

Report: Firearms in Europe

The European Gun Debate

13.08.2015
Firearms United
Katja Triebel

The Gun Debate

The gun debate was once strictly a national debate in the USA. Since 1970 universities and NGOs in the USA have researched this topic. European research started almost twenty years later, mostly by NGOs which work on international level like IANSA, Saferworld and Small Arms Survey. Objective studies of European universities were rare, but they are on the rise. When the *Pacific University* published in July 2015 its essay *Philosophy & Gun Control* half of the authors lived in Europe and Canada. So they represent an important view on the gun debate for European society.¹ Three authors demand more gun control, two authors call for less regulations and one recommends a compromise for minor restrictions.

The arguments for more control:

- Governments have the constitutional obligation to enact stricter gun control regulations for the security of its citizens (Ponzer, Molloy College, New York, USA)
- Hunting by individuals should be forbidden, not because of its impact on hunted animals, but because of the risk that other humans could be killed by a hunter who legally owns guns. (Riddle, Utica College, New York, USA).
- Dangerous weapons like guns and knives need tight control. This is morally obligatory. *We need to give up our habits for the greater good.* (Müller, American College of Thessaloniki, Greece)

The arguments for less regulations:

- The harm introduced into society by permitting private citizens to own guns is outweighed by the benefits. (Hsiao, Florida State University, USA)
- Criminological studies suggests that gun ownership has a negative effect on crime or no visible effect at all. (Bernstein, Oriel College Oxford, UK)

The argument for minor restrictions

- Freedom might not involve the freedom *to* guns, but instead, a freedom *from* guns. Canadian citizens enjoy the public good of safety from deadly firearms because they have accepted minor restrictions on gun freedom as individuals. (Kocsis, Queen's University, Canada).

The most important arguments in the gun debate

Gun ownership supporters	Gun control supporters
Gun ownership belongs to personal liberty, private ownership and freedom from state coercion.	Common-sense safety measures can reduce gun violence.
Gun ownership is overwhelmingly safe in terms of the practices of a majority of gun owners.	Restrictions are imposed because gun ownership is a threat to the safety of citizens.
Gun ownership is embedded in the fundamental right of self-defence.	Generally permitting guns for self-defence is bad for society.
Higher gun ownership rates do not cause higher crime rates, including homicide rates (Kleck 2015).	The social costs of gun ownership become the central issue in the regulation of deadly weapons" (Cook and Ludwig 2006).

Why referring to philosophers instead to criminologists?

The gun debate is a moral debate paired with ignorance and partial knowledge as there are hardly facts and these are often never published. If you ask people, scientists and politicians - everybody has an opinion in the gun debate. These opinions are represented in the philosophical essays.

The majority of the citizens do not know anything about their own national gun law - but they have an opinion: more gun control leads to less crime. And less crime is our global aim. We all want a safe society, we all want to ban evil.

If you read the above mentioned six essays you will see that the two gun control supporters attach none or only one reference (Ponzer and Riddle), the European control supporter Müller refers mostly to media articles and governmental statistics and his own experience with knives. These three argue that the mere gun ownership is a threat. The other three authors, Kocsis, Hsiao and Bernstein lists studies from both sides of the gun debate and compare the different attitudes to gun ownership. They also differ between felons and law abiding citizens. Two of them conclude that there is no evidence that gun ownership leads to crime.

Does the knowledge of facts change the attitude to guns?

Gary Kleck is Professor at the College of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Florida State University.² His research centres on violence and crime control with special focus on gun control and crime deterrence for more than 30 years.

He belongs to the staff of the "*Committee on Priorities for a Public Health Research Agenda to Reduce the Threat of Firearm-Related Violence*" which Obama issued in 2013 after the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School.³

Gary Kleck described his transformation by facts:

Up until about 1976 or so, there was little reliable scholarly information on the link between violence and weaponry. Consequently, everyone, scholars included, was free to believe whatever they liked about guns and gun control. There was no scientific evidence to interfere with the free play of personal bias. It was easy to be a "true believer" in the advisability of gun control and the uniformly detrimental effects of gun availability (or the opposite positions) because there was so little relevant information to shake one's faith. When I began my research on guns in 1976, like most academics, I was a believer in the "anti-gun" thesis, i.e. the idea that gun availability has a net positive effect on the frequency and/or seriousness of violent acts. It seemed then like self-evident common sense which hardly needed to be empirically tested.

However, as a modest body of reliable evidence (and an enormous body of not-so-reliable evidence) accumulated, many of the most able specialists in this area shifted from the "anti-gun" position to a more sceptical stance, in which it was negatively argued that the best available evidence does not convincingly or consistently support the anti-gun position. This is not the same as saying we know the anti-gun position to be wrong, but rather that there is no strong case for it being correct. The most prominent representatives of the sceptic position would be James Wright and Peter Rossi, authors of the best scholarly review of the literature.

[Subsequent research] has caused me to move beyond even the sceptic position. I now believe that the best currently available evidence, imperfect though it is (and must always be), indicates that general gun availability has no measurable net positive effect on rates of homicide, suicide, robbery,

assault, rape, or burglary in the U[nited] S[tates]. This is not the same as saying gun availability has no effects on violence—it has many effects on the likelihood of attack, injury, death, and crime completion, but these effects work in both violence-increasing and violence-decreasing directions,

For example, when aggressors have guns, they are (1) less likely to physically attack their victims, (2) less likely to injure the victim given an attack, but (3) more likely to kill the victim, given an injury. Further, when victims have guns, it is less likely aggressors will attack or injure them and less likely they will lose property in a robbery. At the aggregate level, in both the best available time series and cross-sectional studies, the overall net effect of gun availability on total rates of violence is not significantly different from zero. The positive associations often found between aggregate levels of violence and gun ownership appear to be primarily due to violence increasing gun ownership, rather than the reverse. Gun availability does affect the rates of gun violence (e.g. the gun homicide rate, gun suicide rate, gun robbery rate) and the fraction of violent acts which involve guns (e.g. the percent of homicides, suicides or robberies committed with guns); it just does not affect total rates of violence (total homicide rate, total suicide rate, total robbery rate, etc.).⁴

Marvin Wolfgang, who was acknowledged in 1994 by the British Journal of Criminology as "the most influential criminologist in the English-speaking world"⁵, commented on Kleck's research concerning defensive gun use:

I am as strong a gun-control advocate as can be found among the criminologists in this country. If I were Mustapha Mond of Brave New World, I would eliminate all guns from the civilian population and maybe even from the police. I hate guns—ugly, nasty instruments designed to kill people.

... What troubles me is the article by Gary Kleck and Marc Gertz. The reason I am troubled is that they have provided an almost clear-cut case of methodologically sound research in support of something I have theoretically opposed for years, namely, the use of a gun in defense against a criminal perpetrator... I have to admit my admiration for the care and caution expressed in this article and this research. ...Nevertheless, the methodological soundness of the current Kleck and Gertz study is clear. I cannot further debate it.

...The Kleck and Gertz study impresses me for the caution the authors exercise and the elaborate nuances they examine methodologically. I do not like their conclusions that having a gun can be useful, but I cannot fault their methodology. They have tried earnestly to meet all objections in advance and have done exceedingly well.⁶

Also interesting is this information of Professor David Mustard⁷, former advocate of strict gun control in the "University of Pennsylvania Law Review":

When I started my research on guns in 1995, I passionately disliked firearms and fully accepted the conventional wisdom that increasing the gun ownership rate would necessarily raise violent crime and accidental deaths. My views on this subject were formed primarily by media accounts of firearms, which unknowingly to me systematically emphasized the costs of firearms while virtually ignoring their benefits. I thought it obvious that passing laws that permitted law-abiding citizens to carry concealed weapons would create many problems. It is now over six years since I became convinced otherwise and concluded that shall-issue laws—laws that require permits to be granted unless the applicant has a criminal record or a history of significant mental illness—reduce violent crime and have no impact on accidental deaths. My transformation is not unique; other scholars, such as Gary Kleck, have significantly changed their views about firearms as they learned more about the evidence.⁸

Gun Violence: The Real Costs

Philip J. Cook and Jens Ludwig published in 2006 their study "The social costs of gun ownership." Nobody with common sense would deny their claim, that the social cost of gun ownership is the central issue in the regulation of deadly weapons. But we need a closer look to their methodology and their statement:

This paper provides new estimates of the effect of household gun prevalence on homicide rates, and infers the marginal external cost of handgun ownership. The estimates utilize a superior proxy for gun prevalence, the percentage of suicides committed with a gun, which we validate. Using county- and state-level panels for 20 years, we estimate the elasticity of homicide with respect to gun prevalence as between + 0.1 and + 0.3. All of the effect of gun prevalence is on gun homicide rates. Under certain reasonable assumptions, the average annual marginal social cost of household gun ownership is in the range \$100 to \$1800.⁹

The German economist Christian Westphal examined Cook and Ludwig's analysis, got his study peer-reviewed and shares also the data set:¹⁰

Regression findings in Cook and Ludwig's 2006 analysis on "the social costs of gun ownership" are completely spurious due to ignoring the ratio fallacy (see Kronmal 1993).

[They] use data on homicide rates and gun prevalence proxies from U.S. counties over the period 1980–1999 and, in their panel data analysis, find a positive and statistically significant association between both variables. We re-examine their analysis and show that their findings are driven by spurious correlations arising from the use of a common denominator (ratio fallacy) to deflate both dependent and independent variables as well as unaccounted county- level time trends.

When we attempt to replicate their results accounting for these issues, we no longer find any evidence that gun ownership is linked to homicides.

The same verdict comes from Gary Kleck. Cook and Ludwig's studies belong to the ones with methodological errors. He published his "*Methodological Review of the Evidence*" of "*The Impact of Gun Ownership Rates on Crime Rates*" in January 2015:¹¹

Kleck reviewed 41 English-language studies that tested the hypothesis that higher gun prevalence levels cause higher crime rates, especially higher homicide rates.

Unfortunately, research on the effect of gun levels on homicide and other crime rates has generally been of poor quality, and prior reviews of the evidence have failed to systematically sort out the methodologically better studies from the less sound ones. It is especially discouraging that scholars keep making the exact same mistakes over and over again, so it is critically important to differentiate better studies from worse ones. All research is flawed, and all bodies of research are incomplete, but that does not mean we cannot distinguish the less flawed work from the more flawed, and draw tentative conclusions based on the best available research conducted so far.

To summarize, the only prior research that supports the hypothesis that higher gun ownership rates cause higher crime rates is research that makes at least one, and usually all of, the three fundamental methodological errors identified here. Conversely, research that avoids or minimizes these flaws consistently finds no support for the hypothesis.

Technically weak research mostly supports the hypothesis, while strong research does not.

It must be tentatively concluded that higher gun ownership rates do not cause higher crime rates, including homicide rates.

Why does gun prevalence not have a significant positive effect on homicide?

The most likely explanation is that

- (a) most guns are possessed by non-criminals whose only involvement in crime is as victims, and
- (b) defensive gun use by crime victims is both common and effective in preventing the offender from injuring the victim.

These violence reducing-effects of guns in the hands of victims may roughly cancel out the violence-increasing effects of guns in the hands of offenders, resulting in a near-zero net effect on homicide rates (Kovandzic et al., 2012, 2013).

Kleck asks the right question in his paper: **Why get so many poor quality studies on this topic published despite their conspicuous failures?**

The answer is influence and money.

Influence by Non-Government-Organisations (NGOs)

Public opinion is influenced by the published opinion, e.g. by media and campaigns. After the Second World War, many NGOs have successfully fought with global campaigns for arms control measures. Since the nineties the focus concentrated on conventional weapons, especially small arms and light weapons. Among the newly established NGOs in this period is the *International Action Network on Small Arms* (IANSA) one of the biggest stakeholders. Many organizations which joined the IANSA were former members of the *International Campaign to Ban Landmines* (ICBL). At the same time the *World Forum on the Future of Sport Shooting Activities* (WFSA) was founded, an international association for the preservation of the private possession of firearms. The best-known member of the WFSA is the National Rifle Association (NRA).

Most NGOs engaged in the "gun debate" are members of one of the two umbrella organizations :

	Gun ownership supporters	Gun control supporters
Umbrella Organisation	WFSA - <i>World Forum on the Future of Sport Shooting Activities</i>, 1996, Brussels	IANSA- <i>International Action Network on Small Arms</i>, 1998, London
Members	100 million members from 44 organizations in 24 countries.	500 million members from 800 organizations in 120 countries.
Aim	Study, preservation, promotion and protection of sport shooting activities on every continent.	Stop the ownership of firearms by anyone other than a government agency.
Mean	Outsourcing licit civilian guns from the definition of SALW.	Arms Trade Treaty for all guns
Most prominent members	NRA (America), FACE (European hunters), AFEMS (European manufacturers), AECAC (European dealers), FESAC (European collectors)	Amnesty International, Oxfam, Saferworld, Brady Campaign, Coalition for Gun Control, Gun Control Network, International Peace Bureau

Both umbrella organisations are invited with speeches to all UN small arms conferences since 2001 and participate in the national and international preparations (PrepCom) for the next conference. Since 1995 both groups are committed to research, policy development, advocacy, public awareness and education and the implementation of practical measures.

The humanitarian and human rights organizations published empirical evidence of a link between the increased proliferation of small arms and their impact on the increase of violence and the loss of lives- - especially among civilians. The gun proponents focused on preventing global gun control, which lead to restrictions to the licit trade in firearms or the right to private gun ownership.¹²

In 2006 UNIDIR examined the influence of NGOs with regard to the small arms control and disarmament, describing the influence of some NGOs as follows:¹³

In recent years, NGOs have done much to highlight the devastation wrought by conventional weapons—particularly small arms and light weapons—and to promote national, regional and international governmental action on this issue, culminating in an ongoing global campaign—Control Arms—for an Arms Trade Treaty to control conventional arms transfers. While such NGO campaign and advocacy work has, by its very nature, received widespread attention, NGOs are also increasingly involved in the implementation of international agreements, sometimes directly and sometimes through assistance to states.

UNIDIR refers to the campaign of Oxfam, Amnesty International and IANSA which was launched 2003 with the goal of a global Arms Trade Treaty.¹⁴

UNIDIR examined also in this report the non-state monitoring by civil society. They are counted as an important resource, although the authors noted that **because of lack in facts the findings could be interpreted in different ways**. The yearbooks had been created as a joint project of IANSA, International Alert, Saferworld and the Centre for International Co-operation and Security (CICS) at the University of Bradford, entitled "Biting the Bullet".

The study's authors demanded of the NGOs who are involved both in lobbying and campaigns, as well as in research to ensure that the work on the monitoring and review are completely separated from their activity in campaigns in order to guarantee objectivity. Throughout the report there is no activity mentioned by the WFSA.

IANSA is financially very well supported

- by the governments of Great Britain, Belgium, Sweden and Norway
- by the Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Compton Foundation, Ploughshares Fund, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Open Society Institute, Samuel Rubin Foundation and Christian Aid (UK)

IANSA is also a member

- of the reference group for the International Standards on Small Arms Control (ISACS)
- of the expert's group which advises the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) on the implementation of the UN Firearms Protocol.¹⁵

IANSA members cooperate closely with UN agencies, in particular with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the regional UN disarmament centres of UNODA.

Dr. Franz Császár, Professor Eremitus of the University of Vienna, said:

NGOs which support disarmament publish lots of books which are written by activists with financial support by foundations and governments.

Because these gun control advocates do not differ between licit and illicit guns in their data sets, I fear that changes in the national gun laws are mainly influenced by these well-funded NGOs. In contrast the financial resources of gun advocates are modest.¹⁶

Follow the money

Crime sells as news

Crime is the most popular topic for print and broadcast news. The coverage of crime in news usually includes :

- sensationalism
- exaggeration
- misinformation

In reality sex crimes and violent crimes occur seldom. In the news they have a massive over-representation.¹⁷

Crime and "fear of crime" sells

Police, prison guards and people, who work in the "crime control industry" become stakeholder or spokespersons and advise how tax money can be spent.

Three examples of "crime control industry" in Europe:

1. The partner **Arquebus Solutions** of the European ballistic study *EFFECT*, funded with almost 500.000€ by the EU DG Home Affairs, is a company which earns money by identifying misused weapons with ballistics. Arquebus was founded in 2012 by former senior members of the United Kingdom's National Ballistics Intelligence Service (NABIS).¹⁸ NABIS was implemented in 2008 and is credited with contributing to a 45% reduction in firearms related crimes over a 5-year period.¹⁹ (Note: we doubt that the reduction is notably caused by NABIS.) Arquebus advertises with "Legal Test Fires". (Note: this looks like mandatory ballistic test for all licit guns.)
2. Arquebus Solutions' partner, the **Wynyard Group**, is a company which sells an advanced crime analytics software. They want to connect the national gun registers and the ballistic database of Arquebus/NABIS to indentify "persons of interests". They advertise with 245,000 firearms-related homicides worldwide (excluding war-torn countries).²⁰ (Note: Europe has 1000 firearms-related homicides per year, most of them committed by illicit firearms; in the gun registers licit owners are registered; all "lonesome wolves" who made terrorist attacks were known already as "persons of interest" by the police).
3. The German company **Armatix** was able to launch its electronically blocking system for inherited weapons into the German gun law 2003. They tried to implement their

electronically secured weapons ("smart guns") as mandatory weapons for every gun owner in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and New Jersey (USA). They paid at least one Swiss National Council to lobby their products to mandatory law.²¹

They were guest speaker at the UN Conference 2015 for "*New technologies and human security*", organized by International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Germany to the UN.²² They contributed to the "background paper" for the "*Smart Technology in SALW Control*" of the BICC (Bonn International Center for Conversion). committed by the *Small Arms Survey*.²³ In 2012 they made €3 million losses that year, on top of €11 million in losses for the previous years and are actual as "smart gun leader" in chapter-11 style restructuring.²⁴ (Note: the German gun law is at the same time in renovation regarding storage solutions. The new additional CEO Helmut Brandtner is former attache of the Embassy of Austria and had worked four years for the UN.)

Crime and "fear of crime" support the Gun Control Advocates

Since 1977, there were no more disarmament treaties in the line. William Hunter, former director of the *Arms Trade Resource Center* at the *World Policy Institute* said in a telephone interview, that conventional arms transfers, except for small arms, were history. His institute had to look for other topics. Also, the UN Department of Disarmament Affairs (DAA) was struggling with its existence, according to a former staff.

Both recognized the disarmament of small arms and light weapons (SALW), which were already a topic in areas of conflict, as a new task.

In the beginning there were two international networks. One assumed that weak gun laws in democracies are the cause for violence and called for strict control of private gun ownership. The other, more prominent network, saw firearms as a cause of violence in areas of conflict and was involved in the disarmament of civilians.

In 1998 both networks joined and founded the ***International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA)***. They agreed to the following objectives:

- Reducing the access to firearms for civilians
- Discouragement of gun ownership and use
- Delegitimize the possession of firearms
- Elimination of trusting people with firearms as a mean for self defence
- Stigmatization of states and non-state actors who use small arms

These goals went far beyond the goals of disarmament activists. Initially they did not want to deal with the private gun ownership in peaceful countries, but with weapons of war in conflict areas. First chairman of the IANSA was Rebecca Peters, who had enforced the weapons law tightening in Australia on the board of Australia's '*National Coalition for Gun Control*'. Company headquarters is in London. IANSA receives large donations from foundations and governments, especially in Europe. Already at the beginning the control advocates of IANSA used scientific evidence for their political goals. They started studies on everything - the quantities of lawfully traded arms to the number of victims by firearms.

Their main studies come from the Small Arms Survey (SAS).²⁵

The **Small Arms Survey** is by its own account an "*independent research project at the Geneva Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies*". It collects and publishes information that are related to small arms and light weapons 'SALW' and is regarded as a resource for governments, policy makers, researchers and activists, as well as research on small arms.

The Survey was established in 1999 and supported by the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), as well as investments from Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. It also receives financial support from France, New Zealand and Spain, as well as various UN agencies.

The Survey collects information each year itself or represents data from other organizations in its yearbooks. Due to the lack of globally consistent definitions there are always some discrepancies. Pleasant data are not questioned. **The conclusions of the evaluated data leads often to the existence of a problem of small arms.** It should be noted that the staff of the Survey are objective scientists or dedicated control advocates, however **there is not one single scientist in the staff who belongs to the gun advocates.** The situation is similar in the organizations from which the Small Arms Survey obtains its data, such as SIPRI or gunpolicy.org.

Of course the economic power of gun proponents (manufacturers, dealers and users) is on the other scale of the balance. **But in the topic of firearms we Europeans made the experience that more weight is in the scale of the gun control supporters. This counts for money, studies and also for influence.**

¹ Riddle, Christopher A. (2015) "Philosophy & Gun Control: Introduction," *Essays in Philosophy*: Vol. 16: Iss. 2, Article 1. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1526-0569.1529>

² Gary Kleck - [Faculty of Florid State University](#)

³ Priorities for Research to Reduce the Threat of Firearms-Related Violence (2013) - [Summary](#)

⁴ Guns and Public Health: Epidemic of Violence or Pandemic of Propaganda? - [1994 Tennessee Law Review](#).

⁵ Marvin E. Wolfgang: Leading Figure in Criminology, 1998, [New York Times](#)

⁶ Marvin E. Wolfgang, "A Tribute to a View I Have Opposed", [Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology 1995, Vol. 86 No. 1](#)

⁷ David B. Mustard - [Faculty of the University of Georgia](#).

⁸ Data are also Important - Mustard, 2003, [University of Pennsylvania Law Review, Vol. 151](#)

⁹ The social costs of gun ownership, Cook& Ludwig, 2006 , [Journal of Public Economics, Vol. 90](#)

¹⁰ [The Social Costs of Gun Ownership: Spurious Regression and Unfounded Public Policy Advocacy](#), Westphal

¹¹ The Impact of Gun Ownership Rates on Crime Rates: [Journal of Criminal Justice, Volume 43, Issue 1, January-February 2015, Pages 40-48](#)

¹² NGOs and the Small Arms Issue, Peter Batchelor, [2002 UNIDIR](#)

¹³ The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in the Monitoring and Verification of International Arms Control and Disarmament Agreements, [2006, UNIDIR](#)

¹⁴ Homepage of [Control Arms](#)

¹⁵ Homepage of the [UN Firearms Protocol](#)

¹⁶ IWOE Newsletter [01/2006 \(pp 5-7\)](#)

¹⁷ The Harms of Crime Media, Denise L. Bissler, Joan L. Connors, 2012, ISBN 9780786491353

¹⁸ Coventry University makes gun crime the target in European ballistic study - [Homepage of the University](#)

¹⁹ Wynyard and Arquebus launch gun crime solution - [Press Release by the Wynyard Group](#)

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Armatix dossier 2002-2011, 2011, [Katja Triebel](#)

²² Indicative Schedule of the Side-Events 2015 - [UNODA](#)

²³ Conference Background Paper "Smart Technology in SALW Control". 2013, [Small Arms Survey](#)

²⁴ Smart gun leader is in chapter-11 style restructuring, 2015, [Fortune](#)

²⁵ The Global Right Wind and the Clash of World Politics, 2012, [Cambridge University Press](#)