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From The Times

September 8, 2007

Wouldn't you feel safer with a gun?

British attitudes are supercilious and misguided

Richard Munday

Despite the recent spate of shootings on our streets, we pride ourselves on our strict gun laws. Every time an American gunman goes on a killing spree, we shake our heads in righteous disbelief at our poor benighted colonial cousins. Why is it, even after the Virginia Tech massacre, that Americans still resist calls for more gun controls?

The short answer is that "gun controls" do not work: they are indeed generally perverse in their effects. Virginia Tech, where 32 students were shot in April, had a strict gun ban policy and only last year successfully resisted a legal challenge that would have allowed the carrying of licensed defensive weapons on campus. It is with a measure of bitter irony that we recall Thomas Jefferson, founder of the University of Virginia, recording the words of Cesare Beccaria: "Laws that forbid the carrying of arms . . . disarm only those who are neither inclined nor determined to commit crimes . . . Such laws make things worse for the assaulted and better for the assailants; they serve rather to encourage than to prevent homicides, for an unarmed man may be attacked with greater confidence than an armed man."

One might contrast the Virginia Tech massacre with the assault on Virginia's Appalachian Law School in 2002, where three lives were lost before a student fetched a pistol from his car and apprehended the gunman.

Virginia Tech reinforced the lesson that gun controls are obeyed only by the law-abiding. New York has "banned" pistols since 1911, and its fellow murder capitals, Washington DC and Chicago, have similar bans. One can draw a map of the US, showing the inverse relationship of the strictness of its gun laws, and levels of violence: all the way down to Vermont, with no gun laws at all, and the lowest level of armed violence (one thirteenth that of Britain).



How worried should we be about gun crime?

Serious gun crime is concentrated in particular parts of England; internationally, the country has a low death rate from guns

BACKGROUND

Factfile: teenagers gunned down across UK
Three murders in four days in South London

America's disenchantment with "gun control" is based on experience: whereas in the 1960s and 1970s armed crime rose in the face of more restrictive gun laws (in much of the US, it was illegal to possess a firearm away from the home or workplace), over the past 20 years all violent crime has dropped dramatically, in lockstep with the spread of laws allowing the carrying of concealed weapons by law-abiding citizens. Florida set this trend in 1987, and within five years the states that had followed its example showed an 8 per cent reduction in murders, 7 per cent reduction in aggravated assaults, and 5 per cent reduction in rapes. Today 40 states have such laws,

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We Shall Overcome, protesters sing at peace vigil

and by 2004 the US Bureau of Justice reported that "firearms-related crime has plummeted".

In Britain, however, the image of violent America remains unassailably entrenched. Never mind the findings of the International Crime Victims Survey (published by the Home Office in 2003), indicating that we now suffer three times the level of violent crime committed in the United States; never mind the doubling of handgun crime in Britain over the past decade, since we banned pistols outright and confiscated all the legal ones.

We are so self-congratulatory about our officially disarmed society, and so dismissive of colonial rednecks, that we have forgotten that within living memory British citizens could buy any gun – rifle, pistol, or machinegun – without any licence. When Dr Watson walked the streets of London with a revolver in his pocket, he was a perfectly ordinary Victorian or Edwardian. Charlotte Brontë recalled that her curate father fastened his watch and pocketed his pistol every morning when he got dressed; Beatrix Potter remarked on a Yorkshire country hotel where only one of the eight or nine guests was not carrying a revolver; in 1909, policemen in Tottenham borrowed at least four pistols from passers-by (and were joined by other armed citizens) when they set off in pursuit of two anarchists unwise enough to attempt an armed robbery. We now are shocked that so many ordinary people should have been carrying guns in the street; the Edwardians were shocked rather by the idea of an armed robbery.

If armed crime in London in the years before the First World War amounted to less than 2 per cent of that we suffer today, it was not simply because society then was more stable. Edwardian Britain was rocked by a series of massive strikes in which lives were lost and troops deployed, and suffragette incendiaries, anarchist bombers, Fenians, and the spectre of a revolutionary general strike made Britain then arguably a much more turbulent place than it is today. In that unstable society the impact of the widespread carrying of arms was not inflammatory, it was deterrent of violence.

As late as 1951, self-defence was the justification of three quarters of all applications for pistol licences. And in the years 1946-51 armed robbery, the most significant measure of gun crime, ran at less than two dozen incidents a year in London; today, in our disarmed society, we suffer as many every week.

Gun controls disarm only the law-abiding, and leave predators with a freer hand. Nearly two and a half million people now fall victim to crimes of violence in Britain every year, more than four every minute: crimes that may devastate lives. It is perhaps a privilege of those who have never had to confront violence to disparage the power to resist.

Richard Munday is editor and co-author of Guns & Violence: the Debate Before Lord Cullen

HAVE YOUR SAY

Mr. Morrison,

It is not just population/ density. Many highly populated areas in the US (Florida was mentioned) have seen violent crime vary directly with degree of gun control.

The US has more gun deaths because of places like Chicago and NY, which have had strict gun control for many decades

Diana, Seattle, WA,

It is illogical to suggest the lack of gun laws causes low violent crime. The banning of guns is due to a highly populated area, which are prone to violent crime. The U.K. has roughly 1/20 intentional firearm deaths per 100,000 people than the U.S.A., and I for one believe it should stay that way.

Max Morrison, Torquay,

Finally! At least one man in England has it right on gun control!

Brian Hansen, Mediapolis, Iowa, USA

Very good article. Self-Defense is a human right. It would be wonderful if the world were a civilized place where the need for firearms was vanquished, but we all know that this is not the case. As long as there are people who would wish to do violence, people need a way to defend themselves from it



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Mike, Warren, MI, United States

After reading this article, I do believe there may yet be hope for a civilized society in England. I am an American and I DO own a firearm and carry it legally, Criminals do not know who I am or others like me. We are the sheep with teeth and claws who serve to help keep everyone safe.

David Boyd, Ft. Wayne Indiana, USA

Our forefathers framed our constitution and especially the second ammendment to provide the people with not only the right but the responsibility to protect themselves. Among their stated reasonings were to allow the people to defend ,and if need be, overthrow a "tyrannical government".

Thomas, Tuscaloosa, USA

What are the actual gun laws in England?

Kyle, London, England

This is the first intelligent, cogent, and unbiased article on firearms that I have read in the Times in years. Congratulations.

Scott, Durham, NC, USA

As a small man living in a high crime area, I wish I could own a gun.

Simply, so I could take a walk again.

Since I've been a victim of attempted robbery twice, I do not feel safe going for a walk down to the shops, and always drive everywhere, whenever possible.

I wish I lived elsewhere..

Steve, Coventry (ugh!),

The period England we so fondly look back on today was the sum of it's parts, and gun ownership was a part of that polite society.

Amanda, MANSFIELD, England

The government only disarmed the uk population so that it could control them more easily, take away the right to protect yourself and you will hide in a dark corner,knees shaking.....papers please.....papers please.....click...gulp..

Randol, Glasgow, Scotland

if someone was to intrude my home at night do i not have the right to defend my home? well the only way i can think to stop the intruder would be to use excesive force but with a fire arm pointed at him it might make him think twice about attacking me or my kids.

james, midlands, uk

'Gun control is like trying to reduce drink driving by making it tougher for sober people to own cars'

John, Bristol, UK

We are licensed, and do carry daily 24 / 7.

CCW means: "Concealed, until needed!"

"My wife, and I intend to be there to watch our youngest child graduate high school, college, and then have children of her own."

Rick.

Rick , Cincinnati, usa

I'm a Brit living in Georgia, US. I fire about 200 rounds per week in a range. Personally, I would like to think that I could own handguns (of my own choosing - Sig Sauer P226 and P220) back in Blighty but I am an expert marksman. I would not draw my weapon in an argument over a game of darts in the local pub. This is the real danger of relaxing gun laws in the UK - people would go crazy with them. I know enough idiots in the UK that would simply draw their weapons where even 'fisticuffs' weren't necessary. If concealed-carry was permitted, the UK would become a very dangerous place for a generation.

How do you 'vet' the people? Criminal record? They'd just buy on the black market. Depressives? They're currently not allowed shotguns in the UK but why not? Surely a depressed soul has as much right to home defence as a 'normal' soul?

It's a no-win situation at the moment. The responsible people forego their 'rights' to hopefully prevent the idiots from 'expressing' theirs...

Mick, Toccoa, Georgia

I don't own a gun, never have & probably never will. I have never felt it was necessary to own a gun. Now I thought many of the comments were very interesting & I'm not saying I agree with one side or the other. I think the comment that has always fascinated me has been the one that says:

Guns do not kill people. People kill people.

Now I have 2 comments to make about that comment. I have worked with computers & I learned that it isn't the computer who messes up, it is the person using the computer. As I learned "garbage in, garbage out" so the same would apply to a gun. Bullet in, bullet out, which only happens when the person on the end of the gun applies the action.

People with guns kill other people with guns, people with guns kill other people with guns & on & on it goes, & where it stops nobody knows.

Ellen, Bloomington, USA/Illinois

The idea that we the english are enslaved in some way is patently ridiculous, if you US bods who are so critical would like to tell me (apart from owning a Gun) what freedoms you have which i dont ??? Its simply trash talk.

What the gun lobbyists fail to understand is that when the late 90s when the gun controls came in only 69k guns were handed in from a population of around 55million !

The country has never been keen on gun ownership and provided we are able to control and repair some of our social fabric issues will never need to in the future. Something the US is singularly failing with in its urban centers.

The Mistake we made was penalising the Gun club members ,sportsmen,farmers,and bonifida Hunters for a crime committed by a nutjob

Jack, Dunstable,

If everybody in your nation read this article I feel that a great violation of British citizens rights could be reversed. Misinformation and a generally bias media is almost certainly to blame for the restrictive laws thus far. Articles like this one are becoming an increasingly rare find, as are journalists with the guts to rain on everyones feel-good parade and point of the real issues.

Chris Spear, Salt Lake City, UT, USA

Excellent article. Mr. Munday even mentioned that a law abiding gun owner with a concealed carry permit stopped the gunman at the Appalachian Law School, a fact that most American media did NOT report. Guns in the hands of the law abiding and responsible are no threat to anyone except the criminal element which wishes to do us harm. The police cannot be everywhere at the same time and our personal defense starts with us- knowing your surroundings, not knowingly putting yourself in a dangerous situation, etc. But we are not LOOKING to be victimized and thus must be able to viably defend ourselves against people who simply couldn't care less whether we live or die. We didn't ask to be robbed, beaten, raped, assaulted or murdered and so we must preclude these attacks against ourselves and/or our loved ones.

Jeff, Metairie, Louisiana, USA

I totally agree with Richard Munday. This is an outstanding article, but I am very much surprised that it has been published and not censored...

JÃ¼rgen Riegler, Latschach, Austria

A good article. I feel sorry for the people in the UK that they aren't allowed to defend themselves.

Thomas, Graz, Austria

Outstanding article. One that is written with facts. One that is based on truth, rather than emotion.

Mark, Dallas,

This is a very interesting subject here.

I'm writing a uni essay on arming the police forces and this article holds many interesting points. With the increase in gun crime in the UK i believe there will come a point at which it will necessary for citizens to arm themselves.

Amusingly though, the current gun crime statistics show that if you are involved in a firearm incident its almost twice as likely not going to be a real gun, more likely an air gun, although in such cases the criminal is far more likely to actually use the weapon to harm you...

Rather ironic really.

I do believe this is a topic i may be following after my assesment.

Best regards

-Jvr

Jvr, Cambridge/Luton,

I think we should be allowed to own firearms at the very least. I'm not sure about people being allowed to carry them in public at least without a permit as there are loads of idiots around. In saying that however it might make some people think twice if they know that everyone around them could possibly be armed.

Davy Ewing, Dumbarton, UK

This is a refreshingly well-written article that I, for one, am glad to have read. It looks like Mr. Munday has done his research, and done an excellent job detailing his findings.

I only wish I'd known about this article before today.

AbNo, Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA

I am actually split on this, i have always wanted to own a gun; not to shoot people just targets!! we are living in an increasingly scary world, though i hate to say it; ask yourself if having a gun would escalate arguments to fatal consequences.

nick, Liverpool, Merseyside

Mr Munday has put into print what many people believe, that state gun control is not about controlling crime but controlling the population. In a generation or so most people will think it is the norm to be unarmed and to treat violence with the stoicism of a calf caught by a lion. That time is not yet and if people could be educated in the truth and not brainwashed by popular state tripe we may have a chance to re-emascuate ourselves, and civilisation will be the better for it.

Matt Mckeown, Newport, Isle of Wight

The arguments are endless. Much of what has happened in the last 50 years has to do with cultural shift. Nannyism along with the expectation that laws and a benevolent government will solve social ills have given rise to increases in violent crime (fewer armed honest citizens and many legal loopholes).

Arms control is the easy, feel-good route for politicians to show how they are helping us. They already know perfectly well that honest citizens are not going to turn criminal. They just want to say "Look how we've done something."

When our cities turn into another Somalia, it will be too late.

Rusty Springfield, Kingston, USA

Those who keep yammering that "fewer guns means fewer deaths" claim they are appealing to "common sense," which is just another way of saying common ignorance. "Common sense" once told us the earth was flat, the sun revolved around it, and heavy things fell faster than light things. These are the people who preach prohibition, which history shows NEVER WORKS. It didn't work for alcohol, it hasn't worked for drugs, and in Britain it isn't working for guns. When you actually study the evidence you are forced to conclude that more guns equals less crime.

Henry Bowman, Wickenburg, Arizona

Of the people By the people and FOR the people. THAT is what the Government here in the US has forgotten. I strongly object to any law that remotely resembles gun control because as was said before "If guns are outlawed, only outlaws will have guns."

It reminds me of a saying my grandmother used to tell me; "locks are for honest people". I didn't understand what she meant for a while, but as I got older I realized what she meant, and it applies for any written law. You take away the right to own a firearm, you take away the right to protect myself and my family in a manner that will actually deter a criminal.

What I really find ironic about society these days is that we are more concerned about protecting the criminals rights and well being, that we are the honest citizen.

Michael Appleton, Phoenix, AZ

i agree with Tom, the media have projected this image that all young people have guns and it does nothing but create moral panics!!

i love the fact that america's are so pro- firearms, i did an exchange programme to the US last year and one of my friends told me how he was shot at by the police just because he ran away after drawing graffiti on the walls. thats just lazy police who love the control they have with thier gun!!!

i was so shocked to walk into walmart (what ever it was called), to find you could buy a rifle and bullets with only an i.d showing you were 18 (CRAZY) and you wonder why you have school

shotings!!!

I think it is a good thing to arm yourself as self defence, but given to the wrong people you could start to find people solving silly situations with gun threats because they have forgotten how to use common sense to calm situations down.

Libby , High Wycombe, uk

Make government your servant, an unarmed citizenry has made government your master.

You must all feel trapped on your island of epidemic crime, tryanny and oppression. On your knees, everyone of you serfs, subjects and peasants. Long-live the royal masters ! Bow to your armed thugs too.

Disarmed yankee

Tory, Chicago area, USA/Illinois

Another perverse impact of British gun laws is the much higher rate of burglaries when the victims are at home than in America. In America, such burglaries of occupied dwellings are rare, because of the high probability that the occupants will be armed.

Terry Linderman, Chicago, Illinois, USA

I think the British Government 's attitude to guns is like this:

If you get a maniac with an unlawfully owned gun and he walks into a school in the UK and shoots 2 teachers and 2 children dead, then the government bans the ownership of guns but if a maniac went beserk on a motorway with dangerous driving and wiped out 2 parents and their 2 children, tyhe government would not ban the ownership of cars.

regards,

Geoff Potter

Geoff Potter, Guildford, Surrey

Gun control is a way for governments to consolidate power.

sd, London, UK

I was attacked six years ago at home in the early hours by an intruder. I heard noises in the house, and was scared we were being burgled. I was asleep and naked at the time. I also didnt have my glasses on and couldn't see much. I took a frenzied beating. The man meant to kill me. Im quite small and not very strong. I had alot of self esteem before that night and had a happy life. The experience was utterly humiliating. I believed my life was over. I was saved by my 6'5 housemate who hearing the attack woke up and managed to pull the assailant off me. Since that night, I have lived with a constant state of terror. I found myself in a situation I could not physically protect myself from. My quality of life since has been poor. I still have trouble sleeping at night (for months I couldnt sleep), I still feel like 'someone could come and get me' I have alot of trouble trying to lead a normal life. I dont know if a gun would have helped. The police arrived 3h later and didn't want to know.

scott, UK,

I read Richard Munday's article, along with all of the comments above and have reached the following conclusions:

1. Statistics can be made to say whatever the presenter wants them to say !

Example: The reason I only had two children is because statistically 1 in every 3 children born in this World are Chinese (whereas both my wife and I are Brits.)

2. Firearm related crime is not carried out using registered weapons, or by registered users - it never was.

3. Prohibition does not solve problems, it is simply a political knee jerk reaction. This is self evident and there are myriad examples.

Register firearms (then you know what they are and who has them) and educate users.

Nigel Preece. Brit in Bahrain & Ex Metropolitan Police Officer.

Nigel Preece, Manama, Bahrain

Reviewing the various comments, for and against, it is clear that the argument - so far - centres on the "public safety" risk involved with civilian ownership of firearms and this is the argument as conducted in the USA where there is virtually no governmental

fear of armed insurrection. In Europe generally the governmental perception of firearms ownership is very different. Civilian disarmament ("gun control") is sedulously promoted under the "public safety" flag despite the evidence that it is a perverse policy which everywhere leads to more not less violent crime. Civilian disarmament is a government safety policy : a prophylactic against armed insurrection - but, of course, it is too shameful to admit openly.

Lewis Thomas, High Wycombe, UK

Those who espouse civilian disarmament - which is what "gun control" really is - base their claims on the public safety argument. European attitudes to firearms ownership differ from those in the USA because the fear of armed insurrection is alive and well in Europe but virtually non-existent in America. Thus in the USA the argument is indeed about "public safety". In Europe the surface argument is the same but there is another, hidden agenda which cannot be publicly acknowledged. It would be too shameful for governments to say that "we don't trust you to have guns because you might turn them against us : WE will have the guns and YOU will do as you are told." Like in Burma ?

Tadeuz Koziusko, London, UK

Bravo - what a sensible and well thought through piece. The idea of allowing people to simply buy and own guns seems radical and ridiculous at first. But I would rather live in a society that thought armed robbery and violent crime was unusual and unacceptable instead of run of the mill and part of everyday life. I want to get hold of Richard Munday's report.

A Martin, London, UK

Guns are a tool, nothing more. You misuse a tool, you or someone near you gets hurt or worse. In the issue of self-defense, any tool will work. Whether it be a .38 snubnose or the hammer that your dad used to build your treehouse that you played in as a kid, all this talk of gun control has been a lesson in futility for the U.S. Government. Good. Let's keep it that way. 2nd Amendment all the way.

bill salani, COLORADO SPRINGS, Co.

Banning firearms is a breach of our civil right to either defend ourselves, our to enjoy a sport. I like to collect blank firing or de-activated weapons, and because of a small minded minority, and even this is now becoming more and more difficult because of a small minded minority that belives the banning of ownership of guns will bring gun crime down. In the town i live {uk} i could buy a working pistol for £70...But i CHOOSE to collect blank firers at a price of over £250..... These "weapons" cant be converted, changed or made to harm in any other way.....so why take our hobby?.....and why take our right to defend ourselves of the need arises in reference to live firing weapons?

Matt Horsman, Goole,

I don't think it matters to the ordinary citizen
If guns are outlawed, then crooks will get guns
Some how, crooks can get guns
I say, give the Police guns

william_e_, London, UK

David Nixon (Atlanta) - excellent, sober, thoughtful contribution to this sometimes frenzied debate. Thank you. I wish our politicians could read Matthew Parris's article today (22 Sept) and take it to heart : stand up and say what they really believe, not what shrill and emotion-based lobby groups demand.

Lewis Thomas, High Wycombe, UK

It doesn't matter if you take away guns or not. People will always find a way of getting guns. But it's just like alcohol in Italy: there is no alcohol restriction, and not as many people get drunk. Perhaps it's the same way with guns?

A problem with allowing more and more people to get guns is that more accidental shootings could happen; like someone frightened on a dark street shooting at a teenager for they thought the teen was about to attack them or something.

Jen McCombs, North Bay, Canada

Studies throughout the world have shown that suitably licensed sporting shooters DO NOT commit offenses with firearms, yet they are continually marginalized for their involvement in a sport where their primary tool is also used by criminals to commit crimes.

In Australia, the majority of firearms used in crime (where these firearms are recovered), are illegally obtained via the black market. The gun buy-back which started in Australia in 1996 has done little to reduce the number of illegal and un-registered firearms in the hands of the un-licensed users.

Those with criminal intent who want a firearms for illegal purposes

will get one...don't punish legitimate sporting shooters for purging their chosen sport.

Troy, Sydney, Australia

I am an English expat and lived abroad most of my life including USA. I feel much more at ease in the States and think the ethos is superior because of the entrusting of defense to individuals. I understand --a million or more people have recently left the UK citing among their various reasons fear of crimes and criminals! I would like my children to experience the States way of thinking

john, nice, france

Yes, I would feel safer with a gun. But not if I knew everybody else had a gun.

alan, cologne,

The truth about the world that we live in is simple... The people that will obey laws, are not the problem. The predators in society, are not going to be stopped by legislation or a piece of paper. They will always have access to guns, drugs, whatever the item being discussed happens to be.

And knowing that truth, I have yet to see anyone ever make a logical argument as to how disarming the victims of violent crime, will somehow make them safer. It is simply not possible.

Having criminals armed, and taking the means of self defense away from their victims, is not going to make said victim safer. It's lunacy to think otherwise, but anti-gun people don't think with their minds, they feel with their emotions, and logic and common sense have no place in their conclusions.

David Nixon, Atlanta, GA, USA

I would just like to put on record my plea for the freedom to own a firearm for my own protection. Laws that ban anything impinge on our freedoms. A law that bans a means of self defence is a severe restriction on our personal safety as well as a restraint on freedom. The law to ban the public owning guns just ensures that the only weapons in private hands in Britain are now in the hands of criminals: That does not make me feel safer!!!

Frankland Macdonald Wood, Sansepolcro 52037, Italy

I am a good law abiding citizen. I have many friends who I would consider the same. However, I would trust neither myself or them with a firearm. Why? Well because despite being good people, just like all the other good people in the world, my friends and I are quite capable of doing bad things.

We could try to identify all the "good" people in the world (some sort of blood test?) and only give firearms to them. However, all it would take would be a "good" persons wife/husband to have an affair, get depressed or become mentally unstable and that "good" person has access to a very effective killing machine.

Name Withheld, Dundee,

Our American laws are based on the greatest set of laws ever conceived by mankind: British Common Law. The right to keep and bear weapons for self-defense goes back as far as the Laws Of Alfred (871-8990) and the Laws of Cnut (1020-1023). Under Henry II these ideas were further refined by the Assize Of Arms Of 1181. A century later, Edward I proclaimed the Statute Of Winchester in 1285. These ideas of a FREE CITIZENRY who possessed personal weaponry (from knives to bows to firearms) have been defended by some of the greatest British minds: Sir John Fortescue; Sir Thomas Moore; Michael Dalton; Sir Edward Coke; Sir Walter Raleigh; Thomas Hobbes; James Harrington; and John Locke. I ask why the British nation has abandoned its own laws; why it has seemingly lost its very SOUL of a free men and women who led civilization throughout its history, only now to mock and villify your EX-COLONIES who still hold these truths to be self-evident. You have thrown away your own birthright...

Mark Gleason, Dillingham, Alaska, USA

I think the law for hand guns should be reverted to allow single shot ones to be kept strictly in gun clubs. Banning this was a stupid idea that achieved absolutely nothing.

Luke Nicolaidis, London, UK

john smith: The most dangerous cities in America are also the cities where it is illegal to defend yourself with a gun..
.. what smith contends above is TOTAL ROT, easily disproved.
.. Missouri enabled si concealed carry 2005, st louis city ~jun2005, yet st louis had the HIGHEST VIOLENT CITY CRIME RATE in america for 2005.
.. St Louis is ranked the MOST DANGEROUS CITY in america by morgan quitno for 2006 (of ~350 cities).
.. St Louis went from mid 30's in murder rate to #11 in 2005, & ranks higher than washDC.
.. for 2006 safest 25 cities, 14 are in guncontrol states.

... for 2006 most dangerous 25 cities, 16 cities are in progun states, only 9 guncontrol.
<http://www.morganquitno.com/cit07pop.htm#25>
 .. of the 25 most dangerous metro areas, 21 were in progun states (2005, Morganquitno).
 .. readers should disregard most progun contentions here, they are misinformed, or lying.
 .. 2nd A mythology breeds MORE GUNS, MORE LIES.
 Jimmy, Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania

NH Mike: "hows this for Irony, the US Gun ban forces point to England and claim Gun Control is a success.."

UK stats: "altho [firearm crime] injuries have - doubled from 2,378 in 98/99 to 5,001 in 05/06 - Gun crime remains a relatively rare event. Firearms (incl'g air weapons) were used in 0.4% of all recorded crime: that is, one in 250 crimes.. proportion excl'g air wpns was 0.2%, or one in 500. Injury caused during a firearm offence is also rare.. only a fifth of firearm offences resulted in an injury and less than 3% resulted in a serious or fatal injury."
www.crimestatistics.org.uk/output/Page54.asp

..approx 5,000 guncrime injury of which only 3%, or 150, were homicides or serious injury (only 129 UK gunshot inj hospital admissions '03.. .. contrast that with US ~11,000 murders, 69,825 nonfatal firearm injury hospital admissions.. (also ~18,000 suicide).

.. no wonder we guncontrollers think UK gun policy successful.
www.gun-control-network.org/GF07.htm
 Jimmy the One, Wilkes Barre , Pennsylvania

I wouldn't feel safer if I knew that everyone else had guns. Let's face it, most of you lot out there are pretty thick. I'm not sure you should be allowed to have cars, let alone guns.

Matt, Brighton, UK

The vast majority of gun owners in the US are law abiding people. Only a very few deranged criminals commit evil acts. The VA Tech murderer was a Korean foreign national. Not a US citizen. The constitution is for "we the (American) people", not a foreign national. This is one gun law I could live with.

Additionally if trained and responsible students and teachers could exercise their second amendment right to carry a gun this mad man would have been killed in short order. These same paople are trusted to drive a car to school but not carry a gun.

I am tired of the ignorant cowards of the world telling me I have to be defenseless because this is what they "think" is best. It would be refreshing if they "knew" the facts.

A defenseless society is at the mercy of the killer. And killers will always be with us.

Fred, Mount Airy, MD

One problem with the "if only people were allowed to carry guns" argument is that even when guns are allowed for self-defense, there's no guarantee someone in a crowd of victims will have one handy. I've lived in Virginia for 25 years where carrying guns in public is legal, provided it's registered and the owner carries a state-issued badge to that effect. I've never once seen anyone carry such a gun nor a badge.

TJ Cassidy, Arlington, Virginia, USA

"So why is the rate of gun crime so much higher in the US than in the UK?

In fact, why is the murder rate in the US almost ten times that in the UK, and why has the disparity actually increased since 1900?"
 - Jon Livesey

A combination of drug prohibition(which has failed even more spectacularly than alcohol prohibition) and the lack of responsibility foisted upon the public by Johnsons Great Society.

ravenshrike, lake forest, illinois

I've lived in the Seattle, Washington, area and now live in Montana and had/have concealed carry firearms permits in both. Have I ever needed to use the firearm I've sometimes carried? No. Have I been happy that I could legally carry a firearm at times? Yes.

Montana is still considered to be the "wild west" by some in this country and abroad yet we have very few murders, although we have many guns. The few murders committed in Billings tend to be stabbings or beatings committed. The murderers generally get to enjoy the hospitality of the state for an extended period, no 15 years (or less) and your out as seems to be the case in Britain. Offending criminals isn't something we consider to be a bad thing.

When people aren't required to do much to care for themselves

besides eating or coming in out of the rain, and self defense is effectively illegal, they're existing not living.

Larry, Billings, Montana, USA

And hows this for Irony, the US Gun ban forces point to England and claim Gun Control is a success accross the pond!

Mike , Bennington, New Hampshire USA

Conceal and Carry laws will be a stretch for you brits, but what about chaning the law to allow you to carry such things as stun guns and pepper spray (and other non lethal self defense). For the home, allowing you to own a pump action shotgun for defense. To me what is sick is that you guys are denied all forms of defensive weapons, even non-lethal. If pepper spray was legal to carry on the streets of london i doubt there would be many "drive by peppering"

Alex Mand, East Hills, NY,

Dear Mr. Shettle;

There ARE plenty of legitimate gun owners in America who have never hurt anyone, and who never will. Contrary to another of your rather silly assertions, in the U.S. there are between 1 and 2 million incidents each year in which honest law-abiding citizens use a firearm in self-defense successfully. In 99% of these incidents, it even proved un-necessary to fire a shot. Forgive me for being blunt, but you are blithely ignorant of what is going on in America.

Mark Townsend, Decatur, Alabama, America

You are 27 times more likely to be shot in the US than the UK
The number of murders by firearms per capita:

US 2.8%

UK 0.2%

That's not true because I'm not part of the low life culture where most of the murders occur. I'm as safe where I live as the safest place in the UK. The above is just another example of how statistics can distort reality.

Carl, Menomonie, USA, Wisconsin

Having served in the U.S. military in England I have a great fondness for your country. I was dismayed when they took your right to defend your life and property away from you. That is a right so fundamental that it needs no further rational. Our Second Amend. to our Constitution granting us the "Right to Keep & Bear Arms" is the underpinning that insures that our other rights will be kept safe and sacrosanct. I have a carry permit in Arkansas, but along with it goes an obligation to follow the law & use the weapon only in a case where there is no other option. In 5 years since the "concealed carry" law has been in effect (in this state) there have been no reports of any misuse.

Kenneth Pelfrey, Rogers , Arkansas/USA

there are something like 40-60 times the number of homicides where the gun is used depending on the statistice you use. The number of times a gun is used to facilitate a crime in the USA is probable not known but likely to be vast

I have been held up in a hotel in Sunnyvale california by an armed robber.

If we were so stupid to legalise firearms in the UK this is what we would be heading towards.

In my view the NRA is a disgrace. Guns to not promote freedom, they provide criminals with the wherewithal to commit their crimes.

In the UK certainly banning all guns is no panacea, and was imposed as a knee jerk reaction to Dunblane, it does however set the standard (i.e. there is NO excuse whatsoever for the carrying of a firearm, and to do so is a criminal offence).

The same sort of reasons apply to arming the police

richard williams, weybridge, surrey

My, this has generated a lot of replies.Nick, in London, the Met HAS confiscated automatic weapons and RPG's. Guess the criminals didn't liaten.

Matthew , The second amendment says NOTHING about carrying weapons only in times of unrest.. I have no idea where you read that.

Dee, London

Thoise were NOTlaw abiding citizens in Hungerford and Dunblane. The shooter in Dunblane had a history of mental problems, Yet he was Given a licence by the police! shooting your mother and setting your house on fire is not the act of a rational law abiding citizen.

Dunblane is even worse. The kiler was a known pedophile who had been kicked out of the Scouts and TWO gun clubs. The P.C. who wanted to deny a firearms licence was overruled by a higher police official.
So who does one blame, the killers, or the Police for not following the rules?

John, London. Please tell me which Walmart where i can go to buy a glock with my groceries??????

Rasendyll, thats a Brady bunch lie.

John Sukey, Tucson, , Arizona

Does this mean that if -- no, make that when -- someone opens fire on a school or university with an assault rife, students and faculty should be allowed to tote AK-47's in self-defence? After all, a handgun would be quite useless against a weapon that can spray dozens of bullets in a minute. Taken to its logical conclusion, Mr. Munday's argument would have citizens arm themselves to the maximum extent against all possible threats. Also, couldn't this same logic be applied to the spread of WMD's? "Limits on WMD's harm only law-abiding nations", etc.

tariq, Toronto, Canada

Tarni- I too would feel safer, for myself and my 1 year old son, if no guns existed and everyone could be trusted to do no harm. But they do exist and people can only be trusted to harm others if it suits their purpose. So I own a gun, to protect myself and my son. Just like I own a hammer to fix the stairs. A tool is a tool. It is the intent of the user that determines it's use.

"Love not the Swiftness of the arrow, Nor the Sharpness of the sword, but what these defend."

James, Dallas, USA

People always toss out the "accidental death" problems with guns. How about some hard numbers of lets say accidental children deaths from guns, then compare that number to back yard pool drownings, and, or several other common accidental deaths. The number is vastly disproportional larger for deaths from around the home and other daily activities than deaths caused by accidental discharges of fire arms.

Look up some Gun Facts and you will be surprised. For example like how many more guns are in American homes than are pools owned by Americans, yet there are many more deaths by drownings than the relatively small numbers from accidental shootings.

Sean, Dana Point , Ca.

To Matthew Warrington:

You know not wherof you speak. The 2nd Ammendment gives the people the right to be armed at any time. It has nothing to do with times of unrest. Yes, we have to show that we are qualified to do so, in those states that require us to do so (Vermont has no gun laws and open carry is permitted). No, we don't shoot one another. The streets do not run red as some suppose. And for your information, many of us do hunt with a pistol, or rather, a revolver. I use a .357 magnum single action Ruger handgun to hunt deer. FYI, that is equal to an .38 caliber cartridge with a longer case, and that is .557 inch in diameter. Not very big, is it? I use a crossbow to hunt, also and that's far more dangerous than a handgun. My family is far more precious than anything else. I will defend them in any way I can. If it takes a pistol, so be it.

Bob McCulough
Pennsburg, Pennsylvania

Bob McCullough, Pennsburg, Pennsylvania

The oft cited example of mental illness, to repetedly act in a manner that brings about an undesirable result, expecting a different outcome each time, certainly applies to the minds of those who would restrict normal, law abiding citizens' access to firearms. Every time and place it's been tried a more vulnerable population is increasingly victimized by an empowered malicious element.

Consider the humble porcupine. He walks the forest floor slowly and at peace, knowing that he has the respect of the mighty wolf without a need for mortal combat.

Name withheld, plattsburgh, us /ny

"Fight Crime - Shoot Back" Heilung, Colorado

Heilung, Denver, Colorado

"Because Jon there are substantially more people living in the US than in the UK. Taken proportionately gun crime in the UK is far higher"

Really, last time I checked, the UK (pop. 60m) had about 60 gun murders per year, or 1 per million. In the US (pop. 300m) there were about 12,000, or 40 per million. Pretty conclusive on the murder front.

I'm not sure about the overall gun crime rate, but I would like to see some police statistics for your claim. If it is higher here, I'll bet most of those crimes are things that are legal in the US, like owning a gun. By that logic, we could eliminate all crime by making everything legal!

Someone, Merseyside,

Hundreds of family's, huh wombat?? I think your facts are incorrect to say the least!

Free men own firearms, slaves (subjects) do not.

daren beede, duluth, USA MN

I'm not sure about the pros and cons of legal ownership but I'm beginning to think there is quite a strong case for it. However even if it were legal in this country anyone using it to defend themselves from attack would almost certainly be charged with murder. They would probably face a lawsuit from the person who threatened them for having caused "mental anguish" simply for pointing it at them. The more people's right to defend themselves from the predations of criminals is eroded the more of a joke the law is becoming.

James, Bognor Regis, England

Richard Munday is exactly correct. When guns are banned only the criminals have them and use them on the unarmed. Sooner or later you Brits will have to force your government to allow you to arm and defend yourselves. An armed society is a polite society.

Phil, Cleveland, Ohio

Given the latest advice from the Police is to ring them (and wait, and wait) while the criminals go for you/your family/property/neighbours/honest citizens etc, I'd prefer to be trusted to look after myself. And this article sits well with Boris Johnson's comments about a society that lets the little things go by should not be too surprised when it all starts going wrong in rather bigger ways. If we are presumed all to be so hopelessly irresponsible by default that we are not allowed, for example, to defend ourselves appropriately, we shouldn't be too surprised either that such general lack of respect is reflected in so many youngsters reciprocating with disrespect.

Dr Ian Frayling, Cardiff, Wales

To those who would say that Americans who die of gun violence are victims of an acquaintances are twisting the stats. If you mean an acquaintance as being my friend, not likely. If you mean an acquaintance as being a fellow drug dealer, a subordinate in a gang or other criminal element, then you'd be right. Most people in the U.S. who engage in gun crime graduated to it - meaning they started somewhere else in the criminal justice system. And if you graduated to that level of crime, and are possession of a firearm, you are in violation of the law anyway...criminals are not allowed to have guns. This goes to prove the idea that criminals, by their very nature, do not obey laws. Gun control has no impact on them. Most gun owners are law-abiding, and feel a great sense of responsibility as a result of their decision to own a firearm. Excellent article, Mr. Munday.

Jason Hansen, Germantown, United States/ Wisconsin

As Americanised as Britain and the world in general has become over a period of time, I feel that this is just another step towards a one world, one culture regime that the American government is setting out to do.

The famous saying in America that "Guns Don't Kill People, People kill people" is it only me that stops and thinks for a short moment the question of "Doesn't the gun help in this situation?"

If Britain is going to adopt this kind of Gun culture that has ripped the heart out of America and helped towards many innocent people being killed, then I believe it is a very sad day.

In my opinion this is a campaign of fear and consumption, the idea that through the media "keep everybody afraid and they will consume".

Gary Alan Thomson, Glasgow, United Kingdom

As a UK citizen and a US resident I have to say it would be a disaster if he binge-drinking idiots we see on our streets every night were allowed to carry guns. Most of my friends in the US have guns - some of them extremely powerful - but they all know how to use them safely without endangering the lives of others. Some also have CCP's. I doubt many in the UK would even know how to set the safety catch, even if they could figure out how to load a gun correctly. Anyone in the UK desperate enough to want

to shoot a gun can always go to the US and do it supervised and safely.

Brian, Farnham, UK

To "Frank Warrington:"

There is no "qualification" in the second amendment that states arms may only be carried in times of "unrest." The amendment states, "A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed."

See anything about "unrest" in that sentence?

I understand a lot of europeans believe America is a violent place because of some of our dopier movies, and possibly over-hyped news stories that inevitably surface when there's an incident like Virginia Tech.

Actually, if it weren't for inner-city gang/drug activity, our crime and murder rate would be a lot closer to what is viewed as the european norm.

It has also been shown that in areas where guns are strictly controlled in America, the crime rates are usually higher than others. Gun control just does not work.

Mark Townsend, Decatur, Alabama, America

History shows that having guns does not turn law-abiding people into criminals. The State of Florida has issued over 2.1 million concealed weapons licenses since 1987 with an average of 450,000 people being licensed at any given time. During that 20 year period, only 161 licenses were revoked due to the commission of a gun crime. Other states wit concealed carry have similiar results.

Another interesting fact is that that country with the highest murder rate in the 20th Century was Soviet Russia, which had a total ban on civilian gun ownership. Axes and knives were the weapons du jour in most cases. About 70% of all murder victims are killed by someone they know. The availability of guns has very little to do with anything other than how the murders are committed.

Scott Curtis, Ocala, Florida

Gareth Rhymes,

regarding your statement "This is the Biblical model of law and order...", you may want to re-read your Bible.

It was no secret to Jesus that His disciples carried weapons. At the last supper, Jesus tells His disciples that "if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one" (Luke 22:36 NIV)

http://www.2ampd.net/Articles/Marshall/god_and_M-60.htm

The sword was the modern day equivalent of the handgun, to be used for personal protection.

anonymouse, Florida, USA

I fear the goverment that fears me, as a law abiding citizen, having recourse to firearms. Every tyrannt who has terrorized minorities and generally been a thug has first disarmed his citizenry, then has sent in the brownshirts to round up and exterminate the "undesireables".

I own a very nice Beretta pistol, which I carry in my car with me. I have never had to use it, and hope I never will (other than practicing on the firing range). But I do know that there are people out there who are simply maniacs, who have no sense of morality, and if given a chance, will hurt me or my family. Since I am an older person and of small stature, I need an "equalizer"

People like Tami are living in a self-induced bubble of fluffy hypnotic unreality. Perhaps she never leaves her house. Tami, it's a bad world out here. Until Christ returns and the wicked are punished, there will be evil people. Perhaps in your world they don't exist. In the real world, they do. You need to wake up.

Edward Hara, Harrisburg , PA

Most people I know are quite unstable emotionally, and that includes myself. When I came out of the artillery as an expert on guns and explosives, I even sent back the one rifle I won at school on the basis that weapons are for use. I think that if I carried a gun at all times, there would be occasions when I would want to use it. I just thought it safer for the rest of you if I did not carry a gun. So far 50 years later, I have not done much harm to anyone, but I might have done if I had carried a weapon! And I suspect I am much more cold-blooded and unemotional than many people I meet!

Brian Lewis, Manila, Philippines

The statistic that you are 43 times more likely to be injured by the gun in your home came from Dr. Kellerman at the CDC in Atlanta. he refused for 3 years to show how he got those figures. When

Congress threatened his funding he divulged that his study was limited to 300 homes in Urban Atlanta. He limited the numbers to cases where the assailant was shot and killed, in relation to all accidents with guns. His study cooked up to arrive at a predetermined conclusion. His study was completely unscientific and universally discredited. Yet the figure is still repeated as fact. Bottom line. You poor Brits were turned from citizens into subjects in '97 when your right to possess guns was denied by your government. I hope you can use the democratic process to change that. We do here in the USA. The raw power of the NRA comes from its members and our vote. We successfully remove over 90% of the anti-gun politicians we target. And they know it.

RP Hughes, AR., USA

As another gentleman pointed out, the murder rate in the U.S. is greatly exaggerated by inner city blacks killing each other over a turf war or some drug deal gone bad.

The truth is that most suburban Americans don't give a rip what the inner city black gang members do to each other. If they weren't using guns to kill each other they would just stab each other to death, or bludgeon their victims with baseball bats.

Here in the greater Baltimore area, the murders are 90% or better black on black and with few exceptions take place inside the city of Baltimore. In the white suburban areas of Maryland, including the rural areas with high gun ownership numbers, the crime rate is very low.

I'm sure my opinion won't be popular with Jessie Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition, but the facts in indisputable.

ace rothstein, Baltimore, Maryland, USA

This debate echos the debate we have in the US. The realists accept that gun laws don't work, thugs won't be deterred by such laws, and that guns exist. The leftists refuse to accept reality and wish that guns didn't exist and that all people were kind and gentle. The essence of liberalism is the denial of reality, and the fervency of the denial shows the vigour of this secular religion. The gun banners inflict their secular religion on the rest of society, and require that society be the victims of their delusions. If the elimination of firearms, and other weapons, somehow magically made all men lambs of God, society would have realized that many eons ago and the marketplace of ideas would have worked to produce tranquility. That disarmament and the designation of people as helpless victims is imposed by the leftists/state only demonstrates the practical and moral bankruptcy of gun banning. Gun bans have never been about crime control, but about a state fearing its people.

William Peterken, Freeman Township,

First id like to say im am very surprised at the amount of british nationals who agree with this article. Many times it seems you guys are very quick to defend your laws and look down on us "colonies". Now that being said, i understand why there may be apprehension to normal citizens carrying guns, but what stuns me is that there is apprehension to anything carried for defensive purposes. these things include pepper spray and tasers. it seems to me that british politicians legislate in an attempt to get to the unattainable goal of no violence, which is completely insane. It defies reality. Dunblane was a horrible tragedy- but was one where the system that was in place failed because some cheif of police failed to listen to the Firearms officer and signed off on mr. hamiltons FAC. this is analogous to VT where our NICS system failed to catch his prior court mental insanity conviction. I will end with this, it is much easier to control the object, than control the person

Alex Mand, East Hills, New York

An awful lot of the anti-gun types commenting here seem to assume that by owning a gun a person immediately becomes a mono-solution maniac whose only response to a percieved threat is to blast away. To my mind this is an erroneous and misleading line of thought.

Ownership of a firearm does not immediately remove alternative solutions (avoidance, use of lesser force to deter attack etc). Indeed any reputable firearms training programme will stress these options as being far more preferable to the use of a firearm.

The one advantage a firearm bestows upon the owner (along with a host of responsibilities, I might add) is more choice. If running away or defeating an attacker with non-lethal force is not an option then a person with a gun has one further choice to make: use the gun or curl up in a ball and hope it will all be over quickly.

Sadly, if you are British, your government (the members of which recieve armed police protection) has already made that decision for you.

The Remittance Man, Kleinkudooskop, South Africa

The person who thinks knives are better because you need more thought to use them is a complete fool, absolutely ridiculous comment

When you take away a mans means of self defence, you take away his right to self defence. The police are powerless to protect the populace, and our politicians only wish to curry favour of the ignorant masses lead by the biased and ignorant media.

This article uses facts to decry the stupidity of the draconian gun laws in the UK.

Never mind, next time one of the anti gun believers finds themselves in a life threatening situation, just like the innocent man kicked to death in Warrington, call the Police, they just might get there quick enough to direct the hearse to the crime scene.

Karl, Manchester,

The gun controllers always say there will be carnage in the streets, but the experience has always been that the law abiding (wow) obey the laws. Personally, I don't even want to go through the expenses of hiring a lawyer and going to court. So, I obey the laws.

As for "law abiding" maniacs on a rampage, only a truly law abiding citizen with a weapon can stop a massacre. The police will arrive later only to carry out an investigation.

Those who cannot and will not defend themselves should not proscribe weapons from those who can and will.

Frederick Su, Bellingham, WA, USA

"Don't be daft." A gun can do damage without a great effort whereas a knife needs more thought. The more effort and thought for someone to harm another the better

Lookman, Surrey, UK

Spot on, Rich.

Robin, Leighton Buzzard,

QUOTE: Tami from London UK

"No I wouldn't feel safer with a gun. I'd feel safer if no guns existed at all, and if all people could be trusted to not want to do harm to anyone else."

So would I. Unfortunately, we live in the real world, and I am glad I can get a permit at least to be able to defend myself. I am one of those "scrawny-pale-guy" types. The type that a thug with a pipe might think looks to be a good target for mugging or worse.

The view that current gun laws in the U.K. allow violent criminals to keep fire arms is a fallacy.

Craig, Uckfield,

The point, Craig, is that criminals will not give up their guns. If I am willing to risk 20-Life to take some old lady's purse, and life, why am I going to care about the extra few years for using a gun to do it?

For that matter, if I am a large, strong, young thug, why do I need a gun? I can mug lesser persons without regard for what they might do to me. Unless they might be packing.

Chris, Howell, MI, USA

"Another thing to consider is the accidents that happen with kids finding their parents' guns and accidentally shooting themselves and/or their friends." (illegal)

"gun deaths come from drug dealers and then,"acts of passion," people caught up in the moment with a little alcohol mixed in." (also illegal)

I'm really for more sensible controls, much stricter and taking away the ludicrous right to own an automatic weapon. (show me a case of a LEGAL automatic being used in a crime)

Liz, Tampa, FL, US

so, how, exactly, do we need more laws to make illegal things illegal?

Chris, Howell, MI, USA

No I would not feel safer, because everybody / anybody else would have one.

jordi, bournemouth,

The oft cited definition of mental illness, "to repetedly act in a manner that brings about an undesirable result, expecting a different outcome each time", certainly applies to the minds of those who would restrict normal, law abiding citizens' access to firearms for the purpose of self defense. Most every time and place it's been tried a more vulnerable population is increasingly victimized by a newly empowered malicious element.

woodpiggie, plattsburgh, us /ny

William Rawle, respected 1800's constitutional scholar, knew ben franklin - his 'Constitutional View of the United States' (~1829) is required reading to graduate today from west point; often quoted favorably by progun & gun gurus, this very quote in fact:
Wm Rawle, ~1829: "In the second article, it is declared, that a well regulated militia is necessary to the security of a free state; a proposition from which few will dissent..
..The COROLLARY, from the first position, is, that the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed."
webster's 1828 dictionary: COROLLARY: 1. A conclusion or consequence drawn from premises, or from what is advanced or demonstrated.
(2). A corollary is an inference from a preceding proposition.
.. Wm Rawle CLEARLY calls the individual clause a COROLLARY to the militia clause; the individual clause is thus irrefutably proved to be a CONSEQUENT evolved from militia necessity, succinctly explained by a man of the times.

Jimmy the One, Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania

I just want to add my two cents worth. I live in the high desert of New Mexico. Here we have few restrictions on firearms. We are allowed to carry firearms in our personal vehicles. It is something left over from the early days. It works very well and we do not have mass murders or people murdering each other in the streets. Our crime rate is low as is our violence rate. Our self defence laws are also pretty relaxed. At least we can defend ourselves against violent criminals and housebreakers. My thoughts go out to the law abiding British citizens who cannot defend themselves. Perhaps when one of the MPs who sleep in gated houses and have armed bodyguards is accosted things will change for the better for Britain

RICHARD, new mexico, usa

Dear Alex T, London; The 43 times statistic is nonsense, its a study thats so bad it verges on the fraudulent. If you want a scientific and accurate view of this statistic i suggest you google "guns in the medical literature" and look at the article by dr Edgar Suter He notes that "Interestingly, the authors themselves described, but did not use, the correct methodology".

The true measure of the protective benefits of guns are the lives saved, the injuries prevented, the medical costs saved, and the property protected -- not the burglar or rapist body count. Since only 0.1% to 0.2% of defensive gun usage involves the death of the criminal, any study, such as the one you quote ,that counts criminal deaths as the only measure of the protective benefits of guns will deliberately underestimate the benefits of firearms by a factor of 500 to 1,000".

Be convinced

Lech Beltowski, Auckland, NZ

How many of you on the "anti-gun" side of this debate have been on the receiving side of a violent crime? I have and it's not pretty. It makes you realize that there is in fact evil in this world. I also guarantee that you will change your viewpoint on the subject in about a nano-second..

The issue is not guns at all, it's people. In the UK (and known world) the murder rate hovered around 50 per 100,000 from the 14th through 17th centuries, well before the time of guns en masse. Yes, we are more civilized now, but it seems to me that we have done a pretty good job of killing each other since the beginning of time and will, in all likelihood, continue to do so. Just because we have invented television & Viagra does not mean that evil has disappeared from the face of the earth.

Because this thread is fact heavy, I have to mention that guns prevent about 2.5 million crimes per year in the US - without being fired, so please factor that into the math I have seen in this thread.

Tom, Charleston, SC U.S.

Elisabeth from Hull said:

"I don't want to shoot people, whether they attack me or not."

So Elisabeth, how would you feel if you were the victim of one of the latest outrages to occur to unarmed people in America: A group of thugs broke into a house, beat the husband senseless, tied the wife (lets say it you) and daughter to beds, raped both multiple times, poured petrol around the beds, threw a match on it and left.

In those circumstances would you still be happy to let them have their evil way, because you have a moral objection to using a gun?

You would rather see your daughter raped and burned to death than consider shooting the animal responsible?

Philip, Newberg, Oregon

Tom from Cardiff

Sorry to disagree ... "most criminal guns do not come from legal supply channels" First and foremost they are most often ILLEGALLY made available to them by family members, in that they are inelligible to obtain them themselves, Second, they are purchased for them by straw buyers, and turned over to them ILLEGALLY, for the same reason, Third, they are often purchased ILLEGALLY from a gun runner on the street, and Fourth, they are stolen during the commission of a ILLEGAL crime. Fifth they are purchased ILLEGALLY through the presentation of FALSE ID information and circumvent the worthless National Instant Check System and lastly, an extremely few ... less than 1% are obtained from a licensed dealer ... ILLEGALLY ... under false prentense at a gun show - after having cleared a Federal background check.

Gun control doesn't work -- the reasons for the decline in NYC was fully explained by NYC authorities at http://www.gladwell.com/1996/1996_06_03_a_tipping.htm

Glenn Anderson, Murphy, NC

Statistics are constantly manipulated in both directions to make political points. The most dangerous cities in America are also the cities where it is illegal to defend yourself with a gun. Take any statitistic you want and you will at least end up there.

If you regard a pistol as a simple peice of machinery with a specific function, you will quickly realize that it is far more benine and less dangerous than say a vehicle. People are not afraid of loading up their families in an auto and hurling themselves down a highway at 80 kph in close proximity to total strangers, but they are afraid of a 4 lb. peice of metal with 8 moving parts. Why? It is ignorance. Lack of knowledge = fear. What's more dangerous by any statistic...guns or automobiles? You are more likely to be killed by an automobile than you are of a gun in any country. In the US, more of us are trained and educated, and therefore qualified to carry, conceal and defend ourselves and our families in most areas.

John Smith, Indiana, USA

As an American, the surge of violent crime in the UK (and elsewhere in Europe) is depressing as we entertain here renewed interest in disarming law-abiding citizens. The bitter situation of the UK does not trouble our gun-ban proponents. They cannot learn.

The 2nd Amendment, BTW, is about self-defense and the inalienable right that an individual has to defend self, family, community and property against predation from criminals, solo or in groups, even from the government. It is about guns only as they are the most effective tool to that end. The concept existed before guns and will after. It is about people and right to life and liberty.

Paraphrasing a wiser man, there are worse things than fighting for your life against evil. You could have a so empty life even you wouldn't do anything to preserve it.

I have been on the sharp end. I choose to fight, but only if attacked. My guns (and driving) have killed fewer than Ted Kennedy's driving.

Harry Schell, Pasadena CA , USA

Mr. Munday is to be congratulated on a very insightful and well articulated article on the issue of gun control. I particularly enjoyed his use of Thomas Jefferson's visionary statement. Here, in the United States we face significant challenges in preserving the 2nd Amendment. The right to keep and bare arms is circumvented not by legislation but quite often by regulation, making gun ownership more complicated and more regulated year after year. The legislative mentality of the liberal left is to regulate guns out of existence without a legislative record of opposing the 2nd Amendment.

Guns in the United States particularly semiautomatic weapons with high capacity magazines have been officially designated as "evil." A term that can only be rightfully and correctly applied to people, unless one is an animist. However, like unborn children guns can't vote so they are easy prey. People commit crimes not firearms; personal safety is a privilege that should be afforded to all.

Salvador Palma, Atlanta, GA

In a democracy, the first line of defence is the citizen; which rather lets the UK out of that category, since the citizen (sorry, subject) is not permitted to hold any realistic means of defence.

I am 60 years old. I was taught to handle firearms by my father, and to use them in a responsible manner, from the age of eight. I grew up in an isolated cottage; my father's shotgun stood beside his desk and, as a child, I never touched it without permission. Despite a more fluid population, (post-war 'squatter's' lived nearby in a former Army camp), we were never burgled, because, as one of the camp's inhabitants told me, 'All farmers have got guns.'

The right of effective self defence no longer exists; 'Appropriate response' is a legalistic fiction which lives only in a court-room and is utterly irrelevant in the real world.

The coin of citizenship has two faces; 'Responsibility' and 'Rights'- without these a society is bankrupt.

'Armatissimi e liberissimi' - Machiavelli

T.R. Booker, Brightonsea, UK

For Oliver in London:
miÄ-tiÄ-tia (m-lsh) KEY

NOUN:

An army composed of ordinary citizens rather than professional soldiers.

A military force that is not part of a regular army and is subject to call for service in an emergency.

The whole body of physically fit civilians eligible by law for military service.

To the rest of my pro-gun control American bretheren: Those who are willing to trade freedom for security, will end up with niether in the end.

Democracy is two wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for lunch. Liberty is a well-armed lamb contesting the vote! -Ben Franklin

David Beeman, Alamogordo, NM

"The largest drop in crimes in the US has been in New York, which has gone from over 2,600 murders in 1990 to 874 in 2005. And they have done so whilst maintaining their strict gun control."

But without significantly changing their gun control laws. The gun control laws that failed to make much of a difference--the 1911 Sullivan Act, the 1967 New York City Gun Control Law, the ban on assault weapons--all happened before the improvement.

Similarly, Britain's most peaceful period was BEFORE the Pistols Act 1903, the Firearms Act 1920, and the 1967 licensing of shotguns measure. Gun control really doesn't work; what does work is what New York City did under Giuliani: strict enforcement of misdemeanors; enlarged police force; raising standards for police officer hires.

Clayton E. Cramer, Horseshoe Bend, Idaho

To "Liz" in Florida (and a few others),

You should gain at least a basic understanding of a topic before engaging in an adult conversation about it.

Right off the bat, nobody is walking around the streets of FL with automatic weapons, or certainly not legally. There is no way for a private citizen to carry an automatic firearm. There are a handful of tightly regulated people with federal licenses that can purchase them, mostly collectors, but they cannot carry them in public.

Secondly, the number of crimes committed with legally registered handguns is statisticly insignificant. Law abiding citizens are not out killing each other, armed or otherwise.

There is no reason for you to be living in fear in your home, you are far more likely to be killed while driving to work. However, if you are reasonably fearful for your current surroundings, don't you believe you have the basic human right to defend yourself?

Mark, Rochester,

This is all very interesting but to get the full background to the evolution of firearms law - and why the USA maintained its Common Law heritage while Britain took a different course - you can do no better than read Professor Joyce Lee Malcolm's book "Guns and violence - the English experience" (ISBN 0-674-00753-0). Published in 2002, it is still topical and very readable. Usual disclaimers.

DLT, Burnham, UK

The ridiculous arguments given by some of you Brits in support of your silly laws that embolden criminals are just so laughable....if you don't care about having the tools to defend yourself and your family, you are a worthless sissy at the mercy of any crazy with arms...be they terrorist, street thug, or tyrant. We have HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS of guns in the U.S. in the hands of both the good and bad, is that worse than Britain with ALL the guns in the hands of the BAD? Americans use guns in self defense millions of times every year, you don't hear about the old woman who waved a gun around and scared off a gang of thirty drunken low lifes or the college kid who whipped out a .45 on a would be carjacker sending him running. I'm beginning to think my grandmother could come over there and whip up on 90% of you whining babies.

julian, Nashville, USA/TN

Was this article written to solely allow Americans to air their perverse logic for their shoot-em-up culture? It is a debate that is nothing to do with the UK, which is why so few Brits have commented on it. American posters please be assured that Britain will never adopt the sort of gun culture that you have. We see the carnage it has wrought in the US and we don't want it or need it..

Rob Smith, London, UK

Wow, Someone is in Dreamland. Someone wake her up. An armed society is a polite society, dear.

QUOTE: Tami from London UK

"No I wouldn't feel safer with a gun. I'd feel safer if no guns existed at all, and if all people could be trusted to not want to do harm to anyone else."

Bryan, Burke, Virginia

It was brought up earlier that "police cannot defend everyone". I might be missing something, but police are only called once a crime has taken place. My brother was talking to a police officer and even the police officer conceded this point. It is a very rare occasion that police are there when a crime is taking place. That is why allowing people to own guns is necessary. While I don't think that people should have heavy machine guns in their homes, I think its overboard when countries, counties, and cities ban, completely, hand guns or other weapons used in self defense. But.. it may be the "red neck" American in me talking.

Michael Thierry, St. Louis, MO

Your article hits the nail on the head. Good job Mr Munday. I also think it is very well written, except for the VA tech incident had 32 killed and 28 more injured I think. It is arguably true that if a student or staff member had been able to legally carry on the VA campus, that the Cho could have been stopped and countless lives saved. Still All in all a very good read. Keep up the good work.

Jungleroy, Salem, US, Oregon

The main reason for the disarmament of Britains was not the rise of crime as officially declared by British polititians but the fear of an armed population dissatisfied with the increasingly socialist government.

Total dependence on the Government needed to implement the current socialist environment in Britain could not have been achieved if people had the individual right to protect themselves. In this era of growing terrorism, the general populace should be deputized not disarmed.

Richard Disney, Reno, Nevada

Liz (Tampa, FL) tells us "that it is very, very hard to wake up EVERY DAY (We live in Florida) to the news of two or three gun deaths the night before just in our area."

In fact, there were 20 murders in Tampa in 2006 (source: <http://tampa.areaconnect.com/crime1.htm>), not the 730 to 1,095 Liz so dramatically describes. And not all of these were shootings.

If the British government's assessment of Britons' character is correct, the US should consider refusing Britons entry to America on the grounds that they are too irresponsible to be allowed the access to guns they would have by being here.

Or did you think your gun laws said something else about you?

John K. Lunde, Corinna, Maine

After witnessing the chaos in New Orleans after Katrina, I realized that no one was going to protect me after a castastrophic event except myself. That's when I bought a gun and have learned to be comfortable with it and would not hesitate to use it if there is a terrorist attack or other event where authorities are too busy to worry about the small stuff (meaning me and mine).

With freedom comes responsibility. Part of that responsibility is to defend your freedom, whether it is threatened globally or locally. Get your freedom back, Brits. You'll be glad you did.

Deborah Durkee, Marietta, USA/GA

The view that current gun laws in the U.K. allow violent criminals to keep fire arms is a fallacy. The law applies to every single UK citizen, including those that live sheltered lives fuelled by criminal activity. These people will be caught and punished, if they are known to possess illegal weapons. The statement that 'Gun laws disarm only the law abiding' is truly absurd. The law is bound to disarm the law abiding, because logically if one is armed they are not law abiding.

Craig, Uckfield,

This is a great article! The problem with this very issue is that both sides are reactionary. I own and shoot guns. Lots of them! I never intend to injure a person with my firearms, I simply shoot targets, cans, etc. It is a sport, and an enjoyable pastime.

The instant I try to bring up the issue of gun control, many people immediately spout "Guns are evil!!!" and close their minds entirely. No object is evil, only can be used for evil.

Anyway...I doubt any change will come soon to either side of the pond, so I feel no further need to elaborate.

Kevin, Fort Collins, USA CO

Wait a minute here! I seem to remember the gun confiscators in the UK admitting, that the gun-bans would NOT reduce crime! So what was their real goal? It is all too obvious to anyone, except the empty-headed leftists who applaud such police-state garbage as gun confiscation schemes.

W. Smith, Greenville, USA

Don't believe the lies of Comrade Northwood above.

Every day an American stops violent crime simply by revealing a firearm and the willingness to use it.

Washington DC is the murder capital of the US and recently a panel of federal judges ruled it's draconian (read English-like) gun control laws were unconstitutional.

I hope that soon the English will again recognize the rights of the individual to be secure in his person from the aggression of others.

D.G., Denton, Texas USA

Murder rates cannot be considered meaningful without considering the way police in US and Britain compile them. In Britain, unless a person is convicted of murder, it is not classed as murder. Manslaughter for instance is not classed as murder. In the US, the situation differs from state to state.

Quoting just official 'murder rates' is meaningless unless one elaborates how each country classifies murder.

The reality is that Britain feels less safe than many parts of the USA.

DaveP, Beverley, UK

Rod, Athens, Texas before you criticise a whole Nation you should learn to read and understand what you are reading otherwise you may preserve the understanding of those that make sweeping generalisations such as yourself that Americans and particularly Texans are stupid!

Phil, Stockport, UK

I have sympathy with the views expressed. Today, it seems that young gang members with no respect for others' lives, and determined criminals can acquire weapons with ease whereas ordinary people wanting to protect themselves are actually prosecuted for doing so by the police, even when these police are uninterested in actually dealing with intruders themselves. Burglary is virtually a non-crime in official eyes these days and criminal offenders are being released without any serious regard for their likely continuation in crime. The social contract in society is based on protection for its citizens and their confidence in justice being done by the organs of the state - if that weakens, people will start to feel they need to act for themselves since only the rich and powerful can buy themselves safety.

kay, Leeds,

While the Second Amendment is crucial in keeping crime down, "the right of the people to keep and bear arms" has little to do with crime, public safety, or even hunting. Rather American gun rights are the ultimate check on governmental tyranny. It is the unspoken, unseen, 800 pound gorilla that keeps a check on radical and revolutionary politics.

It is no coincidence that the more socialist, the more politically correct, the more diverse, more liberal the politician, party or movement the more they want to disarm the general population.

Yes, thousands of citizens are killed by guns each year, but that cost is an inexpensive warranty for a country free of Stalins, Hitlers and Maos.

Da Bear, Walnut Creek, California, USA

The astonishing line the pro-gun lobby comes out with: "If you make carrying guns illegal only criminals will have guns" never ceases to amaze me.

Yes. That's right. It should be illegal for the general public to carry an offensive weapon!

The two valid systems are to (1) prohibit everyone bar the police and forces from carrying firearms (2) make it mandatory for everyone to have a firearm. Allowing some of the populace to arm themselves is a disastrous idea.

Besides, Americans should only constitutionally have a right to bear "arms" in a militia. What does "arms" mean though? Tanks? Bazookas? Grenades? The constitution is hopelessly out of date in this respect and I'm glad we don't have a semi-religious regard for a 200 year old charter. Americans don't need militias to protect themselves against foreigners now.

And yes, I do think the British viewpoint is superior to the American one. Unfortunately that isn't the case in all situations but it DEFINITELY is here!

Will Goudie, Chester, UK

I cannot think of any situation I have ever been in that would not have been made much worse if I had been carrying a gun, but then, as well as being an easy-going type, I am big and ugly, and people do not bother me much.

In Edwardian England, if you killed someone, you were likely to be hanged for it. We could not re-introduce one without the other.

Why not allow persons of good repute (gentlemen) to carry swords? It is a clear and obvious protection, a splendid deterrent, and a weapon of very controllable effect, as well as making an unseemly brawl into a spectacle of some elegance.

Never bring a knife to a gunfight.

Chris O'Brien, Winsford, Cheshire,

Certainly a simple reintroduction of right to bear arms would cause chaos, mainly because most people know nothing of guns or gun safety. I don't agree with going as far as some areas of America (Vermont for example). Our society is not ready for that, and has evolved without guns in the same way Vermont's has evolved with them.

I certainly support the reintroduction for target shooting - it is ludicrous our olympic athletes have to train abroad - often at their great personal expense.

I feel however, we could reintroduce handguns back in for self-defense if a number of safety lessons were required first, followed by a stringent exam, as well as taking in the attitude of the participant at all times (as well as all the checks needed for a firearms licence anyway). People who have accidents in the states, by and large have never been to a proper club - they've just got a permit, bought a gun and have no idea how to carry/store it safely or check clear/unload. EDUCATION is the key!

Richard Hemingway, Uttoxeter, UK

DC is a city that completely bans guns, yet has a huge murder rate.

.. wrong, DC does NOT ban all guns. DC allows rifles & shotguns & there are approx 100,000 legally owned in DC; & business owners & retired cops can possess handguns.

.. if you contend that DC has a 'huge' murder rate then you must also admit that DC's sister city -PRO GUN Richmond Virginia- has a HUGER murder rate, since Richmond's murder rate (~2005) was 43/100k, while DC's was ~35.

.. why hasn't Virginia's guns galore policy worked to lower the murder rate in Richmond?

.. DC is surrounded by 2 states Maryland & Virginia where guns can be readily bought & smuggled into DC easily.

.. DC has no death penalty while both Md & Va do, so it is common practice to bring victims into DC from Md & Va & execute them in DC to avoid death penalty if caught.

.. MORE GUNS, MORE LIES.

Jimmy , Wilkes-Barre, USA

Huzzah! Common sense from an unlikely source! In our laudable efforts - over the last 80+ years to care for and protect all, we have unintentionally removed people's responsibility for themselves and their neighbors. Why are we surprised when grotesque irresponsibility is the result? The guns have always been here, it is WE who have changed.

J.F. Wolfington, Philadelphia, Penn, USA

All those people opposed to gun ownership have obviously never been the victim of a violent assault. I can vividly remember coming home from work one night and being attacked by a 5 strong gang which left me in hospital with 6 stab wounds, and it's not the only time that I have been attacked for no reason, so don't give me any of that self-righteous rubbish about not taking the law into my own hands. If the police, and by extension the government cannot protect me then by what right do they stop me protecting myself?

andy, London,

Can we now leave behind the ranting, the knee-jerking and sterile argument over statistics. The murder rate differs widely from country to country and the availability of firearms is just one of many factors.

For a calm, thought-provoking discussion of Britain's experience of firearms laws "Guns & Violence" by Professor Joyce Lee Malcolm (ISBN 0-674-00753-0) is hard to beat. J L Malcom is Professor of History at Bentley College (USA) and her book covers the experience of firearms - and the laws pertaining to them - in the USA and the UK. It was published in 2002 and may not be at your local bookseller's : don't despair, your nearest library will get it for you at no cost.

David Thomas, Burnham, UK

people who live here in penn have lots of guns.....except in philadelphia, where guns are restricted. outside of philly, we don't lock our cars or our doors.....and we have minimal crime.....robberies are very low and car jackings unheard of.....shootings by legal owners of guns happen rarely here.....only criminals use guns or other weapons to commit crimes.....when are people going to accept the fact that law-abiding citizens who carry guns are a deterrent to crime and criminals love restrictive gun laws???...there is a visceral fear by liberals of guns.....even though statistics always show that legal gun ownership reduces crime and restrictive gun laws encourage criminal activity.

bezoare, pottstown, penn

Robert Turnbull wrote:

"You have a short or selective memory. Legally held guns were used at Hungerford and Dunblane."

If the police had bothered to enforce the law as it existed at the time then neither of the murderers would have had a legal firearm.

Peter, London,

I am firmly of the belief that guns do not kill people, people kill people. If I owned a gun I would no more kill someone with it than I would if I had a knife, a screwdriver or a hammer.

It beggers belief that those who are willing to use them can get them quite easily however I have very little chance of owning one legally. Strict gun control in this country has done little for those law abiding amongst us.

David Knight, Ellesmere Port, United Kingdom

Squeeler from Greensboro (Its caps for the city name as well as North Carolina by the way have to wonder where the sender really is...) Any way living in Seattle Washington which gets and "F" from the gun banning Brady Center in Washington DC I do NOT note the crime that squeeler talks about and looking at the crime stats for N Carolina he/she does not know what they are talking about. Seattle has had two incidents of citizens defending lives in the last three months remarkable only in their rarity. Both licensed armed citizens in the Israel model, a model that has worked for generations for them in the face of total terrorism. The UK is a socialist police state in all but name. The government would rather you die with a stiff upper lip in good form than bother them to do the one job government has above all.

30 year vet police officer making these comments!

C. Sarver, Seattle , Washington USA

Wonderful article.

Even though it is helpful to hear evidence in favour of returning legal firearms ownership to the British public, it might be just as pertinent to wonder if the freedom of any person to arm themselves for their own defence is a matter that should be decided by a government at all

Delegating certain responsibilities to an authority are inappropriate. Personal security is perhaps the most extreme example, because of the inability of the authority to make good on their obligations. This leads inevitably to a spiral of ineffective and increasingly oppressive legislation, which by definition require law abiding citizens to relinquish freedoms of some kind.

This not only effectively empowers the criminal, but increases the feelings of fear and helplessness among those who otherwise would be confident enough to speak up or make a stand against the criminal themselves. Without these people, how can you be surprised that crime is such a problem?

James, Stourbridge, West Midlands

It helps if people put the number of gun deaths in the US into perspective with other causes of death. In 2000 there were 28,163 deaths involving a firearm. 16,586 of those deaths were SUICIDES. There were 10,801 Homicides involving a gun. In 200, only 776 accidental deaths involved a firearm. Now onto other causes of Accidental death:

Falls 13,322

Poison (solid, liquid) 12,757

Choking on food or other object 4,313

Drowning 3,402

Fires, flames 3,377 In the US, you are about 4 times more likely to be killed in a car crash than killed with a gun. (43,354 deaths) Over 9 times more likely to be killed by a negligent Doctor (98,329 deaths), almost 6 times more likely to die from Influenza or pneumonia (65,313 deaths), and over 65 times more likely to die from heart disease. (710,760 deaths) Having seen those numbers, one can clearly see that gun death is not the problem that some people make it out to be. <http://www.gunowners.org/fs0404>.

Benjamin Whetham, Grand Forks, ND, USA

To Dave in England,

So you would feel safer with a gun but would like some decent training. Well you won't get it in England. Laws your government has passed do not even allow your Olympic Shooting team to train in your country. How sad!

But what's really sad is so much of England has just become a country of Sheeple. You've become content to be controlled by the Elitists that govern you.

Just do what they say and you'll be ok. How sad.

Wake up soon or it'll be too late.

As it is, England, France and all of Europe wil fall in 20-40 years unless you open your eyes. It will be a Muslim society with Muslim Shria law.

Tim, Panama City, FL

I gave 25 years to my local police agency. Let me assure the police are a REACTIONARY arm of the government.

I hope you have a plan of action until they REACT to your call to come save you from the horrible thug that has beset you and your family.

Best of luck.

Matthew Chapple, Winston-Salem, , NC / USA

The base fact is that as Law abiding citizens, we are legally obliged to NOT prevent assailants (to either our person or property) from carrying out their crimes. It is a sorry state of fact that if an armed man broke into my house to rape my wife at gunpoint, I could end up imprisoned for assault, for trying to prevent him! It's just ridiculous!

One more nail in the coffin for (not so)Great (any more) Britain. And just another reason that I & so many others who think like I do (logically, sensibly & with a portion of rationality) are leaving this blighted land for the freedoms of other countries (Tennessee here I come! 14 months & counting)

What ever happened to the concept of Government being in fear of it's citizens? (As mentioned, I think, in the US constitution) Why are we suddenly afraid of the Government WE elected to represent our best interests? Can't wait to leave.....

Rob Peel, East Yorkshire, England

Thank you for a true and honest article about the farce that gun control amounts to. It is a simple fact that if you ban guns, the only ones that will still have them are criminals. Disarm the victims and the criminals run rampant with no fear of individuals that they prey on.

Maybe the mentality of being a victim has overtaken too many in England, but I don't wish to be one or any of my family. The police can't be everywhere all the time to protect you from those who would do you harm.

Brian Davis, Shawnee, Oklahoma, USA

There are two points which have not yet been made. First, the CCW permit and gun ownership are separate issues. A state which has lax gun laws does not automatically have loose CCW laws--see Virginia; i.e. a 20 gauge for home protections is available for everyone, but carrying a hidden .38 out into the general populace is State regulated. In many States, you may carry a pistol outside your home so long it is in plain view. Never really happens, except in mountain towns. It seems to upset the locals for some reason. Second, residing in a State with lax gun laws allows you to be a 'free rider', if you so choose. I for once do not own a gun, nor do any of my friends; however, we all feel safer that out and about town or at home we may be surrounded by those who do. It promotes social cohesion as well since it allows your fellow citizens to act in a quasi-policing role.

bjm, Flagstaff, AZ

Interesting, most of Stalin's useful idiots are apparently still in Europe based on the viewer comments. As an United States citizen, I would like to propose a national tax to send our "useful idiots" to Europe where they belong. Perhaps gun control is a good idea for Europe as I am certain "useful idiots" are prone to suicide.

Frank, Tucson, AZ

Bruce Northwood complains he isn't safer for the 200 million legal private guns in America. Bruce lives in Washington DC, the only US city where there are NO legal guns except for the police. By definition, all other guns in DC are in criminal hands.

DC is also the city with the highest murder rate in the US. Is Bruce safer for DC's gun ban? Doesn't look that way, huh?

The high crime rate in inner cities, particularly those that bar the law-abiding from defending themselves, is one reason I refuse to live in one. Yes, the decal on the police cruiser says "To protect and serve". But the police cannot protect individuals from crime, because when someone commits a crime, the police aren't there. (Even criminals are seldom dumb enough to commit crimes right in front of a cop.)

The Supreme Court has ruled that police have no duty to protect individuals, and cannot be held liable for failing to do so. If it's not their duty to protect you, then whose duty is it?

Yup. It's yours.

Phil, Merrimack, New Hampshire, USA

Let's assume the writer is correct. So where do we draw the line? Automatics? Explosives? RPGs? NBCs? Just how much power are we willing to trust each and every member of society with?

Nick, London, UK

Anyone read about the latest 95+ year old woman to be attacked in NY City? I but there would be a lot fewer cowardly punks doing that kind of rubbish if one of them were to get clipped while trying to talk an old woman's purse, don't you think?

Bryan, Burke, Virginia

Let the Yanks have Guns, Let them gun each other down if thats what they want to do. Oh, by the way, the 2nd ammendment carries a qualification that arms are to be carried only in a time of unrest ... or some such. Not to be carried all day, every day by any hillbilly that wishes to. In the UK the police do not as a rule carry guns, and neither do most people. The element that has started to carry guns (illegal) other than the hardcore professional criminals are the most impressionable in our society and they are inspired to carry these weapons as a result of watching mind numbing American Trash in the movies which glamourises the use of these Killing machines. The use of a pistol (hand gun) can only be descibed as for killing, A rifle , it can be argued, has a sporting use, but never a pistol.

Matthew, warrington,

In an average year, 29000, over 80 a day, die of gunshots in USA.

Most are killed by immediate family or close acquaintances in domestic disputes fueled by alcohol.

The UK rate is 200 people per year. The Brits tend to have same disputes, drink just as much but do not have guns lying around the house.

http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/en/annex.pdf

So we are safer with gun control.

Patrick Kirk, Reading, UK

Comment to Mr. Helton: Fully Automatic Weapons ARE legal in the US for individuals paying a \$200 "Tax" via ATF. Such licensing has been in effect since the 1930's.

Comment to Liz: To date, there has not been a single case of one of these legally owned machine guns being used in the commission of a crime.

So many people from the US have responded to Richard's excellent article because (contrary to popular belief in the UK) their 'cousins' are somewhat well read and like to exerceise their First Amendment Right under the Constitution where possible. It appears that most of these people also like to exerceise their Second Ammendment Right as well.

A "Militia" is formed from "the people". "Well regulated" means having skill in use of in this context. This concept is not foreign in Europe: The Swiss do not have a standing army, but a militia. The people have guns and know how to use them. This most probably gave the Germans second thoughts about invading them... Twice.

John, Dallas, Texas

ashton james: .. in all states where permits are granted to carry a firearm, the incidents involving a firearm have dropped significantly.

.. GONG.... After enabling shall issue concealed carry laws (siccw) in montana in 1991, montana's violent crime rate has TRIPLED.

.. after enabling siccw in west virginia it's violent crime rate doubled.

.. after enabling siccw in both dakotas their violent crime rates also near doubled (altho still very low).
 .. after enabling shall issue concealed carry laws in pennsylvania her violent crime rate rose 27% then leveled off, but has not yet fallen below the violcrime rate for her shall issue start year.
 .. Indiana's violent crime rate goes up & down past her start year like a sine curve.
 .. Tennessee needed 10 years before her violcrime rate fell below the siccw start.
 .. & what munday doesn't mention is that florida's violent crime rate rose 17% the first 5 years before falling below.

Jimmy , Wilkes-Barre, USA

England & Wales - Home Office figures.

1988 - 410 people killed and injured by illegal use of firearms, and over a million firearm and shotgun certificates.

2006 - Less than 700,000 certificates for legal possession and 691,508 deaths and injuries from illegal use.

Armed crime increases nearly tenfold whilst legal firearm ownership declines by around a third.

It may not be a direct "cause and effect" - but it does make you think !

Mike Eveleigh, Wrexham, Wales

Well said.

I have wept for England and just about given her up as lost.

It is, perhaps, much to hope, but I wish for England that rationality and courage return to her shores and to her people.

A civilized people looks to its own defense, not to the ministrations of an overbearing nanny entity dedicated to conformity and compliance.

My fondest hope for this Island Nation is the return of honor and dignity to its citizens.

Garry Hamilton, Carson City, NV

What is wrong with some of you people??? Do you not value your life or the lives of your family members??? It is mind boggling to me that some people in this day and age are too weak minded and weak willed to protect themselves.

"Guns are bad, take them away from everyone because it will make me FEEL safer." Stop letting your emotions dictate your lives and start using logic and common sense and you will live longer and happier lives. In every book, article or report ever written about gun control and its effect on society, people claim to FEEL safer when gun control laws are passed, not that they are actually safer. Feeling safe and being safe are completely different things. I for one refuse to spend my short time on earth FEELING safe. I will protect myself and my family by any and all means necessary. If that means using a gun, so be it.

If you refuse to protect yourself and your family from violent crime out of fear of a gun, then you shall get no sympathy from me.

Darcy, Forty Fort, PA

"I know that the figures show taht an armed population means a cautious criminal, but it also means drunken fist-fights become high-noon shootouts.."

I've lived in Vermont where there are no gun control laws and have yet to hear of such a thing - I now live in Texas and have been here for 8 years and have yet to hear of such a thing.

You are making a positive statement that free gun ownership equals daily public shootouts, therefore the burden of proof rests with you. Present your evidence. Otherwise, I can only assume you are making an emotional appeal rather than a fact based argument.

LEH, Austin, TX, USA

On statistics that are being bandied about. The UN labels the UK as having more violent crime than the US, rather than statistics from - suspect - indigenous government sources.

The UK definition and recording of murder / homicide is different from that of US. Indeed, it differs between England and Scotland - which is most likely why the homicide rate in Scotland appears to be TWICE that of England and Wales according to official UK government statistics (it certainly isn't the result of differing gun laws).

Before people spout off lame propaganda they should do some research - but more importantly use some common sense.

Making yourself defenceless cannot possibly make you safer.

First rule applies.

John Pate, Edinburgh, Scotland

Seems since the UK in a knee jerk Tony Blair vote grabbing response to a single outrageous mass murder banned the keeping or using of handguns, ruining the pastime hobby of millions of responsible British citizens, violent crime has increased and more alarmingly crimes involving the use of guns.

I have heard that British Olympic Shooting competitors now have to go abroad to practice, how ridiculous.

Perhaps the time has come to repeal this stupid law and give responsible people back their freedom to practice their hobby, shooting.

Anthony, Basingstoke, UK

Actually, I want to thank the British across the pond for our gun rights in our Bill of Rights. I was your ancestors that were marching to sieze Colonial Armories and stockpiles of Gun Powder so you could easily defeat any pending colonial opposition.

Years later, after we won, we made sure a bad government, criminals, or an invading force could never take over 1 American household without a fight. We had the rights to defend ourselves!

We therefore "owe" you British citizens due to your original abusive imperialism for our gun rights that we enjoy today.

Too bad what has happened to your country, you now continue to set an example of what not to do with Islamic terrorism, failures with immigration, crime, economics, and unending rules based on political correctness.

Thank you my fellow British for the rights I enjoy here in America today.

Mr. Doopy, republic, USA

No I wouldn't feel safer with a gun. I'd feel safer if no guns existed at all, and if all people could be trusted to not want to do harm to anyone else.

Tarni, London, UK

Rod, Athens, Texas: "Well sheeple the majority of us in America support the Second Amendment."

Wow, he called us "sheeple". That, like totally invalidates the freedom of British people to comment on a British newspaper. Who's the arrogant one again, Rod?

Dan, Hampton, UK

I'm an Australian, the gun control lobby have forced millions of dollars/pounds to be misdirected at gun buy backs and tighter regulatory frameworks. When the real culprit is societal indifference to tackling violent anti-social behaviour at its roots. Children grow up on a diet of gratuitously explicit violent TV & Movies. Preframing adolescent minds to accept violence and anti-social behaviour as normal. Governments throw their hands in the air looking for the PR quickfix - band guns. Save lives by tackling the root causes, unfortunately it takes courage and conviction.

W. Brown, Queanbeyan, NSW, Australia

I have to agree with Andy from Abroath, that it is an excelent article but most people will ignore it as they do not read the Times and the "Sun" says guns are dangerous.

Birkbeck, Bowling, Scotland

I was ready to hate this article and its idea, but it does make some sense. However, I feel the problem would be temporarily calmed rather than solved by allowing fire arms. There are many ways to improve society in the UK and thus reduce violent crime.

PS: ironic that children have age guidance on video games but will get a toy gun for their birthday.

joseph, london,

All too true, I think we Brits hate ourselves it's the only reason I can think of for supporting the criminal over the law abiding.

Alan Mclean, nweton-Le-Willows, Merseyside

An armed society is a polite society.

William Wagner, Las Vegas,

Does gun control work? You be the judge ... Since Great Britain's handgun ban in January 1997 the number of deaths and injuries from gun crime in England and Wales increased 340 percent in the

seven years from 1998 to 2005. The rates of serious violent crime, armed robberies, rapes and homicide have also soared. The Republic of Ireland banned and confiscated all handguns and all center fire rifles in 1972, but murder rates rose fivefold by 1974 and in the 20 years after the ban has averaged 114 percent higher than the pre-ban rate. Does gun control work? According to facts and figures, it does not.

Carl Lot, Chicago, USA - Illinois

The anti-gun poseurs are simply unwilling to take responsibility for their own lives where it literally counts most. But, that is not enough. When others do so, that makes them look even more inadequate. No one can be permitted to be seen as more responsible, more generous, or more caring than the liberal. So it is that they seek equality in servitude.

james wilson, las vegas, US

Great comment, and really made me think! Well done!

Mark philips, London, UK

Well said Richard; what we need is a practicable strategy to return the UK to position where we are legally allowed to have the capabilities and rights to defend ourselves (and others) whenever it is necessary, because it's clear that the Police have neither the resources or the mission so to do.

Robert P, Winchester, Hampshire,

An excellent article. The number of burglaries of occupied dwellings here in East Texas are close to zero, since almost all households have guns (plural). The gun laws in the State of Texas allow the citizens to safeguard themselves rather than rely on the limited resources of law enforcement. In fact the telephone emergency number 911 is jokingly referred to as "government-sponsored dial-a-prayer".

Charles Anning, San Augustine, Texas, USA

It is refreshing to see an article stating the realities of "gun control", rather than the myths, inaccuracies & hysterical outpourings of IANSA, the Gun Control Network & the Brady Campaign. The number of crimes of violence committed by Americans licensed to carry a concealed firearm is infinitesimal compared to the number of crimes they have prevented & lives saved.

Mike, Whitehaven, Cumbria, UK

UK law just confirms the NRA (US) position that if you ban guns the only people with guns are the criminals. 10 years experience has shown that banning guns has not worked. I don't think sub-machine guns should be available to the general public but hand guns and rifles would not be a problem. Most people would not bother anyway.

Michael G, London, UK

wombat, you seem to forget that in the same situation a knife, or a blunt object, or even ones own fists could easily have done the same in domestic situations. You can't blame the gun for someones murderous intent.

Great article though, I hope this will help the situation with my friends across the sea

Thomas Cobb, Simi Valley, USA

As a gun-toting American, I think the whole issue can be summed up in one sentence: "You cannot arm slaves and expect them to remain slaves; nor can you disarm a free people and expect them to remain free."

Don Cline, Mesa, Arizona USA

The question should be: Who has the right to deny anyone effective self defense and to then not be responsible? The answer is: A government grown too big and indifferent to be in control of your country.

SteveNelson, W-S, N.Carolina

My wife and I live in Kansas City, Missouri and got our "concealed carry permits" this year. The only requirements are that you not be a felon and take a one day course on the laws around self defense with a gun and you must qualify on the shooting range.

My wife now carries a 9 mm on her walks through the nearby woods and when in the city. I carry when I have to go to the seamier parts of the city.

"Gun crimes" against individuals (especially non-drug related crimes) have dropped every year since Missouri enacted "concealed carry" for non-felons.and with good reason.

Criminals here never know whether the ordinary citizen is carrying a pistol or not. They do know that there is a good chance they are carrying and an assault might be met with bullets.

I feel certain that if any psycho or terrorist starts shooting in a public place in Missouri he or she will find return fire coming their way almost immediately.

John Perney, Kansas City, Missouri, USA

Bruce from D.C....

Did you even read the article? What does that even mean? 200 million guns? Left to right, up to down...i think you might be reading some other way. So there are 200 million guns? Obviously law abiding citizens are no threat to you. (because they abide by the law) Hence your only danger is from non-law abiding citizens. By definition, if they are not law abiding citizens then enacting laws banning guns will be ignored. Herego, the only people with weapons are the people who would use the weapons unlawfully. SO IT MAKES NO SENSE TO BAN LAWFUL CITIZENS FROM OWNING A WEAPON

brett, chicago, il

I legally carry a gun and have not as of yet had any encounter where I felt the need to use it (thank God). But I'd much rather have a gun when I need it than need a gun and don't have it. Guns kill, yes, but guns save lives too. Criminal ALWAYS get and have guns. Criminals do not obey the law, hence will not obey guns laws. Gun control laws prevent the law abiding citizen with the means to defend themselves. Bravo for this article, happy to find there are a least some people thinking over there. Gun crimes will continue to rise over therer until you people force your politicos to change the laws and permit you to carry concealed weapons.

Mike, Manchester, USA/NH

The right of self defense is a fundamental right. It goes along with the right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Without the right of self defense, which is enshrined in the US Constitution's Second amendment, no other fundamental right has any meaning. Disarming citizens deprives them of that fundamental right at puts them at the mercy of criminals and a tyrannical government.

Its sad that the Brits have turned their backs on this right, on which all others depend.

Jack, Florida, USA

"The 2nd US Amendment is all about a deep distrust of government and need for the citizen to have the capability to put an end to a tyrannical regime" -T. Smith, State College, PA, USA

Well, why aren't you putting and end to the Bush administration then?

Pete, Cov,

Mr. Tampa Jeff, Tampa, FL US tossed out this statement: "Norway has far and away the highest firearm ownership per capita in Western Europe, yet it has the lowest murder rate."

What the....? No, Tampa Jeff, we do not! In Norway there are a lot of hunters owning legal guns, but the gun control is very strict. You are not allowed to carry anything that can be _perceived_ as a gun by others in public, hidden or otherwise. There are, on the other hand, some people that own illegal guns (i.e. collectors of rare - often military- guns and criminals). The average Norwegian DO NOT own guns at all!

Oslo-girl, Oslo, Norway

Tom from Cardiff said:

"Nearly all the guns in circulation amongst criminals in the US come from the legal supply channels, either bought legally or illegally from dealers, or stolen from private citizens. "

You only wish. Cheap pistols made in Brazil flow across borders every day, and run through most cities in the United States. Some may come from thefts, but to say that "nearly all" come from legal supply channels is to buy into what the Brady Campaign wants you to believe.

Here is the clearest sign of governmental ignorance: stop lawbreakers by imposing more laws on the law-abiding. If people are already breaking the law, what will more gun laws mean to them? They've already proven that they can get guns illegally from a variety of sources. So why penalize me? I (and my guns) haven't done anything illegal--ever.

Steve, Rochester, NY

Glad you mentioned Dunblane, a perfect example of laws and bureaucracy failing. We had one of those in California, a reprobate with AIDS dementia named Patrick Purdy walked out on as school yard and methodically shot the Asian children at play. The grossly

overweight school employee couldn't move fast enough to do anything. Purdy had been in constant trouble with the law, but had his offenses reduced over and over again. Rather like modern British law enforcement isn't it? Toothless laws, inept and ineffective bureaucrats, career bad guys.

Here's the deal about guns, they need to be "on the street". Guns work when there are so many spread around the populace that the bad guys can't depend on having unarmed victims. There are never enough police around and the government will never stand up and say that they are responsible for protecting you. (They know they can't, and it would be a financial disaster to say so.) "Legally held" guns, locked in cabinet are worthless.

Gene H. Dreher, Hermosa Beach, USA/California

The sheer perversity of this country's approach to personal safety and the right to self-defence (or lack thereof) is staggering. Of course I would feel safer with a gun. Sadly, the only people who have such a safeguard are senior members of the government, select police officers and the criminal fraternity. The rest of us are completely powerless in the face of violent criminal aggression. The oft-derided Americans are absolutely right to treasure their right to keep and bear arms. Yes, the US has a far higher murder rate, it always has had; its homicide patterns seem to be borne from a complex cultural phenomenon. However, up to the 1920s, when the UK had no gun controls at all, our murder rate with firearms was negligible. Since then, the law abiding have been progressively reduced to powerlessness by being disarmed. We should challenge and overturn the liberal-left nostrum that armed citizens, acting in self-dence are evil. Guns are simply equalizers, no more, no less.

Keith G Darby, Flamborough, East Yorkshire

I have just read all of the comments above and they seem to split fairly evenly, for and against the desirability of a legally armed citizenry. The trouble with the comments against is that they are almost universally false, silly and uninformed. The USA has actually performed the social experiment for us. Starting in Florida, right to carry concealed handguns for self defence have been introduced piecemeal across many individual States. Regardless of the evidence from the experience of States which had already done this, in every single State, scaremongers predicted gutters running with blood, road rage resulting in shootings, husbands shooting wives and vice versa. And then none of these catastrophic consequences materialised. Spousal murders remained just the same as before. Road rage incidents fell, as did robbery, rape and violent crime in general. The incidents of illegal use of legal weapons were miniscule. Drunken yobs did not shoot up the streets.

Kenneth Hynes, London United Kingdom, UK

"There are 200 million guns floating around America. Are we safer? No!

Bruce L. Northwood, Washington, D.C., USA"

Speak for yourself. While it may be true for you living in the "gun free" murder capital of the U.S., but my family and I are much safer.

I have a concealed handgun license, following an FBI background check, fingerprinting, and a course in gun law, safety, and non-violent dispute resolution. I also had to demonstrate handgun proficiency.

Set aside your prejudice and educate yourself. Responsible gun ownership in a violent world is a good thing -- you should support it even if you don't plan to own a gun.

T.R., Austin, Texas

A gun is a force equalizer. It's the one weapon that in a set of trained hands allows a smaller, weaker person to defend himself/herself against a larger, stronger person with hostile intent. It's also not a bad way of discouraging an attack by a group of thugs. The police cannot always be there when a predator strikes. If more individuals were able to protect themselves and their families, there would be less crime for the police to be investigating. Guns are not toys and they come with awesome responsibilities to make sure they're not stolen, used improperly, or accidentally fired. I have to believe the average British citizen is every bit as capable of meeting those responsibilities as an average American. At the very least, Brits need the law to recognize they have the right to use any force required to subdue a home intruder. Banning guns just left the populace disarmed and defenseless to illegally used guns, knives, and fists. That's just plain wrong.

Jill, Pittsburgh, PA, USA

I have to stick up for DC - I've lived here for over a year and have never felt threatened. Before that I lived in London for 4 years, and

I dreaded coming home late from work - I didn't even live in a particularly bad area (North Notting Hill).

I feel less safe now reading all these comments about the number of people in the US who carry guns though! I see many weapons on the security guards on the way to work, but I don't like the idea of so many concealed weapons...

Iona, Washington, DC

Frank Upton is wrong.

Recent studies show that in the United States 2.5 to 4 Million people use a firearm to defend themselves from criminal attack. Less than 10% actually need to fire their weapon. Many of these incidents go unreported.

Paul E. Carlson, Elkhart, Indiana, USA

Over 10,000 homicides with guns a year in the US don't encourage me to consider widespread gun ownership. This is about 40 times the UK rate, adjusted for population. Gun ownership in the US is a partial solution to the problems created by gun ownership.

Another problem with widespread gun ownership is the huge number of accidental deaths that result.

Frank Upton, Solihull,

In about 1759, when Benjamin Franklin was still a British subject, he is quoted to have said the following:

"Those who would give up Essential Liberty to purchase a little Temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety."

Those of you (in the US and the UK alike) who support gun control might reflect on these words. It is my informed view that citizens owning (and keeping and bearing) guns is more important to liberty and freedom than is taking guns away from citizens important to safety and crime control.

It is great to see such an article published in the London Times. Methinks people are beginning to wake up on the issue of gun control and it's relation to crime.

Dr. Carl Dick, Chicago, Illinois, USA,

The issue is not that "everyone should have a gun", but rather a law-abiding citizen should have a CHOICE not to be a defenseless victim. It's great to see that common sense is alive and well in the UK - although it's nearly been killed off by political correctness and other socialistic silliness.

Marco, Miami, FL USA

Bruce L. Northwood,

How's that gun ban working for you, in the MURDER CAPITAL OF THE US?

Travis Morgan, Wichita, Kansas, USA

Great article. As a former Law Enforcement Officer in the U.S. (Atlanta), I concur with the finding and opinions of this article. The concept of "Protect and Serve" though honorable, is not necessarily held true in practice. In general, an officer who is trained and willing to interdict a violent situation is more often than not simply cleaning up the mess as the offender has absconded before arrival.

In population centers where the officer to citizen ratio could be in the thousands to 1, it is simply unreasonable to expect broad and effective prevention. This, of course, is exacerbated in an unarmed populace.

Anthony Tarone, Atlanta, GA, USA

The Liberal apologist's knew all this when they disarmed the law abiding of this country. They also knew what would happen! The fact is that the governments of today would far rather innocent people were the victims of violent crime than a single criminal be killed or injured in the commission of his crime.

It also allows them to introduce infringements upon our freedoms that would have our ancestors rising in armed insurrection. Oh, and that's another reason the people of this country aren't allowed weapons. An armed citizenry has to be listened to by it's government.

SwordofAlbion, London,

Firearm homicide rate, deaths per 1,000 people per year - US 0.028, UK 0.001, i.e. murder by firearm, per capita, is 28 times more frequent in the US than the UK. 'Nuff said!

Ted, London, UK

all the statistics on armed self defense have a wide degree of inaccuracies because 99.5% of the time the crime is stopped by mere presence of a firearm (without a single shot being fired). the numbers are between 800,000 and 2.4 million times a year. just basing your studies on killed criminals only (the kellerman method i like to call it) will give you a very misleading result. thats where the 43 times more liekly stat came from

Alex Mand, East Hills, New York,

Okay, okay, don't believe the author of this piece. Read this instead:

http://www.law.harvard.edu/students/orgs/jlpp/Vol30_No2_KatesMauseronline.pdf

Michael, Eugene, OR

Mr. Munday has seen the light and has observed through logical and empirical observation the truth of banning of lawful, private possession of firearms. It has long been known to even the crown of England as far back as the colonial revolts of the Revolutionary War that "gun control" was not about the guns themselves, but the control of people. The United Kingdom now rests upon the edge of a precipice. The banning of firearms has not pushed the nation closer to a fall, but has eroded the ground itself. The foundation of a free society demands that those who participate have all the rights and freedoms accorded to them that once made the United Kingdom great. As the government interferes in the freedoms of its subjects it also interferes in thier ability to participate in building a strong society, a safe society. Remember, "Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety." -- Benjamin Franklin

Shawn Mulock, Calgary, CANADA

The key factor here seems to be gun control versus gun restriction. In places like New York, D.C, and yes, the UK, guns are restricted. In places like Virginia and Kennisaw, Georgia, guns are controlled. In these places, citizens are encouraged to get training and acquire permits proving they have had this training. This means that owners of firearms in these places are responsible and safe with their weapons. But where guns are restricted or banned outright, only determined criminals will possess them.

As with all dangerous things, control = safety. but restriction = disaster

Jamie B, Chaldon, UK

Someone in Bedford is confused. Not sure about the UK, (NOT Bedford, Virginia, right?), but in the USA people don't march around with guns cocked. But would-be bad guys don't know whether or not I'm "carrying", which means the concealed carry law here has a positive effect.

("brutalised by slavery." belies your liberal view, but Virginia was also "New England" and codes of honor are by no means restricted to the southern US)

FYI- I've called police because someone was attempting to break into my home. With the police dispatcher assuring me the officer was "on his way", I stood ready to defend my own. The officer arrived about an hour later. He told me confronting criminals was unsafe. I said yes, so was allowing criminals into your home.

Space prevents addressing your "law-abiding" to resist with a gun comment, though sadly, this Tuesday is 9/11. How many people would still be alive had some folks been able to defend themselves?

Gun control laws=victim disarmament.

Michael Bodkin, Williamsburg, Virginia, USA

It is indisputable that you are more likely to be shot in the US than the UK:

crimeinfo.org.uk points out:

"If the USA and England and Wales had the same population size, the USA would have 34 times the number of shooting homicides that the UK has" it adds later;

"The UK has a much lower rate of these deaths than most countries. For example, Switzerland and Canada have three times the number of shooting deaths."

That seems pretty conclusive - 34 times the number of shooting homicides. 34 times!

Granted if you read the UK tabloids you might think that there is a gun toting murderer on every street corner but really this is far from the case. Indeed fatal shootings have even gone down in the UK with Home Office figures show 50 fatal shootings in 2006, compared with 66 in 1995.

Joe, Southsea, Hampshire

Terrific suggestion! Every closing time a gun battle and every road rage a shoot out. The police will demand more guns and kit to deal with it all and the tax payer will have to meet the cost.

The Dunblane (17 dead) and Hungerford (16 dead) massacres where carried out by 'law abiding' people who went off the rails. Both were members of gun clubs and both vetted by the police. In otherwords, the two biggest gun massacres in British histories were not carried out by 'criminals' but by active members of the gun lobby.

The majority of illegal fire arms into the UK come via Ireland or from Eastern Europe. Foreign gangsters sell these weapons on to other UK criminals. Without stricter border controls, a robust policy against gangsters and the automatic deportation of all convicted foreign-born criminals on completion of their sentences (currently EU and West Indian-born criminals cannot be automatically deported and banned from the UK), the rate of gun crime will continue to rise.

Dee, London,

I introduced legislation here in South Carolina which would allow Concealed Weapons Permit holders to carry on campuses (21 years old and older). This bill received nationwide and worldwide attention, as well as staunch criticism from academia. The intent is to allow law abiding citizens the ability to defend themselves and possibly others. Great article, especially the wisdom of Thomas Jefferson.

Rep. Jeff Duncan, Laurens, South Carolina

Those of you who think that guns are not widely used for self-defense in the U.S. are not looking at all the facts. Our gun-control groups define a self-defense as only a fatal shooting. In other words, if someone breaks into your home and you shoot him in the leg or foot but do not kill him, that's not included. If you kill him it is.

This is clearly misleading and simply propagandistic.

Research conducted by American scholar, Dr. Gary Kleck (a self-admitted academic liberal), has shown that each year in the U.S. guns are used for self defense some 2.5 million times. This number is more than 80 times greater than the total number of times that anybody is hurt or killed in a gun incident of any kind.

Dr. Kleck has shown that 98% of the time that a gun is used for self-defense no shots are fired and nobody gets hurt. The gun's "deterrent" effect causes the criminal perpetrator to peacefully and quickly leave.

Please get the facts.

Mark J., San Jose, CA

The cherry-picked arguments (pre-WWI statistics? Guffaw!) of Tom from Cardiff are unconvincing. If New York's "strict gun control" was so effective, why were there 2,600 murders in 1990?

chas, Fort Worth, USA/Tx

An armed society is a polite society. Vermont is a VERY polite place.

Bob Frenier, Chelsea, VT

Guns in the hands of responsible CITIZENS (and not subjects) is a RIGHT in our U.S. Constitution. It represents the GOD given right of self defence from criminal individuals and above all the right of self defence from criminal governments (and Liberal governments and their policies are the most criminal in Western Civilization). Case Closed.

Mark, Decatur, Texas, U.S.A.

Bravo! A fresh breeze of reason from good Mr. Munday. Not all UK newspapers share a comic-book view of the world! Here in Westford, there are many homes where the residents' preparedness makes home invasions inadvisable.

Dr. R.B. Phillips, Westford, Massachusetts USA

I'll also say this- The US does have a higher murder rate, and it is disgraceful. However, the highest murder rates tend to be related to urban gang violence, and the worst in large cities with some of the most strict gun control laws in the US.

It matters not if gun control is applied to a city, state or country- criminals will get guns. If gun crime can't be eliminated or significantly reduced through gun control laws in a country like England that exists on an island, it can't be eliminated anywhere.

Wake up, Great Britain, firearms aren't the evil boogymen that your elites have tried to convince you they are.

David Belinski, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Excellent article.

I am an ordinary American citizen who has a permit to carry a handgun and a strong opponent to gun control laws such as exist

Great Britain. I hope your countrymen will listen to such sentiments.

Statistics of high rates of violent crime there do not so much reinforce my position but rather sadden me; the very thought that the good people of Great Britain have been reduced to being unarmed subjects at the mercy of the criminal element is depressing... though not so depressing as knowing that the government elites will never reverse policy on the matter.

I speak for many Americans when I say- we love you, Great Britain, but we're worried about you. If change is to happen, it will take great effort by your people, because governments do not grant additional freedoms willingly.

David Belinski, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

A disarmed, high-gun-control society experiences more violent crime.

Establishing more gun control just gives violent criminals more laws to break and (more importantly) enormously increases the number of defenceless victims. Violent crime can be committed in Britain with a lead pipe or a half-brick, and there's little chance of being physically injured whilst in the commission of a violent crime.

There is admittedly what appears to be counter-evidence in the US crime statistics: they have a high level of violent crime AND relatively low gun control. But if you remove the black-on-black violence from Democrat-run welfare-state hellholes like Detroit, New Orleans, etc then the evidence is overwhelming. Guns make society safer because you vastly increase the physical risk of criminal activity.

It would also be a good idea to increase the legal risk of violent criminal activity: stiffer sentencing and less encumbered law enforcement. But legalising guns is an excellent first step.

Toby, Birmingham, UK

IIRC - I recently read an article from across the pond that stated that the Home Office was "cooking the books" in regards to crimes, especially violent crimes, and how they are recorded/reported.

And if you remove the numbers of murders committed in the US by a one large minority group, the numbers here drop down to almost the same as the "reported" numbers in the UK.

emdf1, Washington DC,

Very good Article!

But it will not change British reality, as long as British politicians live in expensive secure Areas and are protected by Police and Bodyguards with taxmoney. You need some mugged MPs in GB!

Friedrich, Salzburg, Austria

I read once that a domestically-owned gun in America is 43 times more likely to be used to kill a family member than an intruder. If it weren't for that fact, I would be entirely convinced by this article.

Alex T, London,

Say what you will about statistics and whatnot but the fact remains that an armed citizenry poses a much greater threat to tyrants, both small, as with a petty robber or potential rapist, and great, such as an abusive governing body. Make note that in All of the most notoriously abusive and oppressive countries in the world guns are not allowed. There is a good reason for that and it is not an interest in the well-being of the people. Unless you view communist Russia, China, North Korea, or to get historical, Nazi Germany, as anything but oppressive and abusive.

The 2nd amendment keeps the 1st amendment alive and well!

K-bob, Portland , Oregon

In the US, the number of crimes or attempted crimes in which the intended victim uses a gun to defend him/herself is very low - less than 1% of violent crimes and less than 1 in 500 burglaries. Mainly, owning a gun just makes you feel safer. If someone shoots you, it really doesn't help that you could have pulled out a gun - if they hadn't shot you first.

Frank Upton, Solihull,

Having lived in the US for a few years, I don't remember my community in Oklahoma City being very much safer for having guns in most households. What I do remember is 99% of the stories in the papers were of domestic incidents that escalated to a killing because one party had picked up the family gun in a rage. So for the 1 or 2 villains that may, or may not, have been apprehended by a gun toting citizen I remember hundreds of ordinary families ripped apart because of some silly row turning into a gun death.

wombat, birmingham, uk,

fantastic article - as many comment, the right to defend oneself should be mandatory. The attitude of ban all weapons, knives, pointy sticks etc in the UK only benefits those living outwith the law. Unfortunately, i can't see any improvement in my lifetime...

gregg corbett, edinburgh, UK

Something to remember: When seconds count, the police are only minutes away. Burglars and home invaders know that they have more to fear from a home owner, than they do the police. Police write reports and call for the transport of the injured or dead.

Paul, Ohio, USA

“An armed society is a polite society. Manners are good when one may have to back up his acts with his life.” - Robert A. Heinlein

Paul, Houston, Texas, USA

Re; James P's last comment from London, UK

I wonder why he had the revolver that he sold before he left South Africa. I would expect it was defensive after all.

HarrySnapp, Toronto, Canada

Rural Vermont with no gun restriction is held up as a safe place to live. In 2005 it had 7 homicides and in 2006 the population was approximately 600,000 (Vermont State statistics) ie one in a 100,000 was a murder victim.

In the UK in 2006 we had 765 murders including the unusual 58 killed by terrorist and 52 people dying due to lack of air by people smugglers. Which puts the UK with a murder rate of about erm one in a 100,000.

Statistics show that for every 'bad' guy killed around 46 Americans die from accidents.

Statistics in Britain show that an innocent person armed with a knife to protect themselves is at a far greater risk than not carrying one - as they are far less likely to confront someone robbing them - than trying to fight with someone who is almost certainly a more experienced fighter.

More guns mean more criminals carrying guns which will lead to numerous shoot outs killing innocent bystanders.

Paul Odtaa, Richmond, UK

Not only do law abiding citizens have the undeniable right to be armed in self defense against criminals, the natural tyranny of the state is also balanced by these rights. Why did Nazi germany, USSR, PRC, and many sundry other authoritarian states deny their citizens this right?

Google search "Democide", a term coined by political scientist R. J. Rummel for "the murder of any person or people by a government, including genocide, politicide, and mass murder".

In the 20th Century, there were 100s Million+ democides, all within mostly Communist or Socialist states that refused their citizens the right to defend themselves.

Vaquero, Charleston, SC, USA

Not to go O/T but considering the deaths of US troops come from a tiny population of 200,000 stationed in Iraq, it's hardly surprising that more people have been murdered in large American cities of several million inhabitants during the same period. Indeed, the Iraqi figures look even more shocking in light of that.

What illegal guns have done to tight gun law societies such as Colombia and Brazil in particular is a tragedy that should never be repeated. Among the near blanket coverage of US gun violence in this country as far as overseas states are concerned, it's worth noting that Brazil had 32,915 gun homicides in 2004 and Colombia, by far the smallest nation of the three, recorded 14,510 in 2005. America has diverse gun laws but the other two have them tight across the board.

The answer to your question is yes, I would feel safer with a gun though I'd like some decent training.

Dave, London,

Though I have always believed in gun control I do see the point being made but what is missing in the cultural context. The US way is to blast away problems; look how most TV and film dramas are resolved. Look at Iraq. Look at the dreadful rate of gun accidents in US homes. The heavily Swiss don't suffer anything like the same level of gun problems. Contrast Katrina with the tsumami. In Orleans they reached for their guns and militia was sent in to control to population ahead of

the aid. We saw those nauseating press conferences boasting how they were goin' to sort out the looters. In Acha- an area of insurrection- the population did not arm themselves and military were part of the relief programme. Sadly Britain's culture is closer to that of the US and I certainly would not feel safer with a gun.

Ged Parker, Washington, England

Mr Turnbull - the present restrictions in the UK are clearly not worthwhile as they have failed to prevent a whole host of tragedies post Dunblane. There is a handy link to an article listing them all next to the article under discussion. Why have they failed to prevent all these shootings and stabbings, mainly of minors? Because guns were forcibly taken away (and banned) from law abiding citizens and did nothing to stop trade in illegal guns anyway. Illegal guns were used in all of these shootings. If the perpetrator did not have access to an illegal gun, they used a knife. I'm thinking there is possibly something wrong with the person at the end of the trigger and not the gun itself... I live in a house with five legal rifles locked away and only used by the person allowed to use them (after the police had interviewed him and conducted a safety search of the premises). I feel utterly safe in the house as I know the guns can't harm me. People kill people, guns and knives don't.

Anna, London,

I've always believed in gun control but I do understand the point being made. What's missing is the cultural context. the US way is to blast away problems; look how most TV & film dramas are resolved, look at Iraq, look at the dreadful accident rate in the home. The heavily armed Swiss have much lower gun related problems.

Contrast Katrina with the tsumami. In New Orleans they reached for the guns and deployed a controlling militia ahead of aid. Most press conferences were on how tough they were going to be with looters. In Acca- an area of insurrection the population did not arm themselves and the military were part of the clean up.

Sadly Britain's culture is closer to that of the US, so over here I would not feel safer with a gun

Ged Parker, Washington, England

James P. says "Most crime in Johannesburg involves legal firearms stolen from their legal owners."

The main reason that happens here in Canada is because the law requires those buying arms or ammunition to write their name and address in registers that are then carelessly (if not deliberately) left open on store counters for all to see. So criminals can easily find out where to get the guns.

No matter how many laws there are, criminals will get guns, just as prohibition did not stop the manufacture and consumption of alcohol and the war on drugs doesn't stop drug use (and encourages abuse).

Wayne N., Richmond Hill, Canada

I think that all americans should be trained in how to own and operate firearms and I think it should be encouraged that all of us own at least one per member of our family.

Josh S., Cross Creek, PA

Last time I checked the statistics 55 percent of home burglaries in the UK ocured when the occupant of the house was home. In the USA the number was 4 percent. Over 50 percent of homes in the USA have seft protection firearms. In the UK it is 0 percent. When they asked criminals in prison why they did not like entering homes in the USA when the occupant was home, what do you think they said?

All you liberals that hate guns, perhaps you should advertise your beliefs and put signs on your house and car that say "Gun Free Zone".

Dale Galarowicz, Canon City, Colorado, USA

Like your Parliament, the US Supreme Court has ruled that the Police and Security Services "owe you no duty to respond" when you call them to save your life or property. 999, or in the US 911, is nothing more than Government 'Dial-a-Prayer'.

PhilM, Newtown Square, USA/PA

Like the atomic bomb, guns cannot be disinvented. They are not very high-tech and are not particularly difficult for someone with basic engineering and metalwork skills to manufacture. If the demand is there then people will make them - or acquire them. Even though Britain is an island and thus theoretically able to keep control of imports (and immigrants) in practice plenty get through - criminals are not using ancient relics of past wars but modern weapons. Look at the illegal drugs trade ! Gun-control advocates frequently call for long (30 years?) prison sentences or even the

death penalty for possession of firearms. People : it doesn't work !
Wouldn't you rather be tried by twelve than carried by six ?

Ben Nicholson, Bristol, UK

You can argue that places with gun control have higher crime, and you can back it up with statistics. And you can argue that places with lots of guns still have lots of crime, and back THAT up with statistics.

Or you can look at the bigger picture. Crime is not going out of style. Criminals are not afraid of breaking the law. They will always have weapons. And the police do not protect people.

The only people disarmed by gun control are those who aren't looking for trouble. That much is indisputable.

So either you believe that someone has the right to defend himself or you don't. If you do, gun ownership follows naturally.

Rob, Fairfax, VA

Yes, I would be safer with a gun, or any legal tool which would be useful for deterrence or defence.

Heck, I'd even feel safer if criminals thought that the UK legal system worked against them, rather than giving them more protection and support than an honest citizen can expect.

We are not legally entitled to prepare to defend ourselves, but if we do defend our lives we are legally required to restrain ourselves as if we were trained and experienced in combat.

If you think I'm exaggerating just check for yourselves on what happens with shoplifters; the police will give fixed penalty notices to shoplifters (despite shoplifter assaults on shopkeepers who try to stop them), but the shopkeeper can be prosecuted for assault and receive a criminal record if he tries to stop the shoplifter.

Derek Phibes, London, UK

You are 27 times more likely to be shot in the US than the UK

The number of murders by firearms per capita:

US 2.8%

UK 0.2%

www.finfacts.com/biz10/worldstatistics.htm

How on earth can that make you feel safer!!!

tony, london,

When British liberals sit around knocking America and sipping wine they feel superior and more fully evolved. They might want to have a look at some American real estate. If not for them then their kids or grandkids. Under Sharia law many PC practices and lifestyles will draw a death sentence. Your kids may need some guns one day soon. We colonials have an immigrant population that is Catholic and hard working.(Mexicans) You have Muslims who will be the majority soon. I am sure they will be happy to obey English gun laws and be good tolerant Englishmen. Thomas Jefferson said "Those who hammer their rifles into plowshares will plow for those who don't." Thank god I am a backward southern boy who is armed to the teeth. We may be speaking Spanish but your women will be wearing burkas. It seems there may be one last wave of English settlers yet. Your simple cousins across the pond may be your salvation yet again.

jeff I, Belcher, louisiana

After witnessing the chaos in New Orleans after Katrina, I realized that no one was going to protect me after a catastrophic event except myself. That's when

I bought a gun and have learned to be comfortable with it and would not hesitate to use it if there is a terrorist attack or other event where authorities are too busy to worry about the small stuff (meaning me and mine).

With freedom comes responsibility. Part of that responsibility is to defend your freedom, whether it is threatened globally or locally. Get your freedom back, Brits. You'll be glad you did.

Deborah Durkee, Marietta, USA/GA

"Bottom line is that the US are welcome to their gun ownership, and if they believe they are safer then good for them.. We Brits do not share this view,"

Speak for yourself!

MM, Andover, Hampshire

Gun control does not reduce crime - it just creates unarmed victims.

Alan W Robbins, New Milford, Pennsylvania, USA

Oh yeh, you just reminded me, I better give a call to that Russian mafia guy about the order for that batch of AK47.

bob, London,

Well sheeple the majority of us in America support the Second Amendment. The right to protect life has not been frittered away over here. Nearly 30 or more States have concealed carry laws and lower crime rates because of that fact. If you folks in England are happy watching your rights be frushed down the loo then more power to you. We did not like the way you ruled over 200 years ago. So why do you presume to be so arrogant as to suggest how we should live now?

Rod, Athens, Texas

As a South African living in London, I am very happy with the present gun laws. Most crime in Johannesburg involves legal firearms stolen from their legal owners. If you are worried about crime do something constructive like giving up some of your time to the local police force, thats what I did, I do not want to live in a country where you can trundle down to Walmart and pick up a Glock and 100 rounds with my bread. I was very glad when I sold my revolver before leaving South African shores.

James P, London, UK

Excellent article! But one that will fall on deaf ears,

Andy, Arbroath, Scotland

While the armed citizen can create parity with the armed thug, the principle behind gun ownership in the US is much deeper. The 2nd US Amendment is all about a deep distrust of government and need for the citizen to have the capability to put an end to a tyrannical regime.

T. Smith, State College, PA, USA

We are an American family, all of us know how to respect and discharge our many legal weapons - even our 5 year old. We practice regularly. Are we safer? You bet! Do we walk in fear? No way! My fellow D.C. American (Bruce) whom I respect his right not to own or carry a firearm, I say to you - don't take away MY right to protect my family as you folks in Washigton have done to yourselves. God help you in D.C.

Steve, Cave Creek, USA / AZ

At last, some sense spoken about personal protection and public responsibility, particularly when the law abiding citizen is having to hide and live in fear from the thug in the street. The elderly being abused and mugged by yobs in the neighbourhood. Fantastic article.Lenient sentences in overcrowded prisons{crime universities}don't work.

William Arancha, London, UK

We have "Right to carry law' here in Arizona and our crime rate has gone steadily down..

Tom Folkman, Tempe, Az. USA

Gun control seems to work in The Peoples Republic of China. I wonder why? If you like your security better then you do your freedom, you will love China!

It is interesting to me that 40 US states now have concealed weapon permit laws given to those who can pass a criminal background check by the FBI and attend and pass a written and gun use class. I wonder why you don't see these gun saves reported in the media; could it be that THEY who control you don't want you to know?

Those 40 states with gun concealed permit are where you will also find the lowest crime levels of all the US other 20 remaining states.

Did you know that more then a million crimes a year are prevented by citizens with a gun protecting their homes, families and business! Perhaps (God forbid) you will have the time to think about that, when a crook breaks into your home; while you wait until the Bobbies bob in.

Fred Bihlmaier, Provo, Utah , Utah, USA

We forget Kennisaw, Ga. where it's mandatory for all adults to possess a firearm, and carry it whinin easy reach. They don't what a crime committed with a firearm is..

Eric Tienter, Jax., Nc.

Brazil pretty much banned handguns for civilians, except for some 22LR (smallest caliber moslty for target practice), some shotguns for the farmers and hunting rifles, the idea of armed civilian self defense is banned in Brazil.

Do you think Rio de Janeiro is SAFE thanks to that??

Fer, Buenos Aires, Argentina,

"Lax gun laws inevitably increase the number of guns in the hand of hardened criminals. And there is no such thing as a law abiding person in whose ownership a gun is harmless. Anyone can lose their temper or suffer a personality breakdown. Anyone can become involved in a crime of passion. Any child who comes across a gun can accidentally fire it."

I suppose that it is true that all of these CAN happen, but in practice, they don't. You can predict with surprising accuracy what persons will commit a murder, and which won't. Convicted felons are typically 40-45% of those arrested for murder. Those under 18 are typically 1/3. Psychotics (usually 1-1.5% of the population) commit at least 5% of the murders in the U.S. Gun control laws that attempt to disarm those solve about 90% of the problem. An adult with no previous criminal or mental illness history isn't very dangerous with a gun.

Clayton E. Cramer, Horseshoe Bend, Idaho

Great article!!! For me it all comes down to the natural law right to self defense. Even animals have it. What right does government have to take that fundamental, natural right from us and tell us we cannot defend ourselves from ruthless criminals? We are not truly free unless we have the right to be armed and defend ourselves.

Scott, Houston, Texas, USA

Yes I would feel safer with a gun.

The police don't protect us. Get assaulted in Manchester and they won't even give you a crime number.

The authorities for whom we all pay so much tax have not only abandoned us they refuse to let us defend ourselves.

You have more chance of getting a prison sentence for defending yourself than you do for attacking someone.

Fine. Disband the Police. They are a waste of space now anyway. So leave us alone. Give me back my tax money and let me carry a gun.

Thalia, London,

Bruce L. Northwood's comment from Washington, D.C., is most amusing. Washington's gun control laws are among the strictest in the U.S.A. and its violent crime rate is almost twice as high as the state with the next highest. (Washington, D.C., is the nation's capitol and on a relatively small plot of land. It is much smaller than a state but, even so, its violent crime rate puts the states to shame.

The violent crime rate in Washington, D.C., was declining until 1976 when it passed its draconian gun control laws. Instead of declining further, the rate of violent crimes doubled the very next year.

"Nothing succeeds like failure" seems to be the motto of gun control fans on both sides of the pond.

Bertillion, Alexandria, VA, U.S.A.

Mr. Northwood would be safer in Baghdad than in our nations capitol where he lives. Washington D.C has been the murder capital of the country 8 out of the last 10 years and is always in the top 5. It is also illegal to have a gun with in its environs. I would rather walk down the street of Baghdad with a marine fire team than down the streets of D.C. alone. He'll change his mind once he or some one he loves is stomped and put in the hospital and Mr. Northwood, you are safer with a gun, protect yourself and those dear to you and stop being a woose.

Ron Nord, San Francisco, Ca

Hot Damn! Someone across the Pond still has some common sense!

Jack Nanney, Greeneville, US/Tennessee

Common sense tells you that if one person is sick enough to open fire on civilians he thinks unarmed, wouldn't it be wise to have other good guy CIVILIANS who are armed there to stop him/her?

A murder on LI express train sometime back systematically went up and down isles killing passengers he knew were unarmed, because of strick NYC gun laws. He was only stopped after he ran out of bullets and had to reload...a brave man jumped him in between reloads. Imagine the lives that could have been saved by one armed civilian angry or scared enough to shoot him dead in his tracks before he killed all those innocent people?

The Bruce's (from UK) of the world are fools to believe the brainwashing of the anti-self defense crowd and stupid enough to be disarmed and enslaved by his government.

Gary, Stamford, USA, CT

The key phrase here is "gun control disarms only the law-abiding[.]". I would extend that with "and the civil."

I am disappointed, as a person who agrees predominantly with liberal ideas, that the UK left is not interested in (and, in fact, opposes) reinstating gun rights. I fully agree that it should not be completely unregulated (mandatory basic firearms training and a medical/psych exam); but a blanket ban cannot possibly help anyone but violent criminals.

Most of us on the left are conflating the idea of not requiring guns with the practice of not allowing guns. The ends are confused with the means. But the paradox is that restoring gun rights will ultimately reduce gun necessity.

The path to reducing violent crime is improving civil rights, liberties, effective education (critical thinking/rationality), and the reduction of poverty and unemployment. Violence is the refuge of the desperate, disillusioned, ignorant and/or the sociopathic. Fix society, not inanimate objects.

Justin Megawame, London, UK

Yes I want a gun for self defence. The police cannot protect everyone. We were stopped from owning a gun for self defence in 1946 by a declaration from the Home Office that had no debate in parliament. In 1953 we were banned from carrying anything that could be used as a weapon for self defence.

Since then the restrictions on the public have got tighter while the powers of the police have got greater yet still we have a higher rate of criminal violence than when we were all entitled to be armed.

Robert Peel said "Police, at all times, should maintain a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police; the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence "

I trust 99% of my neighbours to be armed. With all armed the remaining 1% are no threat. Neither is the state.

A Ross, darlington, UK

This argument is of course complete nonsense. The problem here in the USA is the widespread availability of guns has reached a critical mass, such that they now become the lowest common denominator for solving many relatively trivial disagreements. It is almost a daily occurrence in our relatively small city to hear on the news of a gun crime. Children become familiar with guns and consider them as a normal part of life. Life is cheap here in the USA. People who kill with guns are often treated relatively leniently, which is shocking. It seems that the last 10 years the UK Labour government as followed a number of lax policies (social, immigration, policing) that have allowed guns to become ubiquitous in the lower reaches of UK society. It may be that the proverbial tipping point has been passed and that the UK will replicate the horrifying situation in the USA.

squeeler, greensboro, north Carolina, USA

Why has the UK continued to invest in a nuclear arsenal? Because it is a deterrent, we were all taught this in school. The best way to prevent a nuclear war is to make sure that you have nuclear weapons. If it works for national security why should the same not count when it comes down to personal security? This article actually makes sense. Making anything illegal only stops the law abiding from getting their hands on it, be it drugs, alcohol or guns. The lawless will always be able to have access to anything they want. So we end up with a system where the thugs can carry guns and commit crimes using them and yet the innocent have no legal way of defending themselves, it actually sounds crazy when you write in down.

Gary , London, UK

Culture, not availability of guns is the determinant. Japanese Americans commit less murder than those in Japan. American Jews commit no more murder than English Jews. American blacks commit no more murder than blacks in Jamaica. Mexican Americans commit no more murder than Mexicans in Mexico. Scottish Americans commit no more murder than Scots in Scotland. We just have a mix of different proportions than you. (Our murders _are_ more likely to be done with guns -- without guns, perhaps some of our Dunblane-like massacres would have been bombings, instead.) Someone compared the shootings of policemen before WWI versus today. Policemen exist for the sake of our security; to sacrifice the security of the public for the sake of policemen is a perversion of purposes. The main reason for your gun control is your elites' unwillingness to let law-abiding citizens shoot robbers. As with the end of hanging -- it's to benefit the criminals, not you.

Frank, Memphis, Tennessee USA

Very nice article and very true. I carry a handgun daily in a major metro area in the US. I wish that the UK's citizens could learn to trust themselves and allow those who wish to be responsible for their own lives to do just that.

Andrew, charlotte, usa

Bruce from DC is ignorant. What he failed to mention is that the DC gun ban was recently overturned in federal court. We will have to wait and see if crime rates start to fall there. I live in Georgia and have a concealed weapons permit. At one point the murder rate in Savannah was higher than in Atlanta. My pistol makes me feel that i can DEFEND my family from an assailant. I shoot the pistol at a rifle range on a regular basis and am very comfortable using it, an important annotation. A law-abiding community that is armed in a defensive manner will always outweigh the lawless minority that take no heed of gun laws to begin with. Spot on article. Hopefully you can change some attitudes in the UK.

Brian, Savannah, Georgia, USA

I am a talk-radio host in America. I am an avid shooter. I train with firearms often, not for sport but for self-defense and other purposes. On my show I speak often of the Right To Keep And Bear Arms and how important it is to the very fabric of American life and safety. Try as I might I cannot get a single anti-gunner to come on my show and debate me. Why? Because while they do well with silly slogans, sound bites, and press appearance where they are not challenged, in a live on-air debate with a knowledgeable opponent they know the truth will undo them. Many of us hope that the British government will come to its senses and restore your RIGHT of self-defense!

Dave Champion, Pahrump, Nevada

I agree that the state has no right to disarm law-abiding citizens. However, I don't think concealed carry had any effect, whatsoever, on crime rates, here in the U.S. It seems all reliable research indicates that the only truly causative influence on levels of violent crime at any time is the number of teenage men. There was a population boom in young men that happened to hit at the same time as the crack epidemic in the U.S. Coincidentally, as the drug wars burned out, states began issuing concealed carry permits. It's is far too tempting to equate correlation with causation, there, and you will regret doing so later when your words are thrown back in your face after the next population boom (which is actually on the way in a year or two).

\By the way, I live in Virginia, I have a carry permit, and I carry most of the time.

Michael S., Arlington, VA,

Good article. Sadly the British people and our society are no longer mature enough to be given unrestricted access to firearms. Recent governments and the media have seen to that.

stuart chessell, Horsham, Sussex

Liz in Tampa. Some people (Like Yourself possibly?) DO NOT understand what an "Automatic Weapon" is or how they work. You STILL MUST PULL the trigger for EACH SHOT! The only thing "Automatic" is the fact that it "Reloads" itself between trigger pulls. (So does a revolver!) You do NOT just pull the trigger and it fires as long as you hold the trigger back. THOSE are "FULL AUTOMATIC WEAPONS" and HAVE BEEN ILLEGAL FOR YEARS, whether as Handguns or Machine Pistols /Machine guns! In other words: Even "Automatics" have to have the Trigger pulled for EACH shot taken! EXCELLENT ARTICLE Mr. Munday! Thank You!

Theron Helton, Taylorville, USA/Illinois

Bruce Northwood: Of course you aren't safer for the 200 million guns owned by law abiding citizens. You live somewhere where only the law abiding are forbidden from possessing them. Did you even bother to read the article, which directly addresses your city, before commenting?

Richard Munday: Brilliant article. I salute you. Given the tongue lashing I get from Brits and Continentals over here for my firearms enthusiasm, I can only imagine what you're in for over there.

Random Brits who will lambaste me for my views: I wish you the best of luck with your policy of only allowing the criminally minded, and the government, to own firearms. I'll check with you in 20 to see how you're doing, if you're still there. And hey, who knows, maybe you're right!

Sandro Rettinger, Albuquerque, NM, USA

Very interesting that the majority of responses to this article are from the US. Just goes to show how little traction this issue has in the UK. I suspect it would be the same if the article had been about, say, abortion or capital punishment. Again issues that have little traction in our society. Bottom line is that the US are welcome

to their gun ownership, and if they believe they are safer then good for them.. We Brits do not share this view, and our societal values are very different to those in the US. If Mr Munday wants to have a gun he should move to the US despite the fact that there he is much more likely to be killed with one!

Ollie Bean, London, UK

The moment facts about the failure of gun control come up, someone or the other has to step in and offer New York as an example. Bad news - either these people are completely ignorant or are dedicated to spreading terminal disinformation. Crime in New York has been on a surge for the past two years and the number of murders have increased sharply. Take another metro, Chicago, in whose suburbs I live. Chicago alone has murders that are more than half the number of US servicemen killed in Iraq and Afghanistan put together. In fact, if the murder rates of the anti gun "examples" of New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Detroit were put together, they would significantly exceed the number of casualties in Iraq every year. The state of Vermont, which has almost complete gun freedom - it allows concealed carry of handguns without a permit, has a crime rate that not just other states but most countries in the world would die for.

Mehul Kamdar, Des Plaines, IL, USA

Check out the new Harvard University study. Remember Harvard is not a bastion of conservatism.

http://www.theacru.org/blog/2007/08/harvard_journal_study_of_worldwide_data_obliterate_notion_that_gun_ownership_correlates_with_violence/

BTW, what do you call a person who is allowed to carry a firearm in his country. A citizen. What do you call one who can't? A subject.

Maynard Hirsch, Niles,, IL USA

To Bruce Noethwood;
If you had one, maybe you would.

George Carter, Leesburg, Florida, USA

Tom from Cardiff, you seem to misunderstand something about New York City. Gun control was in effect for a long time, but the city was TERRIBLE! The reason for the drop in crimes/murders is that I got some evidence to an honest N.Y. Police officer, who risked his life to expose this corruption. The evidence was a videotape, which PROVED corruption at the highest levels of the N.Y. Police. Then Rudy Giuliani worked very hard to eliminate most of the Italian Mafia that was in place in New York. Then when Mr. Giuliani became mayor, he FORCED the police to arrest people for crimes, even if they seemed to be minor crimes. This was highly criticized by everyone, yet it ALWAYS WORKS. Most crime is done by average people, and when they see and hear others getting away with things, they decide to either copy those crimes, or come up with some other crime/scam. That is the way that a society works, and guns are good if society enforces laws, bad if society allows unrestrained crime/bad behavior.

Charles P., Norcross, , USA/ Georgia

I think law abiding folks should be able to own a limited number of guns. After all, we limit the kind of guns, why not the quantity? Guns are too big a business in the US, imho, making getting guns illegally too easy. The brits are fools to have given up their guns.

David, phoenixville,

The strongest and most enthusiastic supporters of gun control are those who would commit crimes. How pleased the criminals are, knowing the law-abiding citizen is defenseless.

Philip Beekley, San Antonio, Texas

Why is almost every comment (at least 75%) from America - where has this been linked to?!

Plus although handgun ownership may have been legal in living memory - I NEVER met anyone who actually owned one, or even knew someone who owned one, there are not less" legal guns" in Britain as a result of these laws - cos there were naff all "legal guns" in the first place

Dave, Cornwall,

I wish all of the gun control lobbys and do gooders over here could read this article. I like Mr. Robertsons comments here except the last part. I'd change that to ...there is no "Sense" in being a victim.

I pray for the victims of Virginia Tech and all the victims of gun related crime. I also pray that more would...and could... shoot back!!!

Murph, Madisonville, USA/KY

I love hearing the spew of crap from all these non-USA citizens about US statistics. You really should look at the evidence from reputable sources. Fact: guns save lives and criminals and

oppressive governments fear honest armed citizens.

A jap general (from WWII) once was asked why he never planned an invasion on US soil. His reply: "Their is a gun behind every blade of grass"

Christ man! You guys sound like pansies. If the USA didn't get involved to kick Hitler's tail, you Englanders would be speaking german today and your sissy pants would have been cooked!

Gary, Stamford, USA, CT

When self loading rifles and then pistols were confiscated (l.e. taken against the will of their owners) by the government, was there any evidence of the owners resisting or displaying violence? Did the police storm the homes of the owners?

If not, then it should be apparent that the guns were taken from the wrong people.

The bad guys at Hungerford and Dunblane either possessed illegal firearms (in the case of the former) or were known by the authorities to be a threat (in the case of the latter). The will and means to do evil is not driven by law; how effective has gun control been in Northern Ireland in the control of rockets, grenades, and AKs?

What purpose is served by confiscating pistols from Olympic Team members and taking from them a sport that they have put their heart and soul into?

I have issues with a government that denies you arms or the right of self-defense, yet arms itself to the teeth and (on a whim) demands you take a machinegun and kill people overseas.

John, Dallas, Texas

Someone suggested that the murder rate in the US is ten times the murder rate in the UK. This is false. The murder rate in the US is three times the murder rate in the UK. That is a change from nine times higher forty years ago, when the gun laws of the UK were less stringent and the US had far fewer states that allowed citizen concealed carry. In the time since, the US murder rate has gone down, while the UK murder rate has gone up, narrowing the gap between homicide rates.

Banning guns or allowing guns does not noticeably affect the crime rate. Crime is a problem of culture. The only statistically significant result of gun bans are a reduced ability of law-abiding citizens to defend themselves against criminals who have no concern what weapons are legal or illegal.

Keenan, Louisville, KY,

At first, I was surprised when I read Bruce L. Northwood's comment, "There are 200 million guns floating around America. Are we safer? No!" Then I laughed when I got to the end and read where he lives: Washington, D.C.

Washington, D.C., of course, has the strictest gun laws in the nation -- no handguns allowed, even in one's home, just as in England -- and the highest crime rate. Which is exactly Munday's point. If Northwood wants just to feel, but actually to be, safer, he will do what he can to get D.C.'s draconian gun laws repealed.

Gene Schwimmer, New York,

America isn't your only ex-colony with high gun-violence. Jamaica's murder rate is several times ours -- despite gun laws similar to yours.

Correlating our murder rate by race and national origin, you'll find that Japanese Americans, with the same access to handguns as the rest of us, have a murder rate lower than that of Japanese in Japan. The American Jewish murder rate is no higher than that among English Jews. The murder rate among recent Mexican immigrants is perhaps a bit lower than that among Mexicans in Mexico (where gun laws are prohibitive). The murder rate among American blacks is comparable to that among Jamaicans (where legal gun ownership hardly exists).

Our lower robbery rate is all the more impressive given our much greater incidence of murderous criminals. But your elites simply won't have law-abiding citizens killing robbers.

It's sort of like their opposition to the death penalty. They are motivated by the criminal's safety -- not yours.

Frank Silberman, Memphis, USA / Tennessee

Do you have a fire extinguisher in case of a fire? Better to have a gun and not need it than to need one and be a victim. Liberalism is a mental disorder. Now go out and buy some prayer rugs, you're going to need them.

Captain America, Washington D.C., USA

It's too bad that professor at VT didn't have a legal firearm in his possession. As a holocost survivor he knew what it was about. Had he been armed, he could have ended the terror instead of merely delaying it for a few momemts by sacrificing his life.

Arthur, Leominster, ma

If you disagree with this article then you're probably to stupid to understand that if you can't save yourself, no one else will.

Even with law enforcement on every corner, the only person who can save your life, is you.

Roger, Visalia, Ca. USA

Excellent editorial, Mr. Munday. I am a responsible, licensed-to-carry colonial redneck simply exercising my Constitutional Right to bear arms. It's refreshing whenever I read someone who has actually bothered to research their topic before writing. Continued success in your endeavors.

M Stanton, Union, Kentucky USA

I didn't think there was any common sense left in Britain!

Thanks for proving me wrong and for speaking the truth clear and loud!

I just hope it's not too late to reverse the cultural trend against self-defense in the "scepter'd isle".

David Kane, Mt. Crawford, Virginia

While gun crime is higher in my country, we also have a few more people . The U.K. could fit nicely in Arizona.

An unpalatable fact to those who would ban guns is that in every state where the right to carry has passed, the crime rate had dropped. In states where the right to own and carry a firearm is prohibited, the crime rate remains high. Washington D.C. and New York City have prohibited handgun ownership for many years, but that has done NOTHING to reduce gun crime, indeed, it has escalated.

Few things deter criminals more than the possibility that a potential victim may be armed. It just takes all the fun out of robbery and muggings.

Please don't believe the myth about the "Wild West" that hollywood has foisted on the world. It was far safer than New York or London at the time and justice was swifter for criminals.

I would leave you with the statement that calling 911 or 999 is simply a form of government sponsered Dial-a- prayer.

John Sukey, Tucson, , Arizona

You have a short or selective memory. Legally held guns were used at Hungerford and Dunblane. If the present restrictions prevent another such tragedy then they are worthwhile.

Robert Turnbull, London, UK

Bruce L,

You live in the most dangerous city on the US. Also the one with most restrictive gun laws. If you don't feel safe, it is because of the very laws that your seem to be defending.

If you look at the FBI Statistics (or read this article) you would know that the chances of being a crime victim in London are higher than most parts of the US.

James H, Den Haag, Netherlands

bruce

DC is a city that completely bans guns, yet has a huge murder rate. How's that working out for you.

s. pang, new york, usa

Wow. A Brit that gets it!!

R. Leo, San Antonio, TX,

Great Article. I'm Alaskan and our laws mirror Vermont. I know Mr. Northwood from Washington DC would disagree, but I find it ironic he complains about guns from the most unsafe city in the USA, with the most repressive gun laws in the USA. It's no coincidence Washington DC is as unsafe as it is. Life is good in Alaska. An armed society is indeed a polite one.

John Gamash, Anchorage, Alaska USA

Hey, Bruce! How's that gun ban in DC working out for you?

Bruce N. Mills, Hamilton, Ontario

The article is very interesting, but doesn't prove any cause or effect. In Edwardian England there may well have been more religious observance for instance than there is today. There may well have been no televised glamorization of violence such as we see today. People may have had more respect for the property of others. There may not have been an illegal drug trade. There may have been a temperance movement. There may even have been less disaffected second generation migrant youths. And we certainly had a lower population density then.

Lies damned lies and statistics.

David B, Larkhall, UK

munday: never mind the doubling of handgun crime in Britain over the past decade, since we banned pistols outright and confiscated all the legal ones.

.. never mind that in a recent 21st century year the US state of florida alone had about twice the gun crime that munday decries above, despite britain having 2 & a half times more people.
.. readers should disregard munday's piece as pro gun propaganda, fraught with errors mistakes & half truths.

Jimmy the One, Wilkes-Barre, USA

The guy in DC says we are not safer....lol....a place with almost no legal guns and massive crime. Come out to a city with better gun laws, we don't have near the violence that plagues DC.

Guess I'm a Redneck, Scottsdale, AZ

More guns equals less crime. The politest places you will ever be are at a shooting range, and in a bar filled with U.S. Army Green Berets or SAS.

Mary McLemore, Pike Road, Alabama, USA

"An armed society is a polite society. Manners are good when one may have to back up his acts with his life."

Robert A. Heinlein

My daughter and I both passed the tests required for a concealed handgun license here in Texas - I sleep better at night knowing that she now has the means to legally defend herself. However, I do worry about my mother living in England.

T. Killingsworth, Beaumont, Texas

35,000 people die each year in the USA from gunshot wounds!!!
some are accidents, some from the police, a lot from gangs etc.
3,500 died in the twin towers on 9/11.

Need I say more!!

Nick, Camberley, Surrey England

For the people who wonder why there is "so much gun crime in the USA" - the fact is that we have densely populated "murder capitols" like DC, New York, Chicago, ETC - where guns are illegal.

Essentially, the places with the strictest gun control - have the highest rates of gun crime. Anyone that can't figure out what is going on is a moron - or simply wishes to remain uninformed..

Slick, Cali,

I own three handguns, and I'm relatively proficient in their use; however, they don't make me feel any safer. The fact that I need to own them for personal protection actually makes me feel less safe. The average gunfight takes place at a distance of three to five feet in three to five seconds with three to five shots being fired.

How many gun owners actually train for such an eventuality?

Mark, Fullerton, CA

I cannot think of any situation I have ever been in that would not have been made much worse if I had been carrying a gun, but then, as well as being an easy-going type, I am big and ugly, and people do not bother me much.

In Edwardian England, if you killed someone, you were likely to be hanged for it. We could not re-introduce one without the other.

Why not allow persons of good repute (gentlemen) to carry swords? It is a clear and obvious protection, a splendid deterrent, and a weapon of very controllable effect, as well as making an unseemly brawl into a spectacle of some elegance.

Richard , Dunstable,

The are 0 million guns floating around the UK. Are you safer?

No.

JC, Roanoke, Virginia, U.S.A.

clayton cramer: There are typically about 1200 firearms accidental deaths a year in the U.S. About half of those are hunting accidents .. kids who get hold of a parent's gun and shoot themselves or someone else--a few dozens a year of the under 14 population in a country of 300,000,000.

.. well well, is this the vaunted gun guru 'clayton cramer', the noted pro gun american disciple & author?
.. let's note that twice as many of these fatal (as well as non fatal) gun accidents occur in pro gun states, & of the 'very' pro gun states, 4 times as many as in the 10 states with stricter gun control.

Jimmy the One, Wilkes-Barre, USA

As for lower mortality in police shootings, one would hope advances in medical technology and the vast amounts spent on the NHS have had some result.

Indeed, in Afghanistan fatal casualties are down but serious injuries are up compared to previous wars for the very reason that techniques for keeping the severely injured alive have advanced.

John Pate, Edinburgh, Scotland

I live in the USA, and I completely concur.

Most of the people who deplore the ownership of guns have never been threatened, and it would never occur to them to defend themselves or their families if they were.

I'm fairly certain, if someone were to beat the snot out of them a time or two, they would change their opinion. All the sudden, their gated communities and precious Starbucks stores wouldn't seem so secure.

Travis Morgan, Wichita, Kansas, USA

Wow, a piece in a newspaper (a British newspaper, at that!) on guns that is not hysterically subjective or completely emotion-based. Have I been magically transported to Bizarro Land? How did something brimming with such uncommon common sense get past the censors? There might be some hope left after all.

Jamie Furmage, Milwaukee, Wisconsin/ USA

"[A]n armed population means... drunken fist-fights become high-noon shootouts," a previous commenter suggested...

Citing movies as some sort of evidence may seem persuasive, but sadly, this just isn't the case in reality - where most of us live. In reality, the drunken fist-fights are avoided, as well, because society as a whole is founded on mutually shared responsibility and equal authority. It's what we call society, not serfdom.

Several years ago, Florida passed a "Stand Your Ground" law that says a legally armed citizen is even permitted to use their firearm to come to the defense of someone else, whom they perceive to be in danger. This is borderline vigilantism, yet it *works.*

An armed man or woman is a Citizen, with all the accompanying responsibilities and rights. Unarmed, we become little more than serfs.

Andy, Lexington, KY

The State of Michigan passed a liberal "right to carry law" about 15 years ago. The soft minded insisted that it would be "Dodge City" with road rage incidents and drunken brawls ended with a bang. In short, blood would be running ankle deep in the streets.

To the contrary, Michigan, like the 30 odd states before it that passed similar legislation, has seen a decrease in violent crime.

I own a shotgun and two hunting rifles. Two months ago I was watching television and someone began to kick in my front door at 12am. I retreated to my bedroom and retrieved my shotgun. I then returned to my living room and loudly announced that I was armed. Going so far to tap the barrel of the gun on the window adjacent to the front door. No more burglar. I'm sure he moved on to a more "progressive" home to rob, rape or murder. I wonder how long it would have taken the police to arrive?

Gun control laws (like liberalism) betray a total misunderstanding of human nature. Join the NRA

Neville Chamberlin, Grand Rapids, MI

On the point that Stephen Grindle raised about "the per-capita murder rate in the US still THREE TIMES HIGHER than the UK". It's quite true, however going back 200 years, the per-capita murder rate in the USA has consistently been 4 times higher than that of the UK. For most of those 200 years, the laws regarding guns were virtually identical in the UK and the USA, i.e. law-abiding citizens were free to own & carry guns including handguns,

so the higher rate of murder in the USA can't be explained by the gun laws. There must be other cultural or economic factors operating. The fact that the murder rate in the US is now 3 times higher rather than 4 times higher is indicative of the fact that the UK is closing the gap. The UK's murder rate has increased as the gun laws have got more restrictive whilst the US rate has stayed roughly the same or decreased. The main deterrent to crime needs to be the citizens, because the police will almost always arrive after the crime has occurred.

Tony Yates, Brisbane,

I own guns; quite a few of them as a matter of fact, and not one of them has committed a crime while I have owned it. Nor has it shot anyone, including women, children, or household pets. The simple fact is that blaming guns for violence is just a way to avoid placing the blame for actions of violent criminals on those who COMMIT ACTS OF VIOLENCE. Disarming everyone BUT the criminals will not stop violent crime. My friends; appeasement NEVER works, and pandering to the same types over gun control ignores the fact that gun control isn't about the guns; it's about the CONTROL. Those who beat their swords into plowshares will always be forced to use them to plow the fields of those who do not. Over 100 million disarmed people died at the hands of their own governments last century proving that fact in the concentration camps and gulags of Europe and Russia. Guns are not the problem- those who want to take them away from everyone else usually are the biggest danger to fear.

Jay, Columbia, Tennessee, USA

To quote from the (ever reliable, ahem) Wikipedia:

"In 2005/06 there were 766 offences initially recorded as homicide by the police in England and Wales (including the 52 victims of the 7 July 2005 London bombings), a rate of 1.4 per 100,000 of population. Only 50 (6.6%) were committed with firearms, one being with an air weapon...

By comparison, 5.5 murders per 100,000 of population were reported by police in the United States in 2000, of which 70% involved the use of firearms (75% of which were illegally obtained)."

In other words, gun related fatalities are (using the stats above) roughly 41 times greater (per capita) in the US, where personal gun ownership is licensed, as opposed to the UK.

The US constitution's arcane 'Right to Bear Arms' (intended for militias, not ordinary citizens) is fetishised in the States to an extent that often mystifies others. That 'human right' has created a society in which an individual is far more likely to be shot & killed.

Oliver, London, United Kingdom

Quote,

"In fact, why is the murder rate in the U.S. almost ten times that in the U.K., and why has the disparity actually increased since 1900?".....

If guns suddenly disappeared, does anyone seriously think that all of the potential shooting victims would still be alive? Murderers want people dead. There are other methods.

If you take away the murders committed with a gun, the U.S. murder rate would still be five times greater than the U.K.

I would think that the UK has just as many kitchen knives, clubs and hammers as the US. Why is it that the murder rate committed with these other implements still much lower than in the U.S. ?

There are other factors involved that determine murder rates. Arguing over which implement is employed in ending a life is pointless. A person is not more dead if he is shot rather than stabbed.

Rock, New York, USA

I would prefer put a sign on the front of my house that states "This home is protected by an owner who is trained in the use of firearms. My neighbor, however, does not own a firearm because they are anti-gun."

The people who profess firearms control are the same ones who want speech control and would be angry about my sign as well !!!

Matthew Stuart, Las Vegas, NV, USA

Having been a serving member of the police in Northern Ireland for fifteen years, I can honestly say that being constantly armed is a massive moral, emotional and practical burden. When you live with a 2lb weight on your belt or shoulder, there is a far greater weight of responsibility which clings to the barrel. Safety is always at the forefront of weapon possession and this virtually negates ownership. To use your legally held firearm, you must be absolutely positive that your life, or someone else's, is in imminent danger. This virtually assures any gun-toting criminal the first shot and, if he is any good, your gun is now his and another illegal firearm hits the streets. I know that the figures show that an armed

population means a cautious criminal, but it also means drunken fist-fights become high-noon shootouts..

Gary Boyce, Belfast, N.I.

I applaud this article. Bravo.

The fact is, you narrow the field too much if you look at "Gun Crime". Your crime rate in Britan, overall is 4 times higher now than before guns were banned. This includes all violent crimes, committed with anything, knives, etc. Is there anything noble in holding down the poor lady while she is raped, or the old man while he is beaten and robbed? NO! That is what "Gun Control" laws do. They disarm the innocent and make them the victim of the criminal. Not everyone is Bruce Lee, with Hurculean strength. The firearm is an equalizer for the poor old lady facing the hulking mugger. As has been proven, time and again, disarming the law-abiding only empowers the criminal. And by definition, if Guns are outlawed, only criminals have guns.

Jammy, Bolivar, Tennessee, USA

"60 people were murdered with firearms in England and Wales in 1990, last year it was58"

Tom,Cardiff

The point you are missing is that during one period gun ownership was legal....

You have proven the author's point.

The gun control enacted after Dunblane has done nothing for your safety.

But by all means,continue to revel in your feeling superior to us Yanks.

John Smith, Baltimore, Maryland

I am very sceptical about Richard Munday's use of statistics from America to argue his case for the liberalisation of gun laws. All he does in his

article (Times 08/09/07) is present a correlation between the loosening of gun control and the reduction in crime, but he fails to demonstrate any causal link.

What is more dangerous is he fails to acknowledge the numerous other factors that may have influenced these statistics. Cases have been made for all the following factors; the economy, increased home ownership, more police on the streets, tougher prison sentences, leveling off of divorce rates, legalisation of abortion, better education, increased immigration and even reduction in lead based paints.

The truth undoubtedly lies in a combination of the above (and quite possibly also the liberalisation of gun laws). If Mr Munday wants his theory to be considered seriously he should provide evidence of a causal link and acknowledge the other positions in a very complicated debate.

Ed, Surrey, UK,

America is a big country. Gun control supporters only point to those areas of the country (urban) that have high gun crime and violence rates while ignoring the relative safety of the vast majority of the country. There are 10,000 cities in the United States. Half of ALL U.S. gun homicides occur in 63 cities. Those 63 cities contain about 16% of Americas entire population. And the gun crime in those 63 cities is almost always clustered in certain neighborhoods within each city. In other words in about 95% of the country, we dont have the kind of problem that the gun controllers would have you believe. I dont own a firearm but I live in a medium sized county in Virginia with heavy personal firearm ownership and I cant recall the last time there was a noteworthy gun related murder.

Johnny Oldfield, Gloucester , USA/Virginia

Damn good article, glad someone else in Britain is brave enough to make the case for guns.

Jon, Edinburgh,

This lunacy has extended to knives. The law-abiding are to be monitored, controlled, and intimidated but the outlaws can run rampant.

The Bill of Rights allowed the Citizen to carry arms to protect against The Executive using a Standing Army to oppress....that is why the US took over the concept.

The State has grown inexorably in Europe and especially Britain and Positive Pseudo-Rights have been granted whilst Natural Law Rights have been eroded and the individual made subject to increasingly arbitrary State power and intrusion.

Shooting people is illegal anywhere and subject to investigation,

but in Britain any form of resistance by a householder is indictable and punished. The legal system provides the outlaw with legal rights not to be obstructed in his activities

TomTom, Leeds, England

The difference in murder rates between UK and US can't be ascribed to the rates of gun ownership. The non-gun murder rate in the US is higher than the total UK murder rate; how do guns cause Americans to kill each *without* guns at a higher rate than their UK counterparts?

Obvious answer: there's no correlation between legal gun ownership and murder. Except, of course, for the inverse correlation Mr. Munday documents: the areas of the US with the strictest gun control have the highest murder rates.

That holds true internationally, too: the (many!) nations with higher murder rates than the US all have strict gun control laws.

In the end, of course, guns remain inanimate objects: they do nothing without a human operator. Guns aren't the problem; people are.

Kevin Craig, Nash, Texas, USA

I really liked your article, It is good to see that there are still Brits out there that care about there freedom. But as a Gunsmith from the state of Vermont I have to correct you we do have one gun law in Vermont. At the turn of the last century people were using some of the worlds first suppressors (silencers) for pouching because of this a knee jerk reactionary law was passed banning there ownership in our state.

Anthony, Burlington, VT

When guns are outlawed, only outlaws have guns.

Abid Shaikh, Karachi, Pakistan

"What you have conspicuously failed to mention is that the per-capita murder rate in the US still THREE TIMES HIGHER than the UK (look it up)."

If you exclude New Orleans we're dead even.

Nick, Medford, Oregon, USA

Brits have forgotten that the hard core criminals obey ONLY force and power. If their potential target is weak then he/she will be mugged or worse. If the criminal thinks the target might hurt him or kill him then the criminal will leave him alone. If the criminal system is a joke they will continue to do crimes even after they have been caught once or twice.

It all comes down to this: When a bunch of juveniles would like to kick me to death just for the fun of it I would like to be able to threaten them or kill them if I must as the police can not even protect themselves let alone me. I would not like to hurt anybody but if they think they can play football with my head or rape my wife they are wrong and there will be consequences for them.

Why Brits think they are better of by letting the criminals run rampant is beyond me. Are you stupid or what ?

Heikki, Helsinki, Finland

Pardon me, but I was just wondering if, Bruce L. Northwood, Washington, D.C., USA, could read. Except for the fact that he lives in Washington, DC, which is one of the banned towns, he IS in fact ssafer in the USA. Just not in DC, or NY or Chicago, or any one of the other disarmed victims zones. If he wants to be really safe, just get him to move to Kennisaw, GA, where everyone, by city ordinance, is required to own a firearm, and where they haven't had a murder in over 20 years. Facts man, read the facts !!!

Bob Robertson, Edmonton, Alberta

One never needs a gun until one needs it badly.

joe, North Carolina , USA

Actually, there are around 270 million firearms in the U.S., and yes, we are safer for it.

As the author points out, look at the statistics: violent crime involving firearms takes place far more often in areas where gun control laws are the most strict as opposed to areas where there are fewer or no gun control laws.

Brian Talley, Rochester, New York

Bruce of Washington D.C. Bruce, make that 200 million plus four guns in my family: Myself, my wife, and two teens -boy and girl are all excellent shots and gun handlers. Trained them myself. I carry every where I can legally. I carry in church!! Break into my family space to harm anybody and chances are

really great that you'll end up dead Bruce. 200 million guns and are we safe? My family is Bruce. Very safe.

Thomas, Chesapeake, Virginia

There was a saying running around the roman empire long before the birth of Christ that went-mucro est no iugulo ,vir tenuta mucro est iugulo. Its not the sword that is the killer but the hand holding the sword. Unfortunately for the people of GB they are going to be rudely awakened by the sons of the one true faith when the mullahs give them The Word to destroy the infidels and the infidels will be unable to defend themselves

CEEIV, Palm Springs, FI

Splendid article. A large motivating factor in my decision to leave the UK was the post-Dunblane hysteria leading to the disarming of the law-abiding populace. Now I can comfort myself with the fact that I am legally entitled to cut in half, with a couple of rounds of triple ought buckshot, the guy stealing my TV .

As for the faint-hearts who say, "it's only property": I have to work to buy things, and that's part of my finite lifespan I can never reclaim. Property is frozen life, and every theft is a miniature murder.

David Gillies, San Jose, Costa Rica

stun gun would do me

terry sullivab, london, england

Excellent article that will be totally ignored. The British "orthodoxy" is totally single minded in it's believe that the people should have no right to defend themselves.

bsamways, London, UK

Sounds great. Tool me up.

Steve, London,

There are 200 million guns floating around America. Are we safer? No!

Bruce L. Northwood, Washington, D.C., USA

Well done Richard Munday! The banning of pistols and the confiscation of legal ones was a typically opportunistic and politicised reaction on the part of New Labour (as the present governing party was then pleased to call itself) to the Dunblane tragedy.

The only effects were to enable a number of citizens to make some money at the taxpayers' expense by turning in weapons, many of which if fired would almost certainly have posed a far greater threat to the shooter than any intended victim - and to force the British Olympic Pistol Shooting Team to practise abroad.

T. Nicholls, New Rochelle, NY

"So why is the rate of gun crime so much higher in the US than in the UK"? asks Jon.

I'd suggest that the rate of gun crime in the US has ALWAYS been higher in the rate of gun crime in the UK, well prior to any gun control laws being passed in either country.

But, not all use of guns is by criminals, in crimes. Gun ownership by the law abiding in the USA deters 'gun crime', and common assault from being committed by the non-law abiding upon themselves. The stats are there, as quoted in the above article.

The law-abiding ownership of firearms, particularly pistols, is what has been removed from the equation in Great Britain.

As to rate of 'gun crimes', in Canada, where we have been disarmed to a much less extent than Britain, 'gun crimes' remain rare, though millions of Canadians legally own pistols and other firearms. Like the UK, Canadians have traditionally shown themselves less likely to commit crimes with their firearms.

Hugh Lawlor, St. John's, Newfoundland

To Mr. Livesey with the small caps name in California.

Your stats are incorrect. The gun banners in the US combine US gun crime injuries and suicides. They also include guns found at or near a crime scene and not used--and call the crime a gun crime. Then, they look at gun crime figures in other countries and subtract the suicide stats.

If the stats were compared ethically, one would find that the gun crime in England, for example, is much worse than the gun crime in the US. This is, of course, if one uses the areas of the US where guns are legal. If one includes the cities where guns are illegal, the gun crime figures in the US go up.

Do your own research, Jon. You will find that gun crime--crime in general--is lower where the law abiding can protect themselves

with firearms, and much higher where the law abiding are victimized by illegal gun-toting criminals.
Even here in Canada, as soon as the government instituted intense gun controls, gun crime skyrocketed.

J. Sturm, Toronto, Canada

Because Jon there are substantially more people living in the US than in the UK. Taken proportionately gun crime in the UK is far higher.

What it all boils down to is that an unarmed public is far easier to suppress than an armed one.

Norman Foster, Oxford, UK

to Liz in Florida
for your information automatic weapons have been illegal for individuals to own since 1933.
thats just 1 of the points that you got wrong, every point you made is wrong.

rick wagner, wildwood, usa

Actually, the rate of gun crime in the US almost exactly that of Britain's when you count only white crimes committed with guns. It's an unpleasant fact that black crime skews the statistics horrendously.

Black males in the US commit approximately half of all violent crimes in the United States (rape, robbery, assault and murder). They comprise about 6% of our population. This is an appalling figure and a national tragedy but little discussed in our mainstream media. Politicians and the media seem to prefer that this be swept under the rug.

Bruce Davies, Dalton, GA, USA

Rorke's Drift, L Battery at Nery, Gloster Hill....these battles were the face of British toughness. Now, save for the brave few fighting alongside our boys, what has replaced that toughness? Socialist policies, political correctness and a rising tide of english radical Islam. And of course, the average citizen cannot protect himself because guns are "evil." Pitiful.

England, fly the Union Jack on high, take pride in your history and take back your country!

George, Evansville,, Indiana USA

In light of the increasing threat of Islamic violence, increasing and seemingly endless Muslim immigration, and the openly stated goal of many Islamists to impose Sharia in the UK I think now might be a good time to start rearming yourselves.

What is the gun crime rate in Switzerland where every male is required to own a weapon?

Eric, Little Rock, US

In the USA the arguments for and against "gun control" are based on perceptions of public safety : in the UK - and in the rest of Europe - the impetus for denying public access to firearms is primarily political; to stave off armed revolution. This has been true since at least 1848 but was massively reinforced by the Russian Revolution of 1917. Democratic (and autocratic) governments everywhere looked at their populations, previously regarded as an asset, with nervous apprehension. It is, of course, too shameful to admit openly that the government is disarming its citizens because it doesn't trust them. The disarmament agenda is therefore advanced by stealth under the banner of "public safety". Every headline-grabbing crime involving firearms is regarded by the authorities as a legislative opportunity - as per Dunblane. Recommended reading: ""Guns & Violence : The English Experience" by Joyce Lee Malcolm, ISBN 0-674-00753-0. Its an eye-opener.

John C Calhoun, Milwaukee, WI USA

Having just moved back to the states after 12 years living in England, I found this article very interesting. I actually felt much safer in the U.K. Since arriving in the U.S., my children have been subjected to red alert drills where they are told to hide under their desks in case a gunman enters the classroom. This is the result of our lack of gun control. I am curious why the writer did not mention the fact that there have been no massacres in the U.K. since Dunblane. This is certainly a result of the tight gun control in the U.K., where we in the U.S. continue to watch the news of yet another mass killing of our children.

Sue Hair, Chicago, IL. USA

In fact, why is the murder rate in the US almost ten times that in the UK, and why has the disparity actually increased since 1900?

jon livesey, Sunnyvale, CA/US

Did you not read:

"Never mind the findings of the International Crime Victims Survey (published by the Home Office in 2003), indicating that we now suffer three times the level of violent crime committed in the United States; never mind the doubling of handgun crime in Britain over the past decade, since we banned pistols outright and confiscated all the legal ones."

Never mind... Fact just get in the way!

Steve Bachelor, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

munday: America's disenchantment with "gun control" is based on experience:

.. america is not disenchanted with gun control, ~60%+ of americans support stricter guncontrol, not less.
.. another one of munday's errors.

(recent gallup poll): Gun ownership in the US appears to be on the decline, according to Gallup polls surveying American attitudes... 36% of Americans said they keep a gun in their home-the lowest percentage in 40 years of polling.
.. Only one in 4 think citizens should pack concealed weapons..
Nearly 2 in 3 Americans (65%) say they would feel less safe if they were in a public place and knew that concealed firearms were allowed. 25% say it would make them feel safer, and 8% volunteered that it would not make any difference..

munday: Gun controls disarm only the law-abiding,

.. not true, even gun guru gary kleck contends that guncontrols will prevent some criminals & potential criminals from obtaining a firearm, illicit or not.

Jimmy the One, Wilkes-Barre, USA

So the solution to reducing gun crime in this country is to follow the USA which has the highest gun crime figures of the major industrialised nations? Er...no. Are we also to believe that the world would be much safer from nuclear war if every country had nuclear weapons?

To bring up Victorian and Edwardian analogues as if gun technology had remained static is completely disingenuous. How can you begin to compare Dr. Watson's famous service revolver with a Glock pistol with 33 rounds, or a semi-automatic rifle?

Call me old fashioned, but I believe that you have less gun crime if you have less, not more, guns. Surely the sensible route is to disarm the tiny minority (and impose much tougher laws on the yobs that plague us all) rather than arming the vast majority?

Darren Ross, Sunderland, England

"Finally, someone on that side of the pond with some sense."

Hey, there's plenty more of us who get it :), but British society/politics today is very far to the left, sadly.

MM, Andover, UK

Jon and others- to explain, the murder rate is high only in particular sections of society fueled by crime, drugs and cultural issues. I am a European living in Dallas and I feel infinitely safer walking in the entertainment districts late at night than I would in the UK. A country where, not only are you prohibited from exercising a right to carry a weapon as law abiding individual, but you would likely be prosecuted to a greater extent than the criminal for defending yourself. Jon, did you know in the UK someone can walk in your house, announce they're taking your belongings and there's almost nothing you are allowed to do to defend your property. It is a travesty and an outrage. You'd have to be a maniac to break into a home in Texas, but that's why we don't have to deal with the scum culture the Brit's suffer.

Richard, DALLAS, USA

Statistically, about 6 times as many people choke on food each year than are accidentally shot with a firearm. Mandatory Eating Safety course anyone? Ban food? The thousands of gun laws at the state and federal level do nothing to deter criminals. That's one of those nifty side benefits of being a law breaker. Gun control is a feel good reaction to crime that only applies to the law abiding and paves the way for the felons.

D Mishler, San Diego, California

I concur with the author but at a minimum I must at least disagree with Liz from Tampa, Fl. She admits to not owning guns but then goes to state that there are "thousands" of people killed in firearms accidents per year in the U.S. Well in the latest year I see stats for, 2001, I see about 800 deaths due to firearms accidents in the U.S. compared to about 40,000 caused by auto accidents. We are a nation of 300 million people so keep it in perspective. The bottom line is that if you own a car or a swimming pool the chances of

those objects killing you in an accident is many times greater than your chance of being killed by a firearm. Americans own about 273 million firearms vs about 140 million automobiles. Perspective!

Jim, Honey Brook, USA/PA

munday: New York has banned pistols since 1911, and its fellow murder capitals, Washington DC and Chicago, have similar bans.

.. what rot; new york city is NOT a murder capital, neither is chicago nor WashDC. In 2005 Wash ranked 13th in murder rate, chicago 48th, & NYC 153rd.

.. ranked higher than 13th Wash are 7 pro gun cities & 5 guncontrol cities; Washington's sister city (100 miles south) pro gun Richmond Virginia, ranked 5th highest murder rate at 43 murders/100k, compared with Wash's 35. Perhaps munday can explain why pro gun Richmond's rate is so much higher than 'murder capital' Washington? Why haven't guns lowered the murder rate there as he sneakily misleads by implication?

.. the top ten states having the highest murder rates include only 2 guncontrol states (calif & Md), the other 8 are PRO GUN states: #1 Progun(PG) Louisiana, 2 PG NMex, 3 Md, 4 PGMississ, 5 PG Nev, 6 PGAriz, 7 PG SCaro, 8 PG Georgia, 9 Calif, 10 tie PGArk & PG Mich.

Jimmy the One, Wilkes-Barre, USA

Of course, left-wing types say they want Britain to keep Britain unarmed they are not being strictly honest: the police and army both have guns. What they are really saying is that they want the State to have the sole monopoly on the use of firearms, with the effect that it is only the public who must be left unable to defend themselves. This tips the balance of power too far in the favour of the State. In 'The Prince' Machiavelli advances an interesting argument in favour of an armed population, namely that they will be able to defend their Nation against attack. An armed Nation accepts responsibility for the security of its society, rather than the infantilised position we have towards the State in Britain, where we must beg for protection from our masters. In this regards Switzerland is surely a model, a mature democracy in which all Citizens receive military training and have a rifle in their houses- and also has one of the highest living standards and lowest crime to go with it.

Philip Marshall, Lincoln, Britain

Wow, what a refreshing insight. I am glad that someone finally saw the light, restrictive gun laws ONLY AFFECT THE LAW ABIDING, criminals do not abide by the law. Great article!

Rob Howell, Alberta, Canada

When will the British learn that the more you restrict and control the larger the problem, human nature must out, say no and that's what we do and want. An excellent and true article, we spend many months of the year in Texas where it would be considered insulting and against the constitution for citizens not to carry arms and this is constantly pointed out to us and certainly we feel safer here than in the UK!

Ann Craik, Marmaris, Turkey

Living in Chicago, I can see some decent points on both sides. Those who have mentioned the stats on accidental shootings bring up one of those good points. How about a report that consolidates deaths & injuries from both criminals vs victims/ defendants with guns; plus accidental killings by kids, & arguments too close to alcohol & a gun?

Another comparison many minoritized citizens would like to see: shootings of criminals by police versus wrongful shootings by police, compared against shootings of innocents by gang members in those same neighborhoods.

Could this be organized as a wikified net project? As international, long-term, and detailed/ multi-faceted as those who care to involve themselves can make it?

Rick Thurman, Chicago, IL, USA

A country with no means of self defence would be like a military with no weapons, being unarmed would be our defeat.

Jeffrey R. Wilcox, Mountain City, TN

It's refreshing to hear a voice of reason on firearms ownership. Gun control accomplishes little more than to disarm the law abiding.

To those in the U.K. who think otherwise, come and visit my part of the United States, where firearms laws are quite lax I can't think of any place in any town in Wyoming that I fear being in. People here are quite friendly most of us don't even bother to lock the doors of our houses or cars.

I am perfectly free to walk through town with a loaded handgun on my hip in plain view if I so desire. It's also a relatively simple matter for a law abiding adult to obtain a concealed carry permit for a handgun if you'd rather be more discreet. People who have a safe full of rifles and handguns and thousands of rounds of ammunition are considered firearms aficionados, not gun nuts.

Ironically, I rarely choose to exercise those freedoms because I don't feel the need to here. A freely armed society is a polite society.

Ross, Wyoming, USA

I can vouch for Mr. Hall of Wilmington Vermont's comments, I live just up the road a piece from him, in Brattleboro Vermont, and I enjoy the peace and safety he speaks of here too. I have no idea how many of my neighbors own guns, or carry them, nor do I care. For that matter even our police do not consider it a matter of concern in the ordinary run of things. The law abiding citizen, armed or not as suits her or himself, is not the problem. It is the criminal who will arm himself to his purposes, without the law, that you need to stop, and so far I have seen no "gun control" law either in Britain or here in the U.S. that has any effect on criminals using guns.

David Schnyer, Brattleboro, Vermont

Are you joking? Seriously, we are bigger and have more freedoms, hence the higher numbers. It's a matter of freewill and sheer numbers. And the fact that most societies around the world are basically breaking down regardless of what laws are passed.

Most murders here are concentrated into urban areas where there is more of shall we say an undesirable sort of society. I live in the country and I only feel at risk when driving or venturing into a large urban area.

Joe West, USA,

clearly it would be a great idea to let us law-abiding honest citizens carry guns, whilst strictly forbidding the criminal plebs to do so

oh wait a minute...

Bill, London,

Gun laws are the sticking plaster for governments whose only solution to problems is legislation (usually unenforceable).

With a government stuffed to overflowing with lawyers, is it any wonder that so much of our legislation is useless.

In Singapore there is a term "the amok". This describes someone who has snapped and seeks revenge on society. The killing spree is usually with a machete, but even the dimmest of lawyers knows that a ban on machetes is unworkable.

michael murphy, brightlingsea, essex

Gun bans are classic examples of applying simplistic thinking to complex problems:
For every problem there is a solution which is simple, obvious, and wrong."

â€” Albert Einstein

Society is a complex system which often reacts counterintuitively to our interventions based on incomplete and imperfect understanding. See <http://web.mit.edu/sdg/www/D-4468-2.Counterintuitive.pdf>

The real solution to this and other problems is to revive the traditional militia system, in which every able-bodied person is organized and trained to defend public safety from any foreseeable threat, including crime and terrorism, and to equip himself with everything from firearms to medical and rescue equipment. Never send to know where are the guardians of our lives. The guardians are you.

See <http://www.constitution.org> for more on these topics.

Jon Roland, Austin, Texas, USA

First, Beccaria lived in a state without anything like a modern police force - so the need to bear arms was rather different. Quoting an irrelevant "authority" hardly adds to your case. Second- how do you account for the low, indeed almost minimal, rate of violent crime in Japan, which has extremely strict gun laws? Shouldn't your theory have Japan as a sink of mutual slaughter? Encouraging guns among the population will only produce more violence, more gun killings, and more random acts of madness. What we need is better policing and community relations - not the chance to add to the level of mutual violence.

John, Boston, USA

Mr. Munday's statement, "New York has 'banned' pistols since 1911, and its fellow murder capitals, " is not quite correct. New York State requires a license to purchase a handgun, and depending on county, this can be difficult to nearly impossible. (In

New York City, such permits often involve bribery or political connections.)

What is more significant is to remember that Britain's restrictive Firearms Act 1920 was not passed in response to violent crime (there was far less then than there is now), but fear of Bolshevik uprising--as Cabinet papers declassified in 1969-70 make abundantly clear. See <http://www.claytoncramer.com/firear~1.htm> for quite direct admissions by Cabinet ministers about this.

Clayton E. Cramer, Horseshoe Bend, Idaho

Lest I mislead any to a false impression my wife studied with two world class concert pianists, (her students regularly are accepted at Stanford, Emory, Rice, UCLA, Harvard) I only studied Jazz at University and our many offspring ? Ones studying as missionary Doctor, one in management at a large Fund Company, One studies Ballet at UCSB.

Yes it's true, we are American Rednecks and my family have been Immigrant Rednecks for 360 years. Every Chance I get I take the family to an exclusive beach resort to work on that sunburn on the backs of our necks.

We all voted for George Bush and Ronald Reagan and yes we own and regularly use responsibly many guns, as do our neighbors. I teach gun safety and shooting to Boy Scouts.

Interestingly, in our 3 towns there is zero crime. We are a well armed group of citizens. And our communities send many young men and women to the military academies, the police & fire Academies, out as missionary doctors. We are in the San Francisco East Bay.

Randall, Orinda, CA USA

I agree entirely with this article. We lived in Florida when Hurricane Andrew destroyed our home and everything around us. Public services, including the police, were stretched very thin for days. The people from public housing (counsel housing to you) swarmed out to loot stores. What kept them out of private homes was the chance of being shot by homeowners. Recently, in California, three thugs broke into an elderly man's home to rob and maybe kill him. One was killed on the spot, the other was crippled, and the third was arrested in the emergency room. The old guy had a gun. The police could not have protected him. They can't be everywhere. There are times when only you can protect yourself. By the way, what is going on with the police in the UK? It seems that the best chance of their investigating a burglary is if the burglar takes your television and the police hunt him down for the telly tax.

Rachelle Young, Los Angeles, CA

When American states such as mine (Arizona) passed laws allowing citizens the concealed carry of weapons (when adequately trained and a background check was passed) the media of the hanky wringing types were full of admonitions such as, "bloodbaths in the streets!" None ever happened. Instead, as the writer has noticed, crime stats diminished. People felt safer. The victims became the victors more times than not. For a change the casual criminal was afraid of the footsteps approaching down the alley.

Are honest Brits not as responsible as their armed cousins here? I doubt that.

Take a look around your crime ridden streets and ask yourself this question: Why does my government force me to genuflect to the lowlifes that make my life miserable?

Could it be that some in government see crime as just one more tool for controlling you?

Mike from Tucson, Tucson, Arizona

Sabremesh wrote: "I disagree with virtually everything in this article, but the real shocker is that there is no mention of the fact of that of the 20,000 Americans who lose their lives as a result of being shot, many thousands are killed accidentally."

No, that is not the case.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, the organization that keeps track of death statistics here in the US, the number of people who die from accidental gunshot is well less than a thousand each year, and - more importantly - has been DECLINING each year since we first started keeping records. This, despite the fact that over three million NEW firearms are purchased by private citizens each and every year.

The most recent data indicates that 649 fatalities were due to accidental gunshot in 2004. Bear in mind, our population is estimated at 300 million, and we have (according to the Small Arms Survey) nearly 275 million firearms here. In comparison, 5976 pedestrians died accidentally in 2004.

Kevin Baker, Tucson, Arizona

Richard Munday has encapsulated the situation very well. Gun control laws disarm victims, not criminals; encourage crime and greatly weaken self-defence; divert police resources from potentially useful work to destructive bureaucracy; and destroy sport and weaken pest control. Perhaps most worrying of all, they encourage sloppy, shallow thinking - that inanimate objects can be evil and taint those who come into contact with them.

The evidence supporting the above is stronger, more consistent and based over a much longer periods in more countries than that making the case that smoking is associated with cancer. It is therefore, in social anthropological terms, quite interesting to consider how continuous distortion in favour of gun control, by bodies like the Home Office and Police, have, in fact, been able to fool most of the people (including Times readers), most of the time.

Derek Bernard, Jersey, British Isles

How often do you hear of a killing spree in a British or German school? You, don't? Neither, do I. Even apparently normal citizens go loco and their moment of mental breakdown can turn out to be very tragic as it happens in US. I would feel safer in a country where people can't buy semi-automatic weapons to feel safer.

Chris , Redhill,

Richard Munday is entitled to his views but they are extremely dangerous ones and contrary to the spirit of the British people. There is absolutely no need for anyone to own a gun and I believe they should be banned completely. No sane person would want to carry a gun or to have one available in their home. Some things should be banned, otherwise there would be total anarchy and people would be walking about with Kalashnikov rifles, flamethrowers, grenades and many other undesirable objects. If you want a gun, Munday, emigrate to America where you will fit right in.

Sue, Manchester, England

There's much more to gun crime than how liberal gun laws are, economic, social, legal and political factors colour an immense part of the whole picture.

The large majority of gun crime stems from the poverty suffered in deprived parts of cities. I don't see how allowing the middle class Daily Mail readers to own firearms does anything to solve the problem, if anything it makes the whole situation much more volatile.

gk, West Drayton, uk

A word of reason with a British accent. How refreshing! The accumulating data supporting this conclusion is becoming more and more difficult to ignore, though determined folks on both sides of the pond do so with great passion. How delicious to have a Brit remind us of the assumptions Jefferson brought to our second amendment!

Steve Rhoades, Crystal Falls, MI

My God! A reporter who has actually done his homework. Will wonders never cease...I live in the USA. I have carry permits from 3 states. I have only had to display a weapon once in my non military life to stop a crime, a carjacking, and the sight of an armed citizen was all it took to have the perp fall on his butt and run away. I suspect the criminal element in the UK, as in the USA, likes their victims helpless.

Jim Verdolini, Boise, USA/Idaho

What utter rubbish and distortion of the facts! In 1999, the USA suffered 10.5 deaths by firearms per 100000 population. For the UK the figure was 0.35 deaths per 100000. Assuming that Americans are no more predisposed to commit murder, suicide or kill themselves accidentally than the British, this can ONLY be explained by the ready availability of guns in the US. The figures for homicide, suicide and accidental gun deaths are staggering in the US. So Vermont has only one 13th of the armed violence in the UK? It also has 100th of the UK's population you moron. The facts are absolutely clear: if guns were more readily available, then you are over 20 times more likely to die from them.

Rob, Virginia Beach, VA

Thank you very much for such a reasonable discussion of a very emotional subject. While I would not suggest that the UK rush pell mell to repeal all of its gun laws, I do respectfully recommend that a good faith discussion about whether the UK's stringent gun laws are doing it any good is in order. As previously noted, that discussion must also include an examination of the UK laws regarding the use of deadly force in defense of one's person, the person of others, and in appropriate circumstances, property.

Letalis Maximus, Tulsa, Oklahoma USA

Ban all firearms and cruel and inhumane hunting ! Then if any citizen is caught with an illegal firearm, they must be imprisoned for a minimum of twenty years. This will deter even the most violent and brazen criminals.

Brien Comerford, Glenview, United States

Try moving to a country like South Africa and then let us know if you think a gun would do you any good.

Chantel, UK,

Since 1995 I've carried a handgun in my auto largely because severely wounded in Viet-Nam I live alone on a heavily wooded & isolated rural 5 acre tract and hrice over the years I've returned home to discover unwelcome strangers in defiance of posted "no trespassing" & "keep out" signs on the property.

While none of the three trespassers proved to be a threat to me, who knows about the next person at least willing to violate the no trespassing laws?

Not once in the twelve years and counting I've had a concealed carry permit have I come close to reaching for my handgun & I frequently pray I never need do so, but I am prepared to defend myself if the need should arise.

Should anyone fear or hate firearms, it should be one such as I, made seriously banged up by gunfire, no? To the contrary, I'm fond of firearms.

Dave Livingston, El Paso County, Colorado, USA

British policy with regard to self defence, with or without arms, is both stupid and scandalous. The evidence is clear that violent crime falls when only a small proportion of honest citizens are armed. The evidence the other way is that laws restricting legal use of firearms for self defence and innumerable additional initiatives to reduce violent crime simply result in more crime.

Kenneth Hynes, London United Kingdom, UK

We do not need to carry guns and I wouldn't trust the ability of many to carry one safely. Those in civilised counties give up the right to personal protection in return from protection by the forces of law and order.

This means that firstly those forces must be competent at detection of crimes and secondly the punishment must be adequate to deter those considering committing a crime from doing so.

We need both of those conditions fulfilled again. Firstly police should stop their zero tolerance attack on motorists and redirect it towards violent offenders. Secondly causing death during an armed robbery or other attack should mean a life i.e. till death sentence. This prison sentence should be in conditions no better than that of the poorest free citizen.

D Cage, Highworth, Wilts UK

You are so right. And let us remember that the 200 year campaign in this country to take away our right to be armed was not based on fear of crime but fear of insurrection. The right of a British subject to own a firearm and, in the last event, to use it to remove a tyrannical government that would not go, was well recognised. The British government didn't seek to protect its people -- it feared them. It still does.

John Lynch, Whittington, UK

I am shocked that any intelligent person believes that arming the masses will suddenly bring an end to gun related crime in this country. References to Edwardian Britain where upper class toffs carried pistols for self protection is a world away from our modern disfunctional and fragmented society. Please remember that there was the death penalty for murder right up to 1965, we have now lost that disincentive to carrying out murderous attacks. If anything, the problem with guns is the establishments inability to prevent illegal weapons from coming onto the market, we need to be harder on people reactivating old weapons, and why the hell dont we ban the sale of replica weapons? You only need to read the news to see that some members of society cannot even control a dangerous dog, god know what some would do with a handgun!

Steve, Gosport, UK

"Another thing to consider is the accidents that happen with kids finding their parents' guns and accidentally shooting themselves and/or their friends."

I personally see that as an argument for more responsibility from the parents, for them to educate their children on the dangers of guns, and to keep it more securely locked... and not an argument against people's right to defend themselves.

But I do agree there need to be some gun controls (such as with fully automatic weapons) - just give law abiders the right to defend themselves.

We must realise that the US is a much bigger place, so naturally crime rates are going to be higher.

Plus, they have the problem of their huge border, people crossing it illegally (and with the big problems with drug cartels that Mexico is having), and where do those people get their weapons?

Legally?

So those people flowing into America and causing much of the gun crime are a reason for the law-abiding people to not be allowed to defend themselves?

MM, Andover, UK

Historically, laws supporting self-defense along with a proliferation of legally held firearms equates to less violent crimes and greater public safety. If you think that more legally held guns (especially assault weapons) means more violent crime, then look to Switzerland and think again.

Regarding the US v UK comment (from PDR Kalifornia), one should factor murders committed using illegally held arms. Irrespective of what laws are enacted, these murders will continue until the criminal element is effectively dealt with. There has not been one incident of a legally held machinegun being used in the commission of a crime in the US. California has very harsh firearms bans for the law abiding, yet high murder rates.

At the end of the day, one must ask: How much faith can a government have in its people if it does not trust them with arms? How much faith should the people have in government knowing that they are denied the right and means to defend themselves from violent attack?

John, Dallas, Texas

Jon Livesey asks:

"In fact, why is the murder rate in the US almost ten times that in the UK, and why has the disparity actually increased since 1900?"

Probably for the same reason that our non-gun murder rate is higher than Britain's rate for all categories. We have some very serious problems with murder in the U.S.--although it is concentrated in a relatively small fraction of the U.S. population. The U.S. white non-Hispanic murder rate is higher than the British white non-Hispanic murder rate--but not dramatically higher. There are a number of theories advanced to explain this, but blacks in the U.S. are less likely to have legal access to guns because of restrictive gun laws in urban areas--so gun availability doesn't explain why blacks murder each other at about 3.5x the rate that whites murder each other.

Clayton E. Cramer, Horseshoe Bend, Idaho

I don't understand how you can possibly ignore the evidence. It is not anecdotal, or made up. The fact is, an armed society is much safer than a unarmed one. Facts don't care how you "feel" about an issue. While the safety issues of having guns in the home with children are valid, it mainly stems from the parents being negligent in teaching their children proper gun safety. When a child only sees guns on TV, they tend to develop a "mystique" that makes them an irresistible play toy if stumbled upon.

Although I don't personally own a gun now, I grew up in a large city in California, with guns in our household. My father taught us proper use of, and respect for firearms from the time we could hold one. We spent many a weekend camping in the desert and target shooting.

People intent on mass murder (shooting rampages), or serious crimes (armed robberies, etc..) might think twice about their actions if they believe that one of their intended victims might be packin' heat!

Michael, kitsap, Washington / USA

It is extremely difficult to see any British government dropping gun control. The kids who carry knives to school would switch to handguns immediately - and emulate their heroes in the movies, etc. The control of crime will always come back to the same necessity - visible policemen. Last week, 6 days in London and environs, my score was Traffic Wardens 12 - Policemen 0.

john problem, london,

I'm not quite sure of the point of this article. Reversal of gun laws here is never going to happen. We're not even allowed to have pepper spray, mace, or tazers never mind pistols. Even if we were, we'd be prosecuted for using them. The biggest basket case in this debate is not Britain but South Africa, where the quickest way to suicide is to walk down a street at night carrying a mobile phone and protest if some gentleman wants to liberate it. There, even if you have a legally held pistol in your home, you will be prosecuted for using it against armed intruders. You can buy a gun for about £30, no problem, on the streets of inner Joburg.

The place is awash with weapons imported from Mozambique. The same is happening here as huge numbers of weapons come

in from eastern European countries that are now part of the EU. The political class here no longer care about the danger on the streets because they are protected from it, and senior police officers follow that party line.

David Short, London, UK

I am a retired professor living in West Palm Beach Florida. I carry a concealed pistol except where it is prohibited.

On two occasions before I began to carry, miscreants pointed pistols at me. It is no fun having this happen.

A third miscreant, who approached me after I began carrying needed only to see the grip of my pistol to respond "Ok, I'm cool" and walk away.

If you want to know the truth about guns and their impact on crime, read John Lott's book "The Bias Against Guns".

Those who are unwilling to defend themselves have a name - victims.

Robert Ferguson, West Palm Beach, USA/Florida

Many thanks for the interesting article. I live in Germany where CS gas firing pistols and revolvers are legal and do not need to be registered. I would probably face a few years in prison if caught with my weapon under Britain's draconian laws. It is a reassuring feeling to have it in the drawer of my desk at home,...just in case I might need it to defend myself, my wife or our home. When my grandchildren visit, the gun stays in the drawer and is emptied of its cartridges. Gun control is a political issue. After the Boer War, the government encouraged Englishmen to own rifles and practise with them on a regular basis. The scheme was called 'A Rifle In Every Cottage'. All went well until the Russian Revolution broke out and the Government of the day decided that the scheme.....wasn't such a good idea after all!

Johnj, Berlin, Germany

Richard, the statistics you cite are simply not adequate to prove anything like the case you want to make. You offer no proof that laws allowing concealed weapons have anything to do with the "drop" in crime in Florida. What were the rates of crime reporting? Did the number of police on the streets increase? Was the period before the "drop" statistically a high? These are all questions that would have an impact on the significance of the claims you make. As for the idiots on here yapping about martyrdom, they are neither intelligent nor honest. More guns on the street will increase the murder rate, empower the gangs (who currently carry knives, more than guns) and in general lead to a slide into violence. Hasn't Columbine taught our American cousins anything? If the police are not perfect, the answer is to improve the quality of policing, not to put guns on the street.

Nick, London, UK

Jon Livesey,

That's not true. The USA's murder rate is not ten times that of the UK and the gap between the US and the UK has got closer in recent years. Going back to 1900 is pointless as Britons had equal gun rights until 1920 and relatively lax gun control until the late 60s. Gun control still didn't get really tough until the mid 80s. Since then, deaths and injuries from the illegal use of firearms have increased by 1,000% and the violent crime and murder rates have risen since the 60s.

The USA has always had a higher murder rate than the UK, even when Britain had no gun laws. Britain's gun control has only seen increases in gun crime, violent crime and murder. In contrast, the USA's introduction of right-to-carry laws has seen decreases in such crimes.

Simon Clark, Reading, England

In a state of sheer rage what's the most damage you're going to do? This depends on the tools to hand. In the UK thank god guns are outlawed and that stabbing or fisticuffs is about as bad as it's going to get. If we are allowed to arm ourselves then it all escalates until everyone has one - like in the USA. If you're a cop and the criminals don't have guns (like in the UK) then you don't need them. I find the whole US gun thing frightening reflected by the attitudes of the American comments below. GUNS - if you're a citizen what do you need them for! British common sense always prevailed over the US machismo.

Nick, Kenilworth, UK

I'm an expat Brit living in Arizona, which is an extremely gun-friendly state. Here, I'm licensed by the state to teach concealed weapons classes, which were designed to allow ordinary citizens to carry a handgun for personal protection. Arizona has over 60,000 people who have a concealed carry permit. This is in addition to the hundreds of thousands of people

who own a firearm, but choose not to carry one.
The murder rate here is pretty low; and the only street violence is gang related.
Perhaps it's time to allow the average British citizen to arm him or herself for self defence purposes. If that happens, I'll be on the next plane home!

Tony Walker, Scottsdale, , Arizona, USA

Guns account for about half of the murders in the US. The rate of murder by beatings in the US is higher than in the UK from all sources. So clearly there are sociological reasons for the high rate. That just reinforces the argument that the innocent need to ability to defend themselves. Nearly half of the murders in the USA are committed against African Americans, who are 16% of the population. More than 80% those murders are committed by other African-Americans. So the legacy of slavery plays some part. It is a very complex issue. Even removing the murders committed by African-Americans from the statistics, there are wide disparities from state-to-state in the murder rates. Why? No one really knows. It is very difficult for sociologists and criminologists to sort out. For whatever reason, the innocent are threatened and have the right to defend themselves. The first civil right is the right to life. Without it, all the others are meaningless

Rick Fincher, Raleigh, North Carolina, USA

The trouble with this is the fairly well attested statistic that gun owners shoot themselves or members of their family - by accident - far more often than they shoot any malefactor

Rassendyll, Cambridge, UK

If you want to take this article to the extreme you simply have to compare the murder rates of Washington D.C. (which has an absolute ban on handguns) and that of Kennesaw, Georgia a city in which firearm ownership is mandatory. As it goes without saying, criminals break the law including gun laws.

Mike, Detroit, Michigan

After the Port Arthur massacre, in which 35 innocent people lost their lives to a gun-loving madman, rapid-fire weapons were banned in Australia, with a very small number of exceptions. This was followed by a \$500M buyback of illegal weapons.

While there is considerable debate amongst academics, the latest research concludes that these measures have saved about 250 lives per year.

Dr Mat Ballard, Melbourne, Australia

Gun crime rates are higher here in the US for a number of reasons, all of which are cultural. It is important to remember that the US is truly multi-cultural and we have an entrenched underclass whose plight has been exacerbated by 40 years of policies encouraging irresponsible behavior. The number of young men in many communities who have no male role model other than the crack-head next door is shameful for us and will not be ameliorated by tighter gun controls.

David, Philadelphia, USA

If carrying guns were legal and the norm I am pretty sure that I would have shot at least one person by now. Thing is, if I were allowed to carry a gun I would do so for my own protection, but I could see situations where I might well be tempted to use it, and that is the big problem in the US and a very good reason not to change our gun laws.

But being able to own a Taser gun would be a good idea perhaps..

d case, newquay,

If you stop capital punishment and the right of ordinary citizens to protect their homes what do these stupid politicians expect. All free men should have the right to protect themselves. But, you must expect punishment if you neglect your responsibilities in regard to such weapons.

Fred, Dubai, Dubai

I can only say thank you Richard for expressing my own views so clearly. Would these swaggering pistol carrying blacks act so offensively in public if they knew that a good proportion of the public had the power to react with deadly force? I think not.

Ben, Sunderland, Tyne & Wear

I enjoyed this article.

Sharon S. Roche, Columbus, Ohio

John Hall,
Try doing that with your car and front door in inner city LA, Philadelphia or Washington DC. Its fair to say that the social conditions in Wilmington are a little different to other areas of the USA.

Matthew Mason, Stoke-on-Trent, UK

Males under the age of 24 are more likely to be attacked or mugged. The majority of these cases do not involve fire arms.

Now legalise carrying fire arms and the statistic will read Males under the age of 24 are more likely to be killed.

The youth of our nation have already demonstrated a crass idea of responsibility and consequence. Let guns flow more freely through society and you may find yourself feeling slightly alone with your pistol when you are cornered by a several yobs wielding guns in your direction.

Our country has to grow up first before we can even consider the possibility of legalising guns

Istiaque Ahmad, London, England

A breath of Fresh Air from Across the Pond!

Harry K NRA Life Member since 2002, Stickney, Illinois

As I read Richard Munday's editorial concerning guns and crime I was struck by the similarities to our experience here in Canada. We have basic ly followed your lead in the restriction of firearms and are beginning to experience the same negative consequences. Fortunately for Canada due to our larger land mass, greater proportion of rural inhabitants and proximity to the US we are not as far along the road to "Victim Disarmament". However the Liberal Party of Canada proposed the total ban on civilian handgun if they were elected in 2006. As the Liberals have formed about 2/3's of the Canadian Government s in the last century there was there remains the distinctive possibility that Canada will also proceed down this disastrous path, I applaud Mr. Munday's attempt to enlighten the British public to the mistake that your legislators have made and sincerely hope that your country can undertake a discussion of this issue before our politicians follow your lead to disaster.

Michael Fowler, Quesnel, B.C. , Canada

The pre-WW 1 population weren't conditioned by films, TV and computer games to regard firing a weapon as an everyday occurrence. They didn't have the territorial protection and debt collection problems the illegal drugs industry has to contend with and carrying weapons wasn't then regarded by the uneducated and foolish as a means of gaining "respect". In these changed times, does anyone really think opening a gun shop in any of our inner cities to sell legal weapons for concealed carrying is a good idea?

Finally there are parts of Britain where it is still safe to leave your house unlocked and burglaries are few and far between, there just not where you'll find most hand guns.

CliveS, East Sussex, UK

To Jon Livesey in CA, it may have something to do with the national make-up don't you think? Consider that there are crimes committed in other parts of the world that are unheard of in the US or the UK. Mutilation, cannibalism, "honour" killings, (oops, sorry we do have them in the UK). The point that liberals wilfully obfuscate is that armed crime is declining steeply in the US and rocketing up in the UK. Simple.

Michael Llewellyn, Bridgetown, Barbados

Putting the law into private citizens' hands is not the way to promote justice and order. This can only be done with an effective Police force which can detect and prevent crime and also properly respond to those crimes which are committed.

This is the Biblical model of law and order, with all seated under the authority of the state. The state is blessed with the responcibility to implerment short term justice, until full justice is implemented when Jesus Christ returns, with perfect compitence and power. The key to bringing in this system is for individuals to trust in Jesus Christ, as only by the power of the Holy Spirit working in us can citizens and governments act properly.

More importantly, trusting in Jesus is the only way to be right with the perfectly just God we are all traiters against, as Christ has taken our just punishment in our place. Only trusting in Him can redem us from the eternal destruction we would otherwise face.

God bless,

Gareth Rhymes, Stoke-on Trent, UK

Very eloquent, Mr. Robertson, and entirely true. As are the other affirming comments.

Liz -- didn't you read the article? Rights always have responsibilities attached. When the rights are taken away, so are the responsibilities.

Marty Lyle, Berkley, MI

Well written and well said! Especially true is the comparison between today's panic at the idea of someone carrying a gun and the Edwardian era indignation that someone committed an armed robbery! My how times have changed!

As a youngster, I recall an time where a neighbor's wife called Dad because she thought someone was prowling about her house. While Dad fetched his .38 revolver, Mom called two other neighbors. In less than a minute, three armed neighbors were there to help and caught a ruffian in the yard. When the police arrived, they saw 3 armed men - one with rifle - standing over a man on the ground. Their reaction? To saunter up casually and ask "What've you got here fellas?"

Officials who decry citizen involvement fail to realize that the 1st line of defence against crime is the citizen, who won't act if he fears gov't prosecution for merely trying to protect himself or his community.

BillC, California, USA

To Liz in Tampa, and Sabremesh in London: Actual deaths of children by firearm accident have been under 200 a year, and dropping, nationwide since the 1990s. The gun deaths cited per year are among a population of three hundred million -- five times that of the UK. A lot of those are suicides. A lot of the deaths reported as "accidental" are covered-up suicides. Of those which ARE homicides, around two-thirds of all homicide victims in this country have criminnal records themselves. For juveniles (victims under 18), it's roughly three-fourths.

Two of the three richest counties in the US are near Washington, DC. They are Fairfax County, VA, and Montgomery County, MD. The third is L os Angeles, CA. One of the few differences between the two is in violent crime rates. Montgomery has more violent crime, per 100,000 residents, than Fairfax. Maryland has stricter gun laws. I can (and do) carry a gun in VA. I have to settle for pepper spray in DC and MD. Funny, that.

Dex, Centreville, VA, USA

As evidenced by the comments above, facts do not matter to people who are convinced otherwise. You are right in saying that in America, wherever gun laws have been loosened crime has gone down. It is a responsible, trained, armed citizenry that will keep our neighborhoods safe. Alas, the left does not trust "the people" but freely gives over the protection of their family to enept government.

Deane Pradzinski, highland, california

I was expecting an article based on emotion and fear. I read a well-written piece that captures the heart of the issue. Keep up the good work and continue to shed light on the importance of a population defending ITSELF.

David L., Raleigh, NC, USA Baby!!

I would certainly feel safe if I had a HKMP7 or a P60 but you would not lol!

stefan parmenter, london, uk

Richard Mundy talks a lot of sense in this article. Following the Dunblane shootings of 1996 and the subsequent banning of hand-guns in Great Britain I have been waiting to see a huge decline in gun crime but in fact we have witnessed the opposite. The only people whose activities have been curtailed are law-abiding sports men and women robbed of legitimate pursuits such as pistol shooting. Meanwhile all kinds of criminal elements use hand-guns to their own advantage at will. The country that self-righteously takes pride in its strict gun laws has become ever more awash with illegal guns.

The truth about Britain is that it is a nation with deep spiritual problems, a nation which has been rapidly abandoning the Christian faith and Christian moral values. Those things are the root cause of its many of its current problems, not least its inherent lawlessness, but they are matters with which government legislation alone cannot adequately deal.

Tom Greer, Cookstown, Northern Ireland

I would welcome the chance to have my own gun and would have no compunction about using it, if necessary. However, two things worry me. One, people should only have guns if they know how to care for them and if they would be prepared to use them. If not, the gun is just a gift to the assailant/intruder. The second, and I ask this because I genuinely do not know, how many people are killed in the States accidentally by guns? Perhaps one of the regular contributors from the US could post the answer here.

S. Delaney, London,

Hmm. Vermont has lots of guns but little crime... What else does Vermont have few of? Hmmm. What else did Britain have few of a

hundred years ago?

The left's attack on the culture, on nationhood and the British people has done its work. Now they can infringe upon ancient liberties to self-defense, speech, and privacy on the grounds of "protecting us." Are they demonically clever or incredibly stupid?

The more broken the borders and culture, the more power the left can take. Too bad that the Tories are now just as left wing.

J Maxwell, Cheltenham,

Hopefully our cousins in England will apply their famous common sense and allow law-abiding citizens to defend themselves once again.

Norway has far and away the highest firearm ownership per capita in Western Europe, yet it has the lowest murder rate. Holland has a 50 percent higher murder rate despite having the lowest rate of firearm ownership in Europe.

I would also like to add that in a trend repeated in many US states, Florida gun permit holders are far more law abiding than the general public. Out of 1.2 million permits issued only 157 have been revoked for gun crimes.

Disarming law-abiding citizens does not lower crime it increases the pool of easy victims, particularly those in poor areas under served by police.

Tampa Jeff, Tampa, FL US

As someone who was born and raised around firearms I have a healthy respect for them and realize they can be used for good or bad. It is too bad that the decent people in society have allowed noisy fanatics to have their way passing worthless gun control laws that make victims out of decent people and embolden violent criminals.

Prohibition doesn't work and never will because it is based on faulty premises that don't reconcile with reality. Gun control simply makes the decent elements of society helpless against the whims of politicians and thugs.

So to my distant cousins across the pond I say: America's roots in freedom, common law, and the idea of liberty and self-defense came from your great country. When you begin the process of retaking these rights, the politicians and their handmaidens will paint all kinds of scary pictures of bloodbaths and mayhem. They tried this in Florida and in the end it was exposed for what it was -- lies, lies, and more lies.

G Carlson, Aliso Viejo, CA, USA

You forgot to mention the REAL reason why gun rights are so deeply respected in the USA. When the US first declared her independence, and the British sent troops over her to kill and murder us they encountered something never before seen in the history of human kind: CITIZENS ARMED WITH GUNS! All this other stuff about guns and self defense is a distraction, what guns are really about is power, and liberty, and whose entitled to have that in a free society. The respect towards the right to bear arms in the USA has done more to serve the Brits than they can possibly imagine.

David C, San Diego, CA, USA

It's not just a banning of guns that is a disgrace but also substances such as Pepper Spray. This product hasn't killed anyone yet, but we still won't allow our young women and girls to carry mace or pepper spray to protect themselves in dark alleyways.

Someone in parliament is smoking dope!

Mark, Maidstone, England

I agree one hundred percent. The real impetus behind limiting ownership of weapons is not the fear of crime, but of political opposition. Major restrictions on ownership of weapons have been closely associated with times when governments feared the rise of social discontent, as during the Irish Rebellion, the General Strike, and after WW2. Licensing laws were made far more restrictive during the social upheavals of the 1960s and the most recent confiscation may have been impelled as much by the poll tax protests as anything else.

ScottQ, Boise, Idaho

I don't want to shoot people, whether they attack me or not.

Elizabeth, Hull,

The facts quoted by Jon Livesey are wrong and show the misguided thinking of too many people. The true facts are that the gun crime rate in England is MUCH HIGHER than the U.S. and

has increased exponentially since England banned guns. The same has happened in Australia. Any intelligent person should be able to see that, if you ban guns, only the law-abiding will turn them in. The criminals will revel in the disarming of their potential victims. Think about it...

Robert Marsh, Columbus, Ohio, USA

The fact that one might have a gun deters some criminals. I have one, and my car have a sticker 'insured by Glock '. Of course some people are stupid, and even if you were holding it in your hand they would rush you.

Also one has to go through the hoops to get a licence. It is still legal to carry a weapon in England. Google Bill of Rights 1688.

Desmond Taylor, Houston, USA Texas

More guns -> more dead. Simply derivation. Richard Munday is trying to tweak facts until they fit his point of view. I'd be horrified to ride a bus or train, or visit a supermarket, knowing that a number of people around me would be carrying concealed firearms. We do not need the American Wild West attitude in Europe or Britain. We also don't need their high rate of gun crimes.

Matt, Wuerzburg, Germany

You might want to ask how safe Jean Charles de Menezes felt with guns on the streets.

Geoff Ellis, Wemouth, UK

Richard Munday asks, "Wouldn't you feel safer with a gun?"

My answer is YES, very, and even more so with several, thanks.

C. Morland, Bath,

I can think of at least one person who (with a probability I'd put as high as 30%) might have killed me and perjurally claimed self-defence, had the force multiplier of a gun been available to her within the law. There are some very strange people out there, and not all of them fall into a life of premeditated crime.

Ian Kemmish, Biggleswade, UK

Law makers in the UK don't need self defence. They have personal defenders paid for by the rest of society.

mike, Birmingham, UK

I have never walked in an open space, alone under the stars. Yes, I would if I had a Colt 45 and I would not hesitate to use it against any vermin that threatened me.

Laura Roberts, London, UK

This article makes compelling reading in showing the need for law abiding citizens to protect themselves, but it will never happen.

This country is controlled, not by a government elected by the people but by the "chattering classes" who control and formulate so called public opinion. The Government respond too readily to this influence and ignores the wishes of The People.

Brian Girling, Fareham, Hants

Thank you, Mister Munday, for a breath of fresh air. It is rare that a well-reasoned argument in favor of law-abiding citizens being armed and, in fact, carrying guns in public reaches the pages of the media. Those of us in the United States who legally carry concealed weapons are used to being demonized by those who would have us dependent upon the government for protection when our Supreme Court has ruled that police agencies have no duty to protect individuals. We are less accustomed to someone, especially someone in the United Kingdom, indicate that rather than being anti-social, knuckle-dragging rednecks we are on the right side of the self-defense argument.

Thank you, again, sir.

Kent, Owasso, Oklahoma, USA

A breath of Fresh Air from Across the Pond!

Harry K, Stickney, United States, Illinois

Complicated issues to say the least. Both sides of this issue have plenty of good arguments and spinable "stats" to back them up. I fall on the side of having the right to protect oneself and family in times of crisis. Gun control "For the overall good of the people" just does not work in this case. Until you can totally guarantee me and everyone else that I will never be a victim of a crime, I would rather have the option to take care of myself. That guarantee will never come. "The police will protect you, except when they can't. Sorry, maybe next time." is not good enough.

dan cieski, chicago, usa

Whether the gun crime rate is higher or lower in one country verses another is besides the point. America has problems with crime, but it is due more to liberal judges, poor parenting, cultural reasons, etc., not the access to guns. As seen in the UK, and

other countries, people will kill with rocks, knives, clubs, etc. Should we ban knives, clubs, rocks, fists? Banning guns keeps them out of the hands of the law abiding citizens only. Criminals will get guns one way or another. Nevertheless, the debate is moot, because Americans will never, ever, ever give up their guns. Never. And I'd like to see someone try to take them.....

Mike, Edmond, USA/Oklahoma

I live in Hopewell Township, New Jersey, USA. Everybody I know owns a gun; some people (like me) own a dozen. Gun crime here is virtually nonexistent. Yet a few miles down the Delaware, in Trenton, drive-by gang shootings and armed robberies are so routine they are simply posted on a daily police blotter in the newspaper. Recently a "fashion show" ended in a riot and a gun murder. All those crimes are committed with illegal, stolen, smuggled guns by people who are determined to use firearms violently no matter what the law.

The U.S. murder rate? It is lower among Anglo-Americans (who have the right to keep and bear arms) than among Brits (who do not). You are safe everywhere in the U.S. except in those urban pockets where the culture exalts violence, ignorance, and promiscuity, where people don't even know the laws, much less obey them.

Let's send a few million of these people to the British Isles and watch what happens to the murder rate, whatever the gun laws.

Walt NRALifemember, Hopewell Township, New Jersey USA

Crime has increased in the U. S. precisely because we have fewer lawfully armed citizens than in 1900. In the sage words of a famous bumper sticker, "when you outlaw guns, only outlaws have them."

gOLDborg 1984, Flower Mound, TX

No I wouldn't feel safer with more guns around. They cause so many accidental deaths in the US. When I lived there for five years, I was advised not to let my children play at any child's house if their parents had guns there. Despite what the tabloids says, the rate of murder is so much higher in the US than the UK. And apart Dunblane, I can't think of any school massacres in the UK, yet there are regular in the US. The only difference must be the easy availability of guns. We need to increase vigilance at our borders to stop the guns coming in - not to encourage them.

J O'Neill, London, UK

The murder rate in the UK was significantly lower than that of the US prior to the introduction of restrictions on the ownership of arms. Its cultural, in other words... Gun ownership is up in the US, as is the instance of concealed carry, and violent crime rates of all types are down. Also note the European examples of Finland and Switzerland, where gun ownership rates approach those of the US, and violent crime rates are low. So, its not ownership of guns per se, that is the driver. Regarding the difference in rates of death by gun, in the US , half of all gun related deaths are suicides. Japan has a higher rate of suicide in a country where there are essentially zero privately owned firearms, so guns themselves can't be correlated to suicide, either. I suspect Britons know intuitively that a few criminals cause a large fraction of crimes (Pareto's Law). How about much longer sentences to reduce crime rates? Jailing Tony Martin didn't help either - legalize self defense.

RKV, Santa Barbara , California, USA

But where do you draw the line between legal and illegal weapons?

What if invented a gun that could be taken into a football match and wipe out 10,000 people in a minute?

How do you define which guns would be unacceptable? This is the problem.

Hj, Reading, UK

John Hall

Quite right; that is why I am where I am.

Ex-Pat, Saulieu, France

Several comments were similar to this: "Another thing to consider is the accidents that happen with kids finding their parents' guns and accidentally shooting themselves and/or their friends."

Well, no. There are typically about 1200 firearms accidental deaths a year in the U.S. About half of those are hunting accidents--and a pretty large number of the "cleaning accidents" are by wild coincidence elderly white males--who disproportionately commit suicide in the U.S. There are kids who get hold of a parent's gun and shoot themselves or someone else--but that's pretty infrequent

--a few dozens a year of the under 14 population in a country of 300,000,000.

Clayton E. Cramer, Horseshoe Bend, Idaho

When we look at statistic we must remember what Sir Winston Churchill said, "The only statistics that can be trusted are the ones you fabricated in the first place."

When you consider the number of crimes committed with a firearm from one region to another you must take into account the populations of those regions. Yes the number of occurrences in the US may be higher but our population is much greater than that of the UK. These stats must be viewed based on per capita ratios and the US has a lower per capita rate than the UK. Look at Australia for a real negative effect.

And yes in all states where permits are granted to carry a firearm, the incidents involving a firearm have dropped significantly. Chicago, DC, and NY will continue to suffer alarming rates of violence involving firearms until they open their eyes and relent to the need of law abiding citizens to protect themselves from the thugs who have been given free rein by the bureaucrats who disarmed them in the first place.

James Fabanich, Ashton, USA / Idaho

Oh Richard - violent crime and gun crime aren't the same.

Furthermore, how many Americans are killed accidentally by guns? Even vice-presidents are prone to this.

The problem with gun crime in the UK is not the gun laws it is the failure of the police to catch criminals and customs officers to prevent their import. Being an island, with a large but limited number of entry points, this should be relatively easy. The failure is not one of John Wayne propensities but Mickey Mouse authorities.

Eddie Reader, birmingham, uk

Absolutely right! We need more people making the case for reclaiming this part of our independence from the government!

Dominic Graham de Montrose, London,

Law abiding citizens in Britain should have the right to carry concealed weapons for self defence.

Are we any less important than Royalty, the PM, or any other, 'VIP', who have armed guards carrying concealed weapons to protect them.

Evil people will do evil things, unless they are prevented from doing so. Proactive action, rather than reactive action makes more sense to me. The jails in Britain would be empty!!!!

Gwilym Morgan-Jones, Holyhead, North Wales,

I owned a pistol in Europe, bought for the sheer hell of buying one because I could and in the UK I couldn't.

The thing was a constant worry. If it is to be of any use as self protection, it has to be ready to fire 24 hours/day. With wife and kids around I couldn't keep it like that. I sold it.

And, if you allow people to carry guns around 24 hours/day, how would you feel about all the drunken idiots after hours shooting up whatever? Road rage would develop into carnage. No doubt we would need a drink and firearm charge. If you have one, you have to be prepared to use it and kill the target, so you should load it with hollow point ammunition.

Sorry guys, it is far better to have a complete ban and increase the penalty for possession to 30 years or more, with no possibility of parole. And if juveniles are involved, the sentence should apply to the parents.

Ted Runder, Walsall,

jon from sunnydale, the US murder rate is (5.5 per 100,000 compared to UKs 1.6 per 100,000, so its ~3.5 times greater (from

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article753739.ece

don't you think its odd that the US rate has dropped from 10.2 in 1980 with probably over 100 million guns sold - many assault weapons + pistols, yet in the same period the UK rate has increased despite all of the 'common sense' laws banning those same weapons?

i'd imagine that the reason the US gun murder rate is higher than the UKs is the same reason that your non-firearm related murder rate is higher than most countries total murder rate - inner city USA is a violent place with lots of gangs, and that would be why your murder rate was higher than the UKs before the UK had any gun control in the early 20th century.

haven't you noticed that despite 20,000 gun laws on the books gun control groups never talk about how any of them worked?

mike, warrington, uk

I these days of PC "do as we say, not as we do" government, it is so refreshing to see a journalist share his opinion, not just siding with a political party, or writing what sells.

Our country needs to address the increasing violence in our society, and allow it's law abiding citizens the right to defend themselves and their families.

No doubt after recent tragic events we will see more firearms legislation, which will only affect legal firearm owners, one of the most law abiding sections of our society, but it will be sold right to the general public with the help of the daily rags and the general public will buy it as usual.

Douglas Cook, Annan, Scotland

When Blunkett was Home Secretary he initiated a consultation on Britain's firearms laws. The submissions I have read from the various shooting organisations showed that considerable constructive thought had been brought to bear on this contentious subject. Suggestions made were level-headed and, above all, offered a sensible way forward which would be workable, reduce bureaucratic complication, and command widespread acceptance - they key to any successful law. Then silence.

No comment, argument or response from the Home Office.

You do wonder why as clearly the asserted aims of successive firearms acts are not achieved. "Asserted" not "expressed" as the aims of the acts are conspicuous by their absence in print.

As FDR said during the Great Depression "If a policy is not working we should say so frankly and try something else."

Just so. What are we waiting for ?

David Lewis, Maidenhead, Berkshire UK

OK then, Jon Livesay out there in Sunnyvale CA, why are there so many fewer gun crimes in Switzerland where just about every dwelling is home to a fully-automatic assault rifle ? Sort of knocks your argument out of the ring doesn't it ? Of course wider gun ownership increases the risk of more people being shot - but it would mean that a goodly proportion of them would be criminals - muggers, rapists and violent burglars, not just (as at present) innocent victims only.

Ed Slausen, Oldham, UK

Mr Munday uses deceptive statistics. "Violent crime" means different things in different places. The bar fight meriting a simple police caution in one country results in felony assault charges in another. By the "gold standard" in objective crime statistics -- murder (you can't fake a corpse, after all) -- the US reigns supreme among rich countries, with a rate THREE TIMES Britain's. Surely all of this disparity cannot be attributed to America's lax gun controls. But surely some of it can. It makes sense to allow law-abiding citizens to own firearms provided simple precautions are in place. But in America many of the fifty states eschew even the most basic, common sense controls, resulting in a surreal excess of guns that renders laws aimed at criminal gun use utterly meaningless and unenforceable. It should be possible to allow law-abiding citizens to own guns while denying their use to criminals. Unfortunately one cannot look to the United States to find out how this is done.

Jasper, Boston, USA

Thank you for running this excellent article. As a citizen of the U.S. I view the crime situation of Britain with dismay. The English government has prohibited the citizenry from legal possession of nearly anything that can be used in self defense, and does nothing to protect the now vulnerable population.

Although both of our great nations face considerable crime problems, history shows that violence is not something that can be prevented in a society, however it is something that can be encouraged. Indeed now more than ever the sources and inspiration for such acts are greater than ever before in the history of the world (if simply through the channels of mass media).

The only discouragement for criminally minded people is the fear that the victim they choose could present a risk to them. Among criminals, that fear exists in the U.S., however it does not exist in the U.K., and that is the fundamental problem.

By disarming the citizens, the government has armed the criminals.

Remington Phillips, Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Dear Mr. Munday:

I just want to express my delight at reading your article. I am a British-born naturalized American who finds it very painful to see what has become of the nation that fought Hitler virtually alone for a year. I don't think that could happen today.

You are, unfortunately, a minority voice in your country right now,

but please don't be discouraged. If you continue to express your view, perhaps people will eventually understand the truth of what you are saying.

It is indeed the cities and towns with the most restrictive firearms laws that suffer the highest of crime rates. Chicago, Washington D.C., New York City and Los Angeles prove that regularly.

Again, please don't be discouraged at the fight ahead of you. The only truly hopeless cause is the one you have stopped fighting.

Dennis Coslett, St Paul, Minnesota, USA

I've marvelled for years how any free Briton could allow himself to be disarmed. It's almost too much to believe you've permitted this to happen. You aren't even allowed to defend your home against criminals. What has happened to the courageous people who stood up to the Nazis in WW II? Surely, you will soon act to take back your country from the wimps.

Dick Lambert, Eagle Rock, Virginia/USA

Well stated comment.

I hold a concealed handgun permit in my home state (Texas) that is valid in almost 30 other localities. I do not go armed in order to threaten anyone nor am I interested in provoking anyone: rather I carry solely to defend myself and my family.

The UK has been led down the path on this issue. The police cannot protect you, and are usually to involved in nonsense such as ASBOs and similar paper dreams to hold back the hoodlums and criminals.

For us in the US going armed is a choice: being disarmed appears to be yours. Good luck and watch your back.

A. Merkle, Ft. Worth, Texas

Very well written. I completely agree.

Andrew, Cincinnati,

you are so on the mark, Richard! I am writing from America, and many of us here now consider our former colonial master as the 'benighted' one. How is it that Britain allowed herself to be led astray by the siren song of 'no guns, less violence?' I hope that my second favorite country in the world regains its former greatness and re-arms its citizens.

tom, Lehi, Utah

What you have conspicuously failed to mention is that the per-capita murder rate in the US still THREE TIMES HIGHER than the UK (look it up). If, as you claim, in the UK we suffer 3 times the rate of violent crime than people in the US then every violent incident that happens in the US is 900% more likely to result in murder than it is here. So much for everyone having a gun in their pockets! Also, comparing the murder rate in Maine to that for the whole of the UK is like comparing the murder rate in, say, rural Devon to the whole state of Florida. Finally, I think that using Edwardian England as an example of an armed society with a low crime rate is clutching at straws - that something worked 100 years ago doesn't mean it will work now. Look out your window. We don't use horses to get around anymore. You're going to have to find some stronger arguments to convince me that gun controls should be relaxed!

Stephen Grindle, London, UK

Finally, someone on that side of the pond with some sense. An armed citizenry is a deterrent to violent crime. The data to prove it has been around for years.

Colonial Redneck, Arlington, Virginia

In support of Mr. Munday's position, I would like to point out that the State of Florida has issued 1.2 million concealed weapons licenses since 1987 and only revoked 161 for the commission of a gun crime. Other American states with concealed carry have experienced similar numbers. Lawfully armed citizens improve public safety rather than detract from it, despite common rhetoric to the contrary.

Scott Curtis, Ocala, Florida

Excellent article!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

jon, chicago, USA

As someone who has always fought against the idea of British citizens carrying guns, I find myself now looking at the problem from another perspective.

If for example: an old lady walking to the post office is approached by a gang of youths. I doubt very much that they would harrass or mug her simply because as a law abiding non criminal they would be aware that she may well be legally armed. The only people in Britain who do not have or have access to a gun are the law abiders and the regular Police force. What on earth have we done to ourselves. It is as if we are an over generous doting Father who can never say no to his spoilt, ungrateful child. We allow rights to

those who mock our own. The consequences of illegal actions must be the removal of all but the most basic of rights from the offender.

As a law abiding citizen it hurts me to know that I am unable to defend myself and family even from a minor.

Give me back my dignity and give me the right at least to have a legal weapon.

J Nowland, Leeds, United Kingdom

I fear that after so many years of prohibition we could anticipate a certain amount of mayhem if this liberty were to be restored. The absence of legal firearms from law abiding society for so long means that only the privileged few have been bought up with good 'gun sense'. Possibly a short(five or six hours) series of lessons and a subsequent test would ease the transition to a more liberal and less fearful society.

There would also need to be many changes in the legal system , so that those now legally carrying pistols would not be punished for using them in appropriate circumstances

Fraser James, Whitstable, Kent

Here's a view from the other side of the pond. I don't own a gun, neither does my husband. Many Americans don't own guns. It's a very complex issue. I can tell you that it is very, very hard to wake up EVERY DAY (We live in Florida) to the news of two or three gun deaths the night before just in our area. Can it possibly be that bad in the UK? I doubt it. Another thing to consider is the accidents that happen with kids finding their parents' guns and accidentally shooting themselves and/or their friends. Horrible, to say the least. Many, many if not most of the gun deaths come from drug dealers and then,"acts of passion," people caught up in the moment with a little alcohol mixed in. I'm really for more sensible controls, much stricter and taking away the ludicrous right to own an automatic weapon. That's insanity. I wouldn't know what to advise for my cousins (if you still claim any of us!), but any decision must emphasize responsibilities JUST as much as rights.

Liz, Tampa, FL, USA

I disagree with virtually everything in this article, but the real shocker is that there is no mention of the fact of that of the 20,000 Americans who lose their lives as a result of being shot, many thousands are killed accidentally.

The dangers of people running around with firearms, or grenades, or anthrax or polonium exceed whatever spurious "benefits" there might be from such ludicrous behaviour.

Sabremesh, London,

To add insult to injury, those in the British government who have disarmed the lawful citizens of your nation hide behind armed protection at taxpayer expense while they tell the subjects of Britain in classical Orwellian Double Speak that nobody needs a gun for protection (except them, of course).

I guess some Englishmen are more equal than others.

James Mullen, White Hall, Maryland

Damn right. And if only.

Redcliffe, London,

So why is the rate of gun crime so much higher in the US than in the UK?

In fact, why is the murder rate in the US almost ten times that in the UK, and why has the disparity actually increased since 1900?

jon livesey, Sunnyvale, CA/US

Absolutely right! I have been trying to make this argument for years in the Uk with little success apart from being regareded as a deranged lunatic. By chance I now live in Vermont where guns (completely legal) are regarded as tools not macho fashion accessories. Never lock my door or remove the car keys from the ignition and burglary is virtually unheard of here. Seems like we brits have had a bargain imposed upon us by the estalishment. Give up your ability to defend yourself (and be so much easier to control) and the police will protect you. They can't. It was a bad bargain to start with and it has not been kept. Give us our guns back!

John Hall, Wilmington , Vermont USA

"Never venture east of Whitechapel without your pistol, Watson." As true today as it was then.

Because Brits have been disarmed for long, it really is unwise to suddenly re-arm the law-abiding segment of the population, as there would be a lot of accidents. However, if shooting clubs were resurrected they would provide training centres for responsible future gun owners.

Andrew Milner, Yokohama, Kanagawa

Someone gets it.

Robert, Baltimore,

Yes. It is not only in the context of firearms but of assault in general. I am quite cynical enough to think that the gun controls introduced in this country are in the interest of an authoritarian central control, not the general security of the citizen. Of course, it would inevitably have its side effects - such as I learnt recently it seems to have in Switzerland - but I feel sure that it would introduce a more confident and, perhaps, less servile society. Nobody has suggested banning motor vehicles which kill 3000 or so people a year and I don't think it is over-stretching the point to envisage a personal weapon as giving a person a similar cost advantage. The police would undoubtedly complain, but at the present time I think that that could probably be seen as more likely another bonus indication.

Henry Percy, London, UK

It's reassuring to see that somebody "on the other side of the pond" actually gets it. While much of Europe is seemingly willing to lay down in defeat before criminals and terrorists, there are still those few who understand that disarming the citizenry does not make society a peaceful, safer place. No matter what lengths we may go to, those who are determined to do harm to others will always find a way to acquire and implement weapons. The proper course of action is to allow for honorable people to arm themselves in their own defense.

There is no honor in being a victim; no dignity in dying a martyr for a social policy that has proven itself time and again to be a failure.

David Robertson, Bluffton, South Carolina, USA

Lax gun laws inevitably increase the number of guns in the hand of hardened criminals. And there is no such thing as a law abiding person in whose ownership a gun is harmless. Anyone can lose their temper or suffer a personality breakdown. Anyone can become involved in a crime of passion. Any child who comes across a gun can accidentally fire it. There are no circumstances in which it is beneficial for the "law-abiding" to resist with a gun. Britain was more stable in earlier times because social bonds were stronger, not because people were marching around with guns cocked. Vermont is safer than Washington D.C. not because of its gun laws, but because it has a New England culture, not a southern culture based on codes of honour and brutalised by slavery.

Oliver Chettle, Bedford,

The idea that Britain was a much safer place before gun control is wrong. In the 5 years before WW1, 7 policemen were shot and killed on duty on the mainland. In contrast, 4 were shot dead in the 90s, 3 so far in the noughties. And that's with a much larger population.

Gun controls affect the availability of guns. Nearly all the guns in circulation amongst criminals in the US come from the legal supply channels, either bought legally or illegally from dealers, or stolen from private citizens.

The largest drop in crimes in the US has been in New York, which has gone from over 2,600 murders in 1990 to 874 in 2005. And they have done so whilst maintaining their strict gun control.

The problem in Britain is not genuine gun crime, it is panic over "crimes" committed with toys. Children running around with toy guns would not have raised an eyebrow 15 years ago, now they count towards "firearms crime". 60 people were murdered with firearms in England and Wales in 1990, last year it was 58

Tom, Cardiff,

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