

Guns

My parents were both from rural Eastern Kentucky where boys were allowed to roam the hills unsupervised and gun ownership was the norm. As a boy, I lived in an area near Ford Lake between Ypsilanti and Belleville Michigan. The area adjacent to the lake was undeveloped and the lake was rarely used for recreation so there was little chance of hitting anyone, even with a 22 caliber rifle if we shot toward the lake. I was allowed to roam this area carrying a BB gun and then a 22 rifle and I shot at anything that moved or that would break. The same area of land is now home to hundreds of people. The freedom I enjoyed to use a gun due to low population density is not practical for my grandchildren.

One of the required readings in my high school English course was *The Diary of Ann Frank*. I did not identify with her plight. In my mind, I would not go meekly but would booby trap the stairway and take at least one or two Nazis with me. I assumed that I would have a gun because I couldn't conceive of a country where only the police had them so I would die defending my hiding place. The story did introduce the idea that the established government could be evil and that I might need a gun to defend my personal freedom from the government. Our country's founders were familiar with this concept and wrote the right to bear arms into our constitution.

During a discussion with a friend who has a carry permit for a hand gun, he challenged me to read *More Guns, Less Crime* by John Lott. In spite of my initial skepticism, I got a copy and found that it was written by an economist with a Ph.D. from UCLA who has worked at Yale Law School, Stanford, Wharton, Texas A&M, and Rice. I found his book to be well researched and that he had several valuable insights to offer. One of them was related to the statistic I often quoted about guns being more likely to harm someone you know than a stranger. He pointed out that the study included opposing gang members as people who were known to the gun owner, not just family and friends. If those people were excluded from the study, the likelihood of injury to family and friends fell dramatically. He also noted that most gun laws are enacted state-wide but the use and misuse of guns varied greatly between urban and rural counties within the same state and that laws that made sense in one county did not fit the behavior of citizens in other counties.

I think we can agree that what we want is a society where we can feel personally safe from the misuse of guns and also safe from the misuse of governmental power. Fortunately, we don't have to look any further than the constitution for a common-sense solution. Here is the entire text of the second amendment:

A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.

I propose that we establish well-regulated militias that have the following rules and regulations:

- All gun owners must be members of a well-regulated militia and pay an initial fee for a background check plus annual membership fees to maintain a database of members and their guns.
- To form a militia, applicants would apply for a permit. The process would be similar to applying for a liquor license. Applicants could not have any gun-related criminal convictions.

- Like a bar, only licensed militias could sell guns. The militias must keep records of gun ownership including identifying ballistics records. Having a militia license would be highly profitable—like a liquor license—and compliance would be in the owner’s best interest.
- The size of each militia would be limited to a maximum number such as 50. If a militia loses its license, each member would have to apply to another militia for membership and pay the initial fees. Each member would have an interest in preventing a fellow member from using their gun for a crime or for suicide.
- Militias would be responsible for monitoring their members and their responsible use of fire arms. They are called to account in public forum if one of their members commits a crime with a gun and they risk losing their license as an approved militia if they haven’t provided specified supervision of their members.
- Ownership of specific guns would be private information held by the militia. Ballistic characteristics of each gun and ammunition markers would be made available to law enforcement agencies but specific names would not be revealed without due process and a court order. This provision is for those who fear government confiscation of guns.
- All guns manufactured or imported must be sold to a licensed militia. A U.S. gun manufacturer cannot make more guns than they sell to licensed militias. Manufacture of non-ferrous guns that are designed to avoid metal detectors would be prohibited.
- Database management and supervision would be paid for by a tax on guns and ammunition sold. The system would be revenue neutral for tax payers who do not buy guns.
- Law enforcement officers would be equipped with wands like those used in airports to detect hidden weapons without physical frisking. Guns held by non-militia members or unregistered guns would be confiscated.

By making the members of a militia accountable for crimes committed by their members—including mass shootings—with financial loss to those running the militias, we can reduce gun violence. A question that occurs to most people is what this would mean for urban gangs—wouldn’t they just apply for a militia license? Yes, they could. However, if members were caught with unregistered guns, the militia might lose its license and the right to profit from sales to its members.