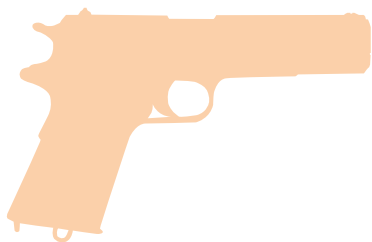


## CALIFORNIA CATCHES UP: WHY THINGS GOT BETTER

by C.D. Michel, CRPA President

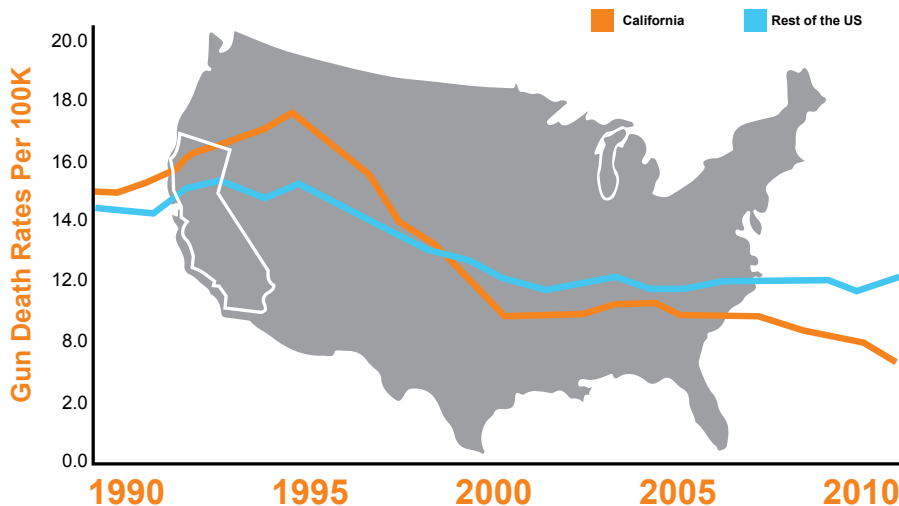


Propagandists flail as they fail. Often they become comic caricatures of themselves. Other times they become more clever, more manipulative, and more dangerous.

The Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence (LCPGV), previously regarded mainly as the law firm for the gun ban lobby, has become America's newest anti-gun-owner propaganda mill. Having been essentially bought with Joyce Foundation "progressive" money, LCPGV is upstaging the ultra-statist Violence Policy Center, which has fallen out of favor, and the Brady Campaign, which is descending into irrelevance while it gets steamrolled by the Billionaire Bloomberg's gun banning PR machine.

Having clever legal talent on staff and at its pro bono disposal, LCPGV is throwing combination punches to heartland America's midsection. First it is drafting model gun control laws and pushing them across the country. Then it spins these civil rights restrictions as "smart gun laws" with agitprop in the PR ether world.

Gun Death Rates in California and the Nation



Case in point: Not long ago LCPGV published a piece of poppycock entitled *The California Model: Twenty Years of Putting Safety First*. Their central claim is that, between 1990 and 2010, gun control laws caused a reduction in California carnage. LCPGV included a graph charting gun death rates in California and the United States, along with the claim "Over the last twenty years, the number of people injured or killed by guns in California has decreased dramatically ... the state's gun death rate has been cut by 56%."

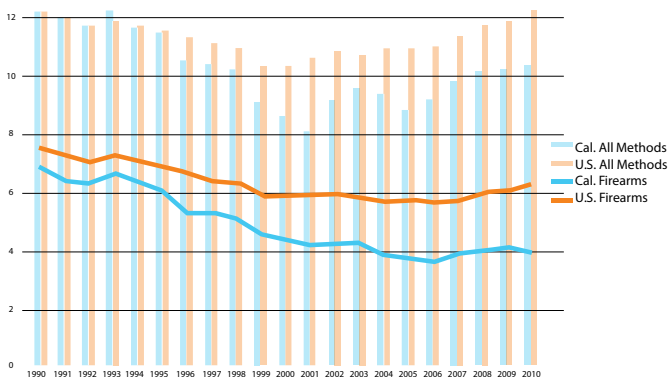
Great news, but what a crock to attribute this decline to California's counterproductive gun control laws. LCPGV may as well attribute improved dental hygiene to more frequent tooth fairy visitations.

We debunked this fraudulent cause-and-effect claim before in "Real Benefits or False Promises?" But let's dig into the data again so you'll see that the newly re-spun numbers are still misleading, and that what really caused the drop in violence is something other than gun control laws.

## GUN DEATHS ≠ GUN CRIME

Most gun fatalities are suicides. In the last reporting year available, the Center for Disease Control's mortality databases show that 61% of gun deaths are purposefully self-inflicted (almost always using legally acquired firearms). Since the LCPGV brags that the gun death rate in California is falling faster than the rest of the country, normal people (like you) might exercise common sense and look at suicides first.

Suicide Rates - California and U.S.



This, of course, explains why the LCPGV did not discuss suicides in its talking points.

California's total suicide rate – which was about the same as the rest of the nation – started plunging in 1996, falling 15% in the two decades that the LCPGV hypes. Firearm suicides dropped even further, falling 40% compared to the national drop of 14%.

What does this mean? It means something exceptional occurred in the realm of California mental health or demographics starting around 1996. As other research has shown, firearm availability has no bearing on the probability of suicides (Americans and Canadians share cultural traits and have nearly equal suicide rates, but Canadians own fewer guns and more often use poison to commit suicide – see our discussion on this in my previous blog post, “Suicides: a non-gun issue”). The only major gun control law between 1996 and 1999 was a ban on “armor piercing” handgun ammunition. Hard headed progressive congress members might need that type of round to commit suicide, but not the average depressed Californian.

This is critically important: the largest cause of firearm deaths is suicides. California's suicide rate dropped sharply in the absence of gun control laws. This drop in suicides alone accounts for most of the LCPGV observations about reduced “gun deaths.” But the LCPGV avoids mentioning it.

## GUN CONTROL ≠ CRIME CONTROL

After suicides (61% of gun deaths), the next largest class of firearm mortality is felonious homicides (the others are legal interventions and accidents, the latter of which is small and has been falling steadily for decades).

What the clever PR spinmeisters at LCPGV don't expose is that, excluding suicides during the same twenty-year period, California was a hellish place of wanton violence. At its peak, California had a firearm homicide rate 30% higher than the rest of the country. It has managed to pull that homicide rate down, and has joined the rest of the civilized nation – that is, the red

states that have been liberalizing gun laws and granting millions of shall-issue concealed carry permits in the same 20 years that California strove to eliminate them.

Which gun control laws caused the sudden drop in firearm homicides starting around 1993-1994? None. In 1994 California began requiring a handgun safety certificate to legally buy revolvers and pistols. The exam is slightly easier to pass than a second grade spelling test, and since thugs buy their guns off the street (where there is no test), retail sales were not impacted. Also in 1994 California enacted a “gun free school zone” act, but public school homicides are statistically (though not emotionally) insignificant, so that useless law wasn't the cause either. No other new significant gun control law surfaced until 1996, and that was the “armor piercing” handgun ammunition ban. After that, we waited another four years for the revised California “assault weapons” ban in 2000 (incidentally, that is the same year California gun homicides rose sharply, indicating thugs were not in need of big, bulky rifles to do their deeds).

What did occur in 1990s was back-to-back crime control laws. California passed the first “three strikes” law in 1994, sending repeat offenders to jail for upwards of 25 years. This was later expanded to the “10-20-Life” law by which criminals misusing guns could be sent to prison forever (10 years for criminally using a gun, 20 for firing it, 25-life for killing or seriously injuring a person).

With these legal tools, California wasted no time in putting violent offenders behind bars. According to the first decadal report, the California Legislative Analysis Office noted:

“Since its implementation, the Three Strikes law has had a major effect on the make-up of the prison population. Since 1994, the courts have sent over 80,000 second strikers and 7,500 third strikers to state prison ... As of December 31, 2004, there were almost 43,000 inmates serving time in prison under the Three Strikes law, making up about 26 percent of the total prison population. Of the striker population, more than 35,000 are second strikers, and about 7,500 are third strikers.”

Los Angeles County alone sent 17,001 hardened, repeat offenders to prison. LA County is the original Gangster Paradise (the song of that same title was recorded by Coolio, a Compton, California native and an alleged member of the Corner Pocket Crips). Within the first ten years, 20% of California's prison population were second- and third-strikers. Forty-one percent (41%) of those impounded people were sent there for violent crimes – assaults, assaults with deadly weapons, assault/battery and illegal weapons possession.

It's no coincidence that the rate of crime decrease doesn't track gun control laws, but is a mirror image of second and third striker incarceration rates.

Go figure.

## PROPAGANDA ≠ FACT

The LCPGV started their analysis at the same time California got tough on criminals, and then omitted that part of the story. That was not an accident. They are smart enough to know that incarcerating criminals and improving mental health does not sell gun control (or snake oil, which is essentially the same substance). Emotion does.

So they lie to stay in the fundraising game, to continue getting grants from wealthy activist foundations, and to pal around with New York billionaires.