21st Century Justice: Current Research on Policing, Criminals, Prisons, and Guns

"Gun Policy in a New Second-Amendment World"

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in a New 2nd Amendment World

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Firearms Facts

- ~250 million in private hands
  - 1/3 handgun

- **Ownership quite concentrated**
  - ~1/3 of households, ~1/4 of adults

- **Annually:**
  - 30,000 gun deaths
  - 80,000 injuries
  - 500,000 gun crimes

- **Guns are used in:**
  - 52% of suicides
  - 68% of homicides
  - 25% of personal robberies
Obama Administration’s Strategy

• Whenever possible, avoid talking about guns
• If pushed (as after Tucson), focus on enforcement
  – Administration taking heat from gun control groups
  – But I think this is good policy, as well as good politics
The challenge

• Whatever you think of current regulations, politics make big changes unlikely
  – State / local regulations undermined by across-state gun transfers
  – Federal politics are what they are (Brady Act was a very watered down law, yet still took a miracle to enact)
• Courts striking down gun bans in DC and Chicago
• Ultimate implications unclear – what other regulations will Supreme Court ultimately let stand?
• What can we actually do that would help?
Feasible, alternative strategies

• Reduce volume of youth violence
• Reduce gun involvement in youth violence
  – **USE**: Change incentives for using a gun
  – **ACCESS**: Make it more difficult for youth to access guns and ammunition
1. Anti-gun policing (key role of gun carrying)
   a) Most homicides in US involve guns, most victims discovered outside
   b) NYPD does a lot of this, studies of Pittsburgh (Cohen & Ludwig) suggests this helps reduce gun violence
   c) But challenging to implement appropriately

2. Swift, certain punishment for carrying guns
   a) Police complains about slap on wrist for illegal gun carrying (“real crime” vs. probabilistic harm)
   b) Seems like promising margin but little direct evaluation evidence (& implementation?)
USE: Make guns a liability to criminals (swift, certain punishment)

3. **Rewards for tips about guns**
   a) Venkatesh: Lots of teens carry guns for status
   b) Rewards for tips inverts incentives to show off
   c) NYPD pilot project, but never evaluated

4. **Direct communication of gun priority to gang members, group sanctions (Boston)**
   a) Is this as promising as we hope? (And can it work in areas w/ weakly organized gangs / drug mkts?)

5. **Less promising:** Long prison terms
   a) People are short sighted (young criminals especially)
Surprise: many high-risk people have difficulty in obtaining guns
(the Chicago story, from Cook / Ludwig / Venkatesh / Braga 2007
Economic Journal)

1. Large price mark-ups relative to legal mkt.
2. Substantial wait times
3. System of “retail brokers” has developed
4. Large share of purchase attempts unfulfilled
   (Different for guns than drugs b/c durable goods?)
Tactics for increasing friction / price in gun market

• Reduce theft through locks & liability
• Investigate “point” sources (both FFL and in the underground market)
  – ATF trace data important for this activity
• Provide arrestees with incentives to share information @ gun sources (NJSP)
• Don’t bother with gun buybacks
Why invest here rather than other areas, in world of severe budget deficits?

• Costs of this problem more widely shared than victimization statistics would suggest

• Gun violence compounds every other social problem and degrades city’s capacity to address all of them
  – Exposure to community violence seems to have wide range of adverse impacts on children’s development
  – Lethal violence (to which guns contribute) particularly costly
  – Every homicide drives 70 people out of city (& drives out businesses)
  – Total social cost of gun violence to Chicago on the order of $2.5 billion per year, around $2,500 per household per year
  – “Victims aren’t the only victims”

• Future vitality of our cities depends on our getting this right, things we can do even without changes in federal, state laws