
ARCHIVED EDITORIAL

Why gun control and abortion cannot be debated

By Richard B. Isaacs

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Gun control and abortion are similar issues in two respects. The first is that participants in both sides of the two issues secretly and sometime not so secretly consider those on the other side to be evil. The second is that there is no basis for rational debate of these issues. The reason for this is that each sides in both issues are talking about quite different issues. A simplistic overview of both of these issues shows why.

Let's start with abortion, since it is the less emotionally-charged issue.

Those who oppose abortion do so on moral or religious grounds: Abortion is murder, which is a sin in and of itself. For some, this is compound by the belief that abortion deprives God of a soul. From this perspective - of abortion as murder anyone involved in abortion is committing a mortal sin. Once you accept this, no rational person could find any situation in which any abortion would be acceptable.

Those who do not oppose abortion do so on philosophical or ethical grounds: Unwanted children, whether unwanted because the parent or parents feel they are not in a position to adequately nurture a new life, or because the baby would present a risk, physical (the pregnancy might kill the mother) or psychic (the baby is the product of rape or incest), to the mother, suffer needlessly if brought to term. From this perspective, anyone against abortion is lacking in ethics. Once you accept this, no rational person could find any situation in which abortion might be acceptably banned across the board.

Thus, we see that the very issues being discussed by each side are essentially non-related, and, thus, not really open to discussion.

Gun control is strikingly similar.

Those who oppose civilian ownership of guns do so on moral or religious grounds: The primary function of a gun is to kill, and those who would allow guns (other than in the hands of the military and the police) are encouraging homicide, which is a sin in and of itself. The stricture against homicide is strongly held: The Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church takes the point a step further, stating that women have a Christian duty to submit to rape rather than do anything that might imperil the rapist's life. From this perspective, gun ownership, particular at the level of gun-related death portrayed in the movies and on television, cannot be justified in this day and age merely because people want to hunt, or to engage in sport shooting, or defending themselves against violent criminals, or because of paranoid fears that our society might turn bad. Once you accept that even a single death from a gun is unacceptable, no rational person could be against either elimination of guns in civilian

hands, or, at the very least, registration of guns to assure that the criminal and the incompetent do not have them, or of bullets so that guns can be traced when they are misused in crimes.

Those who favor civilian ownership of guns do so on philosophical or ethical grounds: They believe that widespread civilian ownership of guns is the base guarantor of America's freedom. They concur with Noah Webster that "Before a standing army can rule, the people must be disarmed; as they are in almost every kingdom in Europe. The supreme power in America cannot enforce unjust laws by the sword; because the whole of the people are armed, and constitute a force superior to any bands of regular troops that can be, on any pretense, raised in the United States."

This is often accompanied by a belief that, since all weapons control in the world's historical past has been for some discriminatory political reason (many now even look with a somewhat-jaundiced eye on Hitler's claims that gun control would make Germany the envy of all civilized nations), we might well question our legislation, ranging from the Dred Scott decision, through past Senator Shield's proposed Congressional ban on Saturday night specials (shortened, for political correctness, from the now-unspeakable "nigger-town Saturday night specials") for the express purpose, according to the Congressional Record, of allowing "the dominant race" to prevent "the carrying by colored people of a concealed deadly weapon, most often a pistol," to more-current legislation which primarily affects the poor.

Once you accept this view, with the concurrent acceptance that some level of death from both misadventure and misuse is unavoidable (just as some level of death is unavoidable within every other activity from athletics to driving to dining to medicine), no rational person could be in favor of any legislation regarding civilian ownership of guns which allows the government to know or restrict which set of civilians has guns, because it needlessly opens the door for some (hopefully-long-distant) future loss of freedom.

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While the issues may not really be debatable, and while by nature they represent discordant and irreconcilable views, it is important to remember two things. First, that the issues themselves are serious, important, and worthy of discussion. Second, that few of the participants in either side of either of these issues hold their views because they are evil people.

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Please note that the writer of this editorial is co-author of *The Seven Steps to Personal Safety*, the leading book for civilians on dealing with violence, and does not himself carry or keep or generally recommend guns for self defense.