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Gun Control Laws: A Solution or a Problem?

            The night of July 23, 2015, was tragic for the people of Louisiana.  Using a handgun, a man opened fire in a movie theater in Lafayette, leaving three people dead and seven others injured (Payne).  According to the Gun Violence Archive, 372 mass shootings happened in the United States last year ("Mass Shootings - 2015").  After each mass shooting, the proponents and opponents of gun control laws continue arguing.  As a new CNN/ORC survey reveals, 52% of Americans think gun laws should be stricter, whereas 46% think they should not (Diamond). Personally, this debate is new for me because I come from a country where the occurrence of gun violence is very rare.  Nevertheless, the U.S. is going to be my home until I graduate.  Therefore, I have been wondering if gun control laws can make it safer, and I decided to explore whether there should be more gun laws in the U.S.

            To begin, I used the website of the LSU Libraries to understand the relationship between gun control laws and mass shootings.  The website gives free access to hundreds of academic and non-academic sources, but I decided to only read academic ones because they are more trustworthy.  The first article I read was published in the *International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences* in 2014.  As stated by Frederic Lemieux, the author, a mass shooting is an incident in which “four or more people are killed by one or more murderer(s) in a particular location with no cooling-off period between the murders” (75).  Lemieux reports that countries with high gun ownership rates are more likely to experience mass shootings (82).  He suggests that mass shooters’ accessibility to large capacity magazines can increase the number of victims (90).  Furthermore, he claims that 56% of mass shooters are mentally ill (91).  Thus, he unreservedly urges legislators to make gun control laws stricter (91).  At this point, I agreed with him.  It makes sense that fewer guns mean fewer mass shootings.  I have never heard about mass shootings in my country, and it is very rare to see civilians with guns.  In addition, background checks can prevent people with mental illnesses from purchasing guns.

            To check whether other scholars agree with Lemieux, I went back to the research page on the LSU Libraries’ website.  Surprisingly, I found an article published in the *American Behavioral Scientist* clearly disagrees with Lemieux.  It is written by Gary Kleck, a professor of criminology and criminal justice.  The journal mentions that Kleck has testified before Congress and state legislatures regarding gun control regulations (1464).  As a result, I thought that it was important to consider his point of view.  Kleck states that mass shootings are “the worst scenarios to use to advocate for moderate gun controls” (1461).  He argues that gun control laws are not effective in preventing such incidents because they only delay gun purchases, and criminals get the guns eventually (1461).  He adds that making restrictions on gun shows are useless because most guns used in mass shootings are either stolen or the shooter bought it before intending their crime (1454).  Moreover, he asserts that preventing large-capacity magazines does not help minimize numbers of a mass shooting victims (1457).  He explains that mass murders usually use multiple guns with several full magazines (1457).  As I finished reading Kleck’s conclusion, I was convinced that some gun control laws are ineffective.  I came to think that banning large-capacity magazines is not significantly beneficial, and background checks have a minimal benefit as many guns used in mass shootings were stolen.

            Strikingly, Kleck also implies that gun control laws can make civilians more vulnerable (1459).  Criminals can find ways to get guns illegally while civilians who obey the law may not have guns to protect themselves.  Since Kleck does not discuss this point further, I decided to investigate it more.  This time, I used Google Scholar.   I found an essay written by Don B. Kate, a criminologist and constitutional lawyer.  According to Kate’s article, there are 1.5 million defensive gun usages each year (69).  Interestingly, having a defensive gun can be a very practical means of protection (Kate 69).  Kate mentions that “surveys among prison inmates find that large percentages report that their fear that a victim might be armed deterred them from confrontation crimes” (70).  Hence, he emphasizes that taking away the guns of “ordinary people” increases crimes by making them vulnerable (79).  Kate’s conclusion surprised me.  Consequently, I decided to look for evidence supporting his claim.  Fortunately, I found an article written by the economists John R. Lott and David B. Mustard, who confirm that allowing civilians to carry concealed handguns can reduce crimes (31).  They declare that more than 5,747 murders and rapes would not have happened if all American citizens were permitted to carry concealed guns (31).  Actually, the claim that gun control laws can increase crimes is shocking.  However, Lott and Mustard’s analysis convinced me that Kleck’s assertion is true, and gun control laws can make civilians defenseless.

            To sum up, before I started exploring the topic, I assumed that more gun laws mean fewer mass shootings.  Lemieux’s argument about the importance of background checks confirmed my assumption.  However, Kleck’s claim that most shooters use stolen and multiple guns led me to believe that most gun control laws are not as effective as expected.  Additionally, Kate, Lott, and Mustard convinced me that gun control laws can be pointless as well as harmful.  Now I can say confidently that the United States should not have more gun laws.  Luckily for Americans, the controversy of gun control is easily researchable.  Nonetheless, it is not that easy to decide which side of the debate is right since some academic journals provide conflicting ideas and data.

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