

The Failure of Banning Breeds
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All over the world, communities and even countries are calling for the banning of multiple breeds of dog. Is this the best way to reduce dog bites? Will this really solve the problems many communities are facing? Or, are legislators trying to take a fast way out and not address the real problem?

If a breed is banned, ultimately only those who are responsible owners of the breed will be affected. Are these the people causing the problems? No. Those who are using dogs for fighting, protecting drugs or as weapons and status symbols will continue to own the dogs and ignore the laws. This type of owner tends not to register dogs, often keeps the dogs in horrid conditions, trains them to be dangerous and feel that laws do not apply to them. These are the people who are causing problems and will continue to do so. If you ban a dog, it will become even more of a status symbol to own. Breaking the law and thumbing noses at society drive many people's actions. Banning a breed will make it more desirable to the wrong people! Suppose a community is able to round up and exterminate all dogs of a particular breed, well, new ones will be smuggled in or another breed will become a status symbol. We need to open our eyes and realize that breed bans will not stop these punks and gangs from doing what they want. Look at all the shootings going on? Obviously gun restrictions are working... Not! And new restrictions fail as well.

What about dog bites? Anywhere from 75-80% (depending on what statistics you look at, I have seen other variations) of all dog bites occur from the family pet regardless of breed or cross. This means 20-25% of all bites are from other dogs – like ones roaming loose. So, you round up all the dogs running loose, it will not have much of an impact in reducing dog bites overall – just those bites caused by loose animals. Honestly, the 75-80% is conservative. How many family pets nip a person and the bite never gets reported and medical treatment never sought? Yes, loose dogs are a risk, but a person is far more likely to be bitten by his own pet or the pet of someone he knows. Banning a breed will not reduce this number at all. Take away the dog, they will get another breed and may just as well get bitten from that one. Most dogs that bite are often poorly trained, poorly socialized and are often left in positions where they may feel the need to bite. Dogs left outside all day and night with no one to watch them are more likely to develop bad behaviors as well as become targets themselves. In a different home, the dog would probably be a great companion. But in the one the dog is in, the dog is now a risk. Would banning the breed work? No. Another dog will be brought in and the scenario play out again – regardless of the breed or cross.

What about animal control? According to the Animal Planet Network show *Animal Precinct*, New York City has about ten animal control officers to police about 5,000,000

pets. How can the officers keep up with this number? I lived in a community just north of Boston, MA that was one of the fastest growing communities in the region. They had ONE part time animal control officer. Her vehicle was constantly breaking down. Several times I was called to make a run for her while her police-issue junker was being fixed. How could she police all the animals in her community? A community that size needs several full-time officers. But no one wanted to increase funding to do so let alone make the existing positing full time and provide the officer with reliable transportation!

What about laws? Laws need to cover any breed or cross of dog. Laws need to realize that even a small dog can cause a fatality in a small human. According to the Washington Animal Foundation (now called the ACF) in Seattle, WA, of the 24 dog bite fatalities in 2001, one was from a Pomeranian, one from a Beagle and one from a Labrador retriever; only one was from a confirmed American Pit Bull Terrier. Maybe we should look at banning Pomeranians? They killed as many people than the APBT that year! In other years, Dalmatians were reasonable for more dog bites than any other breed. Why? Well it was in the years following the release of the live 101 Dalmatians. Irresponsible breeding, owners giving into children's wails or falling for the hype of Hollywood and having to get that new fad. A breed that needs experienced owners and that have high energy drives were brought into homes far from prepared or able to properly own one of these lovely dogs. The results were tragic: sharp rise in bites, thousands of dogs being dumped when they hit a year to eighteen months and became unruly adolescents, etc. Laws to ban a specific breed will not work. Laws need to cover all breeds as any dog can bite and any dog can cause a fatality.

The fault lies with the owners first and foremost. Communities need to increase fines for dogs roaming loose. Yes, accidents happen to even the best dog owner and a dog can escape. But those who habitually allow dogs to roam or be in a position to escape by not having proper fencing are a major problem. Owner who leave dogs unattended outside when no one is home are creating a greater risk. In many areas I have lived, there always seemed to be a core of dogs (of multiple types, breeds, sizes) that were always loose or escaping. The owners could care less. They never felt their dogs were a risk. Yet these dogs had been threatening people in the community and causing damage to property. The fines for roaming dogs are often so minimal that the owners do not care: easier to pay the fine than to fix the problem. Animal cruelty cases need to be made felonies with mandatory jail time for those found using dogs for illegal activities. Hit owners in the wallet and force them to change. Habitual offenders need to lose the PRIVILEGE to own another life. Most punishments for irresponsible pet owners are presently a joke.

And of course, let's not forget education of dog, child, dog owners, and the public. It is through education and responsible dog ownership that dog-related incidents will be reduced. Not through the banning of only a select few breeds.

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