

[The gun debate fires off](#) [1]

Written by [Anton Howes](#) [2] | Saturday 20 August 2011



After the looting, public confidence in police, society and law has been severely shaken. So shaken, in fact, that the taboo on the gun debate appears to have been lifted. Along with outlandish calls for national service, curfews and media bans, many are now seriously asking why we trust such a small police-force to defend a largely unarmed population. During the riots themselves, those who did not band together in large numbers to protect their own communities, like the residents of Enfield, or the Sikhs or Turks, found themselves questioning why they must be so helpless.

Many in the UK are puzzled by the extraordinary popularity of guns in the US. Along with appeals to the Second Amendment of their Constitution, totally irrelevant in this country, the intelligent pro-gun advocate's position may be summed up by a quotation from science-fiction writer Robert Heinlein: "An armed society is a polite society".

In essence, a well-armed population is not only able to defend itself from foreign aggressors or its own government's potential tyranny, but it works as an effective deterrent from crime, and allows self-defence regardless of strength. You don't try to mug even the weediest guy who could pull a gun out on you. However, pro-gun advocates have to take an all-or-nothing approach in order to get as close to the ambiguity and high risk required for a deterrent to be effective: not only do they argue for widespread possession, but for the right to carry weapons with them at all times, and the right to carry concealed weapons.

After all, if guns are only allowed in the home, then street criminals are hardly going to be dissuaded, though burglars (and looters) might. If guns can be carried, but must be revealed, then criminals need only look at their potential victim before deciding to attack. And finally, if guns are legal yet uncommon, then the chances are that only criminals will purchase them with intent. To this end, some push for a culture of gun-owning, as well as ambiguity.

There are many good counter-arguments. Some cite culture as being a necessary precondition: not every country is like Switzerland (where gun ownership is more or less compulsory, and may explain why it has never been invaded), so gang culture can be a concern. Others reject the usual mantra "guns don't kill, people do" to say that tragic crimes 'of passion' are more likely to occur when the drunk or furious have immediate access to firearms. Finally, some just don't want to live in a country that is armed to the teeth, no matter how polite, just as one wouldn't replace seat-belts with a metal spike pointing at drivers' hearts to promote safer driving. Whatever your position, the taboo has lifted: the debate needs to be a serious one.

Anton Howes is Director of the [Liberty League](#)[3].

Source URL: <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/justice-and-civil-liberties/the-gun-debate-fires-off>

Links:

[1] <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/justice-and-civil-liberties/the-gun-debate-fires-off>

[2] <http://www.adamsmith.org/taxonomy/term/5795>

[3] <http://uklibertyleague.com/>

[4] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript

[5] <http://disqus.com>