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Harvard Study: Gun Control Is Counterproductive

POSTED BY [ACRU](#)
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I've just learned that Washington, D.C.'s petition for a rehearing of the *Parker* case in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit was denied today. This is good news. Readers will recall in this case that the D.C. Circuit overturned the decades-long ban on gun ownership in the nation's capitol on Second Amendment grounds.

However, as my colleague Peter Ferrara explained in his [National Review Online article](#) following the initial decision in March, it looks very likely that the United States Supreme Court will take the case on appeal. When it does so – beyond seriously considering the clear original intent of the Second Amendment to protect an individual's right to armed self-defense – the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court would be wise to take into account the findings of a recent study out of Harvard.

The study, which just appeared in Volume 30, Number 2 of the *Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy* (pp. 649-694), set out to answer the question in its title: "[Would Banning Firearms Reduce Murder and Suicide? A Review of International and Some Domestic Evidence.](#)" Contrary to conventional wisdom, and the sniffs of our more sophisticated and generally anti-gun counterparts across the pond, the answer is "no." And not just no, as in there is no correlation between gun ownership and violent crime, but an emphatic no, showing a negative correlation: as gun ownership increases, murder and suicide decreases.

The findings of two criminologists – Prof. Don Kates and Prof. Gary Mauser – in their exhaustive study of American and European gun laws and violence rates, are telling:

Nations with stringent anti-gun laws generally have substantially higher murder rates than those that do not. The study found that the nine European nations with the lowest rates of gun ownership (5,000 or fewer guns per 100,000 population) have a combined murder rate *three times higher* than that of the nine nations with the highest rates of gun ownership (at least 15,000 guns per 100,000 population).

For example, Norway has the highest rate of gun ownership in Western Europe, yet possesses the lowest murder rate. In contrast, Holland's murder rate is nearly the worst, despite having the lowest gun ownership rate in Western Europe. Sweden and Denmark are two more examples of nations with high murder rates but few guns. As the study's authors write in the report:

If the mantra "more guns equal more death and fewer guns equal less death" were true, broad cross-national comparisons should show that nations with higher gun ownership per capita consistently have more death. Nations with higher gun ownership rates, however, do not have higher murder or suicide rates than those with lower gun ownership. Indeed many high gun ownership nations have much lower murder rates. (p. 661)

Finally, and as if to prove the bumper sticker correct – that "gun don't kill people, people do" – the study also shows that Russia's murder rate is *four times higher than the U.S.* and more than 20 times higher than Norway. This, in a country that practically eradicated private gun ownership over the course of decades of totalitarian rule and police state methods of suppression. Needless to say, very few Russian murders involve guns.

The important thing to keep in mind is not the rate of deaths by *gun* – a statistic that anti-gun advocates are quick to recite – but the *overall* murder rate, regardless of means. The criminologists explain:

[P]er capita murder overall is only half as frequent in the United States as in several other nations

where *gun* murder is rarer, but murder by strangling, stabbing, or beating is much more frequent. (p. 663 – emphases in original)

It is important to note here that Profs. Kates and Mauser are not pro-gun zealots. In fact, they go out of their way to stress that their study neither proves that gun control causes higher murder rates nor that increased gun ownership *necessarily* leads to lower murder rates. (Though, in my view, Prof. John Lott's *More Guns, Less Crime* does indeed prove the latter.) But what is clear, and what they do say, is that gun control is ineffectual at preventing murder, and apparently counterproductive.

Not only is the D.C. gun ban ill-conceived on constitutional grounds, it fails to live up to its purpose. If the astronomical murder rate in the nation's capitol, in comparison to cities where gun ownership is permitted, didn't already make that fact clear, this study out of Harvard should.



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