Gun Control and Homicide Analysis

While gun control is a heavily debated topic in society today, I believe in the case of if gun control laws would reduce the number of homicides in the US, it tends to lend towards the fact that the laws would not reduce the number of homicides. In *Taking Sides Clashing Views in Crime and Criminology*, two scholars, Professor Zimring and Professor Stell argue on the matter. Professor Zimring believes gun control laws to be crucial in order to reduce the number of homicides, while Professor Stell argues that the laws will not have a noticeable effect. In this essay, I will analyze both sides of their arguments critically, while comparing and contrasting, and relay my own opinion and analysis.

Professor Zimring holds up a strong case for stronger gun control leading to lesser homicides. He argues that while guns are only used for 4% of crimes, and only 20% of violent, it is still 70% a part of criminal killings (Hickey, 2013). Zimring focuses on the fact that guns are just more likely to kill if used in a crime rather than knives or physical combat. He compounds upon this fact by saying that “many homicides were the result of attacks apparently conducted with less than a single-minded intent to kill (Hickey, 2013).” If there was any question that gun use was only used to threaten in crimes, Zimring proves that most criminals using guns intended to kill from the start. He continues his argument in attacking the pro-gun American mindset that “Guns don’t kill people, people kill people (Hickey, 2013).” He argues that while the availability of a gun does not mean it will play a role in the deciding factor of if a man is going to commit a violent crime or not, the gun still contributes crucially to the death rate when used in criminal attacks. He expands saying, “Our rate of assault is not exceptional; our death rate from assault is exceptional (Hickey, 2013).” However, Zimring is reasonable in what kind of gun control should be done. He refers to regulations restricting dangerous or high risk users from obtaining and
using guns and also the banning of weapons that can be easily misused (such as automatic weapons) (Hickey, 2013). However, the professor himself does not offer a better solution than the mixed of the various laws we have today. He himself actually says, “We have no business asking whether broad classes of laws… work or don’t (Hickey, 2013).”

Professor Stell proposes a counterargument to Dr. Zimring’s work. He first proposes that strict gun control (SGC) does not have a concrete and clear meaning and defines it himself as “an array of legally sanctioned restrictions designed to impose firearm scarcity on the general population (Hickey, 2013).” Stell believes the SGC, in the end, will not create significant rates of homicides to drop in the United States. He addresses Zimring’s data that guns are used in 70% of criminal killings and concludes that Zimring’s data of violent deaths should include suicides by definition which account for more than 300,000 Americans per year (Hickey, 2013). If suicides were included, they would make up for 50% of the guns used violently, and the hypothesis of Zimring would conclude that there would be lower suicide rates in countries with stricter gun control (Hickey, 2013). However, this does not seem to be the case, as looking at countries like Hungary and Denmark, their gun laws are stricter but have higher suicide rates (probably in correlation with their alcoholic rate more than anything else). Stell then goes back to addressing the 70% data of guns used in criminal killings. He states that this number throughout history has remained stagnant at around 70%, but the amount of criminal acts and homicides have lowered drastically (Hickey, 2013). This of course means that if criminal acts and homicides have both lowered, the 70% of gun related criminal killings have gone down a lot more as well. Zimring has said that injuries inflicted by firearms are 5-7 times more likely to result in death and uses this statistic to say that guns are inherently “more lethal” than other weapons (Hickey, 2013). Stell considers this a incorrect assumption as he refers to bombs, bludgeons, and butcher knives
that can be more or as lethal but are just not used as much as guns in violent criminal killings. He believes this is because guns have a much higher intimidation value than other weapons, because of the “estimated increased seriousness of purpose that gun possession tends to convey to others (Hickey, 2013).” He argues that “personality factors” of if the criminal is willing to do the act to killing is more important and says that gun-armed robbers are much less likely to inflict injury than unarmed or armed robbers with weapons other than a gun due to the seriousness of their weapon (Hickey, 2013). We are also stereotyped to believe that gun wielding killing can be anyone that is to snap at any moment. However, Stell argues that most killers are significantly more likely than the general population “to suffer from below-average cognitive ability, brain dysfunction, brain injury or mental illness, alcoholism or other substance abuse,” with histories of violence in their lifetimes (Hickey, 2013). Most people are not likely to commit a criminal killing, and this has even lowered significantly in the African American communities in America. Stell concludes his argument by stating that guns hold strong for self-defense and that the regulations such as the ones in the CCW-issuing states have created enough regulations such as FBI background checks, a personal history free of felonies and mental illness, and fingerprinting for guns to be well controlled enough (Hickey, 2013). His argument is that Zimring denies the use of force for self-defense and does not differentiate violent gun crime to gun use in self-defense.

Looking at both arguments, for and against increased gun control having a positive impact on homicide rates, it is difficult to take a side. While Zimring has a critical point in stating that gun violence does indeed contribute to 70% of criminal killings, one must consider the fact that overall violent crimes and homicides has decreased drastically over the years. Stell arguments I believe to be quite strange. Arguing that suicides should be included in violent death
statistics of Zimring’s data seems to be missing the point that homicides are not only violent
deaths, but criminal killings as well, which suicides are not. Stell also makes the issue of lethality
of weapons and relays just because guns are more likely to result in death, it does not make it
more lethal and states that bombs and other weapons that may be just as lethal. I also believe this
argument to be irrelevant to the homicide issue as guns are the most used weapon in homicide
killings, and while it is fact that just because it is used more doesn’t mean it is more lethal, the
other 30% of homicidal killings done without a gun does not prove enough evidence that other
weapons are likely to be lethal. However, Stell once again refers to what I believe is his strongest
argument, that criminal killings including homicide has lower in general. In comparison with the
greater mass production of guns and increase in gun ownership in America, it is difficult to say
that guns or the lessening of gun control laws has created an increase in homicidal rates. We are
not looking at however, at increase in rates, but the decrease in which gun-control laws might
provide. I believe Zimring has a point about the collaboration of gun-control laws and
state/federal regulation lowering crime in general, and not only gun related homicides. Rate of
homicides involving a firearm decreased by 49% from 1992 to 2011 (Bureau of Justice Statistics,
2013). However, one must remember that on September 16, 1994 Bill Clinton signed the Violent
Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act giving $30 billion dollars in federal aid to help
suppress crime and various other regulations were enforced upon gun ownership (NCJRS, 1994).
It seems then that gun-control laws did have an effect on lower crime rates, however, the amount
of homicide victims killed by guns stayed steady at 67% during 1992 to 2011 (Bureau of Justice
Statistics, 2013). The regulation had not contributed in helping of lowering the use of guns in
homicide. I believe this leads to my conclusion that while regulations help tremendously in
lowering crime, and gun control is a part of that, it cannot lower the rate at which guns are used
in homicidal killings. It seems the criminals will always get the guns somehow, whether they be a hardened criminal or normal day man that has cracked. This means that Zimring is correct in that it has lowered the crime rate of homicides, but incorrect in saying that gun-control has lowered gun usage in homicides. Stell was correct in saying that gun-control cannot lower the gun usage in homicides, but incorrect in saying homicides and crimes in general wouldn’t be lowered by gun control. I side then with more towards Zimring that gun-control does indeed lower homicidal rates (while not directly in the act but only by overall decline of crimes), but refuse his whole argument as it does not offer a solution for the future of how to rid of homicidal killings by guns.

In conclusion, we can see that this whole argument of gun control is rather an argument of perspective and rates. If one looks at the overall decline of crime, it can be said that in this way gun-control has contributed to the overall decline of crime including homicide. However, if one looks at the gun usage in homicides, it has not changed over time at all even with increased gun-control. This essay is effectively bias, but I myself have never been a large firearms proponent or opponent. The statistics given by the governmental agencies are also not likely to be completely accurate or representative as most of them are reported cases and there might be various unreported cases. However, with the research provided I have concluded the above analysis.