

Facile and Frequent: Our Ignorant Social Media Debates



By [Matthew J. Hefti](#)

I can't count the number of variations I've seen on this meme on social media. It has reached the point where I feel compelled to write about it, which means the ignorance it encourages has sufficiently annoyed me.

I'm a vet, I have a lot of vet friends, and I have a fair handful of police friends. Many people in the vet and law enforcement communities are pro-gun to the extreme. I also live in Wisconsin, which is largely rural and has elected one of the most right-wing governors in the country three times; thus, many in my state hold the general conservative position of "guns-for-everyone!" that will be prevalent in the population of any largely rural state such as mine. Many of these friends are thoughtful in explaining their position on weapons, and I enjoy the back and forth of debate with them, though we often disagree.

I also go to a progressive law school and have a lot of progressive and liberal friends, so I get plenty of insightful and pragmatic arguments for varying levels of gun control, along with a healthy dose of optimism that we could drastically reduce gun deaths in this country if we abandoned the irrational and inarticulable fear that holds power over so many of us.

One problem with social media

debate on gun control.

With meme and arguments such as the one above, however, I think people always forget that we're the United States, there are 48 contiguous states, and we have freedom of movement.

If you ban guns in Chicago, people can still—with no problem at all—drive less than an hour north to Wisconsin, load up on whatever weapons they want with no problem, and then head back down to Chicago. And in that case—when only a single locale reasonably restricts guns—sure, only criminals will have guns in that locale.

But the whole idea of saying national gun control wouldn't help ameliorate the problem of gun deaths (to include accidental, suicide, familial, etc.) because it doesn't work in isolation with a single locale like Chicago or California is an absolutely absurd and simplistic non sequitur.

In order for any gun control to be effective, it has to be at a national level. And to cynically believe nothing will help—to believe that restricting semi-automatic handgun sales, conducting buybacks, restricting ammo sales, and reasonably restricting other weapons with no purpose but to kill is a fruitless exercise not worthy of consideration simply ignores the laws of human nature and economics.

If you restrict supply, fewer people will have weapons. If you restrict the supply, the price of a weapon will go up. The price of illicit weapons will go up even further. At a certain point after enforcement and restrictions begin, it stands to reason that handguns and semi-automatic, high-capacity rifles and any other weapon designed for the sole purpose to take human life will become prohibitively expensive for run of the mill criminals.

If weapons are prohibitively expensive, common sense says that access decreases, which will drastically reduce gun homicide

rates. Reducing weapon access will reduce suicides, as studies have shown time and again. Reducing weapon access, creating stricter registration requirements, and requiring greater safety features will naturally reduce accidental and domestic gun injuries and deaths.

So stop saying that because gun control didn't work in Chicago or because it didn't work in California, it won't work in the United States. It's cynical, it's unhelpful, and it's based on narrow views and willful ignorance. These narrow and willfully ignorant positions exemplify the anti-intellectual ideation so prevalent in the United States, a country which actually banned federal funding for the CDC to study the problem.

Because, you know, who wants to learn more? Who would want to have more information to make better decisions? Who would actually want to rely on empirical data gathered by reputable academic agencies without bias whose only concern is gathering and compiling raw data?

Unfortunately the answer is, "Not the United States." At least not writ large.

I want more information. I want thoughtful solutions. I want well-funded research to address *any* societal woe.

I don't want dialog or rights restricted. But I also believe every right comes with inherent tensions. Free speech isn't unlimited (unless you're a corporation or an individual at the top of the oligarchy). The right to be free from search and seizure isn't unlimited. The right to remain silent is not unlimited.

It is not unreasonable to carry on a dialog about how best to limit Second Amendment rights to strike the proper balance between liberty and societal interests. It *is* unreasonable to perpetuate ignorant memes that foreclose any meaningful and intelligent debate. So stop. Stop making facile arguments, and stop posting stupid memes that further divide us, the *United*

States.

Matthew J. Hefti is the author of [*A Hard and Heavy Thing*](#) (Tyrus / F+W 2016). It's the perfect size for a stocking-stuffer. A thick, hard, and heavy stocking stuffer. Matthew has a BA in English, an MFA in Creative Writing, and he's working on his JD. After 12 years as an explosive ordnance disposal technician and 4 combat tours, he has thrown a lot of lead down range. He does not want to kick in your door to take your guns. He does, however, want you to stop posting stupid memes, whatever your political persuasion may be.