

Brazil's President Says Everyone Should Buy A Rifle



(AP Photo/Silvia izquierdo)

Remember when Joe Biden told Americans that they didn't need a modern sporting rifle for self-defense, and they should just get a double-barreled shotgun instead? Brazil's president Jair Bolsonaro has issued his own advice for Brazilians concerned about violent crime, and he's taking a position diametrically opposed to Biden's own stance.

Everyone in Brazil should buy a rifle, the country's far-right president Jair Bolsonaro has said.

He also said on Friday that those who oppose guns should stop nagging gun buyers.

The president has already relaxed gun laws to allow more Brazilians to own firearms for self-defense, citing an increase in homicides.

Brazil has some of the most restrictive gun control laws in the world, and one of

the highest homicide rates on the planet to go along with the restrictions on the ability to keep and bear arms. Until Bolsonaro was elected in 2018, there was little chance that the average resident of Rio de Janeiro or Sao Paulo would ever be granted a license to own a firearm, but in 2019 the president enacted some reforms that made gun ownership more of a possibility than it had been in the past. Earlier this year, the *New York Times* reported that there's been a 65% increase in legal gun owners since the decree took effect.

During Mr. Bolsonaro's first year in office, the government issued more than 200,000 licenses to gun owners. The federal police, which issues licenses for self-defense, approved 54,300 permits in 2019, a 98 percent increase from the previous year. The army, which grants permits to hunters and collectors, issued more than 147,800 new licenses in 2019, a 68 percent increase.

Of course, given that it's the *Times* that we're talking about, you can imagine what they think about the number of new gun owners in the country.

"In the long run, this could be disastrous," said Natália Pollachi, the projects coordinator for Sou da Paz Institute, a public policy group that supports stringent gun laws.

... The flood of new guns in Brazilian homes stands to make domestic violence more lethal, turn ordinary confrontations fatal and turbocharge a black market that is already thriving, Ms. Pollachi warned.

... Lilia Melo, a high school teacher in the northern state of Pará, said the new rules would inevitably lead to more weapons flowing into the black market, which can only lead to more violence.

"Weapons don't bring us safety," she said. "These conflicts end up depriving us of our right to be on the streets."

Here's the thing: Brazil's gun control laws have done absolutely nothing to impede criminals and drug gangs. The country's homicide rate has hovered around 25 per 100,000 for the past decade, with anywhere from 50-60,000 murders reported every year. Compare that to the United States, where even after the biggest one-year rise in homicides in the past 50 years, our homicide rate is roughly one fifth of Brazil's.

Brazil is a public safety nightmare, and even with the moves to expand civilian gun ownership, the process of legally purchasing a firearm is still more restrictive than what you find in even the most anti-gun locales in the United States. Mental health evaluations, a background check process that can take months, age restrictions that bar those under the age of 25 from purchasing a firearm, and a requirement that all guns must be registered with the federal government. And that's just to keep a gun in your home. Despite Bolsonaro's moves to relax the nation's gun laws, carry permits remain off limits to most Brazilians... not that criminals seem to care about these prohibitions.

There are signs that Bolsonaro's re-election bid is in serious trouble ahead of next year's elections, so perhaps his encouragement about owning rifles is just a way for him to reach out to his base of supporters. Still, the fact that Bolsonaro is leaning in to gun ownership instead of embracing gun control as his political fortunes take a tumble is a sign that preventing citizens from owning a firearm for self-defense may not be as popular as it was just a few years ago. As it turns out, when governments can't protect the people they serve, an awful lot of people will choose to protect themselves instead.

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