



YES

**NUMBERS FROM  
NOWHERE**

TALKING BOARD

**740,000**

GOOD BYE

by DAVID B. KOPEL, PAUL GALLANT & JOANNE D. EISEN



CONJURING  
**FACTS**  
TO PROMOTE A  
GLOBAL  
**GUN BAN**

**D**ID YOU KNOW that every year, 740,000 people around the world are killed because of guns? That's why it is so important that the United Nations enact global gun control with an Arms Trade Treaty. That's the claim, at least, of the international gun prohibition lobby.

But it's not really true.

The 740,000 factoid is the creation of the Geneva Declaration Organization.

The GDO, in turn, was created by

42 governments (not including the United States), plus 17 organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme and various anti-gun lobbies. The Secretariat (executive office) of the Geneva Declaration Organization explains that its work is "largely inspired by the U.N. Programme of Action" on gun control. The non-binding Programme of Action was adopted in 2001 when John Bolton and other Bush administration officials heroically succeeded in stopping the Programme of Action from turning into a mandatory global gun control system.

So the GDO set to work on producing a report, the "Global Burden of Armed Violence," which was recently released to great media fanfare at a press conference

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at the United Nations. Reuters, The Associated Press and the U.N.'s own press office pushed stories touting the report. While the report claimed 740,000 deaths from many types of weapons—including grenades and mortars—the press coverage played up firearms as the world's global villain. International gun-ban lobbies, led by Oxfam, hailed the report as definitive proof of the need for U.N.-run global gun control.

Curious, we decided to investigate the new figure to see how it was derived. To the extent that any of the



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underlying data are available, they do not support the 740,000 factoid. Instead, we found that the 740,000 figure appears to have been created by mathematical sleight of hand. The Geneva Declaration Organization rejected our repeated requests to see the calculations or to reveal their hidden data.

To simplify: Suppose that a researcher is trying to estimate how many hamburgers a class of 20 ninth-graders eats every year. There is good data for five of the students, who eat 40, 102, 83, 25 and four hamburgers per year. There is no reliable data for the other 15 students. The researcher announces that, collectively, the students eat half a million hamburgers every year.

You're surprised, since even if all 20 students ate a hundred hamburgers per year, that would only be 2,000 hamburgers annually for the whole class. How did the researchers get to half a million?

It turns out that for the 15 students with no data, the researchers used "estimates." You ask how the estimates were derived, and what the actual estimates were. The researchers won't tell you.

You then ask the researchers to reveal the calculations for how they combined the real data from five students, plus estimated data from 15 students, to arrive at their conclusion of a half-million hamburgers. They won't tell you that, either.

In a nutshell, that's that problem with the 740,000 factoid from the "Global Burden of Armed Violence." Much of the essential data is held secret, and nearly all the math is secret.

Of course, there is no scientific reason for the secrecy. Researchers may have ethical obligations not to reveal information about individual people (e.g., the participants in a psychology experiment), but they also have an obligation to share non-private information, such as the mathematical formulas used to create their results.

Let's go through the GBAV report to see how the 740,000 factoid was concocted.

The GBAV categorized deaths from armed violence in three different ways: one, deaths resulting directly from armed conflict; two, deaths associated with but not caused by armed conflict; and three, intentional homicides.

A significant portion of deaths is the result of wars and similar conflicts. GBAV claims there are 52,000 conflict deaths per year. They acknowledge that a lower estimate of 15,000 exists; the lower estimate comes from Human Security Report, a respected peace and conflict-monitoring group.

Part of the problem, GBAV admits, is that the existing databases of direct conflict deaths vary widely. Also,

the definition of "conflict deaths" is variable. GBAV cites numerous databases and sources, but when these sources are compared, it's obvious that GBAV almost invariably uses the higher estimate.

Next there's the number of "indirect conflict deaths." These are defined as "a result of the loss of access to basic health care, adequate food and shelter, clean water or other necessities of life. In the long run, armed conflict affects mortality by its destructive impact on the national economy and infrastructure. ..."

For example, if a bridge is bombed and not repaired, civilians on the other side might not receive humanitarian aid and supplies of food and medicine in a

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timely manner. Or, they might die in refugee camps where filthy conditions breed illnesses such as cholera and malaria. The GBAV “guesstimates” that indirect deaths from conflict have a 4:1 ratio to direct deaths, so GBAV declares that there are 200,000 indirect deaths.

When you hear of a refugee dying from cholera, you don’t normally think, “Oh, another gun death.” However, the media and the gun-ban lobbies eagerly followed GBAV’s lead in describing the disease and starvation deaths as caused by weapons.

Finally, there’s the question of non-war deaths—that is, murders by individual criminals or gangs, killings by police, self-defense and so on. GBAV claims 490,000 such deaths occur annually, and makes no effort to distinguish lawful self-defense from criminal homicide.

The GBAV statisticians used the Ninth U.N. Survey on Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, which provides country-level homicide rates for 2004, for 68 countries. GBAV states that the year 2004 was chosen because that was the year for which the U.N. had the most complete dataset. Yet these 68 countries comprise only 16.76 percent of the world population. So government data are missing for about two-thirds of the world’s countries, and a full 83 percent of the world’s population. This means that there is necessarily a great deal of guessing about the national homicide rate estimates for about 5/6 of the world.

In order to account for the missing countries, GBAV created regional estimates. The GBAV researchers chose to use a statistical technique called “population-weighted averaging,” in which the data from a few large countries dominate the final result. They could have employed a different technique of using “median values,” in which countries with large populations are weighted equally to countries with small populations.

In some regions—such as South America, Southern Africa and Eastern Europe—the choice of method makes a major difference. For example, in South America, the

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population-weighted average yields an annual homicide rate of 25.9 per 100,000 population, but the median rate is only 13.2. This means that total South American homicides could be as low as 47,658 or as high as 94,952. In other words, one method results in a homicide figure almost two times greater than the other.

The main reason for the discrepancy is that the population-weighted method magnifies the influence of Brazil, which has a very large population, an extremely high murder rate and extremely repressive gun controls that make it impossible for most people to lawfully defend themselves. Most other countries in South America, however, have fairly low homicide rates.

Globally, the population-weighted rate is 7.6, while the median-based homicide rate is 5.4. The population-weighted method is valid only if the high population countries are typical of the region that they supposedly represent; in South America, Brazil is definitely not typical. By choosing population weighting rather than country weighting, GBAV increases the homicide rate by 40 percent. Again, when there is methodological choice, GBAV tends to pick the method that yields the higher number.

Moreover, lumping all homicides into a single category obscures more than it reveals. There are some countries—such as the Netherlands—where self-defense homicides or homicides by the police are rare. So it's legitimate to infer from the Netherlands homicide data that

nearly all Netherlands homicides were criminal.

In other countries, including the United States, lawful self-defense homicides are more common. Florida State University criminology professor Gary Kleck, in his book *Targeting Guns*, estimates that lawful self-defense by civilians constitute about 5 percent to 13 percent of total U.S. homicides.

Countries such as Kenya present a different problem. There, up to 90 percent of homicides are perpetrated by the police, and many of those are cold-blooded murders committed with impunity.

Reasonable firearm policies would attempt to reduce guns in the hands of Dutch criminals, and perhaps of the Kenyan government; at the same time, sensible policies would try to increase firearm ownership among law-abiding people. Yet more guns in the right hands are contrary to the policy of the international anti-gun lobbies.

According to the GBAV, firearms were used in 60 percent

of the 490,000 homicides. How was this figure derived? Well, the GBAV only claims to have firearm homicide data for between 43 and 50 countries. From this limited data, you get an average firearm homicide percentage of about 22.

So how does the 22 percent figure turn into 60 percent? Secret math. The Geneva Declaration Organization refused our repeated requests to provide the calculations or formulas that were used to create the 60 percent claim.

In order to arrive at 740,000 deaths, GBAV needed to use their full estimate of 490,000 intentional criminal homicides. They clearly stated that 60 percent of these were firearm-related. The other 40 percent

would have involved knives, machetes, fists, feet, blunt objects, etc. These weapons are not going to be affected by an Arms Trade Treaty. So, if 40 percent is the correct percentage, and 490,000 is the correct number of deaths due to criminals, 196,000 has been incorrectly added to the total—at least if that total is supposed to be used in support of the Arms Trade Treaty, which appears to be the main purpose for the creation of the 740,000 factoid in the first place.

Note that as an American taxpayer, you paid to create and disseminate the fictional factoid. The United Nations Development Programme used its money to help set up and publicize the work of the Geneva Declaration Organization. By far the largest single contributor to the UNDP is the American taxpayer. Of all the many entities within the United Nations, the UNDP has been the most aggressive in pushing for international gun prohibition.

Notably, from 1999 to 2005, the administrator of the UNDP was Mark Malloch Brown. He then became Chef de Cabinet to Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and finally rose to deputy secretary-general of the U.N. In May 2007, Brown was appointed vice president of George Soros' Quantum Fund, vice chairman of Soros Fund Management and vice chairman of Soros' Open Society Institute. According to Brown, Soros and UNDP "collaborate extensively."

The good thing, from Soros' point of view, is that Soros doesn't have to pay for all the anti-gun propaganda himself. As an American taxpayer, you shoulder much of the burden. **Ⓕ**

Editor's Note: *This article is based on David B. Kopel, Paul Gallant and Joanne D. Eisen's "How Many Global Deaths from Arms? Reasons to Question the 740,000 Factoid Being Used to Promote the Arms Trade Treaty," 5 NYU Journal of Law & Liberty 672 (2010), available at <http://davekopel.org/2A/LawRev/Global-Deaths-NYU.pdf>. The "Global Burden of Armed Violence" report is available at [www.genevadeclaration.org/fileadmin/docs/Global-Burden-of-Armed-Violence-full-report.pdf](http://www.genevadeclaration.org/fileadmin/docs/Global-Burden-of-Armed-Violence-full-report.pdf).*

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