

weapons altogether, but its law was struck down in 2012. In Alaska, Arizona, Vermont, and Wyoming, no permit is needed to carry a concealed weapon.

Both sides of the gun debate believe that they argue for actions that will increase public safety. The advocates of gun ownership point out that localities with strict gun control laws often have very high crime rates and all that bans on handguns do is ensure that only criminals have guns. The advocates of gun control acknowledge the problems but counter that the real problem is that borders are porous and other surrounding jurisdictions often have very weak gun control laws. In fact, according to criminologist Garen Wintemute at the University of California, Davis, a dispassionate look at the evidence seems to support the key claims of both sides. Studies have shown that certain types of gun restrictions—waiting periods, background checks, and some level of screening for gun buyers—work. In Wintemute's words, "They reduce rates of criminal activity involving guns and violence among people who are screened out and denied purchase of a gun—about 25 percent to 30 percent of those who are screened."^b Other types of restrictions, such as gun "buybacks," do not. Buybacks often encourage people to turn in only old, sometimes inoperable guns.

Some measures, such as requiring gun manufacturers to install trigger locks on new handguns, are still too new to allow researchers to evaluate the effects. However, the argument for treating gun violence as a public health problem is a strong one. Gun wounds, most of which

are accidental, are among the leading causes of death in the United States.^c At the same time, there is no evidence to suggest that gun control laws reduce violent crime. This raises an intriguing question: How can gun control laws work and yet not work at the same time?^d One possible reason it's hard to say: "The N.R.A. has blocked most efforts at serious gun research, going so far as to restrict access to the highly informative data available from Justice Department traces of guns used in crimes," according to *The New York Times*.^e

^aQuoted in Alan Greenblatt, "When It Comes to Politics, States Are Barely United," NPR, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/itsallpolitics/2012/12/26/168068305/when-it-comes-to-politics-states-are-barely-united>.

^bQuoted in Jeremy Travis and Michelle Waul, *Reflections on the Crime Decline: Lessons for the Future? Proceedings From the Urban Institute Crime Decline Forum* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute Justice Policy Center, August 2002), 16, http://www.urban.org/uploadedpdf/410546_crimedecline.pdf.

^cFor a discussion of the public health approach to gun violence, see David Hemenway, *Private Guns, Public Health* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004). For statistics related to injuries and fatalities by year, see the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/index.html>.

^dWintemute's answer: "The resolution of that apparent paradox is that under current criteria so few people are denied the purchase of a firearm under Brady and its state-level analogs relative to the number of people who purchase guns every year that an impact on that select group is too small at the population level to be noticed." Quoted in Travis and Waul, *Reflections on the Crime Decline*, 16.

^eGary Gutting, "The N.R.A.'s Blockade on Science," *New York Times*, December 20, 2102, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/12/20/the-blockade-on-science-on-gun-violence/>.