

The Gun Debate: What Everyone Needs to Know

Phillip J. Cook

Kristin A. Goss

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The authors' academic, information-centric approach bolsters the book's impartiality.

The Gun Debate: What Everyone Needs to Know, by Philip J. Cook and Kristin A. Goss, is a balanced look at an intricate issue. Cook and Goss bring a calm, informed voice to an important, vitriolic arena of personal and public life.

The authors use a Q&A format, organizing similarly themed questions into chapters that highlight the complex nature of this issue—"The Value of Guns for Self-Protection and Combating Tyranny" and "The Costs of Gun Violence," for instance. The questions are comprehensive, from the most basic ("Why do people choose to own guns—or not?") to those about historical perspectives ("Did Hitler's gun control laws cause the Holocaust?"), and from the practical ("What about violent video games?") to the political ("How has the NRA shaped gun control policy?"). This format makes it easy to jump around or to read short passages, but while the ideas build from question to question, chapter to chapter, it feels a bit choppy to read cover to cover.

The final chapter, "Gun Policy Going Forward," contains just one question: "What sorts of gun policies might be politically acceptable going forward?" The answer that follows synthesizes material from the whole book to suggest—gently rather than with a more direct proposition—ways technology, policing, and mental-health care can prevent gun violence and subvert the polarity of this issue in partisan politics. The proposals include making available a personalized gun that can be fired only by its owner. This conclusion feels satisfying and rational; it's decisive enough to provide direction, but it's open-handed enough to accept controversy and further debate.

Both authors are university professors, and the book is well researched; it includes ample data and statistics from studies and surveys, and pages of references at the end. There are tables to help break down and compare information, including definitions of terms and an explanation of gun laws in different countries. Cook and Goss are able to explore the deep emotion and political beliefs inherent to the topic without taking them on in full.

This book is best for people who are overwhelmed by the issue of gun control but want to make an informed choice, and for those who want data and sound reasoning to justify their gut reaction to guns.

MELISSA WUSKE (Summer 2014)

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