

Why gun bans don't work...

and what to do. However well-intentioned, gun bans are likely to get the opposite results of what they are intended to achieve. To stop them, the shooting/hunting community needs to get pro-active

By James A. Swan, Ph.D.

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In November, voters in San Francisco approved a ballot measure to ban the sale and manufacture of firearms in the city, and ownership of handguns.

[Backers of the measure claimed that San Francisco taxpayers spent at least \\$31.2 million responding to gun violence every year.](#) Proponents often said they "just didn't like guns around."

[The NRA has already filed a lawsuit to overturn the measure](#), but the vote sends a message. San Francisco joins Chicago and Washington, DC, Great Britain, Australia and Canada, in enacting draconian firearms regulations.

Such bans are being pushed by a large, well-funded movement to restrict, license and ban firearms on the pretense that such bans will somehow reduce violence. And they are likely to grow in momentum, unless some drastic steps are taken.

No one, except criminals, wants crime and mayhem. But however well-intentioned anti-gun folks may be, research shows that gun bans are likely to get the opposite results of what they are intended to achieve, because legal gun owners by and large are not criminally inclined. And without self-defense, people become easy prey for human predators.

[Simon Fraser University professor Gary Mauser](#) finds that a year after the British obediently surrendered 160,000 legal handguns, London muggings were up 53 percent, gun murders up 90 percent and robbery up more than 100 percent. By the year following, annual gun crimes overall had risen 39 percent.

This pattern has continued. The rate of violent crime in England and Wales is more than double the United States. It is now more dangerous to walk the streets of London than New York.

On top of that, British Olympic shooting teams are now forced to practice their sport in another country! This is doubly absurd, for it discourages establishing positive role models for how firearms should be used.

In contrast, during the last decade, violent crime has dropped 40 percent in the United States as the number of firearms and states with concealed carry permits have increased.

Why the bans don't work

Studies by a number of solid researchers, including Don Kates, Gary Mauser, and Dave Kopel, clearly show that legal gun owners are generally mentally healthy and more law-abiding than non-owners, and legal firearms are seldom used in crime.

There are some other reasons why firearms bans don't reduce violence.

It is not hard to reload your own ammunition. Many people do this as a hobby. Criminal elements are already doing this, and making more than reloaded shells.

This country was won by cottage industries of firearms makers. Modern weapons are more complicated to manufacture, but there are numerous reports from abroad of [illegal arms-manufacturing operations](#) sprouting up like mushrooms after a warm, spring rain.

Only about 5 percent of the cargo containers that come into the United States are opened for inspection. The odds of shipping in a load of illegally made firearms and not getting caught are pretty high.

And you ask why the illegal trade in firearms is the third-largest illegal-trafficking element in the world after drugs and smuggling plants and wildlife.

In Scotland, [efforts are afoot to ban kitchen knives and swords](#). Does that reduce violence?

Human nature

The word "arms" comes from the fact that weapons are extensions and amplifications of intention. You can turn just about anything into a weapon newspapers, magazines, and pencils.

Remember that box cutters were all that was necessary to hijack jets on 9/11. If you ban one weapon, people with violent tendencies will substitute.

The issue about weapons ownership and violence is ultimately about community mental health.

Violence arises from a complex set of social and personal forces, one of the most important being the perception that some people are defenseless and can be easily victimized. The way out of being a victim is self-assertion, including defending yourself.

Learning to use a weapon safely is part of self-defense training. Numerous psychological studies show that martial-arts training is good for kids, including at-risk kids who usually have low self-esteem. Check out Chuck Norris' [KickStart program](#) to see what I'm talking about.

What is the safest country in the world? As attorney and author [Stephen Halbrook](#) has pointed out, it is Switzerland, where all able-bodied males serve in the militia. And after proper training, they take home modern military weapons ready to put into use at a moment's notice.

The well-armed Swiss militia dissuaded the Nazis from invading in World War II. The peaceful Swiss have more shooting ranges than golf courses and one of the lowest rates of violent crime of any country in the world.

Shooting sports are lifelong activities that teach self-respect, self-confidence and discipline. They level the playing field for competition, in contrast to many other sports that favor size, strength and sex. More shooting, not less, may be a path to peace.

Attitude building

The hunting and shooting sports community does heroic work, but it tends to focus on fighting a seemingly endless stream of defensive battles.

The time is long overdue to take some pro-active steps to educate the general public about the truth surrounding people who own guns, enjoy shooting them safely and hunt.

Schools are one force. If kids grow up learning to respect weapons, they are less likely to be intimidated by the fear of them.

The [Archery In The Schools program](#), which injects archery classes into physical education programs, is one of the best things that has happened to teach responsible weapons attitudes in a long time. The 4-H shooting program is equally on target. We need more like this.

The media is a powerful force of shaping community attitudes, and its [anti-gun bias is well-documented](#). Outdoor channels tend to reach the choir. The battle for public opinion about guns will be won in the general media.

Preachy documentaries tend to reach "the saved." Despite the box office success of Michael Moore's "Fahrenheit 9/11," his candidate did not win.

People want to be entertained. Consider what the film "A River Runs Through It" did for the explosive growth of flyfishing.

At the upcoming Safari Club convention in Reno, Nev., I'll be chairing a panel of folks from Hollywood who shoot and hunt and want to do something about the negative media spin on hunters and guns. They will have proposals for movies, TV series, contests, promotional ventures and more.

If you can't get to Reno, stay tuned, and in February I'll tell you what kind of media magic the pros want to conjure up to ban the bans. ■

James Swan who has appeared in more than a dozen feature films, including "Murder in the First" and "Star Trek: First Contact," as well as the television series "Nash Bridges," "Midnight Caller" and "Modern Marvels" is the author of the book "In Defense of Hunting." To learn more about Swan, [visit his Web site](#).