

## Report: Most Gun Control Policies Ineffective at Preventing Gun Crime

**Finds mental health reform would have greatest impact**

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December 10, 2015

A report published earlier this month suggested that many of the policies championed by gun control activists are ineffective at combating gun crime and advises policy makers to focus on mental health.

The report, authored by Dave Kopel and published by the libertarian-leaning non-profit Cato Institute, analyzed real-world examples of universal background checks, bans on high-capacity magazines, and bans on assault weapons in the United States as well as internationally to determine their effectiveness. It found that policies did not achieve their intended goals of reducing gun crime or preventing mass shootings.

The report said regulating firearms was less important than focusing on who possesses those firearms. “Firearms in the hands of law-abiding citizens enhance public safety,” the conclusion reads. “Firearms in the wrong hands endanger everyone. Responsible firearms policies focus on thwarting dangerous people and do not attempt to infringe the constitutional rights of good persons.”

It went on to conclude that a universal background check system “is constitutionally dubious, imposes severe burdens for no practical benefit,” and would require “registration of all firearms” to be effective.

The report said that what gun control activists refer to as “assault weapons” and “high-capacity magazines” are actually common firearms and magazines. “Outlawing standard firearms and their magazines deprives innocent victims of the arms that may be best-suited for their personal defense,” it said. “Sensational crimes are often used to push poorly conceived laws which criminalize peaceable gun owners.”

Kopel found that improved access to mental health care would likely have the biggest impact on preventing both mass shootings and everyday violent crime.

“For general improvement in public safety I think mental health is, by far, the issue that has been least addressed and for which there’s the largest potential benefit,” he said. “That’s certainly true within the mass attacks where you have a very disproportionate number of perpetrators who are severely mentally ill. But roughly one fifth of U.S. homicides are perpetrated by people with severe mental illness so helping them beforehand would make a big difference.”

He blamed gun control advocates’ focus on superficial solutions, which appeal to their target demographic, as well as a lack of monetary support, for preventing meaningful mental health reforms.

“Of course the problem with that is the severely mentally ill are not a powerful political coalition,” Kopel said. “They don’t have Michael Bloomberg and \$50 million on their side.”

Kopel said the report, published on Dec. 1, was not produced in response to any recent events but was a long-term project. He said the project began in 2013.

“Good gun policy is a life or death issue so it’s very important that policy makers and the public that influences policy makers make informed decisions,” Kopel said.