

Examining the right to bear arms

## The Truth about Gun Control

**“T**he laws which forbid men to bear arms . . . only disarm those who are neither inclined nor determined to commit crimes,” Cesare Beccaria, an Italian scholar and founder of the modern science of criminology, wrote in his 1764 treatise on the subject. “These laws make the victims of attack worse off and improve the position of the assailant.”

In a new pamphlet from Encounter Books’ *Broadside* series, Cato associate policy analyst David B. Kopel expounds upon Beccaria’s classic insight to investigate why the right to keep and bear arms has always been central to the American identity.

Kopel begins by exploring the history behind our right to bear arms. Self-defense, he argues, is the most fundamental of all natural rights—an inherent

human claim that predates the Constitution itself. Starting with the colonies, Kopel traces the social and legal foundations of this 400-year-old practice—uncovering everything from the racist origins of gun control, to the founding of the National Rifle Association, to the modern debate surrounding firearms. “The right to keep and bear arms is not a 1791 anachronism,” he explains. “It is alive in the hearts and minds of the American people.”

Turning next to the philosophy behind gun bans, Kopel directs his attention to what he calls “pacifist-aggressives”—people who use the power of law

to push their own beliefs against initiating defensive force. “The gun prohibition movement is ultimately based on an authoritarian wish,” he writes, “where gun ownership is a sporting privilege for a few and not a right of the people.” This ideology has little basis in the Second Amendment.

“In much of the world, the armed masses symbolize lawlessness; in America, the armed masses are the law,” Kopel continues. Although some nations treat law as a vehicle of the state, the American tradition views law as the servant of the people—locating the power of enforcement in the citizens themselves and thereby granting less power to the government. As such, “dispersion of physical power in society is both a cause and an affirmation of dispersion of political power.”

Kopel concludes by reducing this critical issue to its root. “What is ultimately at stake is the same question that precipitated the American Revolution: whether the American people are the sovereigns in their own country or whether they should be ruled from above, for their own good, according to the supposedly benevolent commands of the elitist rulers of a top-down, European-style society.” ■

Visit [www.cato.org/store](http://www.cato.org/store) or call 800-767-1241 to get your copy of *The Truth about Gun Control* today; \$5.99 pamphlet.

## Cato News Notes

### PRAISE FOR POLICY REPORT

The last installment of *Cato Policy Report* drew accolades from Caroline Baum in her column for Bloomberg News. In particular, Baum noted the late Nobel laureate James Buchanan’s lead essay—which stressed the importance of developing “an animating principle, an ideal” for classical liberalism—and related Buchanan’s insights to the lack of vision in today’s Republican Party. “It’s not every day that a piece of mail in the inbox is so inspiring,” Baum concluded.

### BATTLING THE BEHEMOTH

In a recent “Economic Beat” column from *Barron’s*, editor Gene Epstein examined a well-known problem: “the high-probability risk that the aging baby boomers will render the federal government unable to meet its promises to its creditors and to the elderly.” Noting that no solutions “should be off the table,” Epstein pointed readers to Cato’s *DownsizingGovernment.org* in particular. “It offers a treasure-trove of statistics and other information on the federal budget, including a department-by-department guide to cutting the fat,” he concluded.

### REGULATION MAGAZINE: SPRING 2013



In the latest issue of *Regulation* magazine, M. Todd Henderson reviews last year’s brouhaha over health insurance and birth control. According to Henderson, lost in the firestorm about religion

and feminism were larger lessons about health care policy and regulation. Also in this issue, Richard L. Gordon argues that recent efforts to cut emissions are nothing new, Jonathan A. Lesser discusses the failure of subsidized wind power when it is most needed, and two articles look at the looming insolvency of Social Security Disability Insurance.