

7. THE POLITICS OF GUN CONTROL

No strategy can be constructed in a vacuum. Gun control, like other progressive measures, faces a diverse range of opponents. Quite apart from those who have different priorities for health from crime prevention and for peacebuilding, there are a range of groups which have a material interest in the arms trade, those who reject the efficacy of firearms control and those who embrace a firearms ideology which associates freedom with guns in a domestic and international context. The American firearms lobby and its international affiliates are probably the most active in this domain and have attempted to construct efforts of the United Nations to control firearms and small arms as part of an international conspiracy to ban civilian use of firearms. Perhaps because of the politicization of gun control, there has been considerable debate about the issue and about the appropriateness of current efforts to reduce gun death and injury. Some have suggested that firearms death and injury are not serious problems compared to other causes of death such as cancer.⁶⁸ Others have argued that there is little evidence to support the link between access to firearms and rates of death and have disputed the studies which propose that stricter controls on firearms reduce gun death and injury.⁶⁹ Some have suggested that increasing access to firearms through arming for self protection saves lives and reduces injury.⁷⁰ These studies have been critiqued for methodological problems.⁷¹ Some of these studies have been dismissed as "political intervention"⁷² and certainly there have been parallels drawn between the gun lobby and the tobacco lobby's efforts to shape the research agenda.⁷³ The gun lobby includes divergent groups with a range of agendas. They promote a dichotomy between "law-abiding gun owners" and the "criminal element" and maintain that controls on legally held guns will have no effect on illegal

⁶⁸ Gary Mauser, Gun Control is not Crime Control, Fraser Forum, 1995.

⁶⁹ Gary Mauser, Are Firearms A Threat to Public Health? The Misuse of Science in Medical Research, (unpublished) presented to the Canadian Law Society Association, Brock University, June 1 - 4, 1996. Gary Kleck, Point Blank, Guns and Violence in America, Aldine de Gruyter, 1991.

⁷⁰ Gary Mauser, op.cit., J.R. Lott and D.B. Mustard, Crime Deterrence and the Right to Carry Concealed Handguns, Journal of Legal Studies, 1997, xxvi 1 - 68; Gary Kleck and M. Gertz, "Armed Resistance to Crime: The Prevalence and Nature of Self Defense with a Handgun", Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, 1995, 86 (1) 150-187.

⁷¹ D.W. Webster, J.S. Vernick, J. Ludwig, K.J. Lester, Flawed Gun Policy Research Could Endanger Public Safety, Am J. Pub. Health, 1997, 87 (6): 918-921. David Hemenway, Survey Research and Self defense gun use: An Exploration of extreme over estimates", Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, in press.

⁷² Neil Boyd, Bill C-68: Simple Problem, Complex Solution, Canadian Journal of Criminology, 1995.7

⁷³ Arthur J. Kellerman, Comment: Gunsmoke - Changing Public Attitudes towards Smoking and Firearms, American Journal of Public Health, June, 1997, Vol. 87, (6).