



More Guns, Less Crime

Guest: John Lott

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John Lott is the founder of the [Crime Prevention Research Center](#) and the author of numerous books, most famously [More Guns, Less Crime: Understanding Crime and Gun Control Laws](#).

This interview took place when Tom was guest-hosting the [Peter Schiff Show](#), and was repeated on Tom's podcast.

WOODS: Tell us about your forthcoming center. I will let you spill the beans about it.

LOTT: Sure, well, myself and a number of other academics are putting together something called the Crime Prevention Research Center. My guess is a lot of people have heard of the \$50 million that Bloomberg announced last week that he's going to be putting into gun control efforts. That's \$50 million on top of money that he's already had for his other groups—Mayors Against Illegal Guns and his Moms Demand Action. Plus he's also spending literally hundreds of millions of dollars pushing gun control research. He's realized and others have realized that the way things have been going for them politically they just haven't gotten the traction that they wanted to get, and so they've decided that if they can control the data that's used out there in the gun control debate that maybe then they can be more likely to win. And Bloomberg keeps on putting out studies. But it's not just him: George Soros is putting up tens of millions. A year ago, President Obama met with the heads of 23 large foundations like Kaiser and Wellness, where they've all agreed that they're going to move away from focusing on health care generally to primarily focus on gun control. And of course, Obama is using the federal government now to put in tens of millions of dollars into funding this type of research.

And the problem is just how shoddy it is. I will just give you an example of a couple of recent Bloomberg studies that have gotten a huge amount of attention. He just had one that came out over a month ago, claiming that there have been 44 mini-Newtowns that had occurred since the horrible Newtown tragedy, with a total of 28 people killed. If you look at the media, he had over 2,000 news hits on that one claim within two weeks after it came out. It basically became the received wisdom in the media, and yet, if you actually look through the news stories that they had for those 44 mini-Newtowns, you see that it's nothing of the sort. You have 40 percent

of the cases involved as lone suicides, virtually always late at night after school's been out for hours. Some of them not even right on school property, some of them just near it.

So you may have some 44-year-old who committed suicide at the periphery of school property at 2:00 a.m. Those are tragic. There is no doubt about it. But to go and claim that a 44-year-old who has nothing to do with the school committing suicide at 2 in the morning is a mini-Newtown is just not right. About a third of the cases involve gang shootings—again, virtually always outside of school hours, again, not even on school property. You are also including legitimate self-defense cases in there. You have one case, for example, at Eastern Florida State College, a student who is 24 years of age who had a permit to carry a concealed handgun—in Florida, if you have a permit, you are allowed to lock your gun in your car on school property. He was attacked by two men. Fortunately, he was close enough to his car that he was able to retrieve his handgun and wound one of the attackers. All law-abiding; no laws broken in doing that. And yet Bloomberg claims that that is a mini-Newtown, somebody going and using their gun in self-defense like that.

I could go on with the errors, but they put out these reports and they get this uncritical coverage, and it affects the debate in many ways. The number that they put out on injuries involving guns for young children—a huge number of errors in there. They make it sound like young children under age five are being injured in accidental gunshots in the home. That's the examples that they give—the couple that they have there. Whereas 75 percent of the injuries involve 17, 18, and 19 year olds involved in violent criminal assaults on them. Basically, the gang violence that's there, so gangs are, again, an important problem, but to go and lump that in with the risks of somebody having a gun in their home and the risk to young children is just unconscionable. But they want to exaggerate the risks of people owning guns in the home in order to scare them into not owning guns.

I know where the data is. I know where it comes from. The other academics that we're working with understand that also. But it's important when these types of claims come out that somebody can quickly respond, to explain what the errors are in the news cycle that occurs, and that's what we're trying to do. The Crime Prevention Research Center, we're not going to have the hundreds of millions of dollars that Bloomberg and others are putting up for their side there. We have a crowd funding. We would like to get to \$300,000 on that. But I think with \$300,000 we can do a lot in terms of trying to respond to these things in a timely manner, and so if people were to go to crimepreventionresearchcenter.org, just our name, you will see at the very top of the page there a link to the crowd funding website.

WOODS: Well, I hope people will do that. This is certainly a worthy cause. It seems to me, John, that this is a problem across the board with the left and statistics. I remember growing up as a kid in the '80s and in college and grad school in the '90s hearing statistics like 100,000 women every year die from complications related to anorexia. This was meant to indict our patriarchal society for imposing an impossible standard of beauty on these women. It turned out that fewer than 100 died. Or remember Mitch Snyder, the homeless advocate, made up the figure

that there were 3 million homeless. He hadn't done any studies. He hadn't gone around with a clipboard. He just invented the figure because he thought that would get attention. That's exactly what they do.

LOTT: Yeah.

WOODS: Now, Bloomberg, though—I want to ask you about Bloomberg. A lot of times today when we hear there is a gun control measure that's being proposed in some state or at the federal level, when we look closely at it, almost none of these measures are actually saying we want to completely disarm the public. It's usually: we want to put background checks, we want to limit your ability to get this or that type of gun. Is Bloomberg aiming at something more ambitious than that? Is he really trying to go back to a draconian style of gun control, or is he just trying to keep "safe schools"?

LOTT: Well, one can go and look at the proposals that he has. He is against people being able to carry permit concealed handguns. There are 11 million Americans right now that have permits to carry concealed handguns. He has supported legislation in many states. In Maryland he was a strong supporter of the rules that they have there now. It costs \$350 to go through the registration licensing process to go and get a handgun in Maryland. He supports the high fees in Washington D.C. In Washington D.C., the cost of registering and licensing a handgun is over \$530. Who do you disarm there? When you have those types of fees it's basically poor minorities who live in high-crime urban areas who are prevented from being able to have guns for protection. If my research convinces me of anything in *More Guns, Less Crime*, it was that those are the very people who are most likely to be victims of violent crime, and therefore, they are the people who benefit the most from having the option to go and protect themselves.

WOODS: What are the statistics or what are the general conclusions that we can draw about the effects of concealed-carry laws? Have they been positive? Have they been negative? And compare that to the version of things we're likely to get reading the *New York Times*.

LOTT: Sure, well, there a lot of academic studies, not just my own. You've had several dozen peer-reviewed, academic studies by criminologists and economists that have looked at that, and what you find overwhelmingly is that people find that allowing people to carry permit concealed handguns reduces violent crime. The more people who carry, the greater the risks that there are to criminals attacking people, and the greater the reduction that you have in crime rates. So just as you can deter criminals with higher arrest rates, or higher conviction rates, the fact that victims might be able to defend themselves can also protect people.

WOODS: What about that study that claims that people are more likely to be harmed in their homes—

LOTT: Right.

WOODS: Somebody in the family is likely to be harmed by the gun, more likely than an intruder is to be repelled. What's the truth behind that?

LOTT: Yeah, well, what the comparison is, is the rate at which you are more likely to kill yourself or a loved one versus killing a criminal. It's just really badly done research. It's probably one of the common claims that you hear. What they do is they'll find somebody who died in or near a residence over the course of a year, and they will ask the relatives of the deceased whether or not a gun was owned in the home, and then they will just assume if the person died from a gunshot and a gun was owned in the home there, then it was that gun that was involved in the death. In fact, when people have gone back and looked at the data, the first of those studies looked at 444 deaths. Only eight of those could actually be attributed to the gun that was in the home. All the rest, all the other 436, were due to weapons brought in from the outside. You fix that one fact, and it completely reverses the results. And that's not the only problem that's there. There are other problems. I can give you one other. They just look at cases where the attacker has been killed. Well, that's not the only benefit that's there. Simply wounding somebody or brandishing a gun and causing them to run away, that produces a benefit. The victim there is saved. It seems like you should want to count those as benefits, and yet they are not given any weight. You fix that also. Just that one thing by itself. You only *kill* people in defensive gun uses maybe one out of every 1000 times a gun is used defensively. And so you're ignoring all those other cases.

WOODS: John, I want to ask you about these sorts of comparisons we hear between countries. A lot of times people like you will make comparisons between states and say in this state it so happens that it's easier to get guns, and lo and behold, the crime rate is lower, and in other states it's harder, and the crime rate is higher, but yet, people will say what about international comparisons? You have heavy gun control in European countries, and yet their violent crime rates are lower. What's the truth about all that?

LOTT: Right, well, usually I don't like to make this comparison across places because it's very hard to control for differences. One fact I will just mention to you: every place in the world that's banned guns has seen murder rates and violent crimes go up after the ban. There's not one single time where murder or violent crime rates have gone down. But you can look across countries—if you go to the Crime Prevention Research Center website and go to the category that's more guns, less crime, you can see data across countries, the crime rates. You can see how the United States compares with its murder rates compared to other countries. We're well below the mean. We're well below the median country. But then also look at measures of gun ownership across those countries, and in fact, when you look at all the countries for which the data is available, you in fact see that the countries that have the highest gun ownership rates have the lowest murder rates, and even if you look at just developed countries, you'd see the same type of relationship there.

WOODS: Now, if Bloomberg wants to try to go the education route, let's say—and of course, we use "education" in quotation marks—but in other words, if he's not pouring his money into political campaigns, he's pouring his money into a big propaganda outfit. I presume he's doing this in order ultimately to revive the presently more or less moribund gun control movement

politically. Doesn't it seem to you that at the federal level, anyway, even the Democrats, their hearts are just not in it when gun control comes up. They know the votes are not there. The support is not there. Yeah, they've got the *New York Times*, but the *New York Times* is not America. Where do you see the gun control movement politically right now? Is it more or less dead?

LOTT: No, I don't think it's dead. You have a number of states, particularly some large states like California and New York, that have very strict gun control regulations the last couple of years. In Maryland they got through rules that I think I mentioned. It costs \$350 to license and register handguns there. In New York you have to pay an \$85 flat fee for going and buying ammunition each time. Whether you buy one bullet or you buy 100, you have to pay an extra \$85 to be able to go and do that on average. There are lots of regulations they have there. I think one common feature of the laws that have been passed the last year or so has been to impose taxes and fees on people being able to own guns or buy ammunition, and I think the reason for that is pretty obvious: they just want to make it costly for people to have guns and use those costs to reduce gun ownership, and then hopefully, eventually, in their mind, make it easier to push more gun control laws at a later date.

WOODS: John, we've got just about a minute and a half left. I want to let you say one more word about the Crime Prevention Research Center. CrimePreventionResearchCenter.org is the website, and that's where you can find out about it. You can see some blog posts. You can find out how to support it. But I want to know, is this going to be an institution that alerts people to the truth about guns, or is it also going to be doing its own academic studies? Is it just going to report on other studies, or is it going to do its own studies in addition to popularizing the truth?

LOTT: Right, well, I am glad you asked that. We're doing both. In fact, there are lots of things from "stand your ground" laws that one can look at to claims about how crime rates have changed in Australia after the big gun buyback that they had there a couple of decades ago—all sorts of issues that come up all the time in the gun control debate, and we want to go and do objective, real quality research there on that, unlike the type of stuff that Bloomberg is putting out, and I think that make them have to respond to some extent, too, just like what I did with concealed handguns laws—the research that I did there caused many people like Bloomberg to have to respond to those things. But there's information on mass public shootings, on mental illness issues with guns. A lot of work needs to be done, and we want to get academics together to go and do those things in peer-reviewed journals.