



California's Gun Control Data Deception

California Politicians and Gun Control Activists Misrepresent Data to Promote a False Narrative to Falsely Claim Gun Control Laws Are Working

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ABOUT NOTME CA

The #NotMeCA Movement is a local initiative to stop sexual assault and end domestic violence. The sad reality is that the prevalence of these crimes is increasing. As part of an effort to end this crisis, NotMeCA is providing assistance for any woman involved in the NotMe program. NotMeCa.org

ABOUT THE TRANSPARENCY FOUNDATION

The Transparency Foundation is a 501c3 nonprofit, nonpartisan organization committed to making public institutions more transparent and accountable to the people they serve. TheTransparencyFoundation.org



What California Politicians Claim

- In June 2023, California Governor Gavin Newsom proposed to amend the US Constitution to limit the rights of Americans to self-defense under the 2nd Amendment. Newsom claimed that California, which has the most stringent gun control laws of any state in the union, was proof that **“gun control laws work.”**
- In August 2023, California State Attorney General Rob Bonta released an “Office of Gun Violence Prevent Data Report,” claiming that California’s “commonsense” anti-gun posture makes it a “leader in adopting new legislation and violence prevention programs that **bolster safety and substantially reduce gun violence over the long-term.**”
- For years, the anti-gun Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence (Giffords) has issued an **“Annual Gun Law Scorecard”** that it repeatedly claims **“shows states with strong gun laws see less gun violence”**
- In November 2023, Giffords also issued a report claiming that “California Has Built a Lifesaving Gun Safety Model for the Nation” that produced **“real and record-breaking results in reducing gun violence”** —while fawning over its partnership with Governor Gavin Newsom.

Unfortunately, California’s liberal media outlets parroted these claims of California politicians – and blindly promoted the Giffords rankings – without any analysis of whether the claims were true. In fact, members of the public are repeatedly told that California’s gun control laws work by the state’s politicians and media outlets.

These Claims Are Completely Unsubstantiated

The sweeping statements made by the California Governor, the Attorney General, and the Giffords are not only unsubstantiated, but thorough yet simple analysis suggest there is **absolutely no correlation between gun control laws and reduction in crime and violence.**

Specifically, Giffords is intentionally misrepresenting data and promoting a false narrative to promote flawed gun control policies that infringe on constitutional rights while making the public less safe.

“

There is absolutely no correlation between gun control laws and reduction in crime and violence.

”

Exposing Giffords' Corrupted Ranking Methodology

Media outlets love to run stories on the latest “ranking” study being released. In many cases, the ranking is based on concrete data sets that are irrefutable – e.g. “Cities with the highest divorce rate” and “States with the cheapest gas.” But in other cases the ranking studies make less data-driven or concrete claims like “Safest cities” or even “Happiest Cities.”

Before promoting a ranking, it is crucial to examine the underlying methodology that produced the ranking. What data is being used? Is the data credible and consistent across the comparison groups? What other factors could explain the differences in the comparison groups?

Knowing that the media likes rankings, Giffords has concocted its “**Annual Gun Law Scorecard.**”

Yet even a casual review of the Gifford ranking scheme exposes the rotten methodology it is based on.

For example, New Hampshire, with its “D-“ grade, has a lower gun death rate than “A-“ states like Illinois, Oregon and Washington, while “F”-rated Texas has a lower gun death rate than “A-“ Colorado.

The failure of Giffords’ statistical nonsense is even more obvious by simply comparing Massachusetts and New Hampshire, neighboring states that are polar opposites in terms of gun laws. Yet somehow, both states have among the lowest amount of firearms-related crime in the US, and overall violent crime in New Hampshire—which has minimal firearms restrictions—is half that of Massachusetts.

But more than a casual review of Giffords’ rankings is needed to expose the corrupt nature of their methodology. In fact, the data exposes three falsehoods embedded within the Giffords methodology.

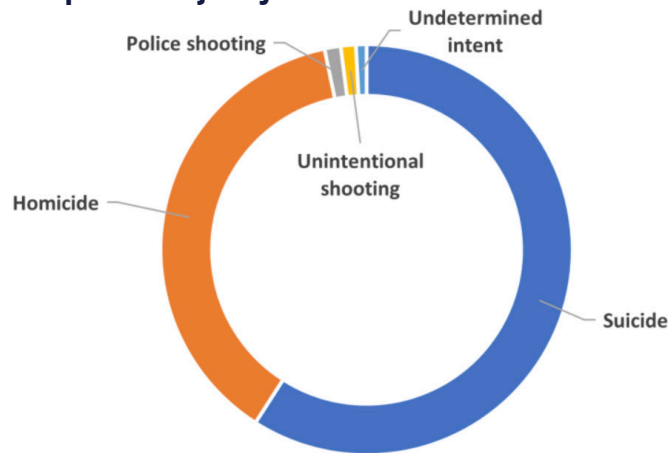
Deception 1: Faulty Definition of “Gun Violence”

The public is primarily concerned about criminals or deranged lunatics using a gun to harm *others*. Despite this, Giffords contaminates its data by incorporating suicides into an overall definition of “gun deaths” versus “gun-related violent crimes.”

- **58%** of gun deaths are related only to suicide.
- A comparison of datasets suggests that ***no more than 6% of firearms-related crime results in homicide***
- And firearms-related crime typically accounts for ***no more than a third of all violent crime***
- This begs a critical question: why is Giffords exclusively focussed on “gun deaths”?

“Giffords contaminates “Annual Gun Law Scorecard” by incorporating suicides into an overall definition of “gun deaths” versus “gun-related violent crimes” – which it completely ignores.”

EXHIBIT 1: Suicides make up the majority of firearms deaths

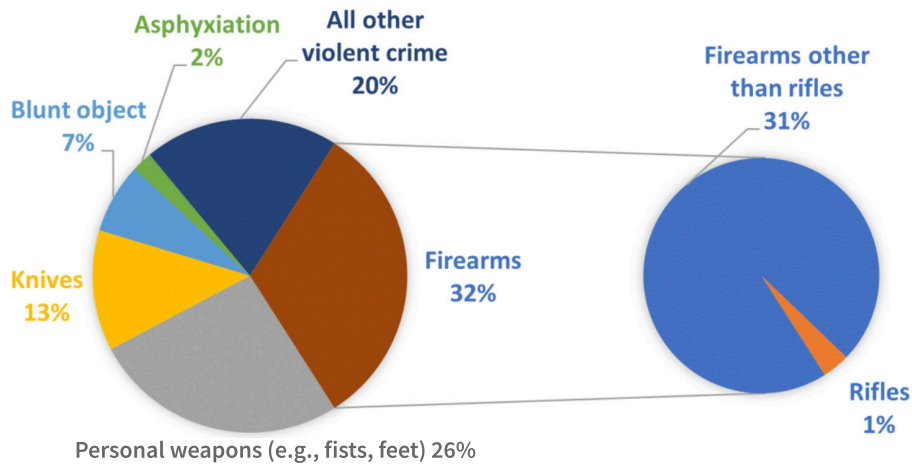


Source: Centers for Disease Control

Let’s examine the national crime data from the FBI¹ and the CDC data used by Giffords. The FBI dataset breaks out firearms as a share of total crime (as well as non-firearm related crime), while the CDC shows total deaths related to firearms. The FBI crime statistics represent a degree of under-reporting (see footnote), but nevertheless provide important insights.

The FBI data reveals geographic variation in crime: across the 50 states and DC, firearm-based violent crime ranges from 5% (North Dakota) to 47% (Tennessee), with a median of just over 27%. In aggregate, firearms are used in only about 32% of all violent crimes nationally, according to the FBI. Of that 32%, rifles are a very small segment. This is so small that out of all violent crimes in the FBI database, just 1% of the total involved rifles, compared to 26% with “personal weapons” (e.g., hands and feet), 13% with knives and 7% with blunt objects. (see Exhibit 2).

EXHIBIT 2: Firearms, and especially rifles, are involved in just a small share of violent crime

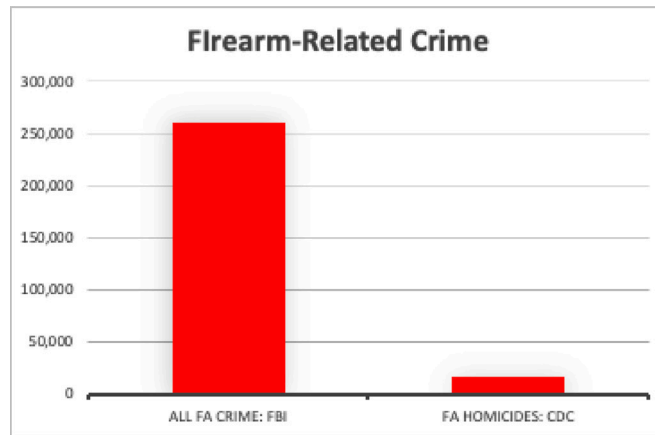


Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation

Meanwhile, as noted above, the CDC data makes clear that most “gun violence”--which in Giffords’ world only means “gun-related deaths”-- is comprised of suicides. More specifically, Giffords’ data representation of the CDC data states that 59% of gun deaths arise from suicides. (Our more recent extraction from the CDC data produced a figure of 58%.)

Finally, now that we’ve placed violent crime and firearm-related deaths in proper proportional context we can display **non-suicide, intentional firearms-related deaths (aka homicides) to all firearms-related crimes.**

EXHIBIT 3: Homicide is a small proportion of firearm-related violent crime



Sources: Federal Bureau of Investigation, CDC

What this clearly shows—and remember that the FBI crimes statistics are somewhat under-reported—is that only a tiny fraction of firearms-related violent crimes actually result in death.

Let’s express this yet another way. The total number of firearms related deaths reported by Giffords via the CDC data for 2021, including suicides—42,653—is slightly less than the 42,915 automobile fatalities for the same year as reported by the National Highway Safety Administration (which includes some suicides as well)². The number of firearm-related homicides, then, at 16,651, is 39% of traffic fatalities.

Now, any kind of violent crime—whether involving firearms, knives, personal weapons, etc—can leave in its wake injury or serious emotional trauma. It is unquestionably a societal problem, as we would all be better off with less crime. But this begs a larger question: why does Giffords completely ignore the larger issue of crime, and focus solely on deaths? Is it because, as we point out, firearms-related crime typically comprises no more than a third of violent crime? Is it because deaths better sell the narrative of a crisis? And is that why Giffords tries so hard to inflate that number with suicides?

The problem, plain and simple, is crime, not guns.

Deception 2: Ignoring Data on How Guns Save Lives

Giffords pretends that guns can only be used for harm – and completely ignores any data showing how guns prevent crime or save lives. By excluding the positive data and only incorporating the negative data, the Giffords methodology is fundamentally corrupted from the get-go.

According to a Georgetown University academic study, “guns are used defensively by firearms owners in approximately 1.67 million incidents per year...and in most defensive incidents no shot was fired.” That total exceeds by about five-fold the number of violent crimes associated with a firearm.³

None of these incidents are included in the Giffords methodology to “balance out” any inappropriate and unlawful use of guns in violent crimes.

But the data is worth repeating, because based on the Georgetown study, **defensive firearm uses outnumber firearm homicides by a factor of 100 to 1:**

- 1,670,000 defensive firearm uses, versus
- 42,653 gun deaths (including suicides) – of which, only 16,651 are homicides

Murder is a crime, carrying very severe punishment upon conviction. Does anyone believe that outlawing guns will stop criminals from committing murder? But banning guns would clearly deprive millions of law-abiding citizens of their right to self-defense.

Deception 3: Cherry-Picked Data and Misleading Comparisons

Giffords claims its ranking methodology proves that gun control works, yet some simple observations and deeper analysis of Giffords’ own data disproves this conclusion:

- Some states with poor Giffords gun law rankings—such as South Dakota or New Hampshire—have lower crime rates than A-ranked California or A- ranked Illinois.
- Giffords most recent rankings completely ignore violent crime, which shows a recent rise in California despite a long term decline nationally.⁴
- The share of violent crime associated with a firearm ranges from 5% to 47%, a range set by two states—North Dakota and Tennessee— that are each scored “F” by Giffords.

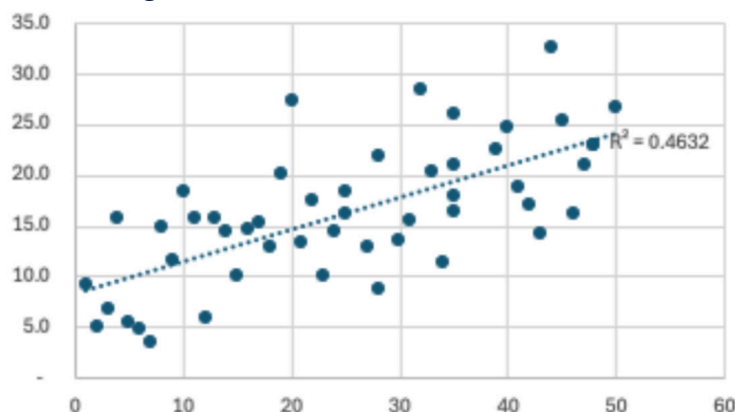
Of course, the very mention of a state like Illinois in this context will suggest to any reasonable observer that something is awry in Gifford’s analysis: Illinois may have lots of progressive anti-gun legislation, but it also has lots of violence in its largest cities. How then, does antigun legislation work to promote “public safety” and reduce crime in Chicago?

- The District of Columbia—which interestingly does not appear in the Gifford rankings--has very restrictive gun laws, but has one of the highest rates of gun use in violent crime at 44%. Including the District of Columbia in the dataset would have immediately demolished Giffords’ false narratives – which we suspect is exactly why they exclude the District of Columbia from their rankings!
- Giffords bashes Alabama and Mississippi. These southern states that tend to respect gun laws are given low marks by Giffords for high gun death rates. Yet a closer look at the data for these states shows that many of their gun deaths are concentrated in a handful of counties – suggesting statewide laws are not driving the outcomes, but rather socio-economic conditions within these specific areas.
- Two states that have among the lowest rates of firearm-related crime are Vermont (14%) and New Hampshire (16%), which essentially have no gun laws, but share a similar rate to their extremely gun-restrictive neighbor, Massachusetts.

In addition to these simple observations, let’s take a deeper dive into data used by Giffords to expose the illegitimacy of their rankings.

First is a scatterplot displaying each state by its firearm-related death rate per 100,000 from all causes (y axis) plotted against its Giffords ranking (1 to 50, X axis):

EXHIBIT 4: Giffords’ State Rankings vs. All Firearms Deaths

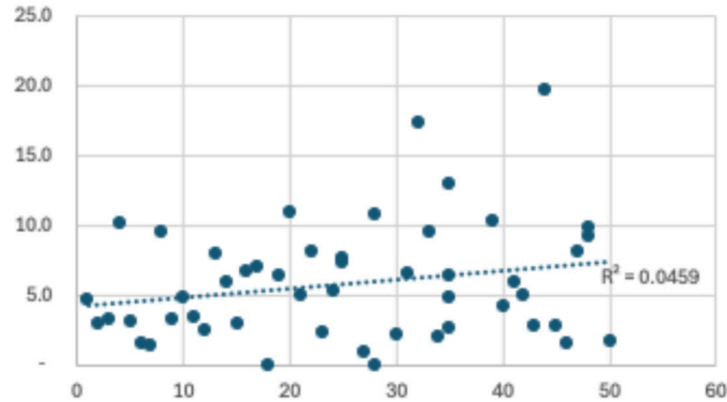


Sources: Giffords and Centers for Disease Control

This at first glance appears to show what is at best a mild statistical correlation (R^2) of .46, but the “all firearm death” rate is nearly two-thirds comprised of suicides!

When we run the same scatterplot but eliminate suicides and consider only homicides, the result is starkly different:

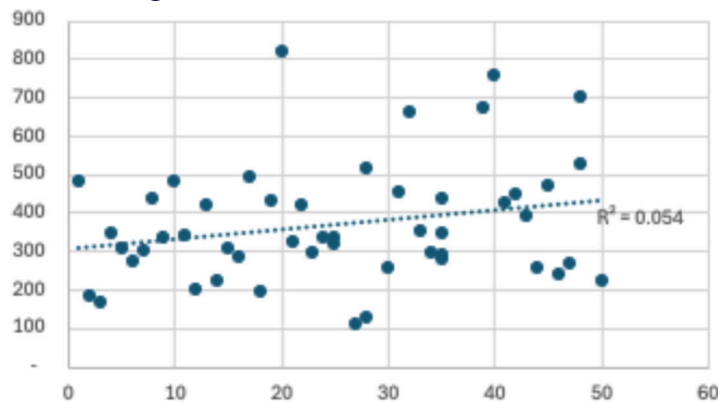
EXHIBIT 5: Giffords’ State Rankings vs. Firearms Homicide Rate



Sources: Giffords and Centers for Disease Control

Without suicides, the correlation basically disappears—an R^2 of 0.046 is statistically meaningless. It’s so meaningless that running the same scatterplot a third time against all violent crime—of which less than a third is firearm related—actually produces a slightly better if still statistically meaningless R^2 of 0.054:

EXHIBIT 6: Giffords’ State Rankings vs. All Violent Crime



Sources: Giffords, Federal Bureau of Investigation

Digging further into the data and the irrationality of the Giffords scoring system, the absence of the District of Columbia mentioned earlier is notable because it would further throw off their rankings. While Giffords does not publish a ranking for the District of Columbia, based on the restrictive gun laws in place in DC compared to states that score very well in Giffords rankings, DC likely would score no worse than a “B+” under Gifford’s system, but more likely an “A” like California. For the sake of discussion, we’re choosing to assume that DC’s gun restrictions would get it an A- from Giffords, similar to Maryland but “better” than Virginia (i.e., through the lens of gun-grabbers) because modern sporting rifles are legal in B+ Virginia but not in the District of Columbia.

This approach implies a “Giffords Rank” of 10 for the District of Columbia, similar to A- states (though again, DC’s slate of anti-gun laws very well could rank closer to 1 in the Giffords world). Nevertheless, even at a rank of 10, the correlations between Giffords’ ranking of gun laws versus various death and violence outcomes completely disappears.

First, the correlation between Giffords drops dramatically just from the inclusion of the District of Columbia, to 0.38 from .46.

Next, we remove suicides to focus on Giffords' rankings versus firearm homicide rates, but include the District of Columbia in the analysis. The non-existent correlation when DC was excluded (.0459) essentially becomes zero with the inclusion of the District of Columbia, with a correlation of 0.0074 (essentially randomness).

Finally, we apply the same approach to violent crime, and including the District of Columbia takes an incredibly weak correlation (.054) between Giffords rankings and violent crime rates, and makes it even less significant, with an R-squared falling to 0.0162.

Clearly, in all cases, the exclusion of the District of Columbia from their "state rankings" allows Giffords to ignore a very inconvenient data point for their already-weak argument. The District of Columbia features numerous Constitutionally abhorrent gun restrictions, and yet boasts high levels of violent crime and high rates of firearm homicides.

Deception 4: Falsely Claiming Gun Control Laws Reduce Violence

The Giffords rankings are designed to advance gun control laws. Yet a simple analysis of the specific gun control laws they propose demonstrates there is little to no connection between the proposed gun control and gun-related crime.

Two of the most commonly-touted gun control measures are a ban on "assault weapons" and a ban on high-capacity magazines.

First, the fact that nearly 60% of firearms-related deaths comprise suicides completely undercuts any argument for banning so-called "high capacity" magazines. Does that 11th or 30th round in the magazine really make a difference?

Let us note that the "high capacity" magazine issue is itself a masterpiece of misdirection by mis-definition. A 15-17 round magazine for a semi-automatic pistol is a **standard capacity** magazine and has been so since John Browning's groundbreaking Hi Power 9 mm pistol, which was designed in 1927 with a 16 round magazine. The Hi Power went on to be the model for the modern generation of semiautomatics. Similarly, the 30-round magazine for the 1960s era AR-15 is its original design standard, which was itself established a generation earlier by the WWII era M-1 carbine (with a 30 caliber round, larger than the AR-15's 22 caliber⁵). The M-1 was subsequently standardized with a 30-round magazine by the US military. Military surplus M1s were widely available to US citizens in the early 1960s.⁶ By the way, leftist icons Patty Hearst, Malcom X, and Angela Davis each had one.



Source: 30 caliber M-1 carbines in the 1969 Sears Hunting catalog

We must pause at this point to emphasize the accurate description of the firearms mentioned above as “semiautomatic”, where one trigger pull fires one shot. The 16,⁷ the military version of the AR-15, looks the same but is an automatic firearm, producing multiple shots with a single trigger pull.

Of course, the data also pours cold water on the “assault weapons” hysteria. The FBI crime data revealing that less than 1% of violent crimes involve rifles of any sort shows that the “assault weapons” hype is another made-up bit of misdirection. The Giffords report claims a victory in outlawing what it emotionally terms 50 caliber “sniper rifles,” but these enormously heavy and unwieldy instruments are used in how many crimes, or suicides exactly? The physical contortion needed to commit suicide with a Barrett 50-caliber rifle is dramatic, if not impossible for most human bodies.

Giffords makes a similar emotional appeal against “armor piercing” ammunition.⁸ However, we again confront that this ammunition is limited to rifles—simply because handguns are much less powerful and lower in velocity—and we know that rifles aren’t involved in crimes often at all.

Giffords also claims that its policies promote safety in firearms manufacture. Nonsense. Firearms are precision instruments, and if they are not manufactured to a high standard they don’t work. California – which is infamous for finding carcinogens and dangers everywhere—has nothing useful to add here, and its “standards” are simply designed to harass manufacturers and citizens.

Finally, both the Giffords and State DOJ reports claim false credit for actions beyond California, such as the infamous 1995 assault weapons ban that has been shown to have no demonstrable effect, or the restrictions on automatic weapons from the 1984 act. Not only can these organizations not demonstrate causality, but even limited further research reveals that much anti-gun legislation may well be counterproductive. The 1995 assault weapons ban has been repeatedly analyzed, and the US DOJ’s own RAND study, recently updated, found “inconclusive evidence for the effect of assault weapon bans on mass shootings.”

FBI crime statistics make abundantly clear that semi-automatic rifles such as the AR-15 (which the anti-gunners inappropriately label as “assault weapons”) are **not** commonly used during violent crimes. In fact, FBI data show that nationally, rifles of all types are typically used in only 4% of violent crimes associated with firearms. Since the national median for use of firearms in all violent crime is only 27%, **rifles only appear in 1% of all violent crime.** Despite the anti-gunners’ claims to the contrary, and despite repeated study,⁹ there is no evidence that “assault weapons” bans reduce gun violence. Anti-gunners politically capitalize on horrific events such as school shootings by blaming modern sporting rifles but studiously ignore the potential roles of “gun-free zones,” dysfunctional families, and heavy use of antidepressants for young males.

A 2020 Criminology & Public Policy paper similarly found no correlation to the incidence of mass shootings.¹⁰ More damning, however, is the data that shows that 82% of mass shootings from 1998 through 2023 occur in “gun free zones,” a favorite progressive policy goal that makes about as much sense as “defunding the police.” The same analysis found that—Giffords claims to the contrary—California’s rate of mass shootings per capita is much higher than the rate for the rest of the country:

*“Since 2000, California’s rate is 0.33 per million, and for the rest of the US, it was 0.25. Since 2010, California’s rate is 0.28 per million and 0.15 for the rest of the US. Since 2020, it has been 0.13 for California and 0.05 for the rest of the US.”*¹¹

Giffords makes no attempt at any logical argument as to why restrictions on inanimate objects reduce

deaths—because they can't. Their assertion that strict gun laws somehow cause lower gun deaths does not pass basic scrutiny: how does a ban on standard-capacity magazines in any way prevent suicides?

Deception 5: Ignoring the Rise of Guns to Protect Politicians and Within Government Agencies

Gun grabbing advocates like Giffords and many politicians seems to be very selective when it comes to which individuals should have their gun rights restricted.

When it comes to their own security, for example, California politicians are very much in favor of guns. The California Highway Patrol (using guns) provides “dignitary protection” to officials such as the Governor, First Lady, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, State Treasurer, State Controller, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and State Insurance Commissioner. Visitors wishing to gain access to the state’s Capitol building are required to submit to an extensive security screening overseen by security teams that include armed staff.

Do prominent billionaires and politicians, such as Michael Bloomberg (who famously sponsors the Everytown USA antigun group) or George and Alexander Soros go anywhere without armed guards?

In a 2020 Fox News townhall, a Virginia resident asked Michael Bloomberg:

“How do you justify pushing for more gun control when you have an armed security detail that is likely equipped with the same firearms and magazines you seek to ban the common citizen from owning? Does your life matter more than mine or my family’s or these people’s?”

Bloomberg’s answer was revealing: yes, his life is more valuable than yours.

“Look, I probably get 40 or 50 threats every week, OK, and some of them are real. That just happens when you’re the mayor of New York City or you’re very wealthy and if you’re campaigning for president of the United States,” Bloomberg replied. “You get lots of threats. So, I have a security detail, I pay for it all myself, and . . . they’re all retired police officers who are very well trained in firearms”¹²

In other words, quite simply, Bloomberg is rich and famous and important, and John Q citizen is not. So, he gets to enjoy protection using firearms—because they are so effective-- and John Q Citizen does not. Because Bloomberg “supports every single active effort to restrict gun ownership that exists”¹³

Giffords celebrates any and all attempts to restrict the availability of firearms to citizens through regulatory creep, which incrementally makes civilian firearm ownership more and more difficult. But Giffords is silent when it comes to the massive arming of the Federal bureaucracy with military weaponry that began in the Obama administration and which, by 2016, resulted in more militarily-armed bureaucrats than there are US Marines.¹⁴

The agencies that have armed themselves include—unbelievably—the EPA, the VA, the IRS, the Animal Plant Inspection and Health Service, the Smithsonian, the U.S. Mint, the Small Business Administration,

the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, and even the Social Security Administration. These are among 67 agencies unaffiliated with the Defense Department that [OpenTheBooks.com](https://www.openthebooks.com) found have spent money to arm themselves in one way or another. As former senator Tom Coburn wrote in a Wall Street Journal op ed piece, why does the IRS need to arm itself?

Giffords and their ilk want to deny US citizens their Second Amendment rights, full stop. That they are oblivious to the Federal bureaucracy arming itself—presumably against that same citizenry—is ample evidence of their unconstitutional intent and their hypocrisy.

Hold Politicians Accountable for Data Integrity

There will always be public policy disagreements as individuals have a wide range of views on many things. However, the public should not tolerate misinformation being promoted by elected officials as we can see in the current use of deceptive data surrounding gun control.

The Giffords “**Annual Gun Law Scorecard**” is based on data misrepresentations, falsehoods, cherry-picked comparisons, and excludes a wide-range of data that would reflect positively on individual safety from our 2nd Amendment right to self defense. Until those deficiencies are corrected, no one should take anything said from Giffords as credible.

Appendix

1. The FBI began collecting very detailed data on the type of weapon used in violent crime of crime in 2021, but the jurisdictional reporting was low (55% but check this). This improved in 2022, but some states and large cities are still underreporting, so the counts overall still represent an underestimate
2. <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/legal/auto-accident/car-accident-deaths/>
3. Even with undercounting from some states, the total count of firearms-related violent crime incidents in the US in 2022 by the FBI does not likely exceed 300,000
4. FBI national crime statistics (1990-2022)
5. The AR-15 .223 caliber (5.56 mm) round is about 75% smaller than the M-1 .30 caliber (7.62 mm) round, but has a higher velocity, producing greater impact energy. Even so, the .223 round was a civilian cartridge used by ranchers and farmers to keep coyotes and other threats to livestock at bay, but adopted by the military for its accuracy and velocity. It is not even considered an ethical hunting cartridge because of its relative lack of power. We note that the distinction between civilian and military firearms in America has always been fluid, going back to the Kentucky long rifle, a civilian arm whose superior accuracy to the military smoothbore “Brown Bess” musket turned the tide of several critical battles for Washington’s Continental Army.
6. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M1_carbine
7. Military versions of the AR-15 have several designations, including M-16 (rifle) or M-4 (carbine). These are outwardly similar to an AR-15 but have a significantly different fire control mechanism (hammer, sear, safety, etc) that enables automatic or “burst” [e.g., three shots with one trigger pull] firing.
8. Most common is a steel-core 5.56 mm (.22 caliber) round that can be used in an AR-15. Typically known as the M855, this was originally developed by the military because the AR 5.56 round—though high velocity—is much less powerful than the 7.62 (30 cal) .308 that is replaced. The M855 has more ability to penetrate a helmet or a tactical vest, but cannot penetrate armor plate.
9. A RAND review of gun control studies, which was updated in 2020, concluded there’s “inconclusive evidence for the effect of assault weapon bans on mass shootings.” <https://www.rand.org/research/gun-policy/analysis/ban-assault-weapons/massshootings.html> Research published in Criminology & Public Policy the same year (2020) concluded that bans on assault weapons “do not seem to be associated with the incidence of fatal mass shootings.” <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1745-9133.12487>
10. Ibid
11. <https://crimeresearch.org/2024/01/updated-information-on-mass-public-shootings-from-1998-through-october-2023/>
12. <https://www.nationalreview.com/2020/03/michael-bloomberg-guns-for-me-but-not-for-thee/>
13. Ibid
14. <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/geneveith/2016/06/armed-bureaucrats/>; also <https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-does-the-irs-need-guns-1466117176>
15. <https://calmatters.org/explainers/california-gun-laws-policy-explained/>

