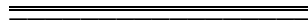


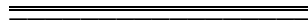
**The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



**Gun Control – Outreach vs Legislation**



**A Leadership White Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Required for Graduation from the  
Leadership Command College**



**By  
Frank Hart**

**Deer Park Police Department  
Deer Park, Texas  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This study compared the effectiveness of community outreach programs combined with community education to the effects of strict gun control legislation in the reduction of violent crime. The reduction of violent crime in society is an important topic in any civilized society and is a necessary function of any community. A community outreach program in conjunction with targeting areas with a high violent crime outbreak can be a far greater tool in the reduction of violent crime than additional or over restrictive gun legislation. In contrast, the implementation of emotion-based legislation that targets gun ownership tends to create a spike in violent crime (Agresti & Smith, 2016). The research used in this study indicates that there is a distinct and measurable reduction of violent crime in areas where well designed and strictly applied community outreach programs are implemented (Steihm, Nadeau, & Johnson, 2015). Violent criminal acts have influenced societies throughout history and it is likely that this will continue into the foreseeable future. It is imperative that communities take the most historically effective and reasonable approach to the reduction of violent crime which includes gun violence. This research exposes several community outreach programs that when implemented correctly, drastically improved the violent crime rate for the targeted area. The research also highlights several gun control measures that failed to reduce violent crime.

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## INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement agencies, both local and state, should increase their community outreach and community training to reduce gun violence. The training and outreach programs should be developed and implemented in lieu of creating additional gun control legislation. The lack of formal and continued firearm safety training that is provided to the public, especially the youth, is unacceptable. Currently, across the country, law enforcement organizations conduct training in identity theft, burglary prevention, and bicycle safety, to name a few. These programs were all designed to influence the community by reducing crime or injuries in their respective areas. The attempt to reduce gun violence should be treated in the same manner.

In a populated society where residents live in close proximity, violence toward others due to dissimilar ideas have and will always be present. The concept of societies solving their differences with violence is not a new issue and dates back 9,500 to 10,500 years ago (Lahr, 2016). Lahr (2016) discovered that the fossilized bodies of a group of approximately 27 hunter-gatherers, including at least eight women and six children, near Nataruk, Africa. The victims of this brutal killing were found to have extreme blunt force trauma to their head, broken knees, and stone projectiles lodged in some of their skulls (Lahr, 2016). This violent scene was described like the scenes of a recent active shooter event, except that this event took place long before the invention of a firearm. This example helps to show that humans have been engaging in violent acts for many years and without the means to protect themselves from attack, the victims were destined to perish.

Predators, who choose to prey on communities, have been identified throughout history and currently live within society. This is not likely to change in our near future; the difference between the hunter-gatherers from Nataruk and the current society is the invention and common possession of the firearm. Although some still fall prey to people who live a life of crime and choose to promote themselves through violence, there are the means and capability of individual protection. Prior to the invention of the firearm, the farmer, hunter-gatherer, or common laborer were unskilled in the art of combat and had no viable way to protect their family or property.

The solution to reducing the number of violent and fatal encounters does not lie with creating more legislation to reduce or remove one item from the population's inventory but in furthering the education to the community and creating outreach programs to target high crime areas. It is nearly impossible to remove all violent acts from society, but with the proper education and outreach, many of the acts occurring in society can be avoided. Many assaults, murders, and even wars were fought prior to the invention of the gun. The gun is merely a tool, no different from a hammer, vehicle, knife or shovel. Each of these items have a purpose ranging from driving a nail to digging soil, however, if used improperly, it could be the device used to cause harm or even death. The excessive restriction or removal of guns will not eliminate murders, mass killings, or war; it simply transfers the tool used to commit these acts and restricts innocent people from defending themselves.

## **POSITION**

Research shows that public outreach programs can be successfully used in high crime areas to reduce crime, specifically violent crime, and will significantly reduce

crimes involving gun violence (Braga, 2001 as cited in Koper, Woods, and Isom, 2015). Boston developed a similar take on prevention with the pulling levers program that was implemented in their high crime areas (Braga, 2001 as cited in Koper, Woods, and Isom, 2015). This study indicated that the community outreach program that was implemented in Boston showed a 63% reduction in youth homicides while also reducing the number of shots fired calls in addition to the reduction of firearm related assaults. This is a very impressive study that shows the crime prevention potential of a well-designed and properly managed community outreach program.

Additional research reported that targeted policing proved to reduce serious crime in high crime areas (Rosenfeld, 2014). Rosenfeld (2014) studied the effects of directed patrol or targeted policing was reviewed in a high crime area. The study specifically targeted 32 firearm violence hot spots for nine months. During this study, the research suggested that there was a substantial reduction in non-domestic firearm assaults (Rosenfeld, 2014).

In modern law enforcement practices, many of the crime prevention strategies have been categorized into the community policing or problem oriented policing category. These two terms eventually merged into one philosophy that was termed *community policing* (Gains & Kappeler, 2011). Another example was at the Columbia Heights Police Department that also implemented a crime prevention program in 2008. A later study showed that crime was reduced in excess of 50% in violent cases as well as in property crimes (M Steihm et al, 2015). This is just another example of a community using the existing legislation and crime prevention strategies to reduce the crime rate and improve the quality of life for the residents.

Community policing efforts have shown to reduce the number of violent criminal events within a specific area and should be implemented anywhere high crime, or violent crime exists (Rosenfield et al, 2014). Many communities use Public Service Announcements, Youtube videos, as well as Facebook posts to inform their communities about crime prevention and safety. These tools should also be used to address our communities with valuable information regarding gun safety and gun violence prevention.

Another avenue to reduce gun violence without creating additional legislation is through youth gun safety education. Many programs exist that target the youth of our community in an attempt to reduce the number of accidental gun incidents. Some of the available programs include free safety literature, explorer programs and gun safety training provided by the National Rifle Association (NRA). All of the leading firearm manufacturers offer free literature on gun safety. This safety literature can be downloaded directly from the gun manufacturer's website, and in many instances, the material can be requested and mailed directly to the requesting party. In addition to gun safety literature, the NRA also developed an explorer program targeted at assisting the community with children's safety. This program is offered free of charge and targets children Pre-K through fourth grade. The National Rifle Association will provide learning material for this course free of charge (<https://eddieeagle.nra.org/program-resources/program-materials/>). There are many applications for this training, including vacation safety schools, primary education facilities or community meetings. Teaching children basic gun avoidance and safety techniques is the first step in reducing accidental gun deaths. Additional gun legislation will not stop a child from accidentally

being exposed to a firearm, nor will it prevent them from accidentally discharging it. Education and responsibility are the only preventative measures that will reduce this type of action.

Additional steps can also be taken to reduce the number of adult accidental shootings. For example, a childproof safety lock and a manufactured load indicator could reduce the number of unintentional gun deaths as reported in the following quote, “The U.S. General Accounting Officer has estimated that 31% of unintentional deaths caused by firearms might be prevented by the addition of two devices: a child-proof safety lock (8%) and a loading indicator (23%)” (as cited in Statistics on Gun Deaths & Injuries, n.d, para. 23). The article estimated that there were approximately 606 accidental gun related deaths in 2012. All of the accidental deaths listed could have been prevented with the proper education, training and safety measures were administered (Law Center to prevent gun violence, 2012)

## **COUNTER POSITION**

There are several arguments suggesting that more legislation is needed to reduce the number of gun related crimes within the community. In 2014, there were 8,124 firearm related murders reported in the United States (Uniform Crime Report 2014). Many citizens fear that they will become victimized by a violent gun-yielding criminal and push to establish further gun legislation to control the perceived problem. (“Background of the issue,” 2016). One article stated, “Proponents of more gun control often want more laws to try to prevent the mass shootings and call for smart gun laws, background checks, and more protections against the mentally ill buying guns” (para. 2). Gun control advocates further feel that by reducing the number of available guns,



the total number of violent crimes where a firearm is used will also be reduced, a theory from Professor Zimring who believes that gun control laws can reduce the rate of homicide by simply reducing the available gun resource (Stell, 2004). Many pro-gun control activists stemmed from a catastrophic event that occurred in their history. Each major event that occurs within the community sculpts the perceptions and beliefs of those affected by the event and usually creates additional legislation. This is seen when the State of Maryland pushed legislation banning assault weapons following the sniper shootings in 2002 (Davis, 2013). The article also quoted Vincent DeMarco (President of the Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence, who said “The guns that killed so many people in the Aurora movie house, that wounded congressman [Gabrielle] Giffords, these weapons need to be banned” (Davis, 2013). Some legislation targets the time a citizen must wait prior to purchasing a firearm. This method of gun legislation is based on a theory that an unarmed citizen who intends to commit murder will be deterred from the violence by waiting for a pre-determined period before his firearm purchase is finalized.

Many methods of gun legislation target a wide approach, based on emotion but this fails to accurately target the source of the problem. For example, the legislation that was passed in Maryland, as mentioned above, specifically targeted weapon manufacturers by brand (Maryland general assembly §5-101 (r) (2) (xi), 2013). Maryland passed a law banning over 40 different weapon manufacturers and types and after reviewing the statistics that monitor gun violence, there have been no significant variations in the number of incidents involving gun violence since the legislation was passed. After reviewing the statistics provided by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in

the Uniform Crime Report (UCR), it shows that the State of Maryland reported 365 total murders in 2012, with 277 caused by a firearm. Year 2013 showed an increase to the total murders, 397 with a decrease to 268 with a firearm. In 2014, there was a decrease of both to 309 murders with 208 being from a firearm. It should also be noted that the State of Maryland reports that, on average, there are approximately 635 ("Highway Safety Data", n.d.) people killed in automobile accidents per year, nearly twice the amount killed with a firearm ("Highway Safety Data", n.d.). The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found that approximately 32,675 people were killed in motor vehicle crashes in 2014 (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, n.d.). The study further stated that there were approximately 15.26 motor vehicle fatalities per 100,000 drivers.

The population of the United States was estimated to be 318,700,000 in 2014 (United States Census Bureau, 2014). With approximately 11,961 murders committed with a firearm, that is approximately 3.76 firearm murders per 100,000 residents (Uniform Crime Report, 2014). The statistics show that a resident in the United States who operates a motor vehicle is over three times more likely to die in a motor vehicle crash than by murder with a firearm.

Other counter arguments call for a total ban of all firearms in an attempt to reduce the violent crime rate. Advocates for this type of action usually also facilitate gun buy-back programs as the first step of their action. A gun buy-back program is where the government or independent groups, purchases guns back from the citizens and have them destroyed, reducing the number of firearms in the community. One proponent of this process is Jessica Mindich, who fully finances gun buy-back programs

within her community (Mindich, 2016). Mindich predicts that she will remove approximately 500 firearms from the community during her upcoming program. Many gun control advocates use the gun buy-back programs as a way to mobilize a community to look at gun control (Wogan, March 2013). Many, like Jessica Mindich and Vincent DeMarco, believe that by banning or systematically removing all or part of the firearm supply, the violent crime rate including homicide will be reduced. Statistics have shown that criminals who routinely violate the law typically do not abide by the current gun laws or voluntarily turn in their guns regardless of the benefit. This point was demonstrated during a study in Seattle and Sacramento when the typical person who was turning in their gun did not statistically resemble the gun population who were committing crimes (Wogan, 2013). Gun control legislation is typical of most of the written law of this country in that it generally only affects and restricts the law-abiding citizen and has little to no effect on the criminal element.

Heavy restriction or banning of firearms does not reduce the violent crime rate, but in most cases causes a significant increase (Just Facts, 2016). In 1976, Washington D.C. passed legislation banning all handguns and significantly restricted the possession of firearms on private property. This law was found to be unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court in 2008. During the time the ban was in place, the murder rate in Washington D.C. was approximately 73% higher than before the ban was implemented. This rate was also 11% higher than the national average (Agresti & Smith, 2016).

## RECOMMENDATION

Communities, law enforcement agencies, and legislators should look to reduce violent offenses involving a firearm through community outreach programs and targeted enforcement practices and stop relying on additional legislation to reduce weapon related crimes. Time after time, politicians and lawmakers use emotion-based legislation, attempting to reduce or stop criminal behavior with little to no success. The process of emotion-based legislation continues to fail, resulting in additional crime and typically results in a spike in violent crime (Agresti, 2016). Additional legislation is not the answer to reducing violent crime.

To reduce any type of crime, including violent crime, communities must first make it a priority and work together with law enforcement to develop viable solutions that uses current legislation to develop lasting relationships with the community. It has been proven that strict gun legislation and gun buy-back programs generally have little to no effect on violent crime (Wogan, March 2013). However, Braga (2001) noted that many community programs were shown to reduce gun violence in targeted areas (as cited in Koper, Woods, and Isom, 2015). Braga (2001) stated that the Pulling Levers program, initiated in Boston, showed a 63% decrease in violent crime in St. Louis. (Koper et al, 2015). It has also been proven repeatedly that directed patrol or targeted policing has been effective in the reduction of violent crime in high crime areas (Rosenfield et al 2014). Law enforcement professionals have historically used crime prevention strategies throughout the nation to reduce crime, and the same process should be used to reduce gun violence. Social media, public safety announcements, and other digital media should be used to promote gun safety and inform the public on

proper firearm safety. This process could also be implemented in police to citizen training, where firearm experts could teach the general population on the proper techniques when handling weapons, and the consequences of poor gun safety actions. Similar programs could be extended to community youths, to reduce firearm accidents. Many programs are available, free of charge, to assist the community with firearm safety. The National Shooting Sports Foundation offers free safety literature as well as safety videos that can be used to assist communities with firearm safety instruction (<http://www.nssf.org>). This free training should be introduced to primary education facilities in the same manner as the stranger danger education, fire drills, or any other safety related lessons taught to children. This research detailed many opportunities to adopt and implement programs that could have a positive impact on violent crime and improve the quality of life for the community.

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