

Gun Control Research: The CDC Study

A comprehensive study done by one of the most prestigious scientific organizations in the country has found no statistically significant evidence that gun control has prevented a single violent crime.

If you believe that scientific research is the most logical way to understand the reality of the world, then you pay attention to studies done by groups and individuals. You also give weight to surveys that attempt to draw conclusions by reviewing numbers of studies.

The survey in question was done by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to determine if gun control has made a difference in the crime rate in the United States. There are some important things to remember about this study, which was published in 2003.

The CDC is a governmental organization that generally favors strict gun control laws. The panel doing the review of studies on these laws was largely made up of advocates for restricting or banning the citizen ownership of firearms in the United States.

The purpose of the survey was to evaluate gun control laws with regard to effectiveness in controlling crime and violence. Given the institutional and individual bias in favor of restrictive gun laws, the conclusions of the CDC study are remarkable.

The CDC panel reviewed 51 studies regarding the effectiveness of gun control laws. Based on that review, they could not say that gun laws had prevented a single crime. The survey included, among other issues, studies of the effectiveness of gun and ammunition bans, licensing and registration laws, child access laws, and waiting periods. There was some slight evidence that waiting periods to purchase a firearm may reduce the gun suicide rate in older persons, while not affecting the overall suicide rate.

You would think that out of 51 scientific studies there would be more evidence of the effectiveness of gun control, if gun control were effective in preventing crime and violence. It is a tribute to the honesty of the CDC panel, given their preconceived ideas that they were willing to issue this report at all. The survey did say in somewhat Orwellian fashion that "insufficient evidence to determine effectiveness should not be interpreted as evidence of ineffectiveness." (Just because 50 studies failed to find a significant result, it doesn't mean that the result isn't there.)

The panel recommended additional research. This CDC survey is corroborated by the results of an even more exhaustive review done by the National Academy of Sciences.

Thacker, Steven, M.D., Dixon, Richard E., M.D., *First Reports evaluating the effectiveness of strategies for preventing violence: Firearms Laws*, Task Force on Community Preventive Services, Centers for Disease Control.

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5214a2.htm>

Firearms Coalition of Colorado PO Box 1454 Englewood, CO 80150-1454

Gun Control Research-The NAS Study
(No credible causal relationship between gun ownership and violence)

The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) was created by Abraham Lincoln to “examine, experiment, and report” on “science and art” when asked to do so by any government department. A panel of NAS scientists began formal hearings on “Improving Research Information and data on firearms” during the summer of 2001. The study was funded in part by the virulently anti-gun Joyce Foundation and the anti-gun David and Lucille Packard Foundation.

David Kopel, Colorado author and expert on Second Amendment issues, and co-author Glenn Reynolds criticized the study at its inception for the anti-gun bias of most of its members and the bias of its funding sources. Surprisingly, given the prejudiced atmosphere of the NAS study, the results, like those of the CDC Study, do not support the premise that gun ownership promotes crime or increases the overall risk of suicide.

The panel reviewed 253 scientific journal articles, 99 books, 43 government publications and some of its own research. The committee found that they could not determine if there was a cause and effect relationship between guns and violence. The below quotation comes from the panel’s Executive Summary, which was published in 2004.

“In summary, the committee concludes that existing research studies and data include a wealth of descriptive information on homicide, suicide, and firearms, but because of the limitations of existing data and methods, do not credibly demonstrate a causal relationship between the ownership of firearms and the causes or prevention of criminal violence or suicide.”

The NAS panel predictably recommended more research. The committee also concluded that there is no definitive information regarding defensive uses of firearms or the positive or negative effects on crime of concealed carry laws. James Q. Wilson, the only relatively neutral member of the panel, according to Kopel and Reynolds, issued a minority report in which he argued that John R. Lott’s extensive research does establish that “shall issue” concealed carry laws reduce homicide rates.

Like the CDC Study, the Swiss-based Small Arms Survey, and the Kates and Mauser Study of international gun ownership and crime, the NAS exhaustive review of the literature in the gun control field does not find a credible cause and effect relationship between honest gun owners and violence. You would think that if there were causation, nearly 400 scientific studies, books, and government reports would have found one example.

The committee also looked at possible methods of government intervention into the “problem” of guns, crime, and suicide. Restricting access to guns? Needs more research. (Keep in mind that Prohibition didn’t work. It fostered the rise of criminal gangs, corrupted police, and promoted general lawlessness.) Prevention programs? Don’t seem to work and seem to increase children’s interest in guns. (What does this say about sexual education programs?) Criminal justice system solutions, such as policing, sentencing, and Project Exile? Need more research. Keep in mind that murders occur in prison.

If restricting access to firearms has had an effect on U.S. gun crime, the anti-gun NAS panel was apparently not able to find it in almost 400 sources. If firearms cause crime, or if gun control laws work, why did this massive review of research fail to find credible evidence? The variables are complex, but if the proof were there, would not one study out of almost 400 have discovered it? Will the NAS continue to review literature in the gun control field until they find even a single study that gives them the results that they are seeking?

Kopel, David, Reynolds, Glen, “Political Science, Doing science a grave injustice,” nationalreview.com, August 29th, 2001.

National Academy of Sciences, Committee on Law and Justice, “Firearms and Violence, A critical review,” nasonline.org, 2004.