

3-5-1999

Weapons Against Weapons: Effecting Gun Control Policy

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp>

 Part of the [American Politics Commons](#), [Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](#), and the [Social Policy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

(1999) "Weapons Against Weapons: Effecting Gun Control Policy," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 6 : Iss. 9 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol6/iss9/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Bulletin of Political Psychology by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact commons@erau.edu.

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: Weapons Against Weapons: Effecting Gun Control Policy

Author: Editor

Volume: 6

Issue: 9

Date: 1999-03-05

Keywords: Gun Control, Policy

Abstract. This article critiques a recent editorial in The New Republic that compares lawsuit and lawmaking routes to effecting gun control policy.

"An Uncivil Action," a recent editorial in The New Republic (March 1, 1999), attempts to make the case that within the United States (US) lawmaking is significantly superior to lawsuits in effecting gun control policy and in inducing the putative consequences of that policy: less illegal killing of people by people. The editorial claims that "Lasting policy victories are won in the political arena, not the legal one. When crusaders rely too heavily on the courts...they inevitably skimp on building public support for their causes, thus sowing the seeds for backlash...Eventually, the only lasting solution to gun violence will be found in new legislation, not jury verdicts. Remember, laws don't undercut democracy; lawsuits do" (p. 9).

Although the editorial's Title implies that civil suits and other variants of civil legal action are much less effective than passing legislation (thus, uncivil suits), it also conjures up an historical difficulty: the quests in the US for the civil rights of racial, ethnic, and other cultural minorities. Specifically, can one validly assert that pro-civil rights policies in the US were so much more advanced by either lawsuits or lawmaking? Have not the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision; *Brown v. Board of Education*; the Great Society legislation in the administration of a former U.S. president, Lyndon Johnson; and countless lawsuits related to racial and ethnic discrimination all led to a somewhat better civil rights climate? Have not the two routes acted in a long-term, synergistic fashion?

The editorial's statement that "Lasting policy victories are won in the political arena, not the legal one" obfuscates this last point. Sure, victories are won in the political arena, because all arenas--of lawsuits and of lawmaking--are, ultimately, political. Moreover, this statement can even be deconstructed to suggest that only illegal action can lead to lasting policy victory--a deconstruction that militates against lawsuits and lawmaking as effective political vehicles.

The statement that "When crusaders rely too heavily on the courts...they inevitably skimp on building public support for their causes, thus sowing the seeds for backlash" discounts phenomena wherein court reliance is what eventually breaks down policy resistance among a population and engenders degrees of behavioral compliance then introjection of and identification with policy intent. Moreover, one can make a strong case that the two-pronged approach of lawsuits and lawmaking constrains the time in which the seeds of backlash can be sown and backlash can be reaped.

The statement that "laws don't undercut democracy; lawsuits do" is obviously a play on the anti-gun control mantra that guns don't kill people, people do. However, history is replete with examples of undemocratic and anti-democratic laws and with lawsuits that have led to weakening and eradication of impediments to democracy.

The essence of a valid comparison between the lawsuit and lawmaking routes to effective gun control or to any policy must lie in the psychosocial dynamics of the population segments to which policy is

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

applied. These dynamics significantly relate to intermediary variables between, among, and within the efficacy of lawsuits and lawmaking--public discourses and private meanings. These discourses and meanings signify the lawsuits and lawmaking and--more importantly--the intent and consequences of the associated policies. An analysis of these sequences can best help one predict in specific cases whether lawsuits with and without existing legislation or legislation with and without accompanying lawsuits will be most efficacious. In gun control as with other policy pursuits there is no magic gun, no magic bullet, and, in the long term, no magic. (See An uncivil action. (March 1, 1999). *The New Republic*, p. 9; DeLeon, P.H., Bennett, B.E., & Bricklin, P.M. (1997). Ethics and public policy formulation: A case example related to prescription privileges, *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 28, 518-425; Hollo, P. (1998). Changes in the legislation on the use of daytime running lights by motor vehicles and their effect on road safety in Hungary. *Institute for Transport Sciences*, 30, 183-199; Lambert, M.T., & Silva, P.S. (1998). An update on the impact of gun control legislation on suicide. *Psychiatric Quarterly*, 69, 127-134; Wolpert, R.M., & Gimpel, J.G. (1998). Self-interest, symbolic politics, and public attitudes toward gun control. *Political Behavior*, 20, 241-262.) (Keywords: Gun Control, Policy.)