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# LETTERS

## Gun Ownership and Risk

In his News & Comment article of 9 October (p. 213), Gary Taubes misrepresents me and my statements regarding the nation's most affluent anti-gun organization, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). First, I am not the National Rifle Association's (NRA's) "director of research." I am the research coordinator. Second, the NRA has not lobbied "to shut down the CDC's research program on firearm injuries." I have said taxpayers should not have to fund shoddy research and am amazed at the number of persons who feel personally threatened by that. We have filed Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, and the CDC has avoided providing us with data acquired with public funds. Third, I did not say, of the *Journal of the American Medical Association's* recent set of articles on gun control, many of which were CDC-funded or -conducted, that "none of the research is definitive." It is not even suggestive of a case for further gun laws. The major call for treating guns like cars cited recent declines in motor vehicle deaths, which no one attributes to car registration or licensing, and which pale in comparison to the decline in firearm accidents.

Some of the CDC research cited in Taubes' article continued the belief that, if you can prove access to firearms, you have proved there is a problem, even without evidence that the firearms are misused. Some of the research revealed the belief that the assertion that there is a public health problem proves each and every proposed gun restriction—however often tried and failed, or based on ignorance of ballistics—to be a good idea. I might have said that the case against gun control is all but definitive, citing the work of Gary Kleck (1) and pointing out the propensity in the CDC studies to include data that make a contrary case.

I gave Taubes detailed examples of the problems in the work of CDC and referred him to criminologists who have also reviewed the work CDC supports and found it unworthy of publication. They were not cited, nor, apparently, consulted.

**Paul H. Blackman**

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## References

1. G. Kleck, *Point Blank: Guns and Violence in America* (de Gruyter, New York, 1991).

Vital cross-cultural data, not included in Taubes' article, reveal that the mere possession of a gun does not account for its use in violent crime. For example, the two most heavily armed countries per capita, Switzerland and Israel, have much less violent crime than does the United States (1). Because of the nature of the militia in Switzerland, one out of every four households must have a fully automatic weapon in the house.

Something other than the mere availability of weapons accounts for their use in violent crime. Just what that something else might be, such as values held by groups, is of great concern, not only to criminologists who are investigating the matter, but to the public in general.

**Kenneth Kulman**

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## References

1. G. Netter, *The Social Location of Serious Crime* (McGraw-Hill, New York, 1978), pp. 118-171; J. Vaughn, "Before you reach for a gun," *Washington Post* (16 November 1987), p. A13; M. Williams, *Guns Ammo* (May 1979), p. 28.

Taubes accurately portrays the technical and political barriers to conducting firearm-related research and the efforts of public health researchers committed to the prevention of firearm-related injuries and deaths. Although the article extensively cites my work and accurately portrays the pivotal role of the Centers for Disease Control, it does not mention some individuals who have made key contributions to the field. For example, two studies attributed to me were actually led by my colleague John Henry Sloan of the Harborview Injury Prevention and Research Center in Seattle. Fred Rivara, the director of that center, and Donald Reay, Chief Medical Examiner for King County, Washington, also supported both projects and my other studies. Important work by Lois Fingerhut of the National Center for Health Statistics in Hyattsville, Maryland; Katherine Christoffel of Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago; and Roberta Lee of the University of Texas was also not cited.

The modest progress that has been made to date in this field would not have been possible without the work of these dedicated individuals.

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