

- Mark your confusion.
- Purposefully annotate the article (1-2 mature, thoughtful responses per page to what the author is saying)
- Write a 250+ word response to the article.

Some Inconvenient Gun Facts for Liberals by Nicholas Kristoff for *The New York Times*, 1/16/2016

For those of us who argue in favor of gun safety laws, there are a few inconvenient facts.

We **liberals** are sometimes glib about equating guns and danger. In fact, it's complicated: The number of guns in America has increased by more than 50 percent since 1993, and in that same period the gun homicide rate in the United States has dropped by half.

Then there are the policies that liberals fought for, starting with the assault weapons ban. A 113-page study found no clear indication that it reduced shooting deaths for the 10 years it was in effect. That's because the ban was poorly drafted, and because even before the ban, assault weapons accounted for only 2 percent of guns used in crimes.

Move on to open-carry and conceal-carry laws: With some 13 million Americans now licensed to pack a concealed gun, many liberals expected gun battles to be erupting all around us. In fact, the most rigorous analysis suggests that all these gun permits caused neither a drop in crime (as conservatives had predicted) nor a spike in killings (as liberals had expected). Liberals were closer to the truth, for the increase in carrying loaded guns does appear to have led to more aggravated assaults with guns, but the fears were overblown.

One of the puzzles of American politics is that most voters want gun regulation, but Congress resists. One poll found that 74 percent even of N.R.A. members favor universal background checks to acquire a gun. Likewise, the latest New York Times poll found that 62 percent of Americans approved of President Obama's executive actions on guns this month.

So why does nothing get done? One reason is that liberals often **inadvertently** antagonize gun owners and empower the National Rifle Association by coming across as **supercilious**, condescending and spectacularly uninformed about the guns they propose to regulate. A classic of gun ignorance: New York passed a law three years ago banning gun **magazines** holding more than seven bullets — without realizing that for most guns there is no such thing as a magazine for seven bullets or less.

And every time liberals speak blithely about banning guns, they boost the N.R.A. Let's also banish the term "gun control": the better expression is "gun safety."

Yet this, too, must be said: Americans are absolutely right to be outraged at the toll of guns. Just since 1970, more Americans have died from guns than all the Americans who died in wars going back to the American Revolution (about 1.45 million vs. 1.4 million). That gun toll includes suicides, murders and accidents, and these days it amounts to 92 bodies a day.

We spend billions of dollars tackling terrorism, which killed 229 Americans worldwide from 2005 through 2014, according to the State Department. In the same 10 years, including suicides, some 310,000 Americans died from guns.

So of course we should try to reduce this carnage. But we need a new strategy, a public health approach that treats guns as we do cars — taking evidence-based steps to make them safer. That seems to be what President Obama is trying to do.

Research suggests that the most important practical step would be to keep guns away from high-risk individuals, such as criminals, those who abuse alcohol, or those who beat up their domestic partners.

That means universal background checks before somebody acquires a gun. New Harvard research confirms a long-ago finding that 40 percent of firearms in the United States are acquired without a background check. That's crazy. Why empower criminals to arm themselves?

Some evidence supports steps that seem common sense. More than 10 percent of murders in the United States, for example, are by intimate partners. The riskiest moment is often after a violent breakup when a woman has won a restraining order against her ex. Prohibiting the subjects of those restraining orders from possessing a gun reduces these murders by 10 percent, one study found.

“If you can keep a gun from someone at that moment of threat, that is very important,” notes Daniel W. Webster, a gun safety expert at Johns Hopkins University who has pioneered research on keeping guns from high-risk individuals.

Some public health approaches to reducing gun violence have nothing to do with guns. Researchers find that a nonprofit called Cure Violence, which works with gangs, curbs gun deaths. An initiative called Fast Track supports high-risk children and reduces delinquency and adult crime.

In short, let’s get smarter. Let’s make America’s gun battles less ideological and more driven by evidence of what works. If the **left** can drop the **sanctimony**, and the **right** can drop the **obstructionism**, if instead of wrestling with each other we can grapple with the evidence, we can save thousands of lives a year.

Possible response options:

- Kristoff challenges both liberals and conservatives on their positions on gun-related issues. Evaluate the facts brought by Kristoff against each side. Was his argument balanced? Do you agree with his conclusions? Which evidence do you find most compelling? What questions do you still have? Explain.
- Choose any passage and respond to it.