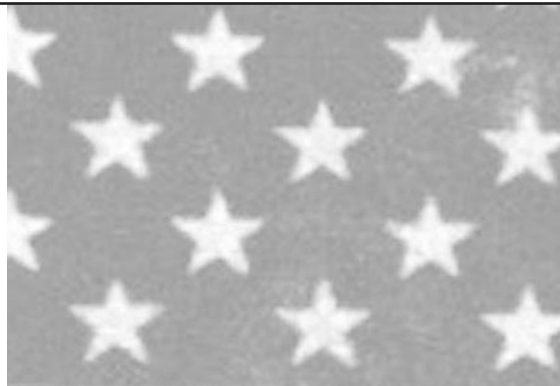


BALLISTICS  
FINGERPRINTING



FINDS CRIMINALS

OR

FUNDS BUREAUCRACY?

The sniper attacks in the D.C. area last year focused national attention on the use of technology to match bullets to the guns they were fired from – “ballistics fingerprinting.”

### PRO

A ballistics fingerprinting database can help catch criminals and save lives. There’s no invasion of privacy – gun sales records are already required and used by authorities. As the database grows, more crimes will be solved.

Yes, guns are stolen, and those already in private hands would not be in the database. But the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives has found that most crime guns were not stolen, and were purchased new only three to five years earlier.

Critics also say a gun’s fingerprint can change or be altered, but the ATF found that not one image in their database was sufficiently altered to prevent identification. Even if alterable, it’s worth implementing – no one suggests police stop dusting for human fingerprints because criminals can wear gloves.

### CON

Today, ballistics fingerprinting is far from fool-proof. A gun’s “fingerprint” changes over time, and criminals could easily alter key gun components to thwart the database, making the bullet an unreliable witness.

Existing programs in New York and Maryland failed to lead to a single conviction. California ballistics experts concluded it was impractical. 200 million guns are already in private hands; neither those nor guns obtained illegally would be tracked.

The proposals are “big government” solutions that would intrude on individual rights. The notion that the government should collect data on every gun manufactured is like having every U.S. citizen fingerprinted to catch a few criminals.

**There are at least two sides to every issue. Our democracy is built on the rule of law. We resolve differences of opinion through dialogue and debate. Disagreement is inevitable. Violence is not.**

American Bar Association



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