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A Lott of Lies: Debunking John Lott, the NRA's Favorite Academic

Fact Sheet

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OVERVIEW

John R. Lott Jr. is an economist and author of the 1998 book *More Guns, Less Crime*, and is touted as an expert by the NRA and other pro-gun organizations. Even though many of his most prominent claims have been decisively refuted, he is still frequently cited and published by media outlets such as The New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, LA Times, CNN, Fox, and many others. In recent years he has testified as an expert witness in Michigan, Tennessee, Wyoming, Nevada, and even the US Senate. Lott is currently the president of The Crime Prevention Research Center, and his newest book *The War On Guns* has received rave reviews from prominent conservative politicians.

Despite these accolades, Lott has committed a host of ethical violations and his research is riddled with **numerous flaws and inaccuracies**, all of which completely undermines his credibility:

SIGNIFICANT ETHICAL VIOLATIONS

John Lott has been caught:

- Fraudulently claiming that he had published a study in the peer-reviewed Econ Journal Watch even though the journal had actually rejected his paper.ⁱ
- Falsely claiming that the mass shooting rate in Europe is equivalent to that in the United States to both the Washington Post Fact-Checker and Tennessee Legislature. His own research actually showed that the US had double Europe's rate.ⁱⁱ
- Claiming that more than 99% of Brady background check denials are errors. However, an Inspector General's report reveals that these background check denials are accurate in 99.8% of cases.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Fabricating an entire survey on defensive gun use. When asked to provide hard evidence of the survey, he claimed all the data had been lost in a computer crash.^{iv}
- Repeatedly supporting studies that have significant errors that either nullify or reverse their results.^{v,vi}
- Frequently hiding his work behind fake identities. In 2003, Lott was uncovered as having invented the identity Mary Rosh -- who claimed to be a former student of Lott's -- to defend his own work.^{vii} And in 2015, Lott was uncovered as the real author of a first person account by stalking victim Taylor Woolrich.^{viii}

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FLAWED RESEARCH

John Lott's status as a credible expert rests on two foundations: his original research on Right-to-Carry (RTC) laws and newer research on whether gun-free zones attract mass shooters.

Lott's research indicates that passing RTC laws dramatically reduces rates of violent crime. However:

- In 2004, the National Research Council voted 15-1 that the current evidence could not support Lott's claim that Right-to-Carry laws reduce crime.^{ix}
- In 2014, a sophisticated study by John Donohue of Stanford found that Right-to-Carry laws have no beneficial impact and actually increase aggravated assaults.^x

Lott's research on the intersection of gun-free zones and mass shootings finds that RTC laws greatly reduce such shootings, only 4 mass shootings (where 4 or more people are killed) since 1950 have occurred in areas that did not ban firearms, and that citizens with concealed carry permits frequently stop would-be mass shootings. Yet:

- A peer-reviewed 2002 study found no evidence that RTC laws reduce mass public shootings.^{xi}
- Lott's own research indicates that at least six additional mass shootings didn't occur in areas that banned guns.^{xii}
- His research misclassifies a significant number of mass shootings that actually occurred in areas allowing guns, ranging from Hialeah, Florida to Umpqua Community College in Oregon.^{xiii}
- An FBI report of 160 active shooting events found that only 1 was stopped by a concealed carry permit holder, compared with 4 by armed guards, 2 by off-duty police, and 21 by unarmed civilians.^{xiv}

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT ARMEDWITHREASON@GMAIL.COM.

ⁱ <https://thinkprogress.org/debunking-john-lott-5456e83cf326#.yjq5yv7x>

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://oig.justice.gov/reports/2016/a1632.pdf>

^{iv} <http://www.armedwithreason.com/shooting-down-the-gun-lobbys-favorite-academic-a-lott-of-lies/>

^v <https://thinkprogress.org/debunking-john-lott-5456e83cf326#.yjq5yv7x>

^{vi} http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/fss_papers/1242/

^{vii} <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/2003/02/01/scholar-invents-fan-to-answer-his-critics/f3ae3f46-68d6-4eee-a65e-1775d45e2133/>

^{viii} https://www.buzzfeed.com/madisonpauly/why-taylor-woolrich-wanted-a-gun?utm_term=.jjR02z9P8#.bjLX5ZpyR

^{ix} <https://www.nap.edu/read/10881/chapter/8>

^x https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2443681

^{xi} https://www.utdallas.edu/senate/documents/MassPublicShootings_000.pdf

^{xii} <https://thinkprogress.org/debunking-john-lott-5456e83cf326#.yjq5yv7x>

^{xiii} <http://www.vox.com/2016/8/30/12700222/nra-social-scientist-claims-debunked>

^{xiv} <https://www.thetrace.org/2015/06/gun-rights-advocates-say-that-places-that-ban-guns-attract-mass-shooters-the-data-says-theyre-wrong/>