

The Facts: Guns and Self-Defense

Following every mass shooting, the gun lobby's rote response is for private citizens to purchase and carry guns so they can act in self-defense. This argument has no basis in reality.

Research by the Violence Policy Center (VPC) shows that self-defense gun use by private citizens is extremely rare. In fact, private citizens are far more likely to use guns to kill others or themselves than to use guns in justifiable homicides.

Some of the key facts about guns and self-defense are below. To learn more about this research, read the VPC's April 2016 study *Firearm Justifiable Homicides and Non-Fatal Self-Defense Gun Use* (<http://www.vpc.org/studies/justifiable16.pdf>).

The study analyzes data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program's Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR) and cites survey data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS).

JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDES BY PRIVATE CITIZENS ARE EXTREMELY RARE

In 2013, the most recent year for which data is available, there were only 211 justifiable homicides involving a private citizen using a firearm. That same year, there were 7,838 criminal firearm homicides.

- In 2013, for every justifiable homicide in the United States involving a gun, guns were used in 37 criminal homicides. And this ratio does not even take into account the tens of thousands of lives needlessly lost in gun suicides and unintentional shootings that year.
- Twenty states reported zero justifiable homicides by civilians in 2013: Alaska, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Montana, New York, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, West Virginia, and Wyoming.
- A significant percentage of the persons killed in a firearm justifiable homicide were known to the shooter, not strangers. In 2013, 27.0 percent of persons killed in a firearm justifiable homicide were known to the shooter, 59.7 percent were strangers, and for 13.3 percent of persons the relationship was unknown.

ONLY A TINY FRACTION OF CRIME VICTIMS EMPLOY GUNS IN SELF-DEFENSE

Over a three-year period, less than one percent of victims of attempted or completed violent crimes used a firearm, and only 0.2 percent of victims of attempted or completed property crimes used a firearm.

- Intended victims of *violent crimes* engaged in self-protective behavior with a firearm in only 0.9 percent of attempted and completed incidents between 2012 and 2014.
- Intended victims of *property crimes* engaged in self-protective behavior with a firearm in only 0.2 percent of attempted and completed incidents between 2012 and 2014.

THE NRA'S CENTRAL ARGUMENT HAS NO FACTUAL BASIS

The NRA has staked its entire agenda on the claim that guns are necessary for self-defense, but this gun industry propaganda has no basis in fact. Purchasing a gun may help enrich the firearms industry, but the facts show it is very unlikely to increase an individual's personal safety. In fact, in a nation of more than 300 million firearms, it is striking how rarely guns are used in self-defense.