**“Boston Marathon Bombing a Red Herring in Gun Debate”**

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* Red Herring
* False Analogy/Comparison

There's nothing new about tragedies being spun for political gain. So it's hardly surprising, if still disappointing, that both sides in the debate over guns have been using the [Boston Marathon](http://www.newsday.com/topics/Boston_Marathon) bombing to score points. Some gun-control proponents argue that firearms are a far bigger public threat than terrorism. Meanwhile, defenders of [gun rights](http://www.newsday.com/topics/Gun_Control) say that the restrictive [gun laws](http://www.newsday.com/topics/Gun_Control) in [Massachusetts](http://www.newsday.com/topics/Massachusetts), resulting in few guns in private hands, left residents helpless during the hunt for the suspects.

While posses of armed citizens may not be the best response to terrorism, in this instance, the lessons of the tragedy suggest that, at the very least, [gun control](http://www.newsday.com/topics/Gun_Control) is no panacea.

Some attempts to find an anti-gun message in the events that unfolded in Boston have been downright odd. As suspect Dzhokhar Tsarnaev was captured, [Derek Thompson](http://www.newsday.com/topics/Derek_Thompson), a senior editor at The Atlantic Monthly and adjunct professor at the Columbia School of Journalism, posted on his Twitter feed, "The only thing that stops 1 bad guy with a gun is 10,000 trained policemen and a 24 hour manhunt. Maybe time to rethink that one" -- likely referring to the [National Rifle Association](http://www.newsday.com/topics/National_Rifle_Association)'s "good guy with a gun" line.

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But Tsarnaev was no mere "bad guy with a gun" -- authorities feared he might have explosives -- and there is at least anecdotal evidence that many good people in [Massachusetts](http://www.newsday.com/topics/Massachusetts) wished they'd had a gun to stop him if necessary.

Meanwhile, New Yorker blogger John Cassidy invoked the defeat of a federal bill providing for expanded background checks for gun buyers as cause to lament the folly of "a country that so vigorously confronts one source of death and destruction while turning its back on another."

Cassidy asserts that, partly because of gun politics, our society does not respond to shootings nearly as aggressively as it does to terror bombings: a perpetrator using "crude, homemade bombs" instantly becomes "Public Enemy Number One," with no manpower or intelligence spared for his capture, while a shooter with a semi-automatic rifle is dismissed as a lone nut.

**But that's a flawed comparison**. Surely, a mass shooter who had managed to flee the scene of the massacre would have become "Public Enemy Number One," and the focus of a manhunt as intense as the one that paralyzed Boston (as was the case with the Washington-area snipers in 2002).

Meanwhile, Cassidy seems oblivious to the irony of his own admission that the Tsarnaev brothers were apparently able to construct lethal bombs using pressure cookers, nails and recipes found on the Internet. If religious zealots can do it, so can [disturbed](http://www.newsday.com/topics/Disturbed_%28musician%29) individuals driven by more personal demons. Even if [gun laws](http://www.newsday.com/topics/Gun_Control) managed to keep all guns out of the hands of such people (which is doubtful: The Tsarnaevs illegally owned a gun), some would turn to homemade weapons.

While Cassidy believes a gun attack on the [Boston Marathon](http://www.newsday.com/topics/Boston_Marathon) could have killed a lot more people, that is far from certain. Indeed, in an area packed with police, a shooter might have been stopped almost immediately.

Tighter background checks for gun purchases may well be desirable. But they are unlikely to stop terrifying acts of extreme random violence.

America's gun culture has its dark side, some of it evident in post-Boston bombing discussions: Pro-gun activist Kurt Hoffman wrote on the Examiner.com website that the Tsarnaevs' ability to "shake the security apparatus of the United States" shows that privately owned weapons can still effectively protect against government tyranny. Responsible [Second Amendment](http://www.newsday.com/topics/Gun_Control) supporters should strongly reject such odious rhetoric.

But we should also be wary of rhetoric that turns a horrific act of non-gun-related mass violence into a pretext to denounce guns -- and to demonize responsible [gun ownership](http://www.newsday.com/topics/Gun_Control).

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