Reading "Gun Violence" Research Critically

Updated from: [Critiquing the "Research" Criticizing Guns](#)

Antigun academics keep complaining that there is not enough "gun violence" research (read: "government funding for their antigun projects"). There are actually more studies than ever, too many even for DRGO to keep up with. These usually feature or employ devices and methods to validate the authors' antigun stance.

Patterns emerge with familiarity and are presented here for reference:

1. **Personal bias**: Antipathy toward gun ownership is often evident in the language of the introduction and summary of the work. It may arise from the authors' personal histories or fit their career arcs. Hoplophobia is often present.

2. **Guns as independent risk factors**: Studies that treat guns as a causative agent (e.g., the "guns as viruses" meme). Then a hypothesis is proposed and analytic approaches are chosen that reinforce the notion.

3. **Selection bias and cherry-picked data**: Choices are always made about what data will be sought, from what sources and over what time periods, and then how it should be interpreted. Smart academicians (and they are very smart) can skew outcomes from start to finish. Scrupulous ones don't.

4. **Arbitrary analogies**: Comparing deaths from gunshot to entirely different phenomena (e.g., vehicle accident deaths). Using flawed premises and logic that have no relationship to the ways that guns work and can harm (e.g., that we must have "smart guns", because autos have built-in safety devices).

5. **Blame mongering**: Holding responsible people other than the ones in the wrong who wrongly use guns at the wrong times.

6. **Diversionary tactics**: Setting up straw men, such as proclaiming that being shot by someone you know is more likely than being attacked by a terrorist.

7. **False attribution**: Depicting correlation as causation, a near universal tactic. Presenting gunshot deaths and injuries as consequences intrinsic to the existence of guns, rather than as aberrations from normal gun use and users.

8. **Data Withholding**: Refusing to share data avoids criticism, probably when it is most merited. Charging for access to articles behind pay walls is another, commercialized way to limit criticism.

9. **Insignificant Significance**: A significant result only demonstrates a >95% probability that a result, based on the premises and methodology chosen, is accurate. It does not prove something is or is not true, nor does it negate criticism of any part of the study.

When you see a "gun violence" or "gun safety" study, look for these tricks. There is no shortage of "gun research"—just a shortage of serious scholars willing to examine firearms and their use without prejudice.