

# IT'S HOWDY BLOOMY TIME



WHEN THE ANTI-GUN  
**MAYORS AGAINST  
ILLEGAL GUNS**  
(MAIG) RELEASED A  
“STUDY” PARROTING  
PREVIOUSLY  
DISCREDITED LIES,  
MOST MAJOR MEDIA  
OUTLETS TURNED  
INTO MICHAEL  
BLOOMBERG’S  
PUPPETS.

by  
DAVE KOPEL



**A** lot of things have changed since 1989. Back then, the musical group New Kids on the Block was still kind of new, Barack Obama was a first-year student at Harvard Law School and had not yet written even one autobiography, and what we today call “the old media” was just “the media.”

But some things haven’t changed: That same media continues to report as fact the fabrications and falsehoods of the anti-gun lobby. No matter how often NRA and other civil rights advocates provide the media with corrections, the media go right on reporting the same old untruths.

Back in the day, the media kept reporting that “assault weapons” were super-powerful machine guns that were frequently used by criminals. NRA kept explaining that these so-called “assault weapons” didn’t fire bigger bullets, and they fired one round every time the trigger was pulled. And police gun seizure data from coast to coast showed that criminals rarely used these guns.

Yet the media continued repeating the same old lies, and thus paved the way for the Clinton-Feinstein-Schumer bill that outlawed 19 guns by name, plus 200 more by generic definition, and also banned magazines holding more than 10 rounds.

The Clinton gun ban expired in 2004, but today the media are leading the charge to reimpose it and make it permanent. This time, the pretext is that American guns are the cause of Mexico’s crime problems. Again, much of the media relentlessly repeat the propaganda of the gun prohibition lobby, while ignoring repeated evidence that those claims are wrong.

Since 2008, most major media have insisted that the United States is the source of 90 percent of “Mexican crime guns.” *America’s 1st Freedom* and many others have repeatedly pointed out the problems with this factoid:

*The large majority of guns seized by Mexican police are never submitted to the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (BATFE) offices in Mexico for tracing.*

There are many reasons a gun may not be submitted. The national government of Mexico has a comprehensive firearms registry, so any gun that

was once legally possessed in Mexico would be found on the registry, without need for a U.S. trace. Corrupt Mexican law enforcement officials sometimes refuse to allow BATFE to trace large arms caches. Sometimes Mexican officials just keep seized guns for themselves. Guns with obvious origins outside the U.S. (e.g., those with Chinese manufacturing markings) are not submitted for American tracing. Also, guns on which serial numbers have been

removed are not submitted.

Moreover, according to BATFE, the large majority of Mexican trace requests submitted to BATFE fail. This means that—despite 42 years of American recordkeeping about the manufacture (or import), wholesale distribution and retail sale of every American firearm—no records could be found. This suggests that many of the seized guns did not, in fact, originate in the U.S.

Additionally, even a successful trace does not prove that agents of the Mexican cartels purchased the gun in the U.S. To the contrary, we know that the cartels have set up gangs in the U.S. to steal American guns and smuggle them into Mexico.

Finally, we know that the cartels have been caught with enormous supplies of grenades, rocket launchers, machine guns and other military weapons—none of which can be purchased over the counter at a gun store in Texas or Arizona. This indicates that the cartels have extensive supplies from a global black market of weapons stolen from national armies or sold by corrupt military or police officers.

Yet, only rarely are these facts mentioned in the so-called “mainstream” American media. Instead, the media continues churning out stories blaming American gun owners for Mexican gun crime.

For example, in September, billionaire New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg put out another “study” blaming America’s Second Amendment freedoms for Mexican violence. The study came from Bloomberg’s self-funded group, Mayors Against Illegal Guns (MAIG). (A more accurate name would be Illegal Mayors Against Guns, since many of the mayors in the group have been convicted of crimes, and since the group supports every gun control scheme possible.)

The Bloomberg group, using data from BATFE, announced that 90 percent of traced Mexican guns



come from the United States, and 75 percent from the four border states of Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and California.

As expected, much of the media—having no inclination to investigate the veracity of the study—parroted Bloomberg’s 90 percent figure as fact.

A story from the ABC News “Investigative Team” began: “A shocking new report obtained by ABC News ...” Well, “obtaining” the report was, despite the story’s implication, not exactly a feat of Woodward and Bernstein-style

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REPORTING THE MAIG FACTOID SO CREDULOUSLY, ABC SHOULD HAVE DONE A BIT OF INVESTIGATING ...

sleuthing. MAIG sent out press releases *en masse* to tout the report.

The report was further publicized by taxpayer-funded press releases from the mayoral offices of the members of Bloomberg’s group, such as Boston Mayor Thomas Menino and Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.

ABC found the figures “shocking,” although they’re essentially the same misleading figures that have been all over the media for the last two years.

ABC also sensationalized Mexico’s “unprecedented bloodshed.” Actually, the 2009 homicide rate in Mexico was 14 per 100,000, the same as it was in 2000. Nor did ABC inform readers that even Mexico’s President Felipe Calderón has admitted that the vast majority of homicides are drug gangsters killing each other.

Instead of reporting the MAIG factoid so credulously, ABC should have done a bit of investigation of its own. If ABC had, it might have found this statement, about an earlier version of the Mexico trace factoid:

“DHS [Department of Homeland Security] officials believe that the 87 percent statistic is misleading as the reference should include the number of

weapons that could not be traced (i.e., out of approximately 30,000 weapons seized in Mexico, approximately 4,000 could be traced and 87 percent of those—3,480—originated in the United States.) Numerous problems with the data collection and sample population render this assertion as unreliable.” (See p. 69 of the Government Accountability Office report available at [www.gao.gov/new.items/d09709.pdf](http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d09709.pdf).)

In fact, in a 16-paragraph story, ABC’s investigator did not include a single word of perspective from a different viewpoint.

INSTEAD OF REPORTING THE MAIG FACTOID SO CREDULOUSLY, ABC SHOULD HAVE DONE A BIT OF INVESTIGATING ...

One rule of good journalism is to not just turn a press release into a news article. A press release can be used as a starting point, but additional reporting should be done. Unfortunately, the BNO News wire (which provides news to MSNBC, among others) essentially rewrote the MAIG press release into a “news story,” while adding no new content.

Over at AOL News, Dana Chivvis wrote a more balanced story. She reported the 90 percent factoid from MAIG, but also pointed out that previous stories by FOX News and the *Examiner* newspaper had pointed out the flaws in the “90 percent” factoid.

Unlike ABC and many others, she was neutral as to who was right, writing, “No matter whose count you believe. ...”

It was commendable that she informed readers that there were two points of view.

It would have been even better if she had dug into the different sources. Then, she would have discovered that the high and low figures are compatible. Only a fraction of Mexican crime guns are submitted to BATFE for tracing, and of the trace requests, most fail. But for the trace requests that succeed, most do find a U.S. origin.

The rest of the article discussed other

gun issues, some not accurately. For example: “ATF can’t fine those dealers who sell guns illegally—it can only revoke the dealer’s license.” It’s true that BATFE can’t impose administrative fines, but if a gun dealer is knowingly selling guns illegally, BATFE can refer the case to the local U.S. Attorney’s Office for criminal prosecution. If the dealer is found guilty, the court can send him to prison for many years, and also impose enormous fines.

*Homeland Security Today*, a news website and digital magazine, is not written for a mass audience; however, special publications for people who work in or with federal departments and agencies can be very influential to their select audience. The MAIG report got a 20-paragraph story from *Homeland Security Today*—an entirely one-sided presentation of MAIG’s viewpoint. If you wonder why some people in the Department of Homeland Security are hostile to gun ownership, articles like this are one reason.

Globally, there’s no more influential magazine than *The Economist*, a newsweekly published in London. Since 1843, it has established a stellar reputation for trenchant analysis, careful reporting and incisive, crisp writing. Critics, though, complain that *The Economist* is not as good as it used to be, and that it often reflects the smug worldview of the Oxford University graduates who predominate at the magazine.

I don’t know enough background facts to discern whether *The Economist’s* stories about German coal mining are reliable, but I do know that the American coverage tends to align with the conventional wisdom of the East Coast’s establishment.

Plenty of *The Economist* stories on the U.S. are often under-reported. Consider *The Economist’s* Sept. 30 piece on the Bloomberg research. The article quoted MAIG’s self-description of being dedicated “to protecting the rights of Americans to own guns, while fighting to keep criminals from possessing guns illegally.” That would actually be a good description of NRA, but it’s not really accurate for MAIG. Claiming that ordinary Americans have *no right at*

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all to possess guns, MAIG kingpin Michael Bloomberg filed an *amicus* brief in *Heller*.

In a few sentences, *The Economist* adequately summarized the main points of the MAIG report on Mexico, and another MAIG report on firearm traces within the United States.

The Mexico study, wrote *The Economist*, "has attracted the sort of response one might expect: Andrew Arulanandam, director of public affairs for the National Rifle Association, called Mayors Against Illegal Guns, 'intent on enacting some form of gun control,' and predicted that people would be 'wary about believing so-called studies that come from groups that have an interest in the outcome.' And he ought to know."

How droll.

That's the kind of wit and insight you could get for free at the Keith Olbermann Fan Forum, instead of having to pay money to read in a news magazine.

Obviously, NRA has a strong point of view on gun issues, and just as obviously, MAIG has its own viewpoint. *The Economist's* snarky point seems to be that if you're biased to pro-gun positions, you're not supposed to point out that somebody else is biased toward anti-gun positions.

A serious writer for the old-fashioned *Economist* would have talked to a couple of neutral experts (or perhaps one expert from each side), and synthesized the expert material to provide readers with the pros and cons of whether the MAIG reports were credible.

The funny thing is, AOL News did a more intellectually rigorous job than did *The Economist*, even though in journalistic prestige, *The Economist* far outranks AOL News.

Greatly exceeding *The Economist's* low standard of coverage on this issue was an *Arizona Daily Star* article by Brady McCombs. Most of the article provided the data about how many traced guns had come from each of the four border states in 2007, 2008 and 2009. McCombs included a paragraph summarizing

two of NRA's reasons for doubting the 90 percent figure: "So many guns are unaccounted for"; and the high numbers of automatic rifles, grenades and rocket launchers in cartel hands suggests that cartels have other significant sources of weapons.

The most diligent reporting on the "study" came from the *El Paso Times*. Reporter Daniel Borunda interviewed a BATFE official in El Paso, a spokesperson from the mayor's office in the border town of Juárez and also asked NRA for comment. (NRA declined as it had not yet reviewed the study.)

The *El Paso Times* also provided the essential context: "An *El Paso Times* investigation last year found that the '90 percent' figure, which was even quoted by President Barack Obama, refers to only the percentage of the guns submitted by Mexico to the ATF for tracing and not all guns seized in Mexico."

As the *El Paso Times* and *Arizona Daily Star* articles show, it would not be accurate to say that all the media are unfair on firearms reporting. The problem, though, is that the audiences for ABC News and *The Economist* dwarf those of local newspapers.

Mayor Bloomberg is very, very good at using the media. He is, after all, the founder and largest shareholder of Bloomberg L.P., a media empire with over \$6 billion in annual revenue from television, radio, Internet, print publications and data services. So MAIG is going to continue to use its expert skills to push anti-gun propaganda throughout the media.

There will always be some conscientious journalists who don't take that propaganda at face value. But there may be many more—especially at the top of the media food chain—who will gladly tell their audiences that whatever Bloomberg says about guns is all they need to know. ☹

*Editor's Note: A frequent America's 1st Freedom contributor, constitutional scholar Dave Kopel was media critic for the Rocky Mountain News from 2001 until its demise in 2009.*

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