



CSPV POSITION SUMMARY

PS-002

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Gun Control Efforts

Research on the effectiveness of gun control laws is inconsistent. In part, the research reflects the heated ideological debate between those supporting gun control and those opposing it. Both sides of the issue have published articles citing that either gun control does in fact reduce violence or gun control does not reduce violence.

A major problem for those in support of gun control is proving the efficacy of gun control laws. These laws are extremely difficult to evaluate. First of all, the nature of law impedes implementing a controlled experiment in which random cities are assigned to pass specific laws and "control" cities are required to have no gun control laws (which would involve overturning existing laws). In addition, laws generally are very difficult to evaluate due to differential enforcement practices in different districts and states. Evaluation research has demonstrated that most gun control laws are poorly enforced due primarily to a lack of resources and the inability of law officials to meet the new legal requirements without an expanded institutional capacity.

Further complications for evaluating gun control laws include controlling for outside contamination from other nearby cities. For instance, if Denver passed a strict gun control law there is no way to keep guns from nearby cities from filtering in and, therefore, an inability of knowing what kind of effect those guns (contamination) would have on the experiment. Gun control effectiveness is also obscured by evidence of a displacement effect, that is, while gun related crimes decline in the targeted area, they often increase in nearby areas in which the gun laws do not exist. The location of these crimes has shifted, but the overall number or rate has not changed.

The evidence for gun control, therefore, is based almost totally on non-experimental research that limits our knowledge and understanding of gun control efficacy.

References

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