

GUN BUY-BACK PROGRAMS

What is it?	Gift certificates, cash or other forms of compensation given, usually anonymously, in exchange for firearms.
Does it work?	There is NO evidence that gun buy-backs are effective for crime control. There is some evidence that the guns surrendered tend not to be the types of weapon used in crime.
How is it normally done?	Local advertising and media draw people to a location where they can safely and anonymously surrender firearms in return for cash, store coupons, or gift cards, often at more than the used firearm's street value.
Mechanism?	The basic mechanism is supposed to be opportunity reduction, whereby fewer guns in the community means fewer shootings. There's no evidence to suggest buybacks drive this mechanism. There may be some diffusion benefit to suicide reduction, though the evidence is not conclusive.
Why doesn't it work?	Guns can often come from locations far from the city paying for them. Programs often pay for guns kept safely at home and not a threat to the community or police. They tend to not reflect the guns used in crime. Guns are easily replaced in the U.S. There is also sometimes anecdotal evidence that people use the money to buy better guns. There is some evidence that it helped maintain already low levels of gun crime in Australia, but that was a nationwide ban that largely attracted low risk weapons.
How's the research?	Moderately reliable, if sparse. There haven't been as many studies as one might want, however a Congressional report in 1998 still concluded " Given their high cost and weak theoretical rationale, however, there seems little reason to invest in further testing of the idea."
Caveats?	Gun buybacks might raise public awareness, but often the demographics of people who surrender guns are not the high risk group. Finding money to distribute safe storage devices is probably better use of gun control funds.
Other considerations?	A common refrain from supporters is that "if we can stop just one shooting, it will be worth it". To counter this, calculate how many hours of effective hot spots policing would have been covered by the gun buyback program costs.
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And finally?	Standard disclaimer: This is a one page summary based on an individual's reading of the literature. It shouldn't be a replacement for your own thorough review of the research. That's why there are links above, and why this is free. Also, your mileage may differ. Experiment, evaluate, learn, share.
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