

American Gun Ownership: The Positive Impacts of Law-Abiding Citizens Owning Firearms

It's no secret that mainstream press coverage of gun ownership in the United States tends to be in favor of gun control – especially when those reporting on the topic are not firearm owners themselves. Journalists focus on how many people are killed by guns, how many children get their hands on improperly stored firearms, and how many deranged individuals go on shooting sprees.

This anti-gun news bias is widespread among the “urban elite” who have very little personal experience with guns and yet write for influential newspapers like *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, etc. Despite this bias, law-abiding private citizens owning guns does have positive impacts on American society that often go unreported – many of which are significant.

Criminals and the Armed Citizen

Perhaps the most notable impact of gun ownership on American society is how it influences the behavior of criminals.

The fact is, criminals fear armed citizens more than they do the police. There's many reasons for this, but here are the most prominent:

- Police are rarely onsite during a crime.
- Police are bound by policy and procedures, and are trained to only use their firearms if it's absolutely necessary.
- Civilians are also less trained.

In a research study sponsored by the United States Department of Justice, James Wright and Peter Rossi interviewed over 1,800 incarcerated felons, asking how they felt about civilians and gun ownership. Thirty-three percent of these criminals admitted to being scared off, shot at, wounded, or captured by a gun-owning victim. Sixty-nine percent of them knew at least one other criminal who had similar experiences. Nearly 80 percent of felons also claimed that they intentionally avoid victims and homes that they believe may be armed.

This shows that at least one in three criminals has been deterred because of an armed citizen, and that four out five avoid victimizing people that have guns.

Law-Abiding Gun Owners & Defensive Gun Use

Advocates of civilian disarmament tend to scoff at the capabilities of everyday gun owners. Many believe that guns in the hands of normal people are crimes waiting to happen. However, thanks to the research of individuals such as John Lott, we now have evidence showing that gun owners are some of the most law-abiding segments of the American population.

Lott drew the example of concealed license holders when compared to law enforcement:

Concealed-handgun permit holders are also much more law-abiding than the rest of the population. In fact, they are convicted at an even lower rate than police officers. According to a study in Police Quarterly, from 2005 to 2007, police committed 703 crimes annually on average. Of those, there were 113 firearms violations on average.

With 683,396 full-time law enforcement employees nationwide in 2006, we can infer that there were about 102 crimes by police per 100,000 officers. Among the U.S. population as a whole, the crime rate was 37 times higher than the police crime rate over those years – 3,813 per 100,000 people.

Not only are gun owners very law-abiding, they are also quite capable of defending themselves against criminals. Criminologists Dr. Gary Kleck and Dr. Marc Gertz carried out a study that found 2.2 to 2.5 million cases of defensive gun use (DGU). Around 1.5 to 1.9 million of these cases involved handguns. There is reason to believe that DGU numbers completely overshadow the criminal use cases of guns.

However, in today's era of outrage politics, many incidents of DGU go under the radar because of their lack of shock appeal that does not make for good headlines.

A Sense of Security

Most people realize that law enforcement cannot be everywhere, yet so many rely on nothing but a 911 call to protect both their home and those inside it. For those who live in remote areas, it can take an hour or more for first responders to arrive after an emergency call, but in most cases, even five minutes is too long. But when a homeowner is armed and trained, the sense of security increases.

Thanks to modern psychology, we know that people need this sense of security in order to grow and develop into healthy adults. Not surprisingly, privately owned guns provide that.

Sixty-three percent of Americans now believe that having a gun in the house increases safety. While some may dismiss the importance of feeling secure and safe, or claim that another person's desire for safety makes them feel unsafe, it is by far the most basic of human needs. And without it, people are left feeling frightened, angry, and defensive – often unable to reach, or even focus on, higher goals.

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