

December 15, 2022

Dear Chair Nadler, Vice Chair Dean, Ranking Member Jordan, and all esteemed members of the House Committee on the Judiciary,

I am writing to you today in response to the December 15, 2022 House Committee on the Judiciary hearing, "Examining Uvalde: The Search for Bipartisan Solutions to Gun Violence." I am the President and Founder of GVPedia, a non-profit providing access to gun violence prevention research.

I reviewed the written testimony of those who posted it online as well as the oral statements presented to the Committee, and would like to provide information I think you may find useful in response to some of the statements made at the hearing, particularly numerous erroneous statements made in the testimony of John Lott.

- 1) **Universal Background Check laws, and particularly licensing laws, would have stopped several mass shootings in the past decade.** In his spoken testimony, Lott argued that "There isn't one mass public mass shooting this century that would've been stopped if such a law had been in effect and had been perfectly enforced." Yet a [report](#) issued in 2019 found: "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." Specific incidents that may have been stopped by universal background checks include the 2019 Midland-Odessa mass shooting, the 2016 Dallas mass shooting, and several others that are detailed in this [GVpedia factsheet](#).
- 2) **The National Instant Check System (NICS) for background checks is accurate.** In his spoken testimony, Lott contended that 99% of initial background check denials are mistakes. This is egregiously false. Both the FBI and Office of Inspector General find that such denials for purchasing a firearm are 99.3-99.8% accurate. You can read more about this falsehood in this [GVpedia factsheet](#).
- 3) **The US has a substantially higher mass shooting rate than other high-income countries, regardless of the mass shooting definition used.** In his spoken testimony, Lott argued that the US mass shooting rate is lower than the rest of the world. To inflate the international share of mass shootings, Lott's research includes group attacks by uniformed soldiers, paramilitary groups, terrorist organizations, and massacres by large rebel groups. There are more than 1,000 of these international cases that Lott [misclassified](#) as mass shootings. One of these misclassifications 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. As Dr. Adam Lankford of the University of Alabama has [noted](#), including such cases is highly misleading and at odds with Lott's own assertions about his research. You can read more about this falsehood in this [GVpedia factsheet](#).

- 4) **Mass shootings do not overwhelmingly occur in gun-free zones, with credible studies finding that only 12-13% of such shootings occur in areas that ban firearms.** In his spoken and written testimony, Lott stated that 94% of mass shootings occur in gun-free zones. This conflicts with Lott's own more recent estimate that 96% of mass shootings occur in gun-free zones. Before the past several years, Lott argued that 98% of mass shootings occurred in gun-free zones. Regardless of which figure is used, it is false. Lott's research on gun-free zones is marred by massive data errors. When studying the period from 1977-1997, Lott treats every mass shooting fatality as an individual mass shooting, greatly distorting his numbers. When GVPedia revealed this error in 2019, Lott corrected it without public update, but then reintroduced it in his most recent research. To learn more about the errors in Lott's work on gun-free zones, you can read this [GVPedia factsheet](#).
- 5) **There is no evidence that mass shooters systematically target gun-free zones.** In his spoken testimony, Lott claimed that shooters overwhelmingly want to maximize casualties and therefore chose undefended targets. He cites the 2022 Buffalo shooting that killed ten and wounded three individuals, along with that shooter's manifesto, as part of this evidence. Yet the Buffalo shooter wrote that there was a "100% guaranteed" chance that he would encounter a civilian with a gun, writing: "This is Buffalo after all so I am expecting some boys to be packing." The manifestos and statements of other mass shooters do not support Lott's claims about targeting GFZs, as can be read in this [GVPedia factsheet](#).
- 6) **Defensive gun use is not more effective at preventing injury than other means of self-defense.** In his spoken testimony, Lott claimed that research overwhelmingly finds that using a gun for self defense is the most effective form of defense. This is false. A 2015 study from Harvard University finds that defensive gun use is no more effective at preventing injury than doing nothing, and is less effective than other defensive strategies. More on this research can be found in this [GVPedia factsheet](#).
- 7) **Evidence indicates that murders did not increase when firearms were banned in other countries.** In his written testimony, Lott wrote "Time and again, crime rises when we prevent people from protecting themselves. Indeed, every place in the world that has banned guns has seen an increase in murder." This is false. Japan is the developed nation that has come closest to completely banning firearms, with several laws enacted from 1946 to 1958 that essentially ban firearms. Since that time, Japan has seen its [homicide rate fall](#) more than 75 percent. Further, a [2013 study](#) found that among developed nations, countries with more guns per capita were associated with significantly higher rates of firearm deaths. For more information on the impact of gun bans on murder rates, please read this [GVPedia factsheet](#).

Thank you for holding this hearing. Gun violence is not a new problem in our country and will only continue to increase if nothing is done. I think we can all agree that this is not the legacy we want to leave our children.

I hope this information is useful to you as you continue to study gun violence. Please know that I and the resources housed by GVPedia are available to you at any time. I encourage you to visit our website, [GVPedia.org](http://GVPedia.org) or to reach out to me directly at [devin@gvpedia.org](mailto:devin@gvpedia.org).

Sincerely,

Devin Hughes