



# *Eye on* Culture



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## **The Media Assault on the Second Amendment**

By David Niedrauer

When it comes to the right to bear arms – to accept personal responsibility to defend home and family – the media are far from fair and balanced.

During the first seven months of 2007, the media waged an intermittent war against the Second Amendment, using a variety of fallacious arguments to make the pitch for gun control. This *Eye on Culture* report will begin by detailing what the media reported on gun issues, and then point out essential information the media failed to mention.

### **I. The Media Assault**

A crime wave in the big cities, followed by the Virginia Tech tragedy in April, gave the media plenty of ammunition for attacking the right to bear arms. The three major broadcast networks ran at least 650 stories on gun homicides from January through July. In a manner reminiscent of Michael Moore, journalists sprinkled post-Virginia Tech news coverage with comparisons between the United States and other countries that have stricter gun control laws and less crime.

The media first broached the urban crime wave immediately following a March 9 court decision, *Parker v. District of Columbia*, which struck down D.C.'s handgun ban. ABC, NBC, CNN, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *USA Today* each ran at least one story on the crime wave between March 9 and March 29.

On the March 10 NBC *Nightly News*, anchor John Seigenthaler tried to link the crime wave and the decision: "A new study of major cities shows an alarming rise in violence ... This comes on the heels of a federal court decision striking down a gun control law in Washington, D.C., on the grounds it violated the constitutional right to bear arms." A major problem:

Seigenthaler failed to acknowledge that the D.C. gun ban was in effect while the crime wave was taking place.

Many media outlets recycled the crime wave story to bash guns again later in the year. For example, on July 8, *ABC World News Sunday* ran a piece on the crime wave, focusing on Philadelphia. ABC anchor Dan Harris laid blame for Philadelphia’s crime problem at the feet of “rural lawmakers” in Pennsylvania who support Second Amendment rights. While “rural sensibilities continue to rule the gun debate,” said reporter David Kerley, “cities like Philadelphia prepare for another night and another shooting death.”

From July 24 through July 26, CBS *Evening News* ran a three-part series called *Battle Line: Philadelphia*, which blamed guns and a shortage of government anti-poverty spending for criminal activity in the inner city. CBS quoted numerous gun control advocates like Miami Chief of Police John Timoney: “[T]here’s been no national effort to deal with this -- with the guns and the availability of guns, and any reasonable measures that have been advocated have been defeated by Congress.” CBS failed to report that police chiefs who support gun control are in the minority. A 2005 [survey](#) by the National Association of Chiefs of Police found that 93.6 percent of chiefs and sheriffs support “civilian gun ownership rights,” and 63.1 percent claimed that concealed-weapons permits reduce violent crime. Not surprisingly, the same survey reports that 93.2 percent say the news media is “not fair and balanced.”

The Virginia Tech shootings on April 16 allowed the media to accelerate massively their campaign against the Second Amendment (see table). Journalists would eventually demonstrate their willingness to smear their own country in order to promote gun control. Just as Michael Moore, in his movie *Sicko*, excoriated America’s private healthcare system by inaccurately comparing it to socialized medicine in other countries, journalists blasted America’s constitutional right to bear arms by pointing to countries that have stricter gun laws and less crime.

<b>Stories Discussing Gun Control, April 16-23</b>	
<b>News Outlet</b>	<b>Number of stories</b>
CNN	24
<i>Washington Post</i>	20
CBS News	13
ABC News	10
<i>New York Times</i>	9
MSNBC	7
NBC News	6

On the day of the Virginia Tech tragedy, Armen Keteyian of CBS *Evening News* used an anti-gun lobby’s rating as the standard by which to assess

Virginia: “[the state] recently earned a C minus rating by the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence.”

The embattled university, Keteyian asserted, has desperately fought Virginia’s “hunting culture” in order to “safeguard the student population.”

NBC anchor Brian Williams heaped praise on Britain’s gun ban on the April 17 *Nightly News*: “Britain outlawed handguns, and anyone caught with one faces a minimum prison sentence of five years. They are so opposed to guns here that not even police officers on routine patrol carry them. Now gun violence is rare.” Williams ignored several salient facts: by tradition, British “bobbies” have rarely carried firearms; Britain has a growing problem with knife violence; and other nations where gun ownership is common enjoy low rates of gun violence. For example, Switzerland, which has very low crime rates, actually issues assault rifles to all adult males for militia service. (See the next section, The Media’s Omissions, for more on the pitfalls of comparing nations.)

Two days after the Virginia Tech massacre, the *Washington Post* was also taking lines from the Michael Moore playbook, attacking not only the Second Amendment, but American foreign policy. Nations around the world, reported the *Post*, “used the university attack to condemn what they depicted as U.S. policies to arm friends, attack enemies and rely on violence rather than dialogue to settle disputes.”

The *New York Times* took aim at a target closer to home. “It is the gun lobby’s incessant efforts to weaken the gun laws that make a tragedy like the one at Virginia Tech possible,” screeched the Gray Lady in an April 26 editorial.

## II. The Media’s Omissions

In their zeal to repeal the Second Amendment, the media failed to inform their audience of at least four powerful arguments against gun control.

**1. Comparisons between countries are not useful.** Unfortunately, direct comparisons between countries based solely on crime rates and gun laws tell very little about whether gun control actually works. Social scientists believe that gun control is only one of many factors that influence rates of violence.

The National Academy of Sciences cautioned in a 2004 report, *Firearms and Violence: A Critical Review*, that, “It is difficult to gauge the value of [gun

control] measures because social and economic factors behind criminal acts are often complex and interwoven, and the efforts are narrow in scope.”<sup>1</sup>

As Brian Williams compared the U.S. and Britain to promote gun control, a pro-gun analyst could easily cherry pick countries to “prove” that gun control doesn’t work. New Zealand, with very limited gun restrictions, has an annual gun homicide rate of 0.18 per 100,000 population.<sup>2</sup> South Africa, where the Firearm Control Act of 2000 licenses firearms to virtually no one,<sup>3</sup> has a rate of 74.57.

A 1998 Library of Congress report concluded, “From available statistics, among 27 countries surveyed, it is difficult to find a correlation between the existence of strict firearms regulations and a lower incidence of gun-related crimes.”<sup>4</sup>

**2. Guns are frequently used to stop crimes.** Between January 1 and August 1, the media almost completely failed to report on an issue most relevant to the Second Amendment debate: the legitimate use of guns in self defense. To the Founding Fathers, the right to bear arms for self protection was essential if citizens were

to be truly free. Alexander Hamilton addressed the “original right of self defense” in *Federalist 28*. Under a “confederacy” that protects the right to bear arms, wrote Hamilton, “the people, without exaggeration, may be said to be entirely the masters of their own fate.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, to have the ability to accept responsibility for defending themselves, rather than having to rely exclusively on the government. Hamilton knew what he was talking about: guns are often used to stop criminals. According to a 1997

<b>Armed Self Defense Versus Armed Murder Stories, January 1-August 1, 2007</b>		
<b>Network</b>	<b>Self-Defense</b>	<b>Murder</b>
ABC	1	178
NBC	1	228
CBS	0	244

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1 Firearms and Violence: A Critical Review. Committee on Law and Justice. 2004. The National Academies Press. August 5, 2007. < <http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?isbn=0309091241> >.

2 Nationmaster.com. < [http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/cr\\_gun\\_vio\\_hom\\_fir\\_hom\\_rat\\_per\\_100\\_pop-rate-per-100-000-pop](http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/cr_gun_vio_hom_fir_hom_rat_per_100_pop-rate-per-100-000-pop) >.

3 “Gun deaths down by half in SA.” August 19, 2006. Independent Online. <[http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?art\\_id=vn20060819091008950C223116](http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?art_id=vn20060819091008950C223116)>.

4 Qutd. In NRA Fact Sheets. < <http://www.nraila.org/Issues/FactSheets/Read.aspx?ID=78> >.

5 Hamilton, Alexander. The Federalist Papers. # 28.

survey by the United States *Journal of Criminal Law*, more than 2.5 million people use a gun in self defense each year.<sup>6</sup>

This essential fact never saw the light of day in the mainstream media. From January through July, armed self defense almost never made it into the news (see table). While the three major TV networks broadcast at least 650 stories about gun homicides, CMI was able to find only two stories about guns used by citizens to defend themselves. John Stossel, anchor of ABC's *20/20*, referred to two cases of armed self defense on the May 4 show. NBC's *Today* show of April 23 featured former Miss America Venus Ramey, 82, who chased an intruder off her property with a shotgun.

The major networks also failed to mention a highly relevant incident, the 2002 shooting at the Appalachian School of Law in Grundy, Virginia. After killing three people, a gunman was forced to surrender by two armed students. Virginia Tech, in contrast, did not allow students to be armed, so nobody was able to stop Seung-Hui Cho on that fateful day in Norris Hall.

**3. Most guns used in crimes are illegally acquired.** Like it or not, banning guns only takes them out of the hands of law-abiding citizens, making it easier for people with no respect for the law to attack their victims. The National Academy of Sciences concluded in its report, *Firearms and Violence*, that only 21 percent of the guns used to commit crimes in this country are bought legally. In countries with strict gun control laws, the proportion can drop well below 10 percent.<sup>7</sup> Legally purchased guns are rarely used to commit crimes, but every time a gun ban is passed, responsible citizens lose the capacity to defend themselves and their families.

**4. Gun control laws have no proven effect.** At worst, gun control laws leave law-abiding citizens defenseless before rapacious criminals, and at best, they may not affect violence at all.

The *Firearms and Violence* study surveyed local gun control policies around the nation, including more than 80 education programs designed to prevent violence in children, but could not find any that actually reduced gun violence.

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6 Kleck G, Gertz M. "The illegitimacy of one-sided speculation: getting the defensive gun use estimate down."

*Journal of Criminal Law*. 1997;87:1446-1461. Quoted. In Kleck, Gary. August 8, 2007.

<<http://www.guncite.com/kleckjama01.html#11>>.

7 10 percent in Australia, according to the *British Journal of Criminology*. "Buyback has no effect on murder rate." October 24,

2006. *Sydney Morning Herald*. August 8, 2007. <<http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/buyback-has-no-effect-on-murder-rate/2006/10/23/1161455665717.html>>.

In Germany, with one of the strictest gun policies in the world, the percentage falls to 0.004 percent. "Germany reevaluates gun laws after school shooting." November 23, 2006. *Deutsche Welle*. August 8, 2007.

<<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,2245918,00.html>>.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention published one of the most comprehensive surveys of gun control laws ever in 2003. The survey looked at bans on firearms, restrictions on firearms, waiting periods and licensing, zero tolerance laws in schools, childhood access prevention laws and combinations of all of these. The result? “The Task Force found insufficient evidence to determine the effectiveness of any of the firearms laws or combinations of laws reviewed on violent outcomes.”<sup>8</sup>

Why do the media repeatedly make the same faulty assumptions and advance the same shopworn arguments for expensive and intrusive gun control policies that have no proven effect on crime, and render law-abiding citizens helpless to defend themselves?

In a word, ideology. The argument for gun control has always been based more on utopian visions than empirical facts. That, and the left simply does not trust an armed citizenry.

The media’s incessant attacks on the Second Amendment demonstrate clearly their liberal bias against gun ownership.

*David Niedrauer recently completed an internship at the Culture and Media Institute.*

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<sup>8</sup> “First Reports Evaluating the Effectiveness of Strategies for Preventing Violence: Firearms Laws.” Findings from the Task Force on Community Preventive Services. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. 3 Oct. 2003. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 8 Aug. 2007. <<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5214a2.htm>>.