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Geneva Declaration Secretariat
c/o Small Arms Survey
47 Avenue Blanc, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland

t +41 22 908 5777
f +41 22 732 2738
e info@genevadeclaration.org
w www.genevadeclaration.org

Instruments of Violence

Weapons Control Efforts to Reduce and Prevent Armed Violence

Marcus Wilson

More than 526,000 people are killed each year as a result of lethal violence, and nine out of ten of these deaths occur in non-conflict settings. Lethal violence is strongly linked to underdevelopment and failure to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2011, p. 1).

Armed violence[1] takes many different forms in different local, national, and regional contexts, so methods to reduce and prevent such violence vary similarly. A common element of direct intervention[2] initiatives aimed at armed violence reduction and prevention (AVRP) is, however, the effort to control access to the weapons most often used to perpetrate violence, which tend to vary from country to country and region to region.[3] For the purposes of this paper, the term 'disarmament' is used as a shorthand for such initiatives.

Disarmament strategies are based on the expectation that restricting access to lethal weapons will result in a reduction in the level of weapons-related homicides and injuries. For example, a 2011 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) survey of 570 state and civil society AVRP interventions[4] found that 90 per cent of direct interventions were disarmament programmes that involved physically removing weapons from society (OECD, 2011, p. 37, Table 2.2).[5]

This paper demonstrates that such weapons control or disarmament initiatives are necessary but insufficient elements in attempts to reduce and prevent armed violence. It surveys a

USA, Los Angeles: Firearms voluntarily surrendered to police custody over a five-hour period on 9 May 2009. In a one-day gun buyback program, citizens who turned in a firearm received a voucher for a local supermarket.
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This Geneva Declaration Policy Paper is one of a series designed to support policy decisions for the ongoing debates about the development framework that will follow the Millennium Development Goals. This series will position armed violence reduction and prevention in the broader context of sustainable development to show how dealing with violence can have a positive developmental impact. Based on current evidence, the papers seek to highlight approaches that, it is believed, will reduce and prevent armed violence.

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range of weapons intervention approaches that have been taken—from 'stand-alone' arms control initiatives to approaches that integrate weapons control into broader development strategies—outlining their strengths and limitations in terms of AVRP. The evidence-based main findings of the paper are as follows:

- Stand-alone weapons control programmes rarely achieve sustainable reductions in armed violence.
- Weapons control programmes are most effective when they include comprehensive strategies for interventions that combine policy reforms, prohibitions on the carrying of weapons, policing, weapons collection and destruction campaigns, awareness raising, and behavioural change.
- Initiatives that produce the most measurable and sustained reductions in armed violence levels are those that address both the supply and the availability of weapons and the factors that drive demand for them. If the factors that drive the acquisition, use, and misuse of weapons—such as feelings of insecurity, mistrust of state security providers, etc.—are not addressed, interventions will have at best only a short-term impact.
- While reducing the availability of weapons is an important variable in the success and sustainability of development planning, complementary initiatives are needed to address the social and economic factors that increase the risk of armed violence.

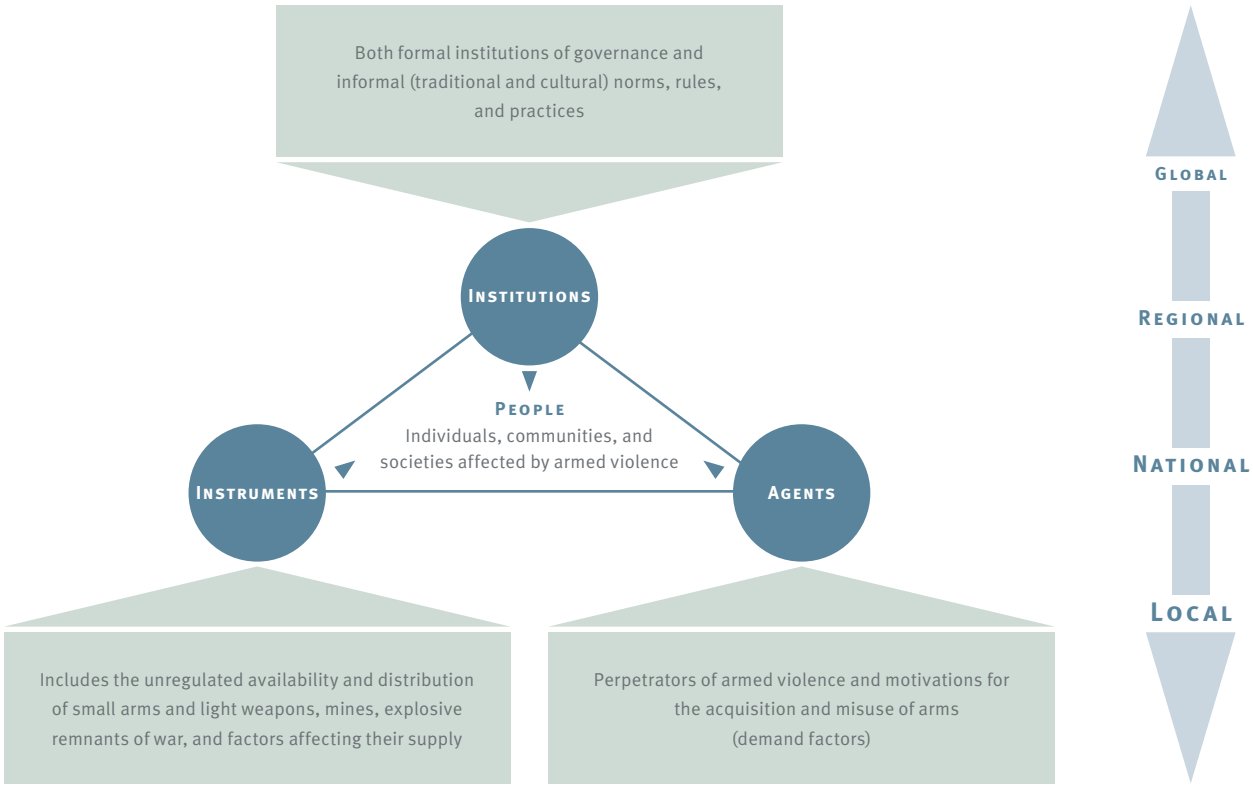
Background

Although most direct approaches to AVRP have been aimed at controlling access to weapons, there are few sound assessments of the effect of weapons control programmes on armed violence levels. As a result, most security-related policy-making and implementation initiatives proceed in the dark and are often guided by preconceptions of what kinds of violence reduction initiative work (Restrepo and Villa, 2010, p. 3).

It is important to point out, however, that a key element in reducing and preventing armed violence through the control of weapons is understanding and addressing the underlying reasons *why* people acquire, use, and misuse weapons—so-called 'demand' factors (Atwood, Glatz, and Muggah, 2006). For example, a recent Gallup crime poll in the United States showed that personal safety is the main reason for US residents to own guns (Swift, 2013). Perceptions of insecurity and the consequent need for protection also seem to drive firearm ownership in other settings. Household surveys carried out in Kenya, South Sudan, and Somaliland show that respondents consider personal protection and the protection of their village or property as the main reasons for owning a weapon (Pavesi, 2013). Respondents to a recent survey in Libya gave owning a weapon for personal protection from gangs and criminals, fear of future conflict and instability in the country, and the protection of property as the top three reasons why they owned firearms (Gallup, 2013).

AVRP thinking has evolved over recent years to reflect the need for approaches dealing with both 'supply' and 'demand' factors and to incorporate broad developmental ideas linking socio-economic and other factors to local, regional, and global issues. The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development fully reflects this orientation. Further, the 'armed violence lens' developed by the OECD (see Figure 1) captures the key elements and levels that shape armed violence patterns, i.e. the people affected by armed violence, perpetrators, the availability of

Figure 1 The armed violence lens



Source: OECD (2009, p. 50)

USA, New York: Police officers perform a random bag check at a subway entrance, August 2011. © Lucas Jackson / REUTERS

instruments (arms), and the wider institutional environment that enables armed violence and/or protects people against it (OECD, 2009, pp. 51–55). The 'lens' encourages practitioners to think outside particular programming mandates and consider the wider armed violence problem and what feeds it. In examining the strengths and weaknesses of particular weapons control approaches and initiatives, this paper shows, through illustrations from initiatives undertaken in different parts of the world, that this broader approach, connected as it is with multifaceted arms reduction efforts, is necessary for disarmament strategies aimed at AVRP to be both successful and sustainable. Disconnected interventions have much less chance of making a positive impact.

Policing strategies and justice interventions

One response to controlling weapons is to strengthen the power of the police, security forces, and justice system to deter would-be perpetrators of violence. Yet when used as a single approach to AVRP, 'zero tolerance' enforcement activities combining deterrence-driven approaches and stricter penalties show little evidence of preventing or reducing armed violence. Intelligence-driven policing that results in weapons seizure operations in targeted areas (see 'Weapons-carrying restrictions and gun-free zones', below) can be successful in controlling the proliferation of weapons, but has been shown to lack ongoing impact without complementary preventive disarmament initiatives.

Street-level police search approaches have been used in many urban areas to remove weapons from violence-prone areas. In Britain, police have the legal power to 'stop and search' an individual they have reasonable grounds to believe is carrying offensive weapons or firearms[6] (Eastwood, Shiner, and Bear, 2013, p. 18). But these powers have been criticised for being unlikely to have a deterrent effect on carrying weapons (Eades et al., 2007, pp. 28–29). A 2003 Home Office report on stop-and-search efforts targeting knife-related crime warned that:

> 'hit rates' are surprisingly low, and suggest that police actions alone are unlikely to have a huge impact on the carrying of knives. They need to be backed by educational campaigns and perhaps periodic 'crackdowns' when there is evidence of weapons being carried in a particular area (cited in Eades et al., 2007, p. 28).

In New York City similar 'stop and frisk' powers have been found to be ineffectual, or even counterproductive (Fratello et al., 2013, pp. 2–3, 89–90).

'Get tough on crime' approaches have also not achieved the desired aim of reducing violence or crime. Attempts to deter gun crime through stricter penalties have been found to be ineffective (Durlauf and Nagin, 2011, p. 28; Cook and Ludwig, 2006, p. 693). Research on minimum sentences and extra prison time for crimes committed with firearms in the United States has yet to show clear evidence of these approaches reducing gun crime; it has even suggested the opposite effect of exacerbating the problems resulting from mass incarceration. Several studies suggest that increases in the severity of punishments have at best only a modest deterrent effect, particularly in areas where sentences are already long (Durlauf and

Nagin, 2011, p. 31).[7] In a further example, eight months before the 2004 presidential elections in El Salvador the outgoing president, Francisco Flores, launched Plan Mano Dura ('Strong Hand Plan') and the subsequent Plan Super Mano Dura, which were joint police–military initiatives intended to dismantle gangs and curb homicides. Although these initiatives achieved wide popular support at the time, the approach was heavily criticised by human rights campaigners for its neglect of prevention and rehabilitation components, and the campaigns were ineffective in reducing homicide rates. Tougher sentences and large-scale confinement in isolated special prisons merely allowed gang members to strengthen cohesion and combine their efforts, resulting in an upsurge of extortions (Wolf, 2011).

In contrast, other experiences in Latin America indicate that multifaceted community-oriented approaches that combine law enforcement with economic and livelihood alternatives have achieved the best results in reducing violence (Rodgers, Muggah, and Stevenson, 2009). Known as 'second-generation' initiatives, they tend to adopt a more evidence-based approach to violence prevention and reduction, and acknowledge that local contexts shape violence, rather than the other way around. UN Development Programme-supported projects launched in Nicaragua and El Salvador incorporated, among other things, legislative reform, weapons collection activities, prohibitions on carrying weapons in public, environmental development in slums, and targeted interventions for at-risk youth and households (Rodgers, Muggah, and Stevenson, 2009, p. 16).

In summary, police services and justice systems play an important role in AVRP efforts, but they work best when combined with a multifaceted disarmament and development approach to AVRP. Police and justice initiatives alone do not provide a one-size-fits-all solution to armed violence.

Weapons-carrying restrictions and gun-free zones

Prohibitions of carrying weapons in violence-prone areas and the introduction of gun-free zones have been widely used forms of AVRP. They are designed to remove the tools of violence and instil public trust in local or state security providers. The examples discussed below from Colombia and South Africa show some positive impacts of these kinds of methods. However, they are representative of direct disarmament approaches to armed violence, and when run in isolation

USA, Arizona. Drug and gun-free school zone signs at a Phoenix elementary school. December 2004. © Matt York / AP Photo.

they do not address the underlying demand for weapons, and hence the sustainability of AVRP is limited.

In 1993 Colombia's three largest cities, Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali, accounted for 23 per cent of the population and 31 per cent of homicides. Civilians with a military-issued permit could carry concealed firearms in public (Villaveces, 2000, p. 1205). Cali (1993–94) and Bogotá (1995–97) each enacted gun-carrying bans at certain violence-prone times of year, including the weekends after paydays, public holidays, and election days (Villaveces, 2000, p. 1206). Results found that during the period under examination the incidence of homicide in Cali was significantly lower on intervention days than in non-intervention periods. On intervention days homicide rates fell from 107.5 to 89.0 per 100,000 population (a 17 per cent drop), with no apparent increase in non-firearms-related homicides (Villaveces, 2000, p. 1208, Table 2). A 9 per cent fall in the homicide rate was experienced in Bogotá, from 59.3 to 54.2 per 100,000 population (Villaveces, 2000, p. 1208, Table 2). The study concluded that, although it was unclear whether this reduction was due to the incarceration of those carrying firearms with intent to kill, whether the ban deterred people from carrying firearms in public on those days, or if the initiative created a police presence that discouraged or interrupted potential armed violence, it is possible for similar programmes to suppress serious interpersonal violence and save lives (Villaveces, 2000, p. 1209).

The Colombian temporary carry-ban model was reintroduced during the Christmas holiday season in 2009–10. An assessment of gun homicide and injury data during the period when the ban was imposed compared to previous pre-ban periods found a significant decrease in gun homicides in the areas covered by the ban. The study found that a ban with an average duration of 35 days prevented 11 gun homicides in a typical controlled area, with no signs of weapons substitution (Restrepo and Villa, 2010, p. 18). However, an evaluation of the study found that this decrease lasted only for up to a month after the ban was imposed, and the rate of decrease slowed as time passed after the beginning of the campaign (Restrepo and Villa, 2010, pp. 3, 22). The report concluded that the enforcement of carry bans had a temporary positive public health impact that diminished with time as enforcement waned (Restrepo and Villa, 2010, p. 40).

Removing weapons entirely from violence-prone areas, rather than just at violence-prone times, has been used to good effect to highlight the criminal use of guns in South Africa. Gun-free zones (GFZs) established in certain communities at the end of the apartheid era in the period 1990–94 bolstered community perceptions of safety and security, reduced the number of people carrying guns, and in some areas lowered gun crime and violence rates (Kirsten, 2004, p. 19; 2006, pp. 35–46). The campaign was the first of its kind to facilitate maximum community participation to change public attitudes on guns. The GFZ public awareness approach was supported by a 24-hour national firearms amnesty in December 1994, which collected only 900 weapons, and according to campaigners successfully placed firearms control on the political agenda (Kirsten, 2007, p. 2). The campaign has been credited with influencing the development of new policy and shifting attitudes away from the normalization of gun possession (Kirsten et al., 2006, p. 31). Studies found that GFZs had a positive impact on people's sense of security as a result of a reduction in gunshots heard by those living in the affected areas (Kirsten et al, 2006, pp. 62, 79).

Although neither of these examples shows a sustained reduction in armed violence levels, they both support an overall AVRP framework in the same way public awareness campaigns do (see below)—by providing a publicly visible measure to denormalize the use of weapons.

Community awareness campaigns and changing attitudes

Where a shift in norms or change in behaviour is required to support wider disarmament programmes, public awareness programmes can be a valuable component of AVRP measures. In terms of a measureable reduction in armed violence, awareness campaigns that are run in conjunction with changes in legislation and disarmament activities tend to have more success than those run in isolation. Public awareness initiatives alone rarely impact violence levels, but can be crucial in changing attitudes towards weapons possession and security dynamics, translating into fewer weapons used in crime and reductions in armed violence. These initiatives also provide excellent opportunities for civil society engagement at the community level, where governments might be less effective. Examples from Serbia and Somaliland illustrate these findings.

In 2004 the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons began a civil society-run public awareness campaign to change attitudes towards firearms possession and safety in the Serbian town of Zrenjanin, which had been experiencing a gun crime wave. The hope was for an initial community awareness programme—through local TV stations, door-to-door campaigning, elementary school outreach, risk education in high schools, and other approaches—to lay the foundation for better participation in future amnesty and firearms registration initiatives. An evaluation of the campaign reported an overall shift in attitude among the 40.5 per cent of the local population that were reached towards a reduction in the perception that the personal ownership of guns increased the personal safety of their owners (Attree, 2005, pp. 24, 26). Yet it was unclear whether these positive changes in attitudes translated into a reduction of gun crime and violence. A lack of official casualty data has made monitoring gun crime levels unreliable, meaning that it cannot be proved that this stand-alone awareness campaign had a positive public health impact (Attree, 2005, p. 25). This in turn invites the question of whether this successful local awareness campaign could have reduced gun crime and violence had it been supported by a multifaceted disarmament and policy framework.

In response to feuding gangs and consequential gun violence in Somaliland in the early 1990s, a collective of community-based traders, civil society groups, community leaders, and women's groups mounted a 'No Gun'

campaign that stigmatized the use of guns and shunned those who possessed them. Men with guns were refused service in shops and jeered at on the streets. Supporting public awareness efforts such as anti-gun performances/presentations and religious sermons added strength to the civil society-led campaign. In a matter of weeks the streets were cleared of weapons and clan militias were encouraged to disband and join the national security forces. As a result of the initiative guns were rarely seen in public, and police and members of the military were regarded as the only persons entitled to carry weapons in public (OECD, 2009, p. 79, Box 5.2).

These examples illustrate the benefits community-driven initiatives can have in changing attitudes towards weapons, but also the need for ongoing monitoring of violence levels in the wake of such programmes to measure their actual impact. Neither of the above-cited interventions provides evidence of reducing armed violence levels, due to a lack of capacity to carry out long-term violence monitoring after the programmes had finished. For community and public awareness campaigns to have a positive long-term measurable impact on armed violence levels, they should be designed so that their effectiveness can be sustainably monitored, and should ideally be supported by legislative reform and physical disarmament campaigns.[8]

Collection and seizure campaigns

Well-planned and transparent weapons collection campaigns and public destruction ceremonies can have a positive impact of reversing proliferation and regaining trust among civilian populations. In post-conflict settings these activities can also be crucial in reducing the threat of violence re-emerging. Yet where planning is flawed or enforcement is heavy-handed, particularly in post-conflict and low-security contexts, collection programmes can have the reverse effect of disarming vulnerable communities. In non-conflict civilian environments collection strategies run in isolation, without the support of policy or behaviour adjustment campaigns, can be only partial responses to much larger armed violence problems.

Weapons seizures and collections in conflict settings

After the long-running peace process that ended the Cambodian conflict in 1998 the first weapons collection programme began in late 1998. Official government information available in 2006 stated that 130,000 weapons had been collected since 1998, in addition to the 180,000 state-held weapons that were destroyed. Trends in the homicide rate over the period show a clear decline from 8 per 100,000 to 3.5 (Wille, 2005, pp. 61, 65). Cambodia experienced a substantial decline in homicide events[9] from 1998 to 2009 (Broadhurst, Boudhours, and Keo, 2012, p. 6). Research conducted by the *Phnom Penh Post* using hospital admission data shows a consistent and dramatic decline in firearms deaths since 1996 (Wille, 2005, pp. 67–68). Although it is difficult to demonstrate definitively that the observed changes occurred as a result of disarmament initiatives, given the timing and size of the disarmament campaign, it is reasonable to conclude that reducing access to firearms had a considerable impact on homicide and gun homicide levels (Wille, 2005, p. 72).

Post-conflict intervention in the Solomon Islands conducted in 2003 by the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands has become a model for other stability-building and post-conflict disarmament initiatives. It was reported that disarmament efforts conducted in parallel with the retraining of ex-militants received and destroyed some 3,700 firearms—more than the number of previously estimated weapons in the country (Karp, 2009, p. 175).

The proliferation of automatic weapons among East Africa's migratory cattle-herding communities in trans-border regions of Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda has led to multiple attempts at civilian disarmament, with varied results. In areas lacking sufficient state power to police the problem, gun ownership was the best guarantee of individual security. Disarmament initiatives were imposed to restore state authority over the area on various occasions during the first decade of the 21st century. Coercive disarmament campaigns in Jonglei State, in what is now South Sudan, resulted in the 'voluntary' surrender of 3,300 firearms—many of good quality—to government officials via local chiefs. The Small Arms Survey reported a serious decline in victimization in Jonglei following the joint peace process and disarmament campaign, with a 76.4–84.0 per cent rise in survey respondents reporting that they felt more secure or about the same (Karp, 2009, p. 167, Box 5.3). However, not all post-conflict disarmament initiatives are so successful and subsequent conflict in the Jonglei State region would indicate that even there the success was short-lived.

After the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement the Government of South Sudan launched a series of civilian disarmament campaigns in an attempt to consolidate legitimate state control and deliver peace. The heavy-handed approach in Jonglei resulted in local violence that killed 1,600 people in what became the deadliest military action since the end of the second civil war (O'Brien, 2009, pp. 10, 21). In 2008 the government tried again and announced a six-month comprehensive civilian disarmament programme that would be the largest conducted across the ten states of South Sudan, involving thousands of soldiers with broad enforcement powers to combat non-compliance (O'Brien, 2009, p. 16). Although largely non-violent, the 2008 campaign was ineffective and largely ignored by five states. Only one state reported the number of weapons collected and it was unclear whether all of these weapons were obtained during the six-month period of the campaign. Evidence suggested that the campaign had little or no impact on armed violence among civilians (O'Brien, 2009, pp. 11–12, 49).

Attempts by the Ugandan government to regain authority in the Karamoja region in 2001–02 saw 10,000 firearms, roughly one-quarter of the Karimojong arsenal, seized and destroyed. But the heavy-handed approach turned what was a region that supported the government into one that opposed it. Fighting ensued, forcing government forces to withdraw from the region in 2003 and leaving disarmed communities vulnerable (Bevan, 2008, p. 54; Wepundi,

Ndung'u, and Rynn, 2011, p. 13).

These examples suggest that the heavy-handed government-led disarmament of targeted groups and communities can lead to instability and even violence if the approach is not balanced, transparent, and universally applied.

In 2005–06 the Kenyan government launched a weapons collection initiative in the Karamoja border areas with Uganda in which 2,298 firearms and 4,418 rounds of ammunition were handed in. But these efforts left the Samburu community more vulnerable to attack, simply because the Samburu were the most cooperative in surrendering their serviceable weapons, while their neighbours surrendered mostly unserviceable weapons. As a consequence, a subsequent amnesty held in 2009 received no buy-in from the Samburu community, who were angry at having been left disarmed against hostile neighbours in 2006 (Wepundi, Ndung'u, and Rynn, 2011, pp. 10–11). Criticism of this latter initiative pointed to the lack of local ownership of the campaign, administrative challenges, poor coordination between civil society facilitators and the security forces, and the failure to address the underlying causes of weapons possession (Wepundi, Ndung'u, and Rynn, 2011, p. 11).

The case in Karamoja highlights the consequences of failing to secure the trust and guarantee the physical security of the local population before initiating disarmament processes. In a conflict-affected environment the seizure of weapons works best when it is preceded by the restoration of a sense of security and trust in the minds of the people, not the other way around (Bevan, 2008, p. 80; Karp, 2009, p. 167, Box 5.3; Wepundi, Ndung'u, and Rynn, 2011, pp. 15–16).

Weapons collections in non-conflict settings

Weapons collection and seizure programmes in non-conflict settings are less likely to have a positive impact unless they are part of broader initiatives aimed at addressing demand and making replacement weapons more difficult to obtain. In the case of legally owned firearms, when those who own them for protection feel that their own personal safety is a vital need on which they do not wish to compromise, it is difficult to achieve positive results in weapons collection campaigns and other control measures (Swift, 2013). Studies of gun buybacks in the United States show that they have no effect on crime reduction when interventions are brief and voluntary, and resupply is easy (Cook and Ludwig, 2006, p. 711), and there is little evidence to suggest that weapons are handed in by criminals (Kuhn et al., 2002, p. 144; Romero et al., 1998, p. 209).

Knife collections and amnesties face even more difficulties and are even less likely to produce any measurable impact than firearm collections. Knife amnesties run in the United Kingdom, for example, have produced only short-term impacts, because many were not supported by large-scale efforts to address the demand for knives (Eades et al., 2007, p. 27). While knife amnesties appear to produce modest temporary reductions in knife-enabled offences, the study

Brazil, Sao Paulo. Graffiti in downtown in Sao Paulo, during a national firearms buy-back program in July 2004. © Mauricio LIMA / AFP PHOTO

acknowledged that daily offence levels are volatile, and the relatively small decrease during a campaign could be put down to chance or coincidence. One positive result, however, is believed to be that the combined effect of greater publicity and higher accuracy of recording measures during the operation would result in driving up, rather than down, the levels of knife-related crime reported to the police (Metropolitan Police, 2006, pp. 5–6).

While well-planned, fair, and transparent weapons collection programmes do have a place in disarmament strategies, particularly when run in partnership with legal prohibitions and public awareness campaigns, collection efforts without other efforts to address the underlying causes of violence or demand for weapons will have limited and, at best, temporary effect.

Integrated disarmament approaches

The most effective examples of civilian disarmament programmes are those that have public support, a legal requirement for mandatory compliance, trade and transfer policy reforms to prevent rapid rearming, and strategies to address demand (Karp, 2009, p. 165). Stand-alone disarmament initiatives have limited effect if they are not supported by regulatory reforms, and those with a public awareness component have the added advantage of changing attitudes towards weapons.

Several countries have shown that large-scale weapons collection programmes can contribute to measurable armed violence reductions when they are supported by legislative reform, campaigns to change attitudes, and civil society involvement. The cases of Brazil, Australia, and South Africa illustrate different integrated approaches to disarmament where concrete reductions in victimization by firearms can be demonstrated.

Brazil

Brazil's Estatuto do Desarmamento (Disarmament Statute) reformed its firearm legislation in 2003 by raising the minimum age at which an individual may purchase a firearm to 25, requiring all guns to be registered, banning the public carrying of weapons, introducing background checks, toughening penalties for firearm offences, and controlling the import of firearms (de Souza et al., 2007, pp. 577–82). The statute included an 18-month national buyback programme and an amnesty for the registration of unregistered weapons.

Box 1 El Salvador

In El Salvador in 2005–06 a civil society coalition called Society Without Violence launched a 24-month municipal pilot project in San Martin and Ilopango with the goal of reducing armed violence levels. The campaign was designed around key intervention areas: restrictions on carrying weapons in public, increasing police capacity, changing public attitudes towards guns, and the voluntary surrender of weapons (which was not carried out) (Cano, 2006, pp. 11–12, 56). An evaluation of the project summarized its aims as an attempt to discourage the circulation of arms in public places, which would then result in a drop in violence in those locations (Cano, 2006, p. 56). It was noted that the implementation of the project faced opposition and a lack of political will among municipal governments, who were openly critical of it (Cano, 2006, p. 57). Indicators of violence levels were contradictory. Lethal violence data in San Marino showed a notable reduction in firearms homicides, but Ilopango experienced a rise in homicides (Cano, 2006, p. 60). The lesson learned here is that for disarmament approaches to be successful, political will and local ownership are crucial. Imposing even multifaceted approaches to AVRP on an unreceptive audience will reduce the likelihood of success.

El Salvador. A soldier uses a welding torch to destroy the chamber of a pistol in September 2012, during a program during which the army destroyed over 800 weapons and thousands of rounds of ammunition surrendered by gangs. © Ulises Rodriguez / REUTERS

Australia, Melbourne. A security firm employee shows firearms surrendered for destruction after Australia's 1996 legislation banning civilian possession of automatic and semi-automatic rifles. © William WEST / AFP PHOTO

By October 2005 more than 450,000 firearms had been collected throughout Brazil as part of the campaign (de Souza et al., 2007, p. 576).

The law reform initiative, in combination with the voluntary weapons collection programme and public awareness campaign, is credited with preventing 5,563[10] potential gun deaths in 2004 (de Souza et al., 2007, p. 575); it also contributed to a 12 per cent drop in gun deaths between 2004 and 2006 (OECD, 2009, p. 90, Box 5.7) and an 18 per cent drop in the rate of gun homicides in Rio de Janeiro over the three years after the Disarmament Statute was enacted in 2003 (Dreyfus et al., 2008, p. 20). The criminal use of knives and penetrating objects also fell by 2.3 per cent (de Souza et al., 2007, pp. 577–82).

With an absence of adequate national data, the ongoing effect of the Disarmament Statute across Brazil has yet to be evaluated. The only empirical analysis of the causal relationship between firearm availability and crime has been done at the municipal level. One study concludes, however, that the Disarmament Statute resulted in a strong and accelerated reduction of crime rates, a reduction in the relative number of police casualties on duty, fewer people killed in confrontations with police, an increase in police seizures of firearms, and an overall positive impact on public safety (dos Santos and Kassouf, 2011, p. 559).

Evidence from across Brazil thus points to the apparent positive impact of the combined Disarmament Statute approach of stricter gun control laws, the removal of a significant number of weapons from circulation, improved law enforcement, and the mobilization of civil society. Further examination of national crime data is necessary to measure long-term effects of the measures, but as it stand; Brazil has experienced a substantial reduction in homicide and particularly gun homicide since the Statute's implementation in 2003.

Australia

In response to the country's worst mass shooting to date, which occurred in Port Arthur, Tasmania in 1996, and the resulting massive public outcry and civil society mobilization, in 1996 Australia initiated a programme for the state purchase and destruction of over 700,000 civilian-held firearms. This was run in parallel with a complete overhaul of federal and state laws governing the possession, acquisition, and transfer of firearms, known as the National Firearms Agreement (NFA). Automatic and semi-automatic firearms were banned, a national firearms registry was established, and licensing regulations were strengthened for permitted firearms. The public health impact has been demonstrated to have been profound. Between 1995 and 2006 gun homicides and suicides dropped by 59 per cent and 65 per cent, respectively (Leigh and Neill, 2010, p. 518; Chapman et al., 2006, p. 365). After the NFA, national rates of all gun deaths per 100,000 population at

least doubled their existing rates of decline (from a 3 per cent to a 6 per cent reduction), as did firearms homicides (3 per cent to 7.5 per cent) and firearms suicides (3 per cent to 7.4 per cent), with no suggestion of substitution at the time to other forms of homicide or suicide (Chapman et al., 2006, p. 365). In 2013 the Australian Institute of Criminology reported an ongoing downward trend in homicide rates since 2001 (Chan and Payne, 2013, p. 5). However, while gun homicide rates have continued their downward trend, homicides involving knives and sharp instruments have increased over time, particularly in domestic and acquaintance homicides (Chan and Payne, 2013, pp. 13–14).

In addition, a 2006 study from the University of Sydney found that the NFA may also be an effective means of reducing mass shootings. Whereas there were 13 mass shootings in Australia (killing 112 people and injuring 52) in the 18-year period prior to 1996, there were none in the ten-and-a-half years that followed (Chapman et al., 2006, p. 365). The complete absence of mass shootings has continued up to the end of 2013 (O'Malley, 2013).

South Africa

Homicide rates in South Africa have more than halved since 1994, when the rate was 66.9 per 100,000 population, compared to 30.9 in 2011–12 (Jaynes, Alvazzi de Frate, and Pavesi, 2013, p. 135). An assessment of firearms homicide and non-firearms homicide rates after the strengthening of South Africa's firearms control laws between 2001 and 2004 found that, although both rates showed a decline, there was a 'significantly faster decline' in firearms homicide rates, which correlates with gradual restrictions on access to guns (Abrahams, Jewkes, and Mathews, 2010, p. 588).

Conclusion

Initiatives to remove weapons, while necessary to reducing and preventing armed violence, are insufficient on their own. This paper illustrates that lasting measurable reductions require more integrated strategies.

For instance, the paper highlights that prohibitions on carrying weapons can successfully shift attitudes and produce short-term violence reductions in focus areas, but without complementary demand-focused activities, few of them produce lasting positive impacts. Awareness raising and civil society engagement in disarmament campaigns are often successful in creating support or changing attitudes towards and temporarily reducing demand for weapons, but have not been found to have lasting measurable AVRP impacts in the absence of other approaches to deal with demand. Depending on the context, weapons removal programmes are successful in not only removing weapons from circulation, but also in raising awareness or increasing trust in security providers, but rarely have collection programmes alone been successful in reducing armed violence or even limiting the number of weapons in circulation in the long term.

In the same way that sustainable development cannot be achieved solely through reducing conflict and instability, armed violence cannot be sustainably reduced by merely removing weapons from circulation. The initiatives that produced the most measurable and sustained reduction in armed violence levels were those that took a multifaceted approach to what is a multidimensional problem. They dealt with demand through community-based awareness campaigns that changed attitudes towards weapons. They removed surplus and illicit weapons from circulation, which in turn had the added benefit of engaging local communities in crime reduction efforts. They restricted the possibility of rearmament by enforcing legislative changes to the way in which weapons can be acquired and transferred. The final—and most often absent—element necessary for successful AVRP programmes is the means to measure their impact in the post-programmatic period. All too often the means to empirically examine the lasting impacts of these programmes over time are excluded from their design.

Policy suggestions

Several factors must be considered when designing effective disarmament programmes to reduce armed violence and save lives:

- Political will, local ownership, inclusiveness, and effective leadership of programmes are prerequisites. Detailed forward planning can be undermined if decision makers or communities do not buy in to the programmes' activities or goals. Coercive disarmament risks isolating the communities whose involvement is crucial. Conversely, voluntary disarmament initiatives strengthened by attitudinal change can foster cooperation and trust.
- Target communities must not be selected based on political or ethnic bias, because programmes will fail if they are perceived to be imposing the selective disarmament of one community and excluding another.
- State institutions alone cannot achieve sustainable reductions in armed violence. Involving communities, civil society representatives, and the private sector at all stages of a programme, including in its design, execution, and review, will help to ensure cohesive running of the programme and ground-level assessment of its effectiveness.
- Reactive or sporadic programmes are less likely to have positive impacts than those that are connected to a broader and longer-term AVRP strategy.
- A comprehensive understanding of the armed violence problem will help avoid any spontaneous initiatives that yield little or in the worst cases are counterproductive. Crime and violence observatories can be useful instruments for developing interventions based on solid evidence.
- Short-term disarmament achievements will fail if the root causes of the demand for weapons, such as insecurity and rearmament supply line, are not addressed in line with sustainable development and peace-building methods.
- Successful disarmament programmes need to be measured not solely by the number of weapons collected, but by the relationship between real and perceived security, trust in the state, economic development prospects, and ultimately the number of lives saved.
- The long-term monitoring of violence levels must be designed into programmes from inception and

given financial and technical support. Too many disarmament programmes are implemented without the means for monitoring future impact.

Endnotes

1 For the purposes of this paper, armed violence is understood as 'the intentional use of illegitimate force (actual or threatened) with arms or explosives, against a person, group, community, or state, that undermines people-centred security and/or sustainable development' (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2008, p. 2).

2 'Direct' programmes are those that seek to address the instruments, actors, and institutional environments enabling armed violence (components), while 'indirect' programmes are those that address proximate and structural risk factors giving rise to armed violence (conditions) (OECD, 2011, p. 22).

3 Approximately 42 per cent of global homicides are carried out with guns, but the proportion of gun homicide shifts from 21 per cent in Western and Central Europe to as high as 74 per cent in the Americas. Whereas guns are far more likely to be used to kill in the Americas, sharp objects are more than twice as likely to be used to kill in Europe (UNODC, 2011, p. 10).

4 In Brazil, Burundi, Colombia, Liberia, South Africa, and Timor-Leste between 1990 and 2010.

5 Of the interventions targeting weapons, most were weapons collection and destruction programmes (47), followed by weapons seizures (26), amnesties and buybacks (21), voluntary gun-free zones (15), securing armouries (6), armourer training (3), and law enforcement (3) (OECD, 2011, p. 37, Table 2.2).

6 Among a list of illicit items that include controlled drugs, sharp articles, prohibited fireworks, stolen goods, articles that could be used to commit a crime, articles that could be used to commit a terrorist attack, and articles that could cause criminal damage (Eastwood, Shiner, and Bear, 2013, pp. 18–19).

7 Violence prevention interventions in Boston (2001), Richmond (2003), and Chicago (2007) in the United States that featured strict sentencing components for gun crimes all claimed substantial success in reducing gun violence, but questions have been raised as to whether these declines actually preceded the interventions (Durlauf and Nagin, 2011, p. 37).

8 Health sector initiatives, such as HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns, should be viewed as best practice models for achieving a public health impact from changes in behaviour through communication and public awareness activities. Noar et al. (2009) review mass communication campaigns and note a positive shift in the purpose of HIV/AIDS campaigns from simply aiming to raise awareness to attempting to encourage safer sexual behaviours.

9 It should be noted that these rates are based on homicide events, not homicide victims, and are therefore lower than rates based on the number of victims; such data was not reliably provided by the police until 2008 (Broadhurst, Boudhours, and Keo, 2012, p. 3).

10 When comparing projected homicides with actual homicides for the year.

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List of abbreviations

AVRP	Armed violence reduction and prevention
GFZ	Gun-free zone
NFA	National Firearms Agreement
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

About the author

Marcus Wilson is a research consultant who has been engaged in small arms policy since 2008. He has conducted research on firearm legislation, gun violence prevention, arms transfers, and the international small arms process.

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The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development

The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, endorsed by more than 100 countries, commits signatories to supporting initiatives intended to measure the human, social, and economic costs of armed violence, to assess risks and vulnerabilities, to evaluate the effectiveness of armed violence reduction programmes, and to disseminate knowledge of best practices.

The Declaration calls upon states to achieve measurable reductions in the global burden of armed violence and tangible improvements in human security by 2015.

Affiliated organizations include the Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO).

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