

Anarchy, State, and Gun Ownership

Written by David Greenwald for Mises.org.

The controversy over whether the Federal Government should ban the possession by citizens of certain types, or all types, of firearms has been raging back and forth for a very long time. I remember as a child seeing news coverage of horrific acts of violence involving firearms. I also remember the seemingly interminable “national conversation” that inevitably followed these events. It seemed, and still seems, to rouse people’s emotions in a way that few other issues do. My parents, like most of their friends, firmly supported gun-control legislation, which meant that I did as well. When I was ten, our Buick LeSabre sported an anti-NRA sticker on the rear fender. I should know—I put it there.

Not much has changed since then. The LeSabre is long gone, but the occasional mass shootings continue, each followed by yet another acrimonious round of national self-flagellation and soul-searching. The first time guns were featured on the cover of *Time Magazine* was in 1968. They ran the same cover again in 1998.

The arguments, for and against, gun control also don’t seem to be any different under Barack Obama from what they were under Lyndon Johnson. Then as now, there were:

- Property-rights-based justifications for gun *ownership* (e.g., guns are like any other property and so anyone may own them, provided they are not used to violate the person or property of others), as well as for gun *prohibition* (except as a decorative candle holder, an AK-47 seems unlikely to be used for any purpose other than to violate the person or property of others).
- Utilitarian reasons for a *ban* (it would increase safety by reducing the overall number of guns in society), and also for *laissez-faire* (prohibition would at best disarm only peaceful citizens, rendering them easy prey for criminals while creating yet another lucrative black market for organized crime).
- Civil-liberties-based arguments for leaving the citizen free (I have a right to defend myself), and for regulating him (I have a right to walk down the street without fear of being shot).

And today, four and a half decades and nine gun-related *Time* covers later, here we are again, still shaking our heads in disbelief at the violence we see around us, and still asking the same question: who is right?

My position, as a libertarian anarchist, is that *everyone is right*. There is no perfect solution to the problem of the use of firearms for criminal purposes, and there are valid points on

both sides of the debate. This is one of the reasons why this issue never has been and never will be resolved as long as we turn to the state to solve it for us instead of solving it for ourselves.

[Read the full thing »](#)