

CROSS SECTIONAL STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEVELS OF GUN OWNERSHIP AND VIOLENT DEATHS

By Colin Greenwood
Firearms Research & Advisory Service,
West Yorkshire, England, UK

The proposition that, "**places with the highest rates of gun ownership and the most virulent opposition to gun control are the very places with the highest rates of gun deaths**"¹ has been tested against the latest available research which covers no less than thirty three different countries and is based on information supplied to the United Nations by the countries concerned and assembled by a team of researchers supplied by the Government of Canada².

The figures supplied have been placed into bands representing (a) very low levels, (b) low levels, (c) high levels and (d) very high levels under each category for gun ownership, homicide, gun homicide, suicide, gun suicide and accidents. The following table summarises the results. Whilst the figures used are 'as reported' and have not been corrected for many possible variables, the results are placed into broad bands with very wide differentials.

The table shows that the United States has a very high level of gun ownership and also has high or very high levels of homicide, gun homicide, gun suicide and gun accidents. But that one example does not establish an immutable rule. Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, New Zealand and Sweden all have very high levels of gun ownership, inland's being the highest recorded in the survey. All these are matched with low or very low levels of homicide, with very low accident levels in all but one case, and with very variable suicide rates.

This survey confirms that, despite a single exception, a high level of violent deaths and particularly guns deaths can exist in countries where gun ownership levels vary from very low to very high and that very low levels of violent deaths can exist in countries with very high levels of gun ownership.

There is, in fact, no relationship between high levels of gun ownership and high levels of gun deaths or of violent deaths in general.

TABLE

Country	Gun	Homicide		Suicide		Gun
	Ownership	Total	Gun	Total	Gun	Accidents
Argentina	b	b	b	*	*	*
Australia	d	b	a	c	c	a
Austria	c	b	a	*	*	*
Belarus	a	d	-	d	*	b
Brazil	a	d	d	a	a	d
Burkino Faso	a	a	*	a	a	a
Canada	d	a	a	c	c	a
Costa Rica	c	c	b	c	b	b
Czech Republic	b	b	a	c	b	a
Estonia	b	d	c	d	c	d
Finland	d	b	a	d	d	a
Germany	d	a	a	c	b	a
Greece	c	a	a	b	b	a
Guinea	d	a	*	*	*	*
Hungary	a	c	a	d	a	*
Jamaica	a	d	d	a	a	a
Japan	a	a	a	d	a	a
Malaysia	a	b	a	a	a	a
New Zealand	d	a	a	c	c	b
Peru	a	a	b	a	a	a
Philippines	a	d	c	*	*	*
Poland	a	b	a	c	a	a
Moldova	a	d	a	*	*	*
Romania	a	c	a	*	*	*
Singapore	a	a	a	c	*	*
Slovakia	b	b	a	c	a	*
South Africa	c	d	d	*	*	*
Spain	c	a	a	b	a	b
Sweden	d	a	a	c	b	a
Trinidad & Tobago	a	d	c	c	a	d
United Kingdom	b	a	a	c	a	a
Tanzania	a	c	a	a	a	a
United States	d	d	c	c	d	d

(a) - Very Low. (b) - Low (c) - High (d) - Very High * No figure.

Table extracted from the Report to the Secretary General of the United Nations by the Economic and Social Council, Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in 1997, 7th March 1997, E/CN.15/1997/4.

INTRODUCTION

The proposition that, "**places with the highest rates of gun ownership and the most virulent opposition to gun control are the very places with the highest rates of gun deaths**"¹ is frequently advanced as if it were some immutable law of nature, akin to asserting that the sun always rises in the east and sets in the west. The latter claim can be verified by complex scientific study of the relationship between the earth and the sun, but it can be verified more easily by observation in every country in the world, and in every part of each country, where it will be found to be the case. Such verification would be called a cross sectional study. The proposition about the sun can also be verified by a time series study, that is to say that in one place, the sun has been observed to follow this law for all time.

But the claim of a relationship between gun ownership levels and gun deaths is rarely supported by evidence. It is claimed as natural law without logic or rational verification. The quoted claim appears to have been made in the course of high profile journalistic cover of a particular event, but it is advanced as a means of social engineering by those who wish to control the actions and the thinking of populations. It is also used as a crutch for those responsible for the control of crime who, by accepting the validity of the claim, seek to gain political advantage by imposing simple 'remedies'.

If the proposition is valid it must hold good across many countries, and across time in any single country. It must also work in reverse and places or times with the fewest firearms must have the lowest level of gun deaths.

A time series study, testing the proposition over time in a single area, may be the simplest test, but even that will have to be corrected for variables such as major changes in the nature of the society, changes in law, social attitudes, police efficiency in combating crime, judicial systems and crime recording methods.

The proposition should also be able to withstand a valid and thorough cross sectional analysis, but this is much more complex. Any study would have to correct for variations in gun counting systems, crime counting systems, demographics, history, relative police efficiency, variables in the judicial systems, social attitudes and much more. If those variables can be fully taken into account, the proposition must remain valid across many countries and not merely in respect of samples carefully selected by researchers to

validate a predetermined theory.

A study which encompasses a long period or a large number of countries would be valid if the proposition was supported in the vast majority of instances and rational explanation was available for a very small number of exceptions.

The purpose of any study must be, firstly, to establish levels of gun ownership over time in a particular country, or at any one time in a truly representative series of countries. Secondly, to establish levels of gun deaths, usually sub divided into homicide, suicide and accidents. Finally, it must be demonstrated that the two things are causally related.

GUN OWNERSHIP LEVELS

Many different methods have been used to establish gun ownership levels. Perhaps the most bizarre was based on a telephone survey and later used in a much quoted analysis of the relationship between gun ownership and homicide in selected countries.³

It seems highly unlikely to say the least that gun owners would respond with any degree of accuracy to a telephone call from a researcher on a subject which is generally seen as highly sensitive.

Gun ownership levels have also been estimated from licences issued by the authorities, but the nature of gun controls vary widely and guns which are licensed in one country are completely free from control in another. In Britain, all classes of shotguns are licensed and must be accounted for individually. In France, most shotguns are free from any control. One survey comparing a Canadian City with a nearby city in the United States City was flawed by an assumption that, at the time, the number of Canadian licences gave an indication of the number of guns when, in fact, it provided only an authority to acquire an additional gun or guns and took no account of existing stocks.⁴

But even in countries where a strict licensing regime has been in force over a long period the number of guns within that system is almost certain to be a gross understatement of the number of guns available in that society. At one level, licences take no account of guns in the hands of military, police and others. State servants, like all other people, are involved in crimes and suicides and in some countries appear to have a marked propensity for accidents. In many countries, militia firearms are widely available

to citizens.

The extent to which even the strictest firearms registration system accurately reflects the number of guns in private hands is a matter for grave doubt. A licensing system in Victoria, Australia had licensed only the person but in 1984 new legislation required the registration of all guns. A 1987 report by the firearms registrar indicated that after three years only 58.9% of firearms he conservatively estimated to have been in licensed hands had been registered. The remaining firearms were still in circulation, probably in non criminal hands, but outside the new system of control.⁵ The report remained unknown except to police and politicians until it was discovered by means of freedom of information laws. It was later sidelined by further legislation in the wake of the 1996 Port Arthur shootings.

In Britain prior to 1988, magazine shotguns were treated in the same way as all other shotguns and subject only to the licensing of the individual with no registration of the guns. New legislation required registration of all shotguns and made some classes of magazine shotguns subject to much stricter controls. Estimates from the British trade obtained by The Shooting Sports Trust, indicated that at least 300,000 such guns had been sold in the preceding ten years alone, with many more sold prior to that. Not more than 50,000 of the guns were registered under the new laws and a further small number may have been otherwise disposed of. The evidence indicates that about a quarter of a million such guns remain illegally in circulation.⁶

There is nothing to suggest that these observations on compliance rates for gun registration are other than entirely representative. Estimates for the number of unregistered guns in Britain have been based on factors such as the number of unregistered guns confiscated by or surrendered to the police, and the evidence suggests that the number of illegally held guns is at least as great as the number legally held.⁷ But the total number of guns registered or unregistered in society is not related to the numbers of such guns possessed or used by criminals, including killers. In most countries those with certain criminal convictions will be prohibited from owning guns, yet the evidence is that it is just this class of person which accounts for the greater part of crime, including fatal crime.⁸ Evidence about the sources of this relatively small number of firearms in any country is incomplete and studies have, in particular, failed to explore the extent to

which legal action against one source will simply result in a shift of source.

Where gun licensing is the exception rather than the rule, estimates of gun ownership levels may be based on the number of guns manufactured and imported, but can take no account of guns illegally imported, or indeed, illegally manufactured. They are not usually corrected for wastage and fail to account for guns in the hands of the servants of the State.

GUNS DEATHS

It seems to be assumed that producing comparable time series or cross sectional figures for gun deaths is a simple matter. In fact truly comparable statistics are almost impossible to produce. It is further assumed that reducing deaths by guns would also reduce total deaths. The evidence does not support that assumption and a reduction in gun deaths would only be beneficial if it produced a reduction in overall deaths and was not simply the cause of a switch to other methods of killing.

Until recently those seeking to highlight a problem with gun ownership levels concentrated attention on the claimed relationship with gun homicide levels and sometimes with general homicide levels in various countries. More recently, there have been claims that both gun suicide and general suicide levels are related to levels of gun ownership and that gun accident levels are subject to the same causes.

HOMICIDE

The Home Office is responsible for collecting statistics relating to England and Wales whilst Scotland and Northern Ireland statistics are separately collected and presented. Since 1967, The Home Office has 'adjusted' homicide statistics retrospectively by taking account of the decisions of the courts or the prosecuting authorities. The number of recorded homicides is reduced by between 13% and 15% by this process. Few other countries reduce the statistics in this way and in many, deaths which are clearly self defence or for which some other defence exists are recorded as homicide. In England and Wales causing death by dangerous driving is no longer regarded as homicide reducing the

figure by some 200 cases per year. In many countries that offence falls into the homicide classification. Recording practices also vary in respect of attempted homicide; criminal statistics for Russia, France and Switzerland used in some studies included attempts as reported homicides, whilst in Portugal cases in which the cause of death is unknown have been shown as homicide, inflating their figure considerably.⁹

Steps have been taken through the Council of Europe to make homicide statistics in Western Europe broadly comparable but many existing studies are based on older figures where the differences in recording practice will distort any comparison. England is generally cited as having an extremely low homicide rate, but in existing studies, the figure would have to be increased by about 30% for comparison with figures for some other countries and should be almost doubled for comparison with those countries which have included attempts with homicide for the purposes of earlier studies.

SUICIDE

Suicide levels appear to be reported more consistently than gun ownership or homicide levels, though there remains a difficulty in a proportion of cases in which the reason for the death is less than clear. Some cases which are suicide may be reported as accidental deaths for a variety of reasons and there is likely to be an absence of consistency. Reporting in many third world countries may be much less than complete and less accurate than it is amongst Western Countries.

Many variables influence suicide rates including religion, social norms and history. Many methods of committing suicide are readily to hand and two different questions therefore arise. The first is whether there is a causal relationship between the number of guns in a society and the rate of suicide in general or gun suicide in particular; the second is whether a reduction in gun numbers, if that could be achieved, is likely to secure a reduction in overall suicide or whether it would merely lead to the substitution of another method with no saving of life.

The great mass of evidence indicates that the suicide rate is not dependent on the availability of one method and that if, by some means, all firearms could be removed from a society, the rate of suicide would remain largely unchanged. The only evidence to

the contrary was generated by the change from toxic domestic gas (which had been a significant method of suicide) to non toxic natural gas. Studies in several countries suggested that, though this had resulted in a significant reduction in gas suicides, there had been no overall reduction in suicide rates. One exception was a study in England by Clarke and Mayhew ¹⁰ which found that the change had caused a significant reduction in overall suicide, though a later study by the same authors suggested that the same was not true for Scotland.

The latest analysis of available evidence, which includes a critique of the Clarke and Mayhew study is that done by Professor Gary Kleck ¹¹ who found that Clarke and Mayhew's conclusions could not be supported by the evidence. The now dated time series analyses of suicide figures for England and Wales over a long period ¹² shows that the suicide rate has been unaffected by massive reductions in gun ownership levels.

ACCIDENTAL GUN DEATHS

If there were no guns, there could be no accidental gun deaths, but it does not necessarily follow that the number of gun deaths is causally related to the volume of gun ownership. As with other causes of death, analysis of accidents is more complex than it first appears. Accidental deaths include a number involving military or police personnel and state owned guns. Most countries have very low levels of gun accidents, and factors other than the mere availability of guns may be significant. However this is the cause of death which, in theory, is most likely to be associated with levels of gun ownership.

UN SURVEY

The most extensive survey of legal firearms ownership was carried out by researchers provided by the Government of Canada under the auspices of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in 1997 and is published as a report to the Secretary General on 25th April 1997 as E/CN.15/1997/4. It surveyed the largest number of countries yet attempted to obtain comparative figures for gun ownership levels and gun related deaths. A number of

countries supplied details only of gun ownership levels and, since they cannot form part of any comparison, they have been excluded. Thirty three countries provided some measure of gun ownership and a measure of least one class of gun deaths.

The numbers reported in every category span a very wide range and a small number of countries reporting very high numbers in any category tended to bias the more usual attempts to fit the numbers into comparative bands. Bands which distinguished between countries with low and moderate sets of numbers are therefore employed in this analysis, but the reported numbers are also included so that the bands can be re-calculated if that is thought appropriate.

GUN OWNERSHIP

Details of firearms ownership are reported in terms of the numbers per 100,000 of (1) firearms licences, (2) firearms owners and (3) firearms. It also sought to establish (4) the proportion of households in which at least one person owned a gun. Responses varied over the range of 0.1 to 411 legally held firearms per 100,000 people and from 0.2% to 50% of households with one gun owner.

Because of the variables already outlined and because of the shortcomings of the survey itself, it would be appropriate to consider the results in terms of bands of numbers of firearms per 100,000 (a) very low - 0 to 24.99, (b) low - 25 to 49.99 (c) high - 50 to 99.99 and (d) very high - 100 to the reported maximum of 411. Where the number of firearms was not given, countries have been placed into bands on the basis of one of the other headings with an indication of which of the headings (1) to (4) above is used.

Band (a) 0 to 24.99 firearms per 100,000 population - very low

Belarus 16.5: Brazil 8.18 ⁽²⁾: Burkino Faso 0.24: Hungary 15.54: Jamaica 7.35: Japan 3.28: Malaysia 7.05: Peru 7.65: Philippines 6.97: Poland 5.30: Moldova 6.61: Romania 2.97: Singapore 0.24: Trinidad and Tobago 6.06: Tanzania 2.33.

Band (b) 25 to 49.99 firearms per 100,000 population - low

Argentina 41.59: Czech Republic 27.58: Estonia 28.56: Slovakia 31.91: United Kingdom 36.58.

Band (c) 50 to 99.99 firearms per 1000,000 population - high

Austria 41.02^{(1)*}: Costa Rica 65.95: Greece 77.00: Spain 64.69: South Africa 84.41.

*An Austrian licence may cover several firearms.

Band (d) 100 to 411 firearms per 100,000 population - very high

Australia 195.90: Canada 241.48: Finland 411.20: Germany 122.56⁽²⁾: Guinea 108.86⁽²⁾: New Zealand 308.90: Sweden 246.65: United States 41% ^{(4)#}

#The figure of 41% of households in the United States is marginally less than the 50% in Finland, but greater than the remaining countries in this band. The number of firearms per 100,000 must therefore fall into this highest band. Elsewhere some scholars report actual gun ownership levels which may be as high as 900 per 1,000 people.¹³

Unfortunately, figures for a number of important countries, particularly European countries such as Switzerland, France and Holland do not yet appear in UN statistics. It is possible to reflect, however, that very low levels of legal gun ownership appear in many countries which are less developed or currently less stable, though there are clear exceptions to that statement. High levels of legal gun ownership appear more common in developed and stable democracies.

The figures presented here are provided by the governments concerned. The variables in reporting practices and other factors are corrected for to some extent by the use of wide bands of the figures and by the fact that they are compared only with figures for deaths derived from the same sources.

GUN DEATHS

The UN study attempts a broad based cross sectional study of gun deaths which is fraught with complexities. The quality of recording methods in many third world countries is questionable, but even amongst the most advanced countries major differences in recording methods make comparisons of gun death rates extremely

difficult. If these figures are also employed in broad bands they may provide a cross sectional analysis at least as valid as any other that has been attempted.

Homicide

International comparisons based on homicide rates are highly susceptible to distortion and the UN Survey cautions that homicide figures are 'as reported' and subject to the strictures set out above. As with figures for levels of gun ownership or numbers of guns the range of figures reported is enormous and they are considered in broad bands. To avoid distortion by a small number of very high figures, the bands show the total number of homicides per hundred thousand population in four bands - (a) 0 to 0.99 - very low; (b) 2 to 3.99 - low; (c) 4 to 7.99 - high and (d) 8+ - very high. Actual figures are included to allow of redistribution within the bands.

Homicides per 100,000 population in band (a) - very low

Burkina Faso 0.04: Canada 1.99: Germany 1.81: Greece 1.33: Guinea 0.34: Japan 0.60: New Zealand 1.35: Peru 1.41: Singapore 1.62: Spain 1.58: Sweden 1.35: United Kingdom 1.40.

Homicides per 100,000 population in band (b) - low

Argentina 3.83: Australia 2.40: Austria 2.14: Czech Republic 2.80: Finland 3.25: Malaysia 2.13: Poland 2.61: Slovakia 2.38.

Homicides per 100,000 population in band (c) - high

Costa Rica 5.52: Hungary 4.07: Romania 4.32: Tanzania 7.42.

Homicides per 100,000 population in band (d) - very high

Belarus 9.86: Brazil 29.17: Estonia 22.11: Jamaica 31.60: Philippines 16.89:
Moldova 17.06: South Africa 64.64: Trinidad and Tobago 9.48: United States 8.95.

Gun homicide figures are reported separately and these are also shown in four bands -
(a) 0. to 0.99 - very low; (b) 1 to 2.99 - low; (c) 3 to 6.99 - high and (d) 7 + - very high.

Gun homicides per 100,000 population in band (a) - very low

Australia 0.56: Austria 0.53: Canada 0.60: Czech Republic 0.92: Finland 0.87:
Germany 0.21: Greece 0.55: Guinea 0.03: Hungary 0.47: Japan 0.03: Malaysia
0.20: New Zealand 0.22: Poland 0.27: Moldova 0.63: Romania 0.12: Singapore
0.00: Slovakia 0.36: Spain 0.19: Sweden 0.31: United Kingdom 0.13: Tanzania 0.50.

Gun homicides per 100,000 population in band (b) - low

Argentina 1.50: Costa Rica 2.57: Peru 1.06.

Gun homicides per 100,000 population in band (c) - high

Estonia 6.12: Philippines 3.61: Trinidad and Tobago 3.42: United States 6.24.

Gun homicides per 100,000 population in band (d) - very high

Brazil 25.78: Jamaica 18.23: South Africa 26.63.

Suicide

The UN Survey reports the following overall suicide rates per 100,000 populations
which are placed in the four bands shown for the reasons set out above: (a) 0 to 1.99 -

very low, (b) 2 to 5.99 - low, (c) 6 to 15.99 - high, and (d) 16+ - very high.

Suicides per 100,000 population in band (a) - 0 to 1.99 - very low

Brazil 0.63: Burkino Faso 0.95: Jamaica 1.46: Malaysia 1.83: Peru 0.42:
Tanzania 0.88.

Suicides per 100,000 population in band (b) - 2 to 5.99 - low

Greece 3.54: Spain 5.92:

Suicides per 100,000 population in band (c) - 6 to 15.99 - high

Australia 12.77: Canada 12.88: Costa Rica 6.54: Czech Republic 9.88: Germany
15.80: New Zealand 13.81: Poland 14.23: Singapore 9.89: Slovakia 13.24: Sweden
15.65: Trinidad and Tobago 8.08: United Kingdom 7.55: United States 11.54.

Suicides per 100,000 population in band (d) - 16+ - very high

Belarus 27.26: Estonia 39.99: Finland 27.28: Hungary 33.34: Japan 17.95.

Suicides involving firearms per 100,000 populations are also shown in four bands (a)
0 to 0.99 - very low, (b) 1 to 1.99 - low, (c) 2 to 3.99 - high, and (d) 4+ - very high.

Gun suicides per 100,000 population in band (a) - 0 to 0.99 - very low

Brazil 0.44: Burkino Faso 0.14: Hungary 0.88: Jamaica 0.36: Japan 0.04: Malaysia
0.00: Peru 0.10: Poland 0.16: Slovakia 0.58 Spain 0.55: Trinidad and Tobago 0.08:
United Kingdom 0.33: Tanzania 0.02.

Gun Suicides per 100,000 population in band (b) - 1 to 1.99 - low

Costa Rica 1.61: Czech Republic 1.01: Germany 1.23: Greece 1.30: Sweden 1.95.

Gun suicides per 100,000 population in band (c) - 2 to 3.99 - high

Australia 2.38: Canada 3.35: Estonia 3.63. New Zealand 2.45:

Gun suicides per 100,000 population in band (d) - 4+ - very high

Finland 5.78: United States 7.23.

The UN analysis contains details of overall suicide rates and firearm suicide rates, and if the weapon substitution theory set out above is even partially correct, then any conclusions should be drawn on the basis of overall suicide rates and not on the basis of gun suicide rates only, but both suicide rates are included in this study.

GUN ACCIDENTS

Fatal firearms accidents are shown for many countries, but these are all extremely low. For reasons set out above, four bands of the number of accidents per 100,000 population have again been created: (a) 0 to 0.19 - very low (b) 0.2 to 0.29 - low (c) 0.3 to 0.39 - high and over 0.4 - very high.

Gun accidents per 100,000 population in band (a) - 0 to 0.19 - very low

Australia 0.11: Burkino Faso 0.05: Canada 0.13: Czech Republic 0.07: Finland 0.12: Germany 0.03: Greece 0.02: Jamaica 0.12: Japan 0.02: Malaysia 0.08: Peru 0.02: Poland 0.01: Sweden 0.05: United Kingdom 0.02: Tanzania 0.02.

Gun accidents per 100,000 population in band (b) - 0.2 to 0.29 - low

Belarus 0.23: Costa Rica 0.29: Spain 0.26. New Zealand 0.29.

Gun accidents per 100,000 population in band (c) - 0.3 to 0.39 - high

None

Gun accidents per 100,000 population in band (d) - 0.4+ - very high

Brazil 0.75: Estonia 0.40: Trinidad and Tobago 0.54: United States 0.58.

COMPARISON

To test the assertion that countries with high levels of gun ownership either invariably or usually have high levels of gun deaths, the information has been tabulated according to the bands described above.

COMMENTARY

Examination of the table based on the UN survey shows that the United States has a very high level of gun ownership and also has very high levels of homicide, gun suicide and gun accidents but with high level of gun homicide. But that one example does not establish an invariable rule. Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, New Zealand and Sweden all have very high levels of gun ownership, Finland's being the highest recorded in the survey. All these are matched with low or very low levels of homicide, with very low accident levels in all but one case and with very variable suicide rates.

TABLE

Country	Gun	Homicide		Suicide		Gun
	Ownership	Total	Gun	Total	Gun	Accidents
Argentina	b	b	b	*	*	*
Australia	d	b	a	c	c	a
Austria	c	b	a	*	*	*
Belarus	a	d	-	d	*	b
Brazil	a	d	d	a	a	d
Burkina Faso	a	a	*	a	a	a
Canada	d	a	a	c	c	a
Costa Rica	c	c	b	c	b	b
Czech Republic	b	b	a	c	b	a
Estonia	b	d	c	d	c	d
Finland	d	b	a	d	d	a
Germany	d	a	a	c	b	a
Greece	c	a	a	b	b	a
Guinea	d	a	*	*	*	*
Hungary	a	c	a	d	a	*
Jamaica	a	d	d	a	a	a
Japan	a	a	a	d	a	a
Malaysia	a	b	a	a	a	a
New Zealand	d	a	a	c	c	b
Peru	a	a	b	a	a	a
Philippines	a	d	c	*	*	*
Poland	a	b	a	c	a	a
Moldova	a	d	a	*	*	*
Romania	a	c	a	*	*	*
Singapore	a	a	a	c	*	*
Slovakia	b	b	a	c	a	*
South Africa	c	d	d	*	*	*
Spain	c	a	a	b	a	b
Sweden	d	a	a	c	b	a
Trinidad & Tobago	a	d	c	c	a	d
United Kingdom	b	a	a	c	a	a
Tanzania	a	c	a	a	a	a
United States	d	d	c	c	d	d

(a) - Very Low. (b) - Low (c) - High (d) - Very High * No figure.

Table extracted from the Report to the Secretary General of the United Nations by the Economic and Social Council, Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in 1997, 25th April 1997, E/CN.15/1997/4.

FOOTNOTES

Comment not forming part of the UN Survey may further amplify the results.

(1) The unique status of the United States is further highlighted by the enormous variations in homicide rates within that country. Detailed cross sectional analysis within the United States would be illuminating, but space allows only of perhaps extreme examples. Lott¹⁴ identifies the ten States with the lowest rates of homicide per 100,000 in 1992 as Alaska, 3.2, Utah 2.99, Massachusetts 2.97, Montana 2.22, North Dakota 1.9, Maine 1.7, New Hampshire 1.5, Iowa 1.1, Vermont 0.7 and South Dakota 0.6. In the bands used in this paper, six of those States would have very low levels and four low levels of homicide. Conversely, the ten States with the highest levels of homicide clearly fell into the very high band.

(2) The rate of accidental gun deaths in the United States is shown in the UN Survey as 0.58 per 100,000 and falls into the very high band. Other statistics indicate that this apparent relationship between a pair of figures in a single country does not justify the claim of a causal relationship. United States Government figures for fatal gun accidents are available from 1933 and show that the rate has been consistently declining from 2.40 deaths per 100,000 population in 1933 to 0.47 in 1995, the figures for 1945 being 1.84 and that for 1994 being 0.47¹⁵. During the period 1945 to 1994, the total stock of guns in the United States has risen from about 49 million to 235 million.¹³ If the relationship is causal, it would be possible to conclude that more guns generate fewer fatal gun accidents, but no such suggestion would be made here.

(3) The United Kingdom introduced strict controls on some firearms in 1920 and has pursued a programme of continuously increasing those controls, significantly reducing its level of legitimate firearms ownership. In the ten years from 1988 to 1997, the number of licenced gun owners in England and Wales has been reduced by 27% from 1,037,400 to

756,700.¹⁶ In 1919, when firearms were effectively free from control in England and Wales, the homicide rate was 0.8 per 100,000 whilst that for the United States was 9.5 (11.9 times higher).¹⁷ The UN Survey shows a rate of 1.40 for Great Britain, but the figure for England and Wales for 1995 is 1.35 per 100,000¹⁸ whilst in the Survey the USA is shown to have a figure of 8.95 (6.62 times higher). For an accurate comparison the number for England and Wales should probably be substantially greater than that shown. The comparative advantage which England had against the USA in homicide figures has actually been significantly reduced.

(4) Japan reported a very high overall suicide rate for this survey, though it has a very low rate of gun suicide. The National Police Agency of Japan has reported an increase in overall suicide from 1987 to 1988 of no less than 34% said to be due to the effects of the economic downturn in that country.¹⁹ Such a change can not be related to gun ownership levels.

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8. (a) Morrison, S and O'Donnell, I. (1994) *Armed Robbery, A Study in London*, Oxford, University of Oxford Centre for Criminological Research (i) at 85, of 214 armed robbers only 16% received their first criminal conviction as a result of armed robbery. (99% were male). (ii) At 50, "None of the guns used by robbers were legally held by them. Indeed in most cases they would have been disqualified from holding a gun licence because of their previous criminal record."
 - (b) Home Office (1998), *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales 1997*, 203 London, Stationery Office. Only 26% of all male robbers (not merely armed robbers) had no previous convictions when convicted: 22% had ten or more previous convictions and the remainder had between 1 and 9 convictions.
 - (c) Kates, D.B. Lattimer, J.K. Boen, J.R. "Problematic Arguments for Banning Handguns." In Kates, DB. and Kleck G. (1997) *The Great American Gun Debate*, San Francisco, Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy. - "Innumerable criminological

studies [show] murderers to be violent aberrants with extensive histories of felony, violence, mental imbalance, substance abuse and firearms and car accidents". (The studies are listed in the authors's notes.

9. For some examples see The Home Office, (1998) *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales for 1997*, Chapter 10. London, The Stationery Office.

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13. Kleck, Professor Gary, *op cit* 97 where the author cites all sources for the figures.

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