

## ...Then Only Criminals Will Have Guns

Following a recent spate of shootings in North-West London, local people say they have had enough, and have marched with police through the streets of the Borough of Brent, **demanding** an end to gun crime in the area.

It is not clear whether London's criminals were impressed by the march. Time will tell. The police are rather despondent, though:

Brent's borough commander, Chief Supt Andy Bamber, said the availability of firearms in the borough was "absolutely horrifying".

"People can easily get a firearm and the age group of those getting involved is coming down," he said.

It's not even remotely true that 'people can easily get a firearm'. Thanks to Britain's stringent gun-control laws, it is only criminals who can easily get them.

Sat, 09/10/2005 - 19:02 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

## Question

What are the penalties for holding an illegal handgun or rifle? What are the penalties for using a firearm in a crime? What are the penalties for smuggling firearms?

by a reader on Sun, 09/11/2005 - 02:15 | [reply](#)

## Penalty

The **penalty** for owning a gun is five years in jail and an 'unlimited' fine.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 02:26 | [reply](#)

## Re: ...Then Only Criminals Will Have Guns

No. Police and army has guns too. Sometime it is not enough - true. But what you suggest instead?

- 1) all teenagers should have guns (from their parents wardrobes)
- 2) all looters should have guns (from nearby gun shop)

- 3) all burglars
- 4) all former prisoners
- 5) some psychologically unstable people (who have not yet been qualified as "dangerous" by GPs)
- 6) all people who at least once in a lifetime might feel jealousy or rage or whatever.
- 7) some drunk people
- 8) people who are annoyed by neighbours, passers by, bad drivers or whatever causes hatred between people.

A teenager shooting classmates in a school, a city white collar worker shooting colleagues being over-exhausted at work, a looter in New Orleans who could easily break into a gun shop shooting rescue workers - these examples seems not enough for you, guys? Are you going to bear arms or arm bears? How do you tell the difference?

by a reader on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 10:55 | [reply](#)

## Re: ...Then Only Criminals Will Have Guns

No. Police and army has guns too.

They have guns, and so do certain specially privileged civilians. However, contrary to what Chief Supt Bamber inadvertently said, none of those people can get them easily. Only criminals can.

Your point might be better made if you removed all the criminals from your list. Why, for instance, did you include burglars, since we know from Chief Supt Bamber that they can already get guns easily?

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 11:19 | [reply](#)

## burglars

knowing that every family can have gun legally quite possibly would provoke every single burglar and thief have guns charged and ready and start shooting to any living soul they meet on their way.

On the other hand many burglars (even if they can easily get a gun) prefer not to have it at all because their sentence would be much higher if found in possession of a gun.

There is no perfect solution in this imperfect world. But once again you exhibit double standards.

On one hand you advocate for giving guns to everybody so that everybody can defend himself/herself. On the other hand, you don't agree that if every country can have weapons of mass destruction than there will be less wars and more protection. Why don't we want Iran to have nuclear weapon?

Because we are not sure that Iranian government would act rationally. The same goes here - I don't believe that all people with guns would act rationally.

If somebody is targeting you as a possible victim and is armed than the fact that you have a gun doesn't play much role. Killers

and burglars who own their living this way would spend more money

to get a better gun and put more efforts in training themselves than any of us. The only choice we have is to set up a body of professionals who can protect others. And that is what police and army are.

Many criminals have guns - true. But you would allow armed criminals to multiply enourmously whereas you would still have your own single gun. I am not sure if this would be a better world to live in.

by a reader on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 11:43 | [reply](#)

## knowing that every family can

*knowing that every family can have gun legally quite possibly would provoke every single buglar and thief have guns charged and ready and start shooting to any living soul they meet on their way.*

Or maybe most thieves don't like gun fights, or murder, and wouldn't rob anyone they thought might be home and have a gun.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 17:41 | [reply](#)

## I Have

A big dog and a shotgun loaded with rock salt. Stops those burglars everytime.

by a reader on Wed, 09/14/2005 - 20:16 | [reply](#)

## Buglers

I don't see why buglers shouldn't have guns. They need them in case someone tries to steal their bugle.

by [R](#) on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 00:38 | [reply](#)

## Oh

you mean burglars... Nevermind.

by [R](#) on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 00:41 | [reply](#)

## Burglars

Thanks for correction... Many people would suggest putting an alarm into house, a dog, a baseball bate or whatever. And many people would find it useful to deter burglars this way. But in any case burglars exist and will exist, they will break into houses, kill or harm people or just leave if anybody is inside. There is no ideal solution. In some places people have just hired guards to look after several houses at once - it works quite well.

But how would you deter you teenage son from finding a gun in

your house in order to settle score with his classmates? Or a husband from killing his wife after finding out that she was having an affair.

Putting aside this hypothetical arguments, I don't see how American society has become safer and less criminal without gun control. As I pointed out before, shooting classmates or colleagues doesn't quite support your argument. Number of prisoners in USA divided by total population is also quite a blow.

by a reader on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 10:16 | [reply](#)

## **Personally, I do not think it**

Personally, I do not think it relevant what effect the Firearms Acts have on the rate of crime. Criminals are responsible for crime. People in general are not.

If you support any law whatsoever that makes it harder for a person to get a gun and use it to defend themselves, then you are, I believe, saying that sometimes a woman must submit to being raped, or beaten up, or killed, in order that other people are safer in general. I don't; I believe in a right to self defence.

In point of fact, gun laws make the country far more dangerous - not that it makes any difference to the moral aspect of the question. The fact that people are not allowed to be armed is what makes armed spree killings possible. This situation particularly promotes the kind of schoolyard murders and killings of wives by husbands that you were talking about. I could easily kill my fiancée with my bare hands if I wanted to. I don't, obviously! But if I did, she would have the right to defend herself. Or so I believe, anyway.

Incidentally, when the original poster said that only criminals could get guns easily, did they mean this as true by definition viz. if you get a handgun without a firearms certificate you're breaking the law, or just practically the case if you're not a career criminal? I don't think it is hard in practice. It's certainly easy to break the gun laws and come up with some sort of illegal weapon yourself. I don't think they can be that hard to buy either. I mean, they will sell some revolvers to any adult in France. [Here](#), for example.

by a reader on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 11:47 | [reply](#)

## **Re: Criminals are responsible for crime.**

The problem is that more people would become criminals and more criminals would use guns.

In general, people un mass don't necessarily act sensibly or rationally. Just like not all countries are expected to be rational about WMD. Some are and some aren't. And that is what bothers me.

You are wrong about using statistical data. In some cases you have

to disregard statistics when your personal situation can easily be isolated from others. For example, if you want to stop living and demand a right to do so. Even if statistics can point out that more people would leave this world this numbers would be irrelevant. By killing your self you don't put anyone else in danger, although some indirect influence is always present.

In case of gun controls, the situation is totally different. The fact that you posses a gun makes quite a big difference on safety of others. Your failure to hold on to it puts other innocent people around in danger. And many people can be expected to be quite careless at times.

If you argue that being killed by neighbour is better than being killed by a burglar than I must say that there is no clear line between would-be-criminal and an innocent person. The moment an innocent person crosses the line (deliberatly, professionaly or by mistake) he/she has become criminal. By letting people have guns you just "produce" more criminals.

Do you have any facts to confirm that there are less burglars in USA or that they are less violent, or there are less victims?

by a reader on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 13:07 | [reply](#)

## **There are quite a few people**

There are quite a few people posting as "a reader" here. I can hardly complain, as this includes me (at 11:47), but it might be confusing things.

Anyway, I have something to ask the person that posted at 13:07.

Do you think that if guns were more readily available, more people would become criminals? Meaning: burglars, robbers, rapists, murderers? I think that's what you were saying. If so, why? I personally think the opposite, as do quite a lot of people, as you can see by the fact that such people seem to rule the blogosphere.

In any case, if it were true, why would this mean that a person should not be allowed to use a gun to defend themself from a rapist, robber, bugle-playing maniac etc?

by a reader on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 13:44 | [reply](#)

## **I am the reader 13:07**

"Do you think that if guns were more readily available, more people would become criminals?"

In order to give any answer to this question we need to summon statistical data which I suggested to do in the first place and which you oppose saying that this is irrelevant because personal protection is what matters.

I argue that if you are more likely to be shot than you are in more

danger and less protected. Again you disagree.  
What is your answer to that?

As for purely ideological discussion that libertarians always tend to prefer, than of course personal freedom and protection is above all values (or at least above common values). But I would argue again that in case of gun control your personal freedom to have a gun oppresses me in the same way as any pyrotechnical experiments in the private property of my neighbour would threaten my life. The fact that my dead neighbour would be responsible for damage to my property is a little consolation to me.

by Yuryr on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 15:06 | [reply](#)

## Intentions are real and they matter

I could kill my fiancee with my bare hands if I wanted to

Yeah, but not wanting to is the same as not being able to.

It's certainly easy to break the gun laws

Most members of the public would not find it easy. They respect the law generally, and would fear accusations of criminality. Only hardened criminals could find it easy.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Thu, 09/15/2005 - 19:08 | [reply](#)

## Statistical Data and Intentions

Yuryr, let's get some statistical data. I'm all for it. It wouldn't change my mind either way personally, because I see the question as a moral issue - people have a right to defend themselves against attack - but if it means something to you, let's do it.

The only problem is what to take as good evidence. I suggest trying to find out what the effect of tightenings and liberalizations of gun laws in different countries is on the trends in the rates of the various types of crime there. You have to look at a derivative so that you can see what actually happens as a result of the gun law changes. It's no good saying (for example) "America is dangerous", or "Switzerland is safe". Lots of people get stabbed in America, for example, but not many in Switzerland.

Tom Robinson, I'm not entirely sure that only hardened criminals would break the gun laws. I have, I'm sure. They're pretty difficult to obey, in fact, if you're interested in shooting. Am I a hardened criminal? Maybe, but I don't feel like one! I really just wanted to know what the original poster actually meant by "it is only criminals who can easily get them."

by a reader on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 08:51 | [reply](#)

## 'Easy'

We meant, as Tom Robinson said, that most members of the public

would not find it easy. Not only for the reasons he gave, but also because they do not have the relevant knowledge and contacts. The fact that they become criminals *by definition* is also relevant, and was a secondary meaning.

by **Editor** on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 09:52 | [reply](#)

## Statistical Data and Intentions

Murders with firearms (per capita):

[http://www.nationmaster.com/graph-T/crime/crime\\_mur\\_wit\\_fir\\_cap](http://www.nationmaster.com/graph-T/crime/crime_mur_wit_fir_cap)

Murders (per capita):

[http://www.nationmaster.com/graph-T/crime/crime\\_mur\\_cap](http://www.nationmaster.com/graph-T/crime/crime_mur_cap)

In both tables USA is preceded only by African and developing countries in other regions.

Another link (rather simplistic summary):

[http://www.learnenglish.org.uk/magazine/magazine\\_home\\_disarmament.html](http://www.learnenglish.org.uk/magazine/magazine_home_disarmament.html)

As we were talking about burglaries the text in the link above says: *Guns don't protect you. Statistics show that you are more likely to be shot if you have a gun in the house. And the person who gets shot is more likely to be the householder than the intruder.*

As for personal morale principles, that I expected to be valued above all by libertarians, lets just reflect on what you are saying. Putting other innocent people in danger is not a moral issue to you, but your own protection is important (even if it doesn't actually make you more protected as statistics shows). Perhaps, we are not sharing the same moral values with you.

But why are you always putting moral first? Correct me if I am wrong. We are talking about legislative and political issues. They don't coincide with moral principles and moral principles are not clear. What we can do in reality is to modify laws in order to be closer to what we see as moral. Besides laws are what should be best for society, not a single person. I know that putting society needs before individual freedom is not moral. But laws are for society and about society and always will be whether libertarians like it or not.

Of course, it is usually the case that if laws disregard private property and personal freedom etc. than the whole society deteriorates. But that is a different topic.

If you are looking for a law that governs your personal life or the life of your family than you use moral principles. When you talk about society (which is not equal to a family) you talk about conventional laws (not moral ones). Using New York map for navigating through London is a little bit awkward to say the least.

by **Yuryr** on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 12:31 | [reply](#)

## Maybe the USA has higher gun

Maybe the USA has higher gun crime than everywhere but Africa

because it imported a bunch of Africans who do it's gun crime for it.

by a racist on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 14:54 | [reply](#)

## Yuryr, I don't think the murd

Yuryr, I don't think the murder rates in any one year in a country really say much. Surely what's wanted is to find out what tends to happen to these rates (or, better, to a more rounded measure of public safety, since a lot of murder victims are criminals, and a lot of crime doesn't result in murder) in a country, after more restrictive gun laws are brought in, and what tends to happen when less restrictive ones are introduced?

I believe that the rate of crime probably generally falls when gun laws are liberalized. This seems to be the case in the US states that have recently allowed concealed carry compared with those that haven't. I don't seem to have time to find evidence, though, sorry! That said, I re-iterate that I believe that the right of a person to defend themself from crime, and to be prepared for it by owning a gun and carrying it in ordinary public places is absolute. You and I are probably not going to agree on this issue any time soon, I feel...

"A racist", I doubt very much what you say (or at least imply), although it is certainly conceivable. But if your implication were true, would it make any difference to the gun law question?

Incidentally, Editor, is it just me, or is it impossible to select (with the mouse) most of the text on **The World**? Maybe this is deliberate? I ask because it meant I couldn't cut Yuryr's urls above - not easily, at least. You might also want to know that your submission verifier earlier asked me to divide two by an empty string. Maybe David Deutsch can do that, but I can't!

Also, thank you for an interesting and unique blog.

by a reader on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 15:49 | [reply](#)

## You doubt the prevalence of (

You doubt the prevalence of (gun) crimes by black people?

<http://www.racismeantiblanc.bizland.com/005/06-02.htm>

<http://www.ourcivilisation.com/usa/racewar.htm>

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/crimoff.htm>

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/glance/race.htm>

This matters to the theory that the reason the US has more gun crime than the UK is lax gun laws.

by a reader on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 16:21 | [reply](#)

## Cutting remarks

We do nothing to inhibit selecting and copying content. I have just

checked using (in alphabetical order) Camino, Firefox, iCab, OmniWeb, Opera, Safari, and Shiira and see no problem, so it seems likely that it is something specific to your browser or its configuration.

The occasional impossible arithmetic challenge is, of course, a deliberate ploy to encourage readers to register.

by **Editor** on Fri, 09/16/2005 - 22:15 | [reply](#)

## A reader 9/14 11:43 calls it

A reader 9/14 11:43 calls it a "double standard" that **The World** doesn't want to ban guns for everyone yet at the same time doesn't "want Iran to have nuclear weapon". Do I really need to point out that this is a silly comparison? Wanting guns to be legal for law-abiding citizens as a matter of general law is not the same as wanting some given psychopath to have a gun. I might add that **The World** never advocated for "giving guns to everybody" but for not banning guns for everybody. There is a difference.

Does a reader really not understand the difference between the general and the particular?

Even the oh-so-gun-plagued U.S. disallows, for example, convicted felons from getting guns. If Iran is not the equivalent on the international scale, what country is?

A reader writes:

"I don't beleive that all people with guns would act rationally."

And neither do I. But this is not a good reason to ban guns altogether. (I do not believe "all people" with baseball bats would act rationally....)

Then a reader declares, out of clear blue,

"If somebody is targetting you as a possible victim and is armed than the fact that you have a gun doesn't play much role."

That's a calculation you've made for yourself, and that's your right. Others have made a different calculation, that a gun would prove useful for self defense in certain situations, and that's their right (in the U.S.).

"But you would allow armed criminals to multiply enourmously whereas you would still have your own single gun"

Armed criminals obtain firearms independently of whether laws exists banning them. This is part of the reason we call them criminals.

And the hypothetical of the multiplied number of armed criminals attacking a solitary citizen who only has a single gun is a total non sequitur. "Criminals" do not all belong to a giant organization together through which they team-up, in ever-increasing numbers (in proportion to their total), to attack a target they have all

decided upon somehow. Even if the reader is right that the group "Armed Criminals" multiplies (by 2, say) due to no gun laws, this does not mean that any given robbery attempt will involve twice as many criminals. That would be a very silly model of criminal behavior to believe in (which I doubt a reader actually does). Certainly, it is true that if one is attacked by a hundred armed men, being armed will probably not help. But so what? If one is attacked by Godzilla a gun won't help either. That's not the sort of situation anyone envisions a gun being useful in the first place.

Because it won't defend against a hundred armed men, there's no use getting a gun that might defend against one or two? That's just idiotic. And you don't really believe that logic either, I hope.

by blixax on Sat, 09/17/2005 - 16:46 | [reply](#)

## **Of course it is exaggregation**

Yes, indeed, I don't think that the whole world conspires against unarmed myself. It is just a simplification. This was a similar to pacifistic reasoning that the more advanced weapons you use the more advanced weapons your enemies use and the balance of force remains but the danger increases. Of course, this logic is not flawless. And countries need to protect themselves and it works. The increased danger of possessing more advanced weapons (like intra-army casualties) are outbalanced by increased protection against a clearly identifiable enemy with clear intentions.

There is one important difference between countries and people. Every country has a system of looking after its weapons. It is never flawless but the system exists and has its purpose.

People don't have such system. Who is going to protect me from your children shooting randomly or by mistake? Don't start again about children throwing knives randomly or trying to strangle everybody with bare hands - it is not the same at all. People can drop a gun on a street or left in a train like they drop thousands of their purses or mobile phones.

There is a systematic way of dealing with criminals and that is called police. You said that you should have a right to protect yourself. Sure. You also have right to protect yourself in many ways. You can demand better policing or higher conviction terms, hire a guard on temporary or permanent basis, or whatever - the possibilities are endless. Nobody tells that police is useless and it has lost its grip on criminals. And But you chose the way which puts other people in danger. Neither system is flawless, neither protects you in 100% of cases. There is no even a particular threat for your at the moment. But you choose the system which puts other people in danger.

I don't mind you giving the right to, for instance, cure yourself with whatever drug you prefer. You have a right to protect yourself against diseases as well. And many people would die additionally as a result of no-prescription medical system. And this terrible statistics wouldn't put me off. Simply because it doesn't put other

people in danger. And the drugs are easier to isolate from children, although not 100% foolproof.

But you simply ignore this important difference between drugs and guns.

If it is difficult to find clear statistics than on the moral grounds it is wrong to put other people in danger for your own safety.

by [Yuryr](#) on Mon, 09/19/2005 - 10:55 | [reply](#)

## "There is one important diffe

"There is one important difference between countries and people. Every country has a system of looking after its weapons. It is never flawless but the system exists and has its purpose."

There are many important differences between countries and people but I don't think that's one of them. I could just as easily say truthfully that Every person has a system of looking after his weapons, it is never flawless but the system exists and has its purpose.

"People don't have such system. Who is going to protect me from your children shooting randomly or by mistake?"

One, you are. I assume that in your everyday life if you saw someone, whether child or not, wielding a gun erratically you would stay away. Two, my children are, since I have instilled in them morality and responsibility. Three, I am, since I keep my gun(s) under lock and key and so forth (this is all hypothetical). Four, the police are; if they're around, they will surely take countermeasures.

Of course, that system isn't flawless, but lack of flawlessness doesn't seem to bother you when it comes to countries bearing nukes, so why should it bother you when it comes to individuals bearing puny firearms?

"People can drop a gun on a street or left in a train like they drop thousands of their purses or mobile phones."

That is an odd thing to say. In my experience, people are quite attached to valuable objects and are reluctant to part with them. How many firearms have you found or observed left on a street or train?

"You also have right to protect yourself in many ways. You can demand better policing or higher conviction terms, hire a guard on temporary or permanent basis, or whatever - the possibilities are endless."

Indeed, and they include arming oneself.

"Nobody tells that police is useless and it has lost its grip on criminals. And But you chose the way which puts other people in danger."

False. The typical citizen arming himself does not, overall (i.e.

looking at both sides, not just one side of the equation), put other people in danger and you haven't established that it does.

"But you simply ignore this important difference between drugs and guns."

I don't think the comparison is important or even interesting. For what it's worth, the policy 'let people treat themselves w/whatever drug they want' would too involve a danger to 'others'. If people can try whatever drug they want, say Dangerous Experimental Drug X (DEX), that leads to a budding industry for DEX, which means it can be found in drugstores, which means it's in lots of peoples' bathroom cabinets (or left on, uh, trains, as the case may be), which increases the likelihood that Little Johnny will find it and gulp it down....

"If it is difficult to find clear statistics"

...you nevertheless seem to feel free to invent conclusions such as "letting a typical citizen be armed puts other people in danger" out of thin air.

"If it is difficult to find clear statistics than on the moral grounds it is wrong to put other people in danger for your own safety."

Yet it is perfectly appropriate to put other people in danger if they pose a threat to my safety. If people do not threaten my safety then they are in no danger from my (hypothetical) firearm, and the same is true of 99% of firearms owners.

This system isn't "flawless", of course, but remember: that's okay with you.

Or is it Not Okay with you for the one special case of firearms, for some pathological reason?

by blixia on Mon, 09/19/2005 - 20:50 | [reply](#)