



Can Gun Control Work? (Studies in Crime and Public Policy)

James B. Jacobs

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Few schisms in American life run as deep or as wide as the divide between gun rights and gun control advocates. Awash in sound and symbol, the gun regulation debate has largely been defined by forceful rhetoric rather than substantive action. Politicians shroud themselves in talk of individual rights or public safety while lobbyists on both sides make doom-and-gloom pronouncements on the consequences of potential shifts in the status quo.

In America today there are between 250 and 300 million firearms in private hands, amounting to one weapon for every American. Two in five American homes house guns. On the one hand, most gun owners are law-abiding citizens who believe they have a constitutional right to bear arms. On the other, a great many people believe gun control to be our best chance at reducing violent crime. While few--whether gun owner or anti-gun advocate--dispute the need to keep guns out of the wrong hands, the most important question has too often been dodged: What gun control options does the most heavily armed democracy in the world have? Can gun control really work?

The last decade has seen several watersheds in the debate, none more important than the 1993 Brady Bill. That bill, James B. Jacobs argues, was the culmination of a strategy in place since the 1930s to permit widespread private ownership of guns while curtailing illegal use. But where do we go from here? While the Brady background check is easily circumvented, any further attempts to extend gun control--for instance, through comprehensive licensing of all gun owners and registration of all guns--would pose monumental administrative burdens. Jacobs moves beyond easy slogans and broad-brush ideology to examine the on-the-ground practicalities of gun control, from mandatory safety locks to outright prohibition and disarmament. Casting aside ideology and abstractions, he cautions against the belief that there exists some gun control solution which, had we the political will to seize it, would substantially reduce violent crime. In *Can Gun Control Work?*, James B. Jacobs, one of our most fearless commentators on intractable social problems, has given us the most sober and even-handed assessment of whether gun control can really be made to work.

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