicide](#) was completed by 150 firearms researchers, including Lott. In contrast to Lott's survey of 120 academics, 84% of respondents to the Harvard survey agreed that having a gun in the home increases the risk of suicide. A July 2014 follow-up survey about [concealed carry](#) laws was completed by 140 researchers, with a majority believing more permissive concealed carry laws have not reduced crime rates. In subsequent [follow-up surveys](#), a similar or greater number of researchers completed the questions than participated in the Lott survey. Furthermore, the Harvard study found much greater support for gun violence prevention policies than Lott's study.

Lott's survey results are more pro-gun than the *New York Times* and Harvard surveys because he and Mauser use dubious search terms to define their sample. The economists Lott surveyed were found by searching JSTOR for the term "gun control," which is not a neutral term and primarily used by advocates of weaker gun laws. A more representative sample of researchers studying the relationship between gun ownership and crime could have been found by searching JSTOR for "guns" and "crime." For example, the sample of public health researchers was created by searching PubMed for the terms "firearms," "violence," "clinical trial," "study," "comparative study," and "journal article." This might help explain why the views of the public health researchers were more consistent with other surveys of experts than Lott's surveys of economists and criminologists.

The sample of economists includes scholars who published as early as January 1997, the same month Lott's major article about concealed carry was published. Lott included the views of economists who wrote one article about gun violence nearly two decades prior to the study, but excluded other researchers with more recent publications that fell outside the "gun control" search term. The long window (from 1997 to 2013) allows Lott to include all of his own studies, but excludes economists who published studies finding that gun ownership is a risk factor for murder and suicide.

An impact of Lott's time frame and search term is that it includes ten articles that appeared in a 2001 issue of the *Journal of Law & Economics* (JLE). This [special JLE issue](#) featured pro-gun articles presented at a conference sponsored by the conservative think tank

American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and organized by Lott while he was an AEI resident scholar.

Lott's sample of criminologists is problematic. Unlike the sample of economists and public health researchers, the authors do not disclose which search terms they used. Lott says "A total of 80 articles were identified" by 80 different criminologists after searching peer-reviewed criminology journals for articles about firearms and violence between January 2000 and December 2013. Lott implies only 80 peer-reviewed articles about gun violence by 80 criminologists were found, but a simple database search during those 14 years will yield hundreds of hits. Only 39 criminologists responded to his survey and top firearm researchers who have been published in criminology journals during this period were not sampled by Lott and Mauser.

GVPedia maintains the largest publicly available database of gun violence studies with 1,118 studies as of Dec. 2020. GVPedia's [study database](#) includes 35 researchers who have published ten or more peer-reviewed studies about gun violence. Only four of the 35 (11%) researchers wrote articles consistently concluding that gun control laws do not reduce violence: John Lott, Gary Kleck, Thomas Marvell, and Carlisle Moody. In contrast, 30 (86%) researchers generally find that gun ownership does not make people safer. We classified the remaining researcher, Mark Gius, as neutral because his findings do not consistently fall on either side of the gun debate. This unscientific review of the most published researchers on gun violence supports the findings of the Harvard and *New York Times* surveys, but not the Lott survey.

Authors with Most Peer-Reviewed Articles in GPVedia Study Database

1. David Hemenway	13. Charles Branas	25. Lisa Hepburn
2. Garen Wintemute	14. Frederick Rivara	26. Mark Gius
3. Daniel Webster	15. John Lott	27. Susan Sorenson
4. Matthew Miller	16. Christopher Koper	28. Thomas Marvell
5. Deborah Azrael	17. Mona Wright	29. Glenn Pierce
6. Philip Cook	18. David McDowall	30. Stephen Teret
7. Anthony Braga	19. Arthur Kellermann	31. Colin Loftin
8. Gary Kleck	20. Michael Siegel	32. Carlisle Moody
9. Jon Vernick	21. James Mercy	33. John Donohue
10. David Lester	22. Shannon Frattaroli	34. Michael Anestis
11. Jens Ludwig	23. Cassandra Crifasi	35. Andrew Papachristos
12. Douglas Wiebe	24. Sandro Galea	

Black = Found that increased gun availability increases crime and decreases safety

Red = Found that increased gun availability decreases crime and increases safety

Green = Neutral

Sources:

John Lott, *Gun Control Myths*, 2020

John Lott, "What type of gun control will actually make us safer?" Testimony before the Joint Economic Committee of the United States House of Representatives and the Senate, [Senate website](#), Sept. 18, 2019

John Lott, *War on Drugs*, 2016

John Lott, Arthur Berg, and Gary Mauser, "Expert Views on Gun Laws," [Regulation](#), Winter 2019-2020

John Lott and Gary Mauser, "Researcher perceptions of lawful, concealed carry of handguns," [Regulation](#), Summer 2016

Quoctrung Bui and Margot Sanger-Katz, "How to Prevent Gun Deaths? Where Experts and the Public Agree," [New York Times](#), January 10, 2017

Margot Sanger-Katz and Quoctrung Bui, "How to Reduce Mass Shooting Deaths? Experts Rank Gun Laws," [New York Times](#), October 5, 2017

"Firearm Research Surveys," [Harvard Injury Control Research Center](#) (accessed Dec. 9, 2020)

"Study Database," [GVPedia](#) (accessed January 21, 2021)

"Guns, Crime, and Safety: A Conference Sponsored by the American Enterprise Institute and the Center for Law, Economics, and Public Policy at Yale Law School," [The Journal of Law and Economics](#), 2001

MYTH: Most studies show that more guns mean less crime

Fact: A majority of studies do not find evidence that right-to-carry laws decrease crime

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott falsely claims that two-thirds of peer-reviewed literature shows concealed carry laws reduce crime.
- Lott's false claim relies on obsolete work and studies in which right-to-carry (RTC) laws are not the variables of interest.
- Most studies with a national scope published since 2005 find that RTC laws increase crime, particularly aggravated assaults. In short, more guns in public means more crime.

Lott's Claim:

In 2012, Lott published an article in the *Maryland Law Review* claiming that two-thirds of peer-reviewed literature shows ["right to carry laws reduce crime."](#)

The Facts:

Lott's analysis is deceptive because he excludes studies that find RTC laws increase crime and many studies he lists as pro-RTC are either deeply flawed or not about concealed carry. After correcting these mistakes, only five studies not written by Lott support his claim compared to 26 studies published before 2012 which disagree that more guns means more crime.

Lott's [original list](#) of RTC studies in *Maryland Law Review* included only three studies finding RTC laws increase violent crime and 11 studies finding RTC laws have no discernible effect on violent crime (which totals 14 studies disagreeing with the claim that RTC laws decrease crime). Lott's list excluded at least 12 academic studies published between 1995 and 2011 which found RTC laws either had no effect on crime or a negative impact, either of which contradict his claim. With the addition of these 12 studies, Lott's original list of 14 studies disagreeing with his claim expands to 26 studies.

Lott's list claims 21 studies, articles, and books find that RTC laws reduce crime. This list, however, is highly inflated because many of the studies are either not about RTC laws, have

been disavowed by the authors, or were written by Lott using flawed methodology. Five of the 21 studies Lott lists are not primarily about RTC laws.

The following are the five of the 21 studies from Lott's list which did not measure RTC and crime. Instead, they measured safe storage laws, private security contractors, juvenile handgun possession, abortion laws, and unmarried fertility rates:

1. John Lott and John Whitley, "Safe-Storage Gun Laws: Accidental Deaths, Suicides, and Crime," [Journal of Law and Economics](#), October 2001
2. Bruce Benson and Brent Mast, "Privately Produced General Deterrence," [Journal of Law and Economics](#), October 2001
3. Thomas Marvell, "The Impact of Banning Juvenile Gun Possession," [Journal of Law and Economics](#), October 2001
4. John Lott and John Whitley, "Abortion and Crime: Unwanted children and out-of-wedlock births," [Economic Inquiry](#), October 2007
5. Todd Kendall and Robert Tamura, "Unmarried Fertility, Crime, and Social Stigma," [The Journal of Law and Economics](#), 2010

A sixth article should also be excluded from Lott's list of 21 supporting studies because it measures the impact of RTC laws on police deaths, not general crime or even homicides:

6. David Mustard, "The Impact of Gun Laws on Police Deaths," [Journal of Law and Economics](#), October 2001 (MLR)

The authors of two studies that found RTC laws reduce crime no longer support their own findings because they relied on flawed Uniform Crime Report (UCR) data. In a paper about the unreliability of county-level crime data, Michael Maltz says Lott and Mustard used flawed UCR crime statistics to reach their counter-intuitive conclusion that more guns means less crime. Maltz mentions that "counties in those states with the most coverage gaps have laws permitting the carrying of concealed weapons" and "in their current condition, county-level UCR crime statistics cannot be used for evaluating the effects of changes in policy."

7. David Olson and Michael Maltz, "Right-to-Carry Concealed Weapon Laws and Homicide in Large U.S. Counties: The Effect on Weapon Types, Victim Characteristics, and Victim-Offender Relationships," [Journal of Law and Economics](#), October 2001 (MLR)

Florenz Plassmann and John Whitley's 2003 study "Confirming More Guns, Less Crime" relies on the same flawed Lott-created county data set for his 2003 book *The Bias Against Guns*. Ayres and Donohue uncovered multiple errors in their data set and after correcting these errors, found no evidence that RTC laws reduced crime.

8. Florenz Plassmann and John Whitley, "Confirming More Guns, Less Crime," [Stanford Law Review](#), 2003 (Not Peer Reviewed)

Lott also lists a [study](#) by Thomas Marvell and Carlisle Moody as pro-RTC even though 23 of the 24 jurisdictions examined found RTC laws actually increased crime. Florida was the only jurisdiction that appeared to benefit from increased concealed carry. In a 2009 [Econ Journal Watch](#) article, Ian Ayres and John Donohue explain, "Based on the state-specific estimates they generate from this new model, Moody and Marvell conclude that RTC laws are beneficial because one state – Florida – outweighs the overall harmful effects estimated for the other 23 jurisdictions." Ayres and Donohue argue that since 23 of the 24 jurisdictions found RTC increased crime, this study should be "taken as evidence against the more guns, less crime hypothesis."

In 2003, Marvell and co-author Tomislav Kovandzic published their study on Florida's concealed handgun permits and crime between 1980 and 2000. They concluded "increases in permit rate growth may actually lead to slight increases in crime." In a subsequent version, the authors changed the conclusion to "we find no credible statistical evidence that permit rate growth (and presumably more lawful gun carrying) leads to substantial reductions in violent crime, especially homicide." The Marvell-Kovandzic study and its subsequent revision both disproved the concept that more guns means more crime.

9. Carlisle Moody and Thomas Marvell, "The Debate on Shall-Issue Laws," [Econ Journal Watch](#), September 2008

Another publication Lott cites is the lone dissent by the late conservative criminologist James Q. Wilson during the 2004 National Research Council examination of gun laws. Out of a panel of 16 scholars, Wilson was the only scholar who believed the research showed murder rates decline after the states adopted RTC laws. Lott unfairly counts Wilson's lone dissent as one study with the weight and status equal to the majority opinion supported by 15 scholars who disagreed with Lott's claim that more guns means less crime.

10. James Q. Wilson, *Firearms and Violence: A Critical Review*, [National Academies Press](#), 2005

Of the remaining studies, Lott is either the sole author or coauthor on six of them; all of these studies rely on the same flawed data that Maltz warned against after walking away from his own study:

11. John Lott and David Mustard, "Crime, Deterrence, and Right-to-Carry Concealed Handguns," [Journal of Legal Studies](#), 1997
12. John Lott, "The Concealed-Handgun Debate," [Journal of Legal Studies](#), January 1998
13. John Lott and John Whitley, "Measurement Error in County-Level UCR Data," [Journal of Quantitative Criminology](#), June 2003
14. John Lott, *More Guns, Less Crime*, 2010 (3rd edition)
15. John Lott and William Landes, "Multiple Victim Public Shootings, Bombings, and Right-to-Carry Concealed Handgun Laws: Contrasting Private and Public Law Enforcement," *The Bias Against Guns*, 2003 (Not peer reviewed)
16. Stephen Bronars and John Lott, "Criminal Deterrence, Geographic Spillovers, and Right-to-Carry Concealed Handguns," [American Economic Review](#), May 1998 (Not Peer Reviewed)

Of the original 21 studies Lott cites, only five studies by scholars other than Lott support his conclusion:

17. William Bartley and Mark Cohen, "The Effect of Concealed Weapons Laws: An Extreme Bound Analysis," [Economic Inquiry](#), April 1998
18. William Bartley, "Will Rationing Guns Reduce Crime?" [Economics Letters](#), 1999
19. Florenz Plassmann and T. Nicolaus Tideman, "Does the Right to Carry Concealed Handguns Deter Countable Crimes? Only a Count Analysis Can Say," [Journal of Law and Economics](#), October 2001
20. Carlisle Moody, "Testing for the Effects of Concealed Weapons Laws: Specification Errors and Robustness," [Journal of Law and Economics](#), October 2001
21. Eric Helland and Alexander Tabarrok, "Using Placebo Laws to Test 'More Guns, Less Crime,'" [Advances in Economic Analysis and Policy](#), 2004

Lott's review was published in 2012, but the most recent study of the remaining five was published in 2004. However, most modern studies with a national scope published since 2005 find that RTC Laws increase crime.

Lott's Counter:

Melinda Wenner Moyer, a science journalist and contributing editor at *Scientific American*, countered Lott's findings in her article, "More Guns Do Not Stop More Crimes, Evidence Shows," published in the October 1, 2017 issue of *Scientific American*. Moyer [concludes](#), "when all but a few studies point in the same direction, we can feel confident that the arrow is aiming at the truth—which is, in this case, that guns do not inhibit crime and violence but instead make it worse."

On Nov. 10, 2017, Lott posted a [response](#) on his website to Moyer's rebuttal in *Scientific American* in addition to his submitted [letter](#) to *Scientific American*. Lott complains that Moyer used his list from the 2012 *Maryland Law Review* article instead of "the more complete list on our website that we provided to her."

Lott states in his response that Moyer's article "is very biased and ignores virtually all of the literature on right-to-carry laws and gun ownership since 1998." He accuses Moyer of ignoring 24 peer-reviewed publications that show crime falls after people are allowed to carry concealed handguns.

Lott also responds to criticism that RTC laws were not the focus of five of the original studies. Lott explains, "Just because a paper is generally on safe storage laws or abortion doesn't mean that it doesn't also account for other factors. Those papers also include a variable for right-to-carry laws. Even though I provided her with links to actual copies of the papers, it appears that Moyer did nothing more than read the titles of the papers." Later in the post, Lott continues, "Moyers statement was that these other papers did not deal with right-to-carry laws. You might argue that this particular paper doesn't deal with them enough to draw any definitive conclusions, but for the abortion, safe storage, and minors papers (the three that she mentions), they and all the others that I list do deal with it."

In response to Moyer's criticism that one-third of the pro-RTC citations refer to Lott's own work, Lott's website explains, "Yes, a number of the pro-carry papers are by Dr. Lott, but he was counting all peer-reviewed papers that examined US data. And the three papers we've mentioned are all peer-reviewed. Many of Lott's papers were co-authored with others."

Rebuttal:

Lott defends his inclusion of studies about abortion, safe storage, and private security because the papers include RTC laws as controls. However, serious researchers would not look at a control variable coefficient for RTC laws and make a conclusion about the impacts of RTC laws. Lott's abortion paper doesn't include a table showing the impact of the RTC law but merely mentions it in a footnote.

Lott's inclusion of Marvell's Oct. 2001 [article](#) as evidence that RTC laws reduce crime is another example of why a control variable in a study focused on another policy should not be used to draw conclusions about concealed carry. Marvell's paper measures the impact of juvenile handgun possession and only uses RTC as a dummy variable for part of the analysis. Marvell writes, "Analysis of the results for these three law variables is outside the scope of the paper. A rough summary is that the shall-issue laws have little discernible impact except for reducing rape."

In the past, Lott has tried to downplay the significance of control variable coefficients in his own research. For example, Lott's data says rural areas are more dangerous than cities, despite FBI data showing the opposite. Lott's model also suggests that a decrease in the population of middle-aged and elderly black women and an increase in unemployment would substantially decrease homicides. David Hemenway of Harvard [points out](#) the bizarreness of this strange result in Lott's model: "a decrease of 1 percentage point in the percentage of the population that is black, female, and aged forty to forty-nine is associated with a 59% decrease in homicide."

In his critical review of Lott's *Bias Against Guns*, Hemenway explores many of the absurd findings in Lott's data. For example, Lott's analysis finds that closing the gun show loophole should reduce Indiana's violent crime rate by 72% and auto theft rate by 102%, which would require auto-thieves to be returning previously stolen cars. The same model predicted an 83% increase in New York's violent crime rate and a 95% increase in the robbery rate, which also didn't happen. Hemenway concludes, "Lott's results are just one piece of evidence that his models are misspecified, and should not be accepted as valid."

Lott tries to have it both ways in his rebuttal. Either control variable coefficients are worth paying attention to, in which case Lott's studies would be automatically dismissed for using poorly designed models, or they are not relevant and he shouldn't be including them in a

literature review as evidence on the impact of RTC laws. The truth is that while looking at control variable coefficients is one way to determine whether a model has major issues or not, they should not and can not be used as solid proof of anything on their own.

Another complaint in his rebuttal is that Moyer did not use Lott's most current list of pro-RTC studies. On Nov. 29, 2020, Lott posted the following [updated list](#) on his Crime Research Prevention Center website:

Lott's Pro-RTC Expanded List

1. John Lott, "More Guns, Less Crime: A Response to Ayres and Donohue," [SSRN](#), September 1999
2. Florenz Plassmann and John Lott, "More Readers of Gun Magazines, But Not More Crimes," [SSRN](#), July 2002
3. John Lott, "Right-to-Carry Laws and Violent Crime Revisited: Clustering, Measurement Error, and State-by-State Break Downs," [SSRN](#), Feb. 2004
4. Carlisle Moody and Thomas Marvell, "The Debate on Shall Issue Laws, Continued," [Econ Journal Watch](#), May 2009
5. Carlisle Moody, Thomas Marvell, Paul Zimmerman, and Fasil Alemante, "The Debate on Shall-Issue Laws," [Review of Economics & Finance](#), 2014
6. Mark Gius, "An examination of the effects of concealed weapons laws and assault weapons bans on state-level murder rates" [Applied Economics Letters](#), 2014
7. Carlisle Moody and Thomas Marvell, "The Impact of Right-to-Carry Laws: A Critique of the 2014 Version of Aneja, Donohue, and Zhang," [Econ Journal Watch](#), January 2018
8. Carlisle Moody and Thomas Marvell, "Do Right to Carry Laws Increase Violent Crime? A Comment on Donohue, Aneja, and Weber," [Econ Journal Watch](#), March 2019
9. Carlisle Moody, John Lott, and Thomas Marvell, "Did John Lott Provide Bad Data to

the NRC? A Note on Aneja, Donohue, and Zhang," [Econ Journal Watch](#), January 2013

10. Carlisle Moody and Thomas Marvell, "On the Choice of Control Variables in the Crime Equation," [Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics](#), October 2010

Lott's Nov. 29, 2020 list also includes 18 studies he included in his 2012 *Maryland Law Review* article. In addition to adding more outdated academic work, Lott continues to include studies in which RTC laws are not the variables of interest. For example, Plassmann and Lott's 2012 article did not study RTC laws but how subscriptions to Handguns Magazine impact crime. It is also worth noting that only one of the ten studies on Lott's expanded list did not include Lott or Marvell as authors. Problems with Marvell and Lott's data and analyses were discussed in the previous section.

The following 37 studies published between 1995 and 2018 contradict Lott's claim that RTC laws reduce crime (36 if you exclude studies that aren't primarily focused on RTC laws). The studies were found using Lott's 2012 list as well as GVPedia's Feb. 2019 concealed carry [literature review](#).

Concealed Carry Studies Finding Increased Crime or No Effect, Pre-2012

"No effect" indicates a study found no increase or decrease in crime resulting from RTC laws. "Increase" indicates a study found RTC laws increase crime. "Lott excluded" indicates Lott excluded the study from his analysis.

1. David McDowall, Colin Loftin, and Brian Wiersema, "Easing Concealed Firearms Laws: Effects on Homicide in Three States," [Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology](#), Fall 1995 - Increase, Lott Excluded
2. Jens Ludwig, "Concealed-Gun-Carrying Laws and Violent Crime: Evidence from State Panel Data," [International Review of Law and Economics](#), September 1998 - Increase
3. Dan Black and Daniel Nagin, "Do Right-to-Carry Laws Deter Violent Crime?" [The Journal of Legal Studies](#), January 1998 - No Effect
4. Hashem Dezhbakhsh and Paul Rubin, "Lives saved or lives lost? The effects of concealed-handgun laws on crime," [The American Economic Review](#), February 1998 -

No Effect, Lott Excluded

5. Ian Ayres and John Donohue, "Review: Nondiscretionary Concealed Weapons Laws: A Case Study of Statistics, Standards of Proof, and Public Policy," [American Law and Economics Review](#), Fall 1999 - No Effect
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Post-2012 Concealed Carry Studies Finding Increased Crime or No Effect

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30. Marjorie McElroy and Will Wang, "Do concealed gun permits deter crime? Dynamic insights from state panel data," [Working Paper](#), 2014 - Increase, Not Peer Reviewed
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33. Jeremy Carter and Michael Binder, "Firearm Violence and Effects on Concealed Gun Carrying: Large Debate and Small Effects," [Journal of Interpersonal Violence](#), 2016 - Increase

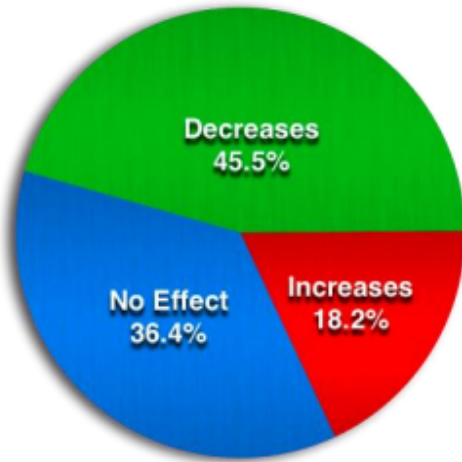
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37. Mark Hamill, et al., "State Level Firearm Concealed-Carry Legislation and Rates of Homicide and Other Violent Crime," [Journal of the American College of Surgeons](#), 2018 - No Effect

GVPedia's list also included seven more publications listed under "other academic literature" that found RTC laws led to more crime. Comparing the above lists clearly shows that most studies do not support Lott's claim that more concealed carry leads to less crime. Even before excluding articles with flawed data, Lott's list of pro-RTC laws is smaller than the list finding RTC laws are associated with more crime or have no effect.

GVPedia's [literature review](#) identified 59 studies published between 1995 to 2018, as well as 20 other academic works. GVPedia's review differs from Lott's because GVPedia excludes studies that aren't about RTC laws and books that aren't peer reviewed. Of the 59 studies, 33 were published before or during 2005, and 26 were published after 2005. The review concluded that "The modern academic literature and investigation of causal pathways both reinforce the conclusion that RTC laws likely increase crime, or at best have no net beneficial effect." Without controlling for quality, studies were evenly split on whether RTC Laws reduce, increase, or have no effect on crime.

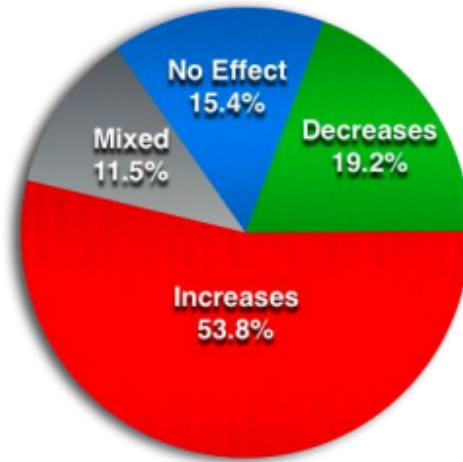
GVPedia's analysis of RTC studies in its database of academic studies also found that most articles finding RTC decreased crime were published pre-2005 and most recent studies have found RTC increases crime.

Studies by Result 1995-2005



6 studies showed RTC increases crime
15 studies showed RTC decreases crime
12 studies showed RTC has no effect on crime
No study showed RTC has mixed results

Studies by Result 2007-2018



14 studies showed RTC increases crime
5 studies showed RTC decreases crime
4 studies showed RTC has no effect on crime
3 studies showed RTC has mixed results

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John Lott, "UPDATE: Do Right-To-Carry Laws Reduce Violent Crime?," [Crime Prevention Research Center](#), Nov. 29, 2020

John Lott, "What A Balancing Test Will Show for Right-to-Carry Laws," [Maryland Law Review](#), 2012

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Devin Hughes, "GVPedia Concealed Carry Literature Review," [GVPedia](#), Feb. 27, 2019

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David Hemenway, "Book Reviews. Lott JR, Jr. The Bias Against Guns," [Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#), 2003

MYTH: Concealed handgun permit holders commit virtually no crimes

Fact: Concealed handgun permit holders commit crimes more frequently than permit revocation rates indicate

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott claims that right-to-carry laws can't increase violent crime rates because permit holders commit virtually no crimes.
- Lott provides some evidence that permit holders commit fewer crimes per capita than the general population. That evidence, however, is misleading because permit holders are required to pass a background check, thereby reducing--but not eliminating--permit holders who have a criminal history.
- Problems with Lott's analysis include the lack of public data on many fronts including permit holders' backgrounds, states that do not require a background check to conceal carry, improperly completed background checks on permits, and states that rely on an honor system for permit revocation.

Lott's Claim:

In his 2020 book *Gun Control Myths*, Lott claims "U.S. handgun permit holders are extremely law-abiding" and "Concealed handgun permit holders rarely get into any type of trouble with their concealed handguns." Citing the 2010 edition of his book *More Guns, Less Crime*, Lott says concealed handgun permits are revoked at "rates of thousandths or tens of thousandths of one percent." Lott estimates that "Out of every 100,000 permit holders, only a couple of them have had their permits revoked for a firearms-related violation. Most of these violations are trivial offenses."

In a 2017 report authored by Lott on concealed carry permit rates, Lott disputes a study by University of Stanford researchers John Donohue, Abhay Aneja, and Kyle Weber that concluded that RTC laws increase violent crime rates. Lott [argues](#) that "Since permit holders commit virtually no crimes, right-to-carry laws can't increase violent crime rates." Lott says that if only thousandths of one percent of permit holders commit violent crimes, "You can't get the increases in violent crime rates that a few of their estimates claim. To get their results, state police agencies would have to be missing around 99.4% to 99.83% of violent crimes committed by permit holders."

Lott further claims that police are more likely to have their permits revoked than concealed handgun permit holders. In Lott's book *Gun Control Myths*, he writes "Permit holders are convicted of firearms-related violations at about 1/6th of the rate that police officers are." In the 2017 [report](#), Lott says concealed carry permit holders are even more law-abiding than police: "Between October 1, 1987 and June 30, 2017, Florida revoked 11,189 concealed handgun permits for misdemeanors or felonies. This is an annual revocation rate of 10.4 permits per 100,000. In Texas in 2016 (the last year for which data is available), 148 permit holders were convicted of a felony or misdemeanor – a conviction rate of 12.3 per 100,000. Combining Florida and Texas data, we find that permit holders are convicted of misdemeanors and felonies at less than a sixth of the rate for police officers."

The Facts:

Comparing crime rates among permit holders to those of the general public and police officers is highly misleading in relation to whether concealed carry laws increase crime. Lott provides some evidence that permit holders commit fewer crimes per capita than the general population. That evidence, however, is misleading because permit holders are required to pass a background check, thereby reducing--but not eliminating--permit holders who have a criminal history.

A population of individuals who can pass a criminal background check is more law-abiding than a population that includes individuals who have a criminal history and therefore could not pass a background check.

The real debate is whether permit holders are more or less law-abiding than the rest of the population who could pass a background check, but don't obtain a permit. More data is needed to draw concrete conclusions. No accurate measure of criminality among permit holders exists and researchers have no data on the entire subset of the population who could pass a background check.

Lott cites revocation data from both Michigan and North Carolina to bolster his claims about permit holders being extremely law abiding. However, both states are known to have inaccurate revocation data. A 2011 report by MLive, a Michigan online newspaper, [analyzed revocation data](#) in Michigan and found that in two large counties, 77% and 79% of the convictions of permit holders were unreported, meaning many permit holders who should have had their permits revoked did not. Many counties responded with incomplete

reports, or none at all, making statewide revocation data very difficult in determining crime rates among permit holders. As MLive reports, frequently the boards overseeing permits aren't even notified when a permit holder is convicted.

A 2011 investigation by *The New York Times* examining concealed carry permit data in North Carolina [found](#) that "More than 2,400 permit holders were convicted of felonies or misdemeanors, excluding traffic-related crimes, over the five-year period." This includes nearly 900 permit holders convicted of drunk driving and more than 200 convicted of weapon-related crimes. In roughly half of the more than 200 felony convictions, the holder's permit was not revoked or suspended, including in cases of murder and kidnapping.

Lott's analysis of permit revocation data is fatally flawed. Lott's data suffers from incomplete data, missing data, lack of access to public data on permit holders, improperly completed background checks on permits, the failure of some states to require a background check on permit holder applicants, and states that rely on an honor system for permit revocation.

In addition to relying on unreliable data, Lott's choice to compare permit holders with police officers is not persuasive because law enforcement frequently encounters situations where the opportunity for criminal conduct by officers, such as the misuse of force and corruption, is a potential, whereas permit holders as a group will almost never face similar situations.

Sources:

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John Lott, "Concealed Carry Permit Holders Across the United States: 2017," [SSRN](#), July 24, 2017

Devin Hughes, "GVPedia Concealed Carry Literature Review," [GVPedia](#), Feb. 27, 2019

John Agar, "Ready, aim, misfire: Analysis finds mistakes, misunderstanding in gun reports," [MLive](#), April 3, 2019

MYTH: A concealed handgun permit holder has never shot the wrong person during an attack

Fact: GVPedia lists instances in which a concealed permit holder shot the wrong person

Summary:

- In his 2020 book, *Gun Control Myths*, researcher John Lott claims a concealed handgun permit holder has never shot the wrong person, such as a bystander.
- Lott repeats this claim in a January 2021 [opinion](#) piece in *Newsweek*.
- No reliable database exists of incidents cataloging concealed permit holders who shot unintended targets.
- The media does not consistently provide details regarding a shooter's concealed permit holder status., However, several instances of permit holders shooting the wrong person have been identified.
- During attempts to stop attacks, concealed carry permit holders have unintentionally shot bystanders. In addition, they have unintentionally shot family members, friends, and strangers.

Lott's Claim:

In his 2020 book *Gun Control Myths*, Lott disputes that concealed carry permit holders who attempt to stop an attack increase the confusion during the attack and can unintentionally shoot the wrong person.

In his 2020 book *Gun Control Myths*, Lott insists that concealed carry permit holders have never shot “the wrong person.” He cites the Tucson mass shooting in which six people were killed and thirteen were wounded by gunfire, including Congresswoman Gabby Giffords. Concealed carry holder Joe Zamudio was in the area of the shooting that tragic day, heard the gunshots, and ran to the scene. Unknown to him, unarmed civilians had already disarmed the shooter. Zamudio, however, came within seconds of shooting the innocent bystander. Zamudio said he was “very lucky” that he didn’t shoot the wrong person in the confusion.

As Lott addresses the issue, he writes, “So much of the gun control debate is about what hypothetically might go wrong. But let’s look at the actual reality. Below, I list instances of permit holders intervening in attacks from 2014 through early 2019. There were also many

such interventions prior to 2014, but not a single known case of a permit holder shooting the wrong person.”

Lott further argues that “if a permit holder were to shoot a bystander, it seems clear that such an event would get news coverage.”

In a January 2021 [opinion](#) piece in *Newsweek*, Lott writes, “Advocates of gun-free zones claim that permit holders will accidentally shoot bystanders, or that arriving police will shoot permit holders...[P]olice virtually always arrive well after the attack has ended, so there isn't confusion about who the target ought to be.”

The Facts:

Contrary to Lott’s claim, permit holders have unintentionally shot the wrong person. Because public mass shootings are rare events relative to other types of gun violence, it is extremely rare for a concealed permit holder to be present during a public mass shooting and choose to intervene. While there are incidents where a concealed carry holder has helped bring an end to an attack, there are also instances where the permit holder missed the target and shot a bystander. Please note that these lists are not comprehensive.

- On November 9, 2020, a concealed permit holder missed her intended targets and [shot her 21-month-old baby](#). The dispute began when a Detroit woman ate her neighbor’s delivered meal after it had been sitting untouched on the porch for half an hour. When the permit holder came to her porch to retrieve the meal she ordered, an argument broke out involving several people. The permit holder pulled out a gun and started shooting at neighbors standing in front of her car. She missed her intended targets and accidentally shot her 21-month-old baby in the hip. Capt. Ian Severy of Detroit Police said, “I don't know if I can adequately find the words for the feeling I get when anytime a child or an innocent person of any sort, is the victim of violence. It is disgusting, quite frankly.”
- On September 7, 2020, an argument broke out between two men during a [Labor Day party in Detroit](#). After party goers tried to separate them, both men allegedly pulled out guns and began shooting. One of the men, a 24-year-old concealed handgun permit holder, was fatally wounded after firing several shots. A 29-year-old woman at the party was also shot in the crossfire. At the time of the publication of

this post, authorities have not been able to determine which man shot the female bystander.

- On August 31, 2020, a 61-year-old man was bit in the leg by his neighbor's dog. The victim's friend, a concealed carry permit holder, fatally shot the dog and [unintentionally shot his friend](#) in his other leg.
- On June 16, 2020, two retired police officers working as security guards responded to a patient attacking a nurse at a [hospital in Munster, Illinois](#). After the patient was in a chokehold, one of the security officers, Benny Freeman, a former sniper on a SWAT team, fired two shots, fatally killing both the patient and the other security guard.
- On May 7, 2019, two teenagers opened fire at STEM School Highland Ranch in Colorado, killing one and injuring seven. An eighth student was unintentionally shot by an armed security guard with a concealed carry permit. The campus security guard said he fired two rounds after seeing a muzzle come around the corner, but the gun belonged to a sheriff's deputy. The school did not know the security guard was armed. John McDonald, head of security at Jeffco Public Schools, told the [Denver Post](#) that untrained armed individuals can make a bad situation worse and "There's no way for anybody in uniform to know who a good guy or a bad guy is" when they see a person with a gun.
- On September 26, 2015, a man witnessed a carjacking at a [Houston gas station](#). The witness fired at the carjackers, but unintentionally shot the victim of the carjacking. After picking up his shell casings, the shooter left the scene without waiting for the police to arrive.
- On May 17, 2012, two armed men attempted to rob a [Houston Family Dollar store](#) just before closing. Customer Kevin Simon, who police say had a concealed handgun license, drew his gun and fired at the robbers. The store's assistant manager was fatally shot and the two armed men fled in a customer's car.

GVPedia identified several instances of armed permit holders unintentionally shooting someone when an attack was not occurring:

- On December 12, 2020, a concealed carry permit holder dropped his gun at an Evansville [Cracker Barrel](#) restaurant. One round discharged when the handgun hit the ground, giving a female bystander minor injuries.
- On February 1, 2020, concealed handgun permit holder Antion Haywood was "very drunk" when he left [Gene's Supper Club](#) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Haywood fired his

gun through his car's sunroof. Although he wasn't targeting anyone, a bullet hit a pregnant mother of five in a party bus. The woman died, but her child survived after an emergency C-section.

- On June 4, 2014, James "Tony" McKenzie unintentionally and fatally shot himself while [driving his car in Meigs County, TN](#). He had a valid concealed handgun permit and his family said he always carried his gun with him.
- On December 15, 2013, 24-year-old permit holder Ryan Frederick was showing off his new handgun in [Colombia, TN](#) when he unintentionally fired a shot that traveled through the floor and killed 19-year-old James Tyler Wisdom.
- On February 12, 2012, concealed handgun permit holder Cornelius J. De Jong IV brought his handgun to a [party in Redmond, Washington](#). When someone objected to a handgun at a party where people were intoxicated, De Jong removed the magazine and fired the gun at a wall to demonstrate it was unloaded. There was a live round in the chamber which hit and killed a 20-year-old woman in the next room. De Jong, 21, was previously convicted of a DUI, underage public intoxication, and two incidents of a minor in possession of alcohol.
- On February 12, 2012, concealed permit holder Moises Zambrana showed his Ruger 9mm to Dustin Bueller at a [church in St. Petersburg, Florida](#). Zambrana removed the magazine but did not realize there was a round in the chamber. It fired, fatally shooting Bueller's girlfriend.

Between January 2015 and March 2018, at least [47 people in the U.S.](#) shot friends, family, or emergency responders after mistaking the victims for home intruders. For example, the investigation by [BuzzFeed News](#) and the Trace identified Alexis Bukrym who shot her roommate in the chest with a Ruger LCP .380 when she mistook him for a burglar. Police returned her gun a month after the shooting and she now keeps the gun a few steps away from her bed instead of under her pillow. Bukrym called her roommate's death a risk she must take to protect herself. "There's always a threat of somebody wanting to hurt you," she said. "I would take that chance every day."

Sources:

John Lott, *Gun Control Myths*, 2020

John Lott, "Don't Let Anti-Gun Activists Weaponize the Capitol Hill Riot," [Newsweek](#), January 20, 2021

Albert Samaha and Sean Campbell, "These Good Guys With Guns Accidentally Shot Their Friends And Family Members," [BuzzFeed News](#), Mar. 28, 2018

MYTH: Since 2014, police have unintentionally shot only one concealed carry permit holder during a public attack

Fact: Since 2016, law enforcement officers have wrongfully shot a concealed carry permit holder multiple times during public attacks

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott claims that since 2014, only one concealed handgun permit holder was fatally shot by a police officer during a public attack.
- No reliable database exists cataloging incidents involving concealed permit holders.
- The media does not consistently mention if a shooter or victim is a concealed permit holder.
- However, several instances of police wrongfully shooting permit holders have been identified.

Lott's Claim:

In his 2020 book *Gun Control Myths*, Lott claims, "Responding police officers also have never accidentally shot a permit holder who was legally carrying and had just intervened in one of these attacks."

Later he states: "There has been one case of a police officer fatally shooting a concealed handgun permit holder. The attack occurred at the Galleria Mall in Hoover, Alabama on Nov. 23, 2018." Lott explains that the permit holder was shot by police while running toward a victim with his gun drawn, but "was not involved in stopping the attack."

In a January 2021 [opinion](#) piece in *Newsweek*, Lott writes, "Advocates of gun-free zones claim that permit holders will accidentally shoot bystanders, or that arriving police will shoot permit holders. But in recent years, concealed carry permit holders have stopped dozens of what otherwise would have been mass public shootings in malls, churches, schools, universities and busy downtown areas. These cases virtually never get national news coverage. Not once have these permit holders ever shot a bystander. And police virtually always arrive well after the attack has ended, so there isn't confusion about who the target ought to be."

The Facts:

Since 2016, law enforcement officers have wrongfully shot a concealed carry permit holder multiple times during public attacks. These shootings nullify Lott's statements.

Examples include:

- On November 1, 2018, security guard Jemel Roberson stopped an active shooter inside of a [Chicago bar](#) and held the suspect on the ground at gunpoint. When law enforcement arrived, a white police officer fatally shot Roberson, a 26-year-old Black organist at a Chicago church. Police Chief Dan Delaney said, "Jemel Roberson was a brave man who was doing his best to end an active shooter situation at Manny's Blue Room." According to the [Chicago Tribune](#), law enforcement said Roberson had a valid firearm owner's identification card and was licensed by the state to work armed security.
- On June 29, 2018, Jason Washington, 45, attempted to break up a fight at an on-campus bar and restaurant at [Portland State University](#). Washington's gun fell out of his holster while breaking up the fight. When he reached to pick up the gun, two police officers fatally shot him nine times. The university paid a one million dollar settlement with Washington's family and mandated additional officer training.
- On June 14, 2019, Greenville County Deputy Kevin Azzara responded to an alarm call at a [home in Simpsonville, SC](#). Azzara approached the house and saw the homeowner and concealed weapons permit holder Dick Tench holding a firearm. The officer fired at Tench through the front door window, striking him with two bullets and grazing him with two more.
- The fatal shooting of Philando Castile is commonly cited as an example of the additional risks faced by Black permit holders. On July 7, 2016, two Minnesota police officers pulled over 32-year-old Black motorist [Philando Castile](#) with his partner and daughter in the car. Castile informed the officers that he had a firearm and was licensed to carry, but officer Jeronimo Yanez fired seven shots at Castile when he reached for his ID. Castile died at the scene.
- On December 4, 2020, Franklin County Sheriff's Deputy Jason Meade fatally shot Black concealed carry permit holder Casey Goodson Jr. in [Columbus, Ohio](#). Sheriff Meade was finishing a U.S. Marshals Fugitive Task Force operation that was targeting someone else when Meade said he saw a man with a gun. According to Meade, there was "a verbal exchange" and Meade fatally shot Goodson. Goodson's

family says Goodson was carrying sandwiches for his family into his home when Meade shot him in the back.

The dangers of permit holders carrying extends beyond police officers unintentionally shooting a person who was not actually a threat. The 2016 shooting of Dallas police officers is an important example of how the presence of civilians open carrying firearms can complicate the efforts of law enforcement to stop a mass shooter. On July 17, 2016, Micah Xavier Johnson fatally shot five police officers, injured nine additional officers, and wounded two civilians during a protest in Dallas, Texas. The attack ended when police attached a bomb to a bomb disposal robot. The bomb detonated, killing Johnson. According to Dallas Police Chief David Brown, the presence of approximately 30 people carrying AR-15-style rifles made identifying the gunman more difficult. “We’re trying as best we can as a law enforcement community to make it work so that citizens can express their 2nd Amendment rights,” Brown said. “But it’s increasingly challenging when people have AR-15s slung over their shoulder and they’re in a crowd,” he said. [“We don’t know who the good guy is versus the bad guy”](#) when everyone starts shooting.”

In April 2018, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) released a letter of opposition to the Concealed Carry Reciprocity Act, which would have made it easier for people to carry concealed weapons in the United States. The letter was signed by [473 law enforcement agencies from 39 states](#) who believed the right-to-carry law would “hamper law enforcement efforts to prevent gun violence.”

In a press release, then-Boston Police Chief William Evans said, “As law enforcement officers across the US, we oppose this dangerous threat to our officers and to public safety.” Atlanta Police Chief Erika Shields said, “Given the recent series of mass shootings, the last thing we need to do is make it easier for people to carry concealed weapons across state lines. This law makes no sense if our goal is to reduce deaths from gun violence.”

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Zak Koeske, "Midlothian police officer who fatally shot security guard Jemel Roberson placed on administrative leave, officials say," [Chicago Tribune](#), November 13, 2018

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John Lott, "Don't Let Anti-Gun Activists Weaponize the Capitol Hill Riot," [Newsweek](#), January 20, 2021

MYTH: Unintentional child shootings are mostly committed by adults with criminal records

Fact: Recent research has shown that Lott's research severely undercounts the extent to which children do unintentionally hurt themselves and other children by firing their parents' guns

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott claims that most unintentional child shooting deaths are the result of guns fired by adult males in their mid-to-late 20s who have criminal histories.
- Lott relied on (and continues to rely on) outdated Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data from 1999 to support this claim despite researchers and the CDC acknowledging that the underlying data was a significant underestimate.
- Recent research has shown that Lott's research severely undercounts the extent to which children do unintentionally hurt themselves and other children by firing their parents' guns.

Lott's Claim:

In a May 24, 2018 op-ed in *The Hill*, Lott [claims](#), "Relatively few accidental gunshots take place in law-abiding, normal homes; most accidental gunshots resulting in the deaths of minors are fired by adult males in their mid-to-late 20s who have criminal histories. Many are drug addicts or alcoholics. Gunlocks aren't designed to stop adults from firing their own guns." He makes the same claim in his 2016 book, *The War on Guns*, and again in his 2020 book, *Gun Control Myths*.

In 2014, Dr. John M. Leventhal, et al., published an article in the journal, [Pediatrics](#), that found, "[o]n average, 20 US children and adolescents were hospitalized each day in 2009 due to firearm injuries." The article received media attention from [ABC News](#), to which Lott [responded](#) on his website. Lott used a similar response in his 2019 congressional testimony. Lott [writes](#): "These are not little kids who accidentally hurt themselves by firing their parents' gun. Consider these facts:

1. 76% of these injured 'children' were 17, 18, or 19 years old.
2. 62% injuries were the result of criminal assaults.
3. The injuries are overwhelmingly concentrated in large, urban areas."

In a May 13, 2013 *National Review* article, Lott [claims](#), “about two-thirds of these accidental gun deaths involving young children are not shots fired by other little kids but rather by adult males with criminal backgrounds. In other words, unless you send your child to play at a criminal’s home, she is exceedingly unlikely to get shot.”

The Facts:

Contrary to Lott’s claim in his 2018 op-ed, unintentional child shootings are sadly not rare and most are not the result of adult males in their 20s with criminal histories accidentally firing their guns. According to the [Children’s Firearm Safety Alliance](#), 120 children under the age of 18 were killed and 175 injured from unintentional child shootings resulting from negligent storage in 2016. In 2017, 132 children were killed and 216 injured as a result of a child gaining access to an unsecured firearm.

Lott’s claim in his 2020 book that “these are not little kids who accidentally hurt themselves by firing their parents’ gun” is incorrect. Tragically, even toddlers aged three and younger [can pull](#) the trigger of a gun. Data from the Children’s Firearm Safety Alliance shows that from January 1, 2016 to May 26, 2018, 137 toddlers picked up loaded, unsecured guns and pulled the triggers, resulting in the deaths of 51 children and two adults, and injuring 74 children and nine adults.

An analysis of [National Violent Death Reporting System](#) data from 2003 to 2006 by the Harvard Injury Control Research Center found that two-thirds of fatal, unintentional shootings of children under the age of 14 were committed by other children. When self-inflicted unintentional deaths are included, the figure rises to 74%.

Lott’s Counter:

In response to an op-ed published in *The Hill* [criticizing](#) his original opinion piece, Lott [wrote](#) on his website, “Of the fifty-six accidental gun deaths involving children under ten in 1998 and the thirty-one in 1999, only eight and six respectively were shot by another child or themselves. The same statistic for 1997 was only five. — ‘The Bias Against Guns.’”

In *The Bias Against Guns*, Lott writes that 31 children under the age of ten in the US died from accidental gun deaths in 1999. “And few of those actually involved a child firing the

gun.” In another chapter of the book, Lott writes, “In 1999 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data showed that thirty-one children under age ten died from accidental gun deaths. In cases where the weapon involved could be identified, four of these deaths involved handguns. One suicide with a gun was reported in this age group. When all children under age fifteen are examined, the total number of accidental gun deaths was eighty-eight, sixteen of which involved handguns. Over half the guns were unidentified or classified as ‘other.’ Of children under the age of fifteen, 103 died from gun suicides.” Lott writes in a footnote to this passage, “There is an issue of whether deaths are properly classified as accidental, but this bias frequently appears to err on the side of classifying deaths as accidental.”

Rebuttal:

As recently as 2018, Lott continued to rely on outdated CDC data from 1999 to support his claim, despite researchers and the CDC admitting the estimate was a significant underestimate. Additional research has shown that Lott’s numbers severely undercount the extent of the problem of children accessing unsecured guns and accidentally shooting themselves or others. In addition to the Children’s Firearm Safety Alliance and National Violent Death Reporting System data presented earlier in this entry, a 2016 Associated Press and USA Today [report found](#) more than 1,000 deaths and injuries from unintentional shootings from Jan. 1, 2014, to June 30, 2016, 90 of whom were 3-year-olds. In sum, Lott severely undercounts the number of unintentional child shootings and misrepresents the nature of the problem by wrongly claiming that criminal adults usually pull the trigger.

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MYTH: Gangs are responsible for most U.S. homicides

Fact: A 2020 study by the CDC found that 9.7% of homicides in 2017 were gang-related

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott stated that the U.S. has a high homicide rate compared to other developed countries because of “drug gangs.”
- According to the [National Youth Gang Survey Analysis](#) by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Gang Center, and Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, most gun homicides are not related to gangs.
- A December 2020 [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#) by the CDC of 34 states, four California counties, and Washington, D.C., found that 9.7% of homicides in 2017 were gang-related.

Lott’s Claim:

In his 2020 book *Gun Control Myths*, Lott responds to a Vox.com [article](#) by German Lopez that argues “America is an outlier when it comes to gun deaths, but not overall crime.” Lopez cites research by UC Berkeley researchers Franklin Zimring and Gordon Hawkins as well as Duke University’s Jeffrey Swanson to support the claim that “The US appears to have more lethal violence — and that’s driven in large part by the prevalence of guns.”

In response to Lopez, Lott claims “The United States has a relatively low violent crime rate compared to other developed countries. But compared to these other countries, the United States does have a relatively high homicide rate. Vox doesn’t consider the most obvious explanation: that the US has a bad drug gang problem.”

In *Gun Control Myths*, Lott extends the “drug gang problem” to include children of all ages. Lott opines, “The vast majority of these “children” are actually young adults. These are not little kids who accidentally hurt themselves by firing their parents’ gun.” Lott continues:

“Consider these facts:

1. 76% of these injured “children” were 17, 18, or 19 years old.
2. 62% of injuries were the result of criminal assaults.
3. The injuries are overwhelmingly concentrated in large, urban areas.

All of these deaths are clearly tragic. But they are largely a result of gang violence, a problem that won't be solved by scaring law-abiding Americans into not owning guns."

Lott's same language also appears in his 2019 [testimony](#) before a US House of Representatives subcommittee hearing and in his 2016 book *The War on Guns*.

In a Feb. 3, 2020 op-ed published in TownHall.com, Lott [writes](#), "The overwhelming majority of non-adult murders involving [sic] drug gangs, and nearly all of the victims are teenagers. Drug dealers are the primary source of illegal guns."

In a Sep. 3, 2017 letter to the *Des Moines Register* in response to an [editorial](#) published by the paper, Lott [writes](#), "...your editorial ignores the relationship between gangs and gun violence. The Obama administration estimated that up to 80 percent of crime in communities across the U.S. was gang-related. But there isn't a lot of hope of stopping drug gangs from getting guns, no more than there is of ending the illegal drug trade... Unfortunately, too often gun control laws merely disarm the law-abiding. If you really want to put an end to drug gangs, you need to take away their profits. Possibly the only way to do that is to legalize drugs. There will be more drug use and accompanying problems, but there will be less gun violence."

In a Jan. 31, 2014 [post](#) on his website, Lott says that in order to prevent child shootings, parents shouldn't ask if neighbors have a gun before a play date. Instead, "What would make sense is asking them if they have a 17, 18, or 19 year old gang member in the house."

In his 1998 book *More Guns, Less Crime*, Lott writes, "With recent estimates that up to 80 percent of U.S. crime is gang related - and that, primarily drug gang related - it is likely to be as difficult to remove guns as drugs from these gangs."

The Facts:

Contrary to Lott's repeated claim that the U.S. has a relatively high homicide rate because of "drug gangs," most gun homicides are not related to gang activity. According to the [National Gang Center](#), the government agency responsible for cataloging gang violence, there was an average of fewer than 2,000 gang homicides annually from 2007 to 2012. During roughly the same time period (2007 to 2011), the [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#)

estimated an average of more than 15,500 homicides annually across the United States, indicating that gang-related homicides were approximately 13% total homicides annually. The [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#) finds the number of gang-related homicides to be even lower. In 2008, the government agency identified 960 homicides, accounting for 6% of all homicides that year.

According to the Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention ([OJJDP](#)), there was a 3% increase in the number of gangs between 2010 and 2011, but gang-related homicides decreased 8% during the same period. If gang violence was truly driving the homicide rate, gang membership and gun homicide rates would move in the same direction.

A December 2020 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](#)) [report](#) of 34 states, four California counties, and Washington, D.C., found that gang-related attacks were responsible for 11.4% of male homicides and 3.6% of female homicides in 2017, for 9.7% of overall homicides. The previous year, 7.4% of all homicides were gang-related.

A 2012 [CDC study](#) examining five cities with the largest gang problems found a total of 856 gang homicides compared to 2,077 non-gang homicides from 2003–2008. Even when examining cities with the largest gang problems, gang homicides only accounted for 29% of homicides. Contrary to Lott’s claim that the illegal drug trade is fueling US gun violence, the study also says “the proportion of gang homicides resulting from drug trade/use or with other crimes in progress was consistently low in the five cities, ranging from zero to 25 percent.”

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MYTH: U.S. women are disproportionately killed by guns due to sex work

Fact: A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report of 34 states, four California counties, and Washington, D.C., found 21 male and 28 female homicides relating to sex work in 2017, representing under 1% of all homicides that year

Summary:

- According to a 2016 study by Erin Grinshteyn of the University of San Francisco and David Hemenway of Harvard in the [American Journal of Medicine](#), of all the women in developed countries who were fatally shot in 2010, 90% were from the United States.
- A [2003 study](#) by Daniel Webster of Johns Hopkins and his colleagues found that intimate partner homicide increases fivefold with the presence of a firearm.
- An earlier [1992 study](#) by Arthur Kellerman and James Mercy concluded "[m]ore than twice as many women are killed with a gun used by their husbands or intimate acquaintances than are murdered by strangers using guns, knives, or any other means."
- Researcher John Lott contends the real risk factor behind disparity between the U.S. and other developed countries in female firearm homicides is "whether the attacker has a violent criminal record, not whether a gun is owned in the home."
- Lott further argues regarding intimate partner homicide: "what isn't explained here is that intimate acquaintances include crime involving prostitutes and johns or pimps" and "[b]eing a prostitute is simply a more dangerous occupation than most women engage in, and thus women can reduce their risks by not engaging in this type of work."
- In 2019, the FBI identified only three women who were killed in homicides related to prostitution and commercialized vice. In 2014, the year Lott made the claim, nine females were victims of sex work-related homicides.
- A December 2020 [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#) by the CDC of 34 states, four California counties, and Washington, D.C., found 21 male and 28 female homicides relating to sex work in 2017, representing under 1% of all homicides that year.

Lott's Claim:

In a May 29, 2014 column in the *National Review*, Lott attacked a tweet by Shannon Watts of

Moms Demand Action. Watt's [tweet](#) read, "84% of female firearm homicides in 25 countries are in US." Lott [replied](#), "It is hard to see how Moms Demand Action could even make this comparison across all countries. Data from the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) allows you to break down murders either by the sex of the victim or by whether firearms are used, but it doesn't allow users to identify both these categories simultaneously."

Media Matters, a media watchdog organization, posted a response to Lott's article the same day, [explaining](#) "the study didn't use UNODC [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime] data, but instead used data gathered by the World Health Organization." Media Matters also quoted from a [study](#) in the *Journal of Trauma* which concluded "[m]ore than twice as many women are killed with a gun used by their husbands or intimate acquaintances than are murdered by strangers using guns, knives, or any other means."

Lott replied the same day in a blog post on his website. In response to the *Journal of Trauma* conclusion, Lott [writes](#):

"What isn't explained here is that intimate acquaintances include crime involving prostitutes and johns or pimps. On the more general point, the real risk factor is whether the attacker has a violent criminal record, not whether a gun is owned in the home."

"UPDATE: Possibly some context is needed here. One of the points of Moms Demand Action's claim is to make people fearful of guns in the home. The response that I made is that many of these deaths are not involving events between what most people are thinking about regarding 'their husbands or intimate acquaintances.' Being a prostitute is simply a more dangerous occupation than most women engage in, and thus women can reduce their risks by not engaging in this type of work."

The Facts:

Contrary to Lott's claim, sex work-related homicides are relatively rare in the U.S. In 2014, the [FBI identified](#) a total of 19 homicides related to sex work and commercialized vice out of 11,961 total homicides. Ten of the victims were male, and nine were female. Six of the 19 homicides were committed with a firearm and the relationship between the perpetrator

and victim was classified as “acquaintances” in seven cases, “strangers” in six cases, and the relationship was unknown in six cases.

The [most recent](#) data available is from the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reporting published in 2019. The FBI identified only 12 homicides related to sex work and commercialized vice in 2019. Seven victims were killed with firearms and only three of the 12 victims were female. One victim was the killer’s wife, four victims were acquaintances, three were strangers, and four were unknown.

It is important to note that while the FBI data is incomplete, the missing data is too small to make Lott’s claim possible. According to the CDC, 2,317 women were the victims of firearm homicides in 2018. In 2014, 1,722 women were firearm homicide victims.

A December 2020 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](#)) report of 34 states, four California counties, and Washington, D.C., found 21 male and 28 female homicides relating to sex work in 2017, representing under 1% of all homicides that year.

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UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR: John Lott's missing survey on defensive gun use

Fact: Jon Wiener, a historian at the University of California, Irvine, concluded his analysis of Lott with "The conclusion seemed obvious: Lott had never done the national survey. He was lying."

Summary:

- Since 1996, John Lott has claimed that surveys indicate the "vast majority" of defensive gun uses (DGUs) consist of brandishing, but not firing, a gun.
- Beginning in February of 1997, Lott began to specifically claim that 98% of DGUs consist of brandishing, but not firing a gun.
- Lott consistently cited Gary Kleck, the Los Angeles Times, and Gallup for this 98% figure. However, after he was [notified](#) that his citation was inaccurate by sociologist Otis Dudley Duncan in 1999, Lott began attributing the 98% figure to a survey he claims he conducted in the Spring of 1997.
- Lott said he conducted the survey in Spring 1997 yet referenced the statistic from his alleged survey on February 6, 1997, months before he alleges he completed the survey.
- Lott has been unable to provide any substantive evidence that he conducted the 1997 survey.
- Lott claims he conducted a new survey in 2002 to "replicate" the 98% finding, but there is evidence that Lott has misrepresented those results as well.
- David Hemenway, Ph.D., Professor of Health Policy and Director of the Harvard Injury Control Research Center said of Lott's survey, "For readers to accept the results requires complete faith in Lott's integrity, that he will always conduct careful and competent research. Lott does not merit such faith."
- Jon Wiener, a historian at the University of California, Irvine, concluded his analysis of Lott with "The conclusion seemed obvious: Lott had never done the national survey. He was lying."

Lott's Claim:

In a 1996 [article](#) in the journal *Agenda*, Lott said, "...polls of American citizens undertaken by organizations like the Los Angeles Times and Gallup showing that Americans defend themselves with guns between 764,000 and 3.6 million times each year, with the vast majority of cases simply involving people brandishing a gun to prevent attack." The same

sentence appears in a 1997 symposium [paper](#) written by Lott in which he cites research by Gary Kleck and Marc Gertz.

Since 1997, John Lott has consistently claimed that 98% of defensive gun uses require only brandishing the gun, not firing it. During [testimony](#) to a Nebraska legislative committee in February 1997, Lott repeated the claim and added that: "There are surveys that have been done by the Los Angeles Times, Gallup, Roper, Peter Hart, about 15 national survey organizations in total that range from anything from 760,000 times a year to 3.6 million times a year people use guns defensively. About 98 percent of those simply involve people brandishing a gun and not using them."

In the 1998 edition of his book, *More Guns, Less Crime*, Lott attributes the 98% claim to "national surveys." Lott writes, "If national surveys are correct, 98 percent of the time that people use guns defensively, they merely have to brandish a weapon to break off an attack." Lott referred to this statistic more than four dozen times in publicly available sources since 1997.

The Facts:

Lott attributes the 98% statistic to fifteen national survey organizations including the Los Angeles Times and Gallup, but none of the surveys asked about brandishing a gun. Otis Dudley Duncan, a sociologist, [explains](#), "Lott repeatedly made erroneous statements about the findings of other researchers. None of the national surveys that he cited by name actually had any figure at all for merely brandishing or firing. One of them, the Roper survey (which was mentioned in the Feb. 6, 1997, Nebraska testimony) never even did any survey on defensive gun use. Of the polls that did collect data on firing, none of them obtained a figure anywhere near Lott's 2 percent. So everything he has said about surveys on this topic done by others is utterly, totally false. There is no room even for reasonable doubt."

The original source of the 98% statistic probably comes from Gary Kleck. In 1988, Kleck [wrote](#): "over 98 percent ... of the one million estimated defensive gun uses... involved neither killings nor woundings but rather warning shots fired or guns pointed or referred to." It's important to note that Kleck's 98% claim includes firing warning shots and instances when the person fires and misses, not just instances where the firearm is only brandished.

Gun rights supporters who cite Kleck's research frequently omit that the claim included warning shots and missed shots.

Between 1997 and 2000, Lott is one of the writers who appears to omit the important information that Kleck's research includes warning and missed shots, not simple brandishing. Lott repeatedly attributes to Kleck's research the claim that 98% of DGUs involve only brandishing firearms. In addition to citing Kleck in the previously mentioned 1997 symposium paper, Lott [wrote](#) in a February 2000 article, "Kleck's study of defensive gun uses found that ninety-eight percent of the time simply brandishing the weapon is sufficient to stop an attack." In March 2003, this sentence was deleted after Duncan and other scholars pointed out Lott's error.

Lott's Counter:

After Lott was criticized by fellow researchers, he claimed the 98% finding came from his own study rather than from Kleck and other national surveys. In the second edition of *More Guns Less Crimes* released in 2000, Lott changed this attribution from "national surveys" to "a national survey that I conducted." In a 2000 article written for *The Criminologist*, Lott [elaborates](#) on his new position, explaining that the 98% figure derives from a study he conducted in the first three months of 1997, surveying a representative sample of 2,424 people.

To support this claim, in an email written to Professor James Lingdren, a law professor at Northwestern University, Lott [explains](#): "I am willing to bet that I don't start mentioning this [98%] figure until the spring of 1997. If I use it before I said that I did the survey, I will say that they nailed me. But if I only started using it about the time that I said that I did the survey, I think that it would be strong evidence the other way."

Rebuttal:

Scholar Otis Dudley Duncan accepted Lott's challenge and [discovered](#) a reference to the 98% statistic on February 6th, 1997, which was months before Lott claims to have completed the survey. The evidence overwhelmingly suggests Lott did not conduct the survey and has been repeating data he fabricated.

In a [message](#) to Lingren, Lott argued that “The overwhelming majority of the survey work was done at the beginning of the period over which the survey was done. It has obviously been a while, but my recollection is that the small number of people surveyed after the first four or five weeks (mainly January 1997) did not include any more defensive gun uses.”

Lindgren then [explains](#) why Lott’s defense is dubious: “While again this story is certainly possible, Lott himself gave spring 1997 as the time before which he should not have been discussing the 98% figure. Additional matters bear mentioning. It hardly matters whether all of the defensive gun uses were found in the first 4-5 weeks of the study, since Lott could not have known that at the time he spoke about the results unless data collection were complete. If data collection were partial, the precise percentage of defensive gun uses would have been higher with partial data. Collecting so much data in 4-5 weeks would have been unusual for unpaid volunteers who were full-time undergraduate students at the University of Chicago at the time, unless there were a very large number of volunteers. As I discuss below in the section on technical problems with the study, Lott’s numbers suggest that only ½ or 1/8th or 5/8ths of a respondent reported certain kinds of defensive uses. The partial respondents necessary to support Lott’s percentages would be most likely to result from some extreme demographic weights being applied after the data collection were complete and the results were compared with the characteristics of the adult population. If the study were not complete, it would be very unlikely that someone would have weighted the results against the general population before knowing how skewed his sample was. Such weighting is not easy and would have been a colossal waste of time before data collection were complete, since they would need to be redone at the end of data collection. Last, of course, Lott does not mention that he is reporting partial data in his February 6, 1997 testimony.”

When pressed for evidence of the survey, Lott has [claimed](#) all of the following:

- His hard drive crashed in June of 1997, erasing all evidence of the survey.
- He paid for the survey from his private funds but has failed to provide receipts. Therefore, no expense information is available to substantiate the fact that any survey was ever administered
- Employee records do not exist because the survey was completed by unpaid, full-time undergraduates at the University of Chicago in their junior and senior years.

- Telephone records do not exist because Lott instructed the students to use their own telephones. He subsequently reimbursed the students out of his own funds.
- He does not remember the names, contact details, or faces of a single student volunteer. Therefore, students cannot be contacted to corroborate their involvement in the survey's administration.
- He does not remember the questions asked on the survey.
- He had no discussions with anybody about sampling design.
- He did not retain any of the tally sheets because they were lost in an office move in 1997.

After investigating the controversy, Lingdren wrote in a [report](#) that “all evidence of a study with 2,400 respondents does not just disappear when a computer crashes.” Lindgren explains that to lose every conceivable form of hard evidence—phone records, funding, tally sheets, potential communication with consultants, records of employees—is essentially impossible:

“Having done one large survey (about half the size of John Lott’s) and several smaller surveys, I can attest that it is an enormous undertaking. Typically, there is funding, employees who did the survey, financial records on the employees, financial records on the mailing or telephoning, the survey instrument, completed surveys or tally sheets, a list of everyone in the sample, records on who responded and who declined to participate, and so on. While all of these things might not be preserved in every study, some of them would almost always be retained or recoverable.”

Lingdren pressed Lott further, asking him how he drew the sample for the survey. Lott explained that he used a CD-ROM, but that he can’t remember where the CD is or how he obtained it. Lingdren suggested he email all the students at the University of Chicago from 1997 to 1998. Lott resisted, however, saying that he had “serious questions about how complete the University’s alumni records are.”

Lott’s response to his critics has been to assemble [anecdotal claims](#) from various tangentially related colleagues. Duncan and Lambert investigated Lott’s evidence and discovered written statements that don’t provide proof of Lott’s claims.

For example, one of Lott's colleagues claimed that, "John told me that he had conducted a survey in 1997." Notice, however, this is very different from "John told me in 1997 that he was conducting a survey."

Lott did, however, find David M. Gross who claims to have been interviewed in 1997 as part of the survey. Mr. Gross is a former board member of the National Rifle Association and founding director of the Minnesota Gun Owners Civil Rights Association. Jon Wiener, writing in his 2004 book, *Historians in Trouble: Plagiarism, Fraud, and Politics in the Ivory Tower*, observed: "It seems unlikely, to put it charitably, that [David Gross] would turn up in a random sample of a few thousand people out of the 300 million Americans."

Lott has also [claimed](#) under penalty of perjury in *Miller v Becerra* that he sent the lost survey data to three researchers: Dan Black, Daniel Nagin, and Jens Ludwig. He further states that these researchers refused to send his data back to him after the computer crash. All three researchers deny under oath that any such interaction occurred.

Lott also went to great lengths to remind readers that the statistic is a small portion of his book: "The reference to the original survey involves one number in one sentence in my book," and "there have been many claims that I didn't conduct a survey in 1997 that was reported in one sentence on page 3 of my book, *More Guns, Less Crime*."

One wonders why someone who ostensibly went through a herculean effort to conduct a huge survey with his own money in three months' time would then marginalize his own work by insisting that it's only "one number in one sentence" in one book. Donald Kennedy, the late editor-in-chief of *Science* magazine, noted that Lott's many excuses "does not restore life to the data—which, 'far from being one number in one sentence', were at the center of controversy between Lott and his critics."

Lott's Counter:

According to Lott, he undertook another survey in the fall of 2002 with the goal of validating his original 98% DGU claim.

In his 2003 book, *The Bias Against Guns*, Lott discusses the new survey, writing: "...the survey I conducted during the fall of 2002 indicates that simply brandishing a gun stops crime 95%

of the time, and other surveys have also found high rates.” He claims that 1,015 people were interviewed, but Lott does not report the full survey results in the book.

In the appendix, Lott writes, “Overall the survey results here are similar to the one I conducted primarily during January 1997 which identified 2.1 million defensive gun uses, and that in 98 percent of them, the gun was simply brandished.”

Rebuttal:

Many studies of DGU have been published over the past 30 years. None substantiated Lott’s finding that 98% of DGUs only involve brandishing a gun. The majority of similar surveys found that rate to be [typically](#) in the 60-80% range. In addition, online reports of Lott’s November 2002 study suggest that his own study finds a much lower brandishing rate. In a critical review of Lott’s *Bias Against Guns*, Harvard Professor David Hemenway [writes](#), “Exactly 1,015 people were interviewed (p. 259). But unfortunately Lott’s book abruptly ends before he gives the survey results. Internet reports say that 7 of his 1,015 respondents claimed a self-defense gun use (13 uses), and in one of these the respondent shot his gun. This is not 98% or 95%.”

Most importantly, “his survey is not nearly large enough to provide precise estimates of the percentage of self-defense gun users who merely brandish the firearm.” Hemenway continues, “In his analyses, Lott virtually always uses complicated econometrics. For readers to accept the results requires complete faith in Lott’s integrity, that he will always conduct careful and competent research. Lott does not merit such faith.”

Lott’s highly questionable loss of all 1997 survey information, his inability to provide credible answers to his critics, and his heavy reliance on complicated econometrics earned him a spot in Jon Wiener’s book, *A Human Enterprise: Controversies in the Social Sciences*, under the header: “Outright Lies.” Wiener, a historian at the University of California, Irvine, concluded his analysis of Lott with “The conclusion seemed obvious: Lott had never done the national survey. He was lying.”

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Flawed Research: John Lott's complex and erroneous defense of Plassmann and Whitley's 2003 Stanford Law Review article

Facts: In 2003, researchers Ian Ayers and John Donohue discovered errors in a paper originally co-authored by John Lott. The corrected errors rejected Lott's theory that right-to-carry laws reduce crime.

Summary:

- On April 16, 2003, Yale researcher Ian Ayers and Stanford researcher John Donohue [published](#) a critique in the *Stanford Law Review* of researcher John Lott's work in an article, "Shooting Down the 'More Guns, Less Crime' Hypothesis." This was the first installment of a four-paper series debating the impact of right-to-carry laws.
- Analyzing new data released after Lott's initial work in *More Guns, Less Crime*, Donohue and Ayres uncovered that right-to-carry laws do not decrease crime as Lott's initial theory claimed. Donohue and Ayers stated in their paper, "No longer can any plausible case be made on statistical grounds that shall-issue laws are likely to reduce crime for all or even most states" and suggested such laws might increase violent crime.
- Lott was invited to include a response in the same issue of the *Stanford Law Review*, Lott co-authored a response with economists Florenz Plassmann and John Whitley, but despite being the lead author, Lott eventually removed his name from the paper due to a single word in a 120 page paper, according to the editor of the journal (that word has not been publicly disclosed).
- The response, published under Plassmann and Whitley's names only, introduced new data in an attempt to support the initial claim (RTC laws reduce crime).
- Upon analyzing Plassmann and Whitley's new data, Ayers and Donohue found errors that, in fact, rejected the claim that more guns equals less crime.
- While Plassmann admitted that Ayres and Donohue had correctly identified a substantial error in the paper, Lott continued to deny that the error caused any results to change, and publicly provided a data table to support his claim.
- Lott's table, however, still contained substantial data errors.
- Lott quietly made a series of "corrections" to the original data table and backdated the changes, but even after the corrections the table still contained errors.

Flawed Research:

On April 16, 2003, the *Stanford Law Review* [published](#) “Shooting Down the ‘More Guns, Less Crime’ Hypothesis” by researchers Ian Ayres and John Donohue. John Lott, along with researchers Florenz Plassmann and John Whitley, wrote a [reply](#) to Ayres and Donohue in an attempt to confirm the “more guns, less crime” hypothesis.

After examining Lott’s reply, Ayres and Donohue discovered numerous [coding errors](#) (mislabeling data) and empty spreadsheet cells. When these errors were corrected by Ayres and Donohue, Lott’s own model showed that right-to-carry (RTC) laws did not reduce crime and even increased some categories of crime. In a September 2003 email exchange with Tim Lambert, a computer scientist at the University of South Wales, Plassmann [admitted](#) that correcting the coding errors changed the paper’s conclusions.

Immediately before publication, Lott removed his name from the final paper, citing disagreements with the editor over a [single word](#) in the 120 page paper. Ben Horwich, President of the *Stanford Law Review*, [explained](#), “In the end, I had consented to everything that Lott wanted, save one word. He decided to withdraw his name from the paper.”

The *Stanford Law Review* series sparked a debate over whether coding errors found by Ayres and Donohue in Plassmann and Whitley’s response changed the conclusion that RTC laws are beneficial. After correcting Lott’s coding errors, Ayres and Donohue presented a data table which clearly showed that the corrections significantly change the results.

In response, Lott posted a “corrected” table on his website. This “corrected” table, however, showed the same values that Donohue and Ayers had. In other words, the coding errors were removed but Lott still claimed the correctly coded data showed statistically significant drops in rape, murder, and robbery. As Chris Mooney explained in [Mother Jones](#), Lott “omitted a key calculation regarding statistical significance used in the Plassman-Whitley paper.” To sway the results in his favor, Lott [removed](#) the clustering to make the results look statistically significant once again.

Mooney confronted Lott about this change during two [telephone interviews](#) and several email exchanges. Lott replied with a series of contradictory claims throughout a prolonged email discussion with Mooney. Eventually, Lott refused to admit any error on his part and

instead had his [webmaster](#) try to take the entire blame. Even months after the incident, [neither](#) Mooney nor Lambert received an adequate explanation of what actually transpired.

Lott's Counter:

On June 23, 2015, John Lott posted the following counter [on his website](#) to the questions by Ayers, Donohue, Mooney and Lambert which were compiled in an Armed With Reason article by Evan DeFilippis and Devin Hughes. Lott posted, "The reply to Ayres and Donohue in the law review was by [Florenz Plassmann and John Whitley](#). I had helped them out and Whitley notes 'We thank John Lott for his support, comments and discussion.' There were minor data errors in the additional years that they added from 1997 to 2000, but those errors didn't alter their main results that dealt with count data. They had accidentally left 180 cell [sic] blank out of some 7 million cells. Donohue has himself made much [more serious data errors](#) in his own work on this issue. For example, he repeats the data for one county in Alaska 73 times, says that Kansas' right to carry law was passed in 1996 and not 2006, and made other errors. I did co-author a corrected version of the Plassmann and Whitley paper that fixed the data errors and is [available here](#). But DeFilippis and Hughes can't even get it straight what paper I co-authored."

Rebuttal:

In his counter, Lott attempts to downplay his role in the initial paper despite [the original draft](#) listing his name first and statements made by the *Stanford Law Review* editor indicating he was an extensive part of the project. It is a well established fact that Lott was the lead author on the paper but then removed his name during the editing process.

Lott also claims that the data errors were minor because they did not alter the main results of the study. The errors in Plassmann and Whitley's paper that Lott initially co-authored did cause the results of their main regression to significantly change. Lott initially denied the errors in Plassmann and Whitley's paper but eventually did. Even then, Lott tried to downplay their importance and obfuscate their effect in a [series of "corrections."](#)

The "corrected version" Lott currently links to on his website is not corrected. Even after multiple iterations, Lott's "corrected version" still contains data errors. Instead of correcting mistakes, this version only made the paper less rigorous. As Ayres and Donohue concluded in their [critique of Lott](#) published in *Stanford Law Review*:

"In the wake of some of the criticisms that we have leveled against the Lott and Mustard thesis, John Lott appeared before a National Academy of Sciences panel examining the plausibility of the more guns, less crime thesis and presented them with a series of figures showing year-by-year estimates that appeared to show sharp and immediate declines in crime with adoption of concealed-carry laws. David Mustard even included these graphs in his initial comment on the Donohue paper in the Brookings book that PW [Plassmann and Whitley] refer to repeatedly in their current response. But Donohue privately showed Mustard as well as the Brookings editors that the graphs were the product of coding errors in creating the year-by-year dummies, and in the end Mustard conceded and withdrew them from his comment on Donohue. Now PW respond to our paper with an array of regressions that purport to support their thesis, but again are utterly flawed by similar coding errors. We previously made no mention of the initial National Academy of Sciences/Brookings comment error, since we know how easy it is to make mistakes in doing this work. But for the second time Lott and coauthors have put into the public domain flawed regression results that happen to support their thesis, even though their results disappear when corrected. Claiming we misread our results in the face of such obvious evidence to the contrary and repeatedly bringing erroneous data into the public debate starts suggesting a pattern of behavior that is unlikely to engender support for the Lott and Mustard hypothesis. We feel confident concluding that we have indeed shot down the more guns, less crime hypothesis. Perhaps PW can now assist in laying it to rest."

Sources:

John Lott, Florenz Plassmann, and John Whitley, "Confirming More Guns, Less Crime," [SSRN](#), January 24, 2003

Florenz Plassmann, and John Whitley, "Confirming 'More Guns, Less Crime,'" [SSRN](#), April 6, 2003

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Evan DeFilippis and Devin Hughes, "John Lott and the War on Truth: A Response to Lott's Continued Lies," [ArmedWithReason](#), December 1, 2015

Flawed Research: Lott's board member Carlisle Moody misreads his own analysis

Fact: Moody et al. fail to report the significant finding which dramatically alters their conclusion.

Summary:

- A 2011 study by Stanford Law School professor and economist John Donohue and his colleagues attempted to replicate the results of a National Research Council (NRC) review on the effects on crime of right-to-carry (RTC) laws. Researcher John Lott provided NRC the dataset upon which the study was based.
- Donohue et al. found flaws in the NRC dataset provided by Lott, and concluded that the most significant effect of concealed carry laws is an increase in aggravated assault.
- In an attempt to refute Donohue's findings, Carlisle Moody, a board member of Lott's Crime Prevention Research Center, co-authored a paper that claims RTC laws significantly reduce murder, and have no clear effect on aggravated assaults.
- Moody's results, however, support Donohue's findings that RTC laws increase aggravated assaults. This stemmed from Moody et al. misreading their own data table.
- Lott defends Moody from accusations that he misread his own analysis, but Lott fails to address the main points of criticism.

Flawed Research:

In February 2014, Carlisle Moody, a board member of Lott's Crime Prevention Research Center, and three co-authors [released](#) "The Impact of Right-to-Carry Laws on Crime: An Exercise in Replication." The paper was in response to a 2011 study by John Donohue and his colleagues that attempted to replicate the results of a National Research Council (NRC) review on the effects of RTC laws on crime. Donohue's study [concluded](#) that there were flaws in the dataset used by the NRC, which was provided by Lott. Rather than reducing murders, as the NRC study found, Donohue's paper found that the most significant effect of concealed carry laws is an increase in aggravated assault.

Moody's paper states "Once corrected for omitted variables, the most robust result, confirmed using both county and state data, is that RTC laws significantly reduce murder. There is no robust, consistent evidence that RTC laws have any significant effect on other violent crimes, including assault."

However, Moody and his co-authors misread their own analysis.

As Table 3 on page 7 of Moody's paper (pictured below) demonstrates, the increase in aggravated assault for county level data is statistically significant, yet is not bolded by the authors like the other statistically significant findings. In statistics, a result is usually considered significant if there is a less than 5% chance that the result is due to random chance, meaning it has a "t-statistic" greater than 1.96. A significant result means that the authors of a study can put a higher degree of confidence in their finding. As the table below shows, the "stat" for the "post-law trend" for "Assault" (highlighted with a red box) has t-statistics of 2.8 and 2.25 for the general and specific model respectively. Further, the result itself is a positive number, indicating an increase in assault.

Table 3 reports the results of the same simple modeling exercise for murder and assault. The general assault equation has the same control variables as the models reported in Table 2.

Table 3. Alternative models for murder and assault, county data

	Murder				Assault			
	General Model		Specific Model		General Model		Specific Model	
	Coeff	Stat	Coeff	Stat	Coeff	Stat	Coeff	Stat
RTC dummy	-0.0213	1.40	-0.0218	1.46	0.0164	0.47	0.0224	0.87
post-law trend	-0.0220	7.36	-0.0216	8.37	0.0153	2.80	0.0128	2.25
yt-1	0.0691	3.14	0.0692	3.14	0.5990	7.16	0.5991	7.17
Ratrob	0.0009	2.81	0.0009	2.82				
Rataga	0.0011	5.53	0.0011	5.57				
prison_1	-0.0004	-1.94	-0.0004	-2.05	0.0000	0.20		
lpolicerate2	-0.0003	-0.43			0.0008	0.77		
Rpcpi	-0.0056	-2.66	-0.0056	-2.65	-0.0022	-1.14	-0.0023	-1.19
Rpcui	0.0001	0.85			0.0000	-0.03		
Rpcim	0.0000	-0.30			0.0000	0.59		
Rpcrpo	-0.0013	-0.25			0.0001	0.02		
Unemp	-0.0147	-1.53	-0.0149	-1.63	0.0006	0.08		
Povrate	-0.0052	-1.10	-0.0053	-1.16	0.0091	1.17	0.0096	1.15
Density	0.0183	1.48	0.0183	1.48	-0.0165	-4.26	-0.0164	-4.39
Test		P-value		P-value		P-value		P-value
demographics		0.0000		0.0000		0.0000		0.0000
state trends		0.0000		0.0000		0.0000		0.0000
equal(dummies)		0.0000		0.0000		0.0000		0.0000
equal(trends)		0.0000		0.0000		0.0000		0.0000
ADZ spec		0.0000		0.0000		0.0000		0.0000
PET				0.8415				0.9370

Notes: (1) See notes to Table 2 above; (2) Ratrob and rataga are robbery and assault rates.

³ As t goes to infinity the crime rate goes to positive infinity if the coefficient on the trend is positive or zero if the coefficient is negative.

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Nowhere in the Moody paper does it explain why significant t-stats are un-bolded, and it remains undiscussed in the conclusion despite the fact that it directly undermines the thrust of their entire paper. The paper actually supports Donohue's finding that RTC laws significantly increase aggravated assaults.

Had Moody and his co-authors reported their own results correctly, they would have been left with the puzzling conundrum of concealed carry laws both reducing murder and

increasing aggravated assaults. This finding contradicts well-established criminological facts and suggests the paper relies on deeply flawed statistical modeling choices. It's worth noting that the paper states, "The authors thank The Crime Prevention Research Center for its support."

Lott's Counter:

In an August 2016 post on his website, Lott [counters](#) that Moody et al. did not misinterpret their own results as claimed by Evan DeFilippis and Devin Hughes in a ThinkProgress [article](#). Lott writes, "DeFilippis and Hughes seem to accuse a lot of people of deliberately deceiving others. But DeFilippis and Hughes don't seem to understand what is meant by 'robust results, confirmed using both county and state data.' MMZA weren't claiming that there wasn't a single result showing a significant effect for aggravated assaults. What they were saying is that the results weren't consistent across different estimates."

Rebuttal:

Lott's counter deflects from the criticism and does not address the claim that Moody et al ignored a statistically significant finding that undermines their argument that more guns means less crime. Moody's paper highlights significant results, which is a finding with a t-statistic over two. Table 3 clearly shows a statistically significant finding that right-to-carry laws are associated with more aggravated assaults. The authors fail to report the significant finding which dramatically alters their conclusion. Lott's counter does not address these basic points.

Sources:

Carlisle Moody, Thomas Marvell, Paul Zimmerman, and Fasil Alemante, "The Impact of Right-to-Carry Laws on Crime: An Exercise in Replication," [Review of Economics & Finance](#), February 2014

Abhay Aneja, John Donohue, and Alexandria Zhang, "The Impact of Right-to-Carry Laws and the NRC Report: Lessons for the Empirical Evaluation of Law and Policy," [American Law and Economics Review](#), Fall 2011

Evan DeFilippis and Devin Hughes, "The GOP's favorite gun 'academic' is a fraud," [ThinkProgress](#), August 12, 2016

John Lott, "Response To Evan DeFilippis And Devin Hughes' Newest Claims At Think Progress," [Crime Prevention Research Center](#), August 31, 2016

MYTH: Lott's right-to-carry study was published in Econ Journal Watch

Fact: The Econ Journal Watch editor said the paper was considered for publication but rejected. Lott's right-to-carry study was not published in Econ Journal Watch.

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott claimed on his website that his 2015 study on right-to-carry laws was published in the peer-reviewed *Econ Journal Watch*.
- The paper was never published in *Econ Journal Watch*. The journal's editor said the paper was considered for publication but was rejected.
- After a ThinkProgress article pointed out this discrepancy, Lott edited his website and falsely claimed he had originally said the paper was "forthcoming."

Lott's Claim:

On September 13, 2015, Lott's website announced that a study he authored on right-to-carry laws had been published in the peer-reviewed journal, *Econ Journal Watch*. The [headline](#) stated in all caps, "CPRC Has New Refereed Publication in Econ Journal Watch: Explaining a Bias in Recent Studies on Right-to-Carry Laws." A downloadable copy of the paper, which the website article linked to, also said it was [published](#) in the journal.

The Facts:

The paper was not published in *Econ Journal Watch*. An August 2016 article in ThinkProgress [explains](#) that Lott's paper had been considered for publication, but was rejected. Eleven months after the rejection, the post on Lott's website and the downloadable paper on Social Science Research Network (SSRN) had not been corrected.

Lott's Counter:

In an August 31, 2016 post on his website, Lott [replied](#), "Econ Journal Watch originally accepted the paper, but at the last moment in September 2015, the month that the paper was supposed to appear in the online publication, additional work was requested requiring additional work. After that disagreements arose between the editor and myself that spread out over 5 months, and the paper wasn't published. I forgot to go back and remove the

note that the paper was forthcoming. For those interested in seeing whether I needed one more line on my Vita, here is a copy of it.”

During a September 18, 2019 hearing on gun violence, US Senator Martin Heinrich of New Mexico asked Lott about the discrepancy between his claim and statements by the editor of Econ Journal Watch who said Lott’s paper was rejected. Lott [explained](#), “It was originally accepted and then he decided he wanted to make changes in it and we couldn’t agree on the changes, and so then it didn’t get published. But it was originally accepted.” When asked why he didn’t wait until after the study was published to post the news, Lott replied, “Well I think I listed it as forthcoming.”

Rebuttal:

As can be seen in the [archived](#) post, Lott never mentioned “forthcoming” in his post. The day after the ThinkProgress article was posted, the paper hosted on SSRN was [revised](#) to remove reference to Econ Journal Watch. Lott also [changed](#) the headline and the study description on his website.

Sources:

John Lott, “Not All Right-to-Carry Laws Are the Same, Yet Much of the Literature Keeps Ignoring the Differences,” [SSRN](#) (archived), September 5, 2015

John Lott, “Not All Right-to-Carry Laws Are the Same, Yet Much of the Literature Keeps Ignoring the Differences,” [SSRN](#), September 5, 2015

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Unethical Behavior: Creating Mary Rosh, a false online identity

Fact: Mary Rosh is an identity created and used by John Lott to praise himself

Summary:

- Researcher John Lott's most consistent and passionate defender against online criticism was a self-described former student of Lott's named Mary Rosh.
- In 2003, one of Lott's colleagues at the CATO Institute compared IP addresses and exposed Rosh as a false identity created by John Lott.
- Despite admitting that he created Mary Rosh in 2003, Lott testified before Congress in 2019 that his family often used that account to defend him online.

The Situation:

Lott is known to directly engage with critics online and vigorously defend his work. Between 1999 and 2003, he was aided by his most consistent defender Mary Rosh who identified herself as a former student of Lott at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School. In addition to posting comments on blogs and news articles about Lott's work, Rosh [posted](#) 295 times in Usenet forums, a precursor to internet forums where academics would congregate to discuss their work.

On August 18, 1999, "maryrosh from Philadelphia" posted a rave [review](#) of Lott's book with the subject line, "SAVE YOUR LIFE, READ THIS BOOK — GREAT BUY!!!!" She said that "Unlike other studies, Lott used all the data that was available. He did not pick certain cities to include and others to exclude. No previous study had accounted for even a small fraction of the variables that he accounted for."

On November 9, 2001, Rosh posted a [description](#) online of Lott as "the best professor I ever had" and said "Lott taught me more about analysis than any other professor that I had and I was not alone. There were a group of us students who would try to take any class that he taught. Lott finally had to tell us that it was best for us to try and take classes from other professors more to be exposed to other ways of teaching graduate material."

Twice in January 2002, Rosh advocated for carrying a gun instead of a knife for self-defense, [asking](#), “As a woman, who weighs 114 lbs, what am I supposed to do if I am confronted by a 200 lbs. Man?” The following day she added, “Even if I am not wearing heels, I don't think that there are many men that I could outrun.”

Rosh defended Lott with precise citations, often mentioning exact page numbers and table references in Lott's work. On June 2, 2000, Rosh posted online [asking](#) people to download one of Lott's papers as frequently as possible so it would get noticed by other academics.

In some of her posts, Rosh takes attacks personally that were directed towards Lott. On July 26, 2001, she [replied](#) to a post critical of Lott saying, “This posting is filled with lies. Lott is not a ‘shill’ for anyone. Prove your claim.” On August 5, 2001, a commenter [noticed](#) Rosh's sometimes emotional defenses of Lott and replied, “I'm sorry if you're taking this personally, but you are not John Lott.”

As it turns out, Mary Rosh actually was John Lott. In 2003, one of Lott's colleagues at the CATO Institute exposed Rosh as a false identity created by John Lott. Julian Sanchez thought it was strange that Rosh criticized bloggers for posting a link to a debate over a controversial survey of Lott's without calling Lott first. Sanchez [wrote](#), “This sounded odd, not only because bloggers very seldom do that kind of background research before posting a link, but because Lott had made precisely the same criticism several times in e-mails to bloggers covering the story.” Sanchez compared the IP addresses from Mary Rosh's forum posts with the IP address in an email that John Lott had sent him and discovered they were identical.

On January 22, 2003, John Lott admitted he created Mary Rosh and sent an email from MaRyRoSh@aol.com [confessing](#), “The MaRyRoSh pen name account was created years ago for an account for my children, using the first two letters of the names of my four sons. (They later got their own accounts but this one was never erased.) I shouldnt have used it, but I didnt want to get directly involved with my real name because I could not commit large blocks of time to discussions.”

The following month, journalist Michelle Malkin [wrote](#) in a TownHall article, “Lott's invention of Mary Rosh to praise his own research and blast other scholars is beyond creepy. And it shows his extensive willingness to deceive to protect and promote his work.”

In a June 2003 letter to [Science Magazine](#), Lott wrote, “I used a pseudonym in Internet chat rooms because earlier postings under my own name elicited threatening and obnoxious telephone calls.” In response to Lott’s letter, Donald Kennedy, the editor of Science, [wrote](#), “Lott cannot dismiss his use of a fictitious ally as a ‘pseudonym.’ What he did was to construct a false identity for a scholar, whom he then deployed in repeated support of his positions and in repeated attacks on his opponents. In most circles, this goes down as fraud.”

The Mary Rosh controversy earned Lott a spot in the 2014 book *The Encyclopedia of Liars and Deceivers* written by Roelf Bolt and Andy Brown.

Lott’s Counter:

On September 18, 2019, Lott was asked about Mary Rosh during his testimony before the U.S. Congressional Joint Economic Committee. Lott [said](#), “Well, it was basically the family email account that we had. Basically based on the names of my four sons at that time. It was an account that the family used.”

After reading a comment by “Mary Rosh” that said Lott was her best professor, US Sen. Martin Heinrich of New Mexico asked Lott if that showed good judgment. Lott replied, “First of all, I did not write that. It was a family account and there was somebody else in my family who was responding to attacks that were on me, okay? So I don’t police everybody in my family when they go and do things like that and I had members of my family who wrote a couple reviews on my books and other things like that I’m not going to go and tell.”

Heinrich then said, “You’re quoted in this article as saying ‘I probably shouldn’t have done it.’” Lott replied, “There are two different issues here. Did I use that account myself sometimes? And I did, mainly because when I had originally participated in these internet chat rooms.” Lott was unable to finish his reply because his allotted time expired.

Rebuttal:

An examination of Mary Rosh’s [full history](#) of several hundred comments demonstrates that it could not have been his wife and kids engaging in the arguments over econometrics.

For example, Rosh wrote the following in an October 12, 2001 [comment](#), “Even dropping out counties with fewer than 100,000 people and all Florida counties, Black and Nagin find a 6.3 percent drop in Assaults (significant at the 1 percent level) and a 4.6 percent drop in robberies (significant at the 6 percent level).”

On August 14, 2002, Rosh [wrote](#), “I don't see where Lott claimed that the differences were statistically significant at the 95 percent level for a two-tailed t-test. Why isn't the standard the perponderance [sic] of the data?... The question of significance for that result at the 95 percent level for a two-tailed t-test isn't even being debated here. Nor is anyone debating whether the point estimates indicate that we women appear to get a great benefit from using a gun than do men. If one is merely asking whether the perponderance [sic] of the evidence indicates that women get a bigger benefit, Lott's statement is exactly correct.”

Sources:

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