

I S S U E

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Junk Gun Bans in California Newspapers

SATURDAY NIGHT SPECIALS



proposes ban on
sale of 'junk guns'

BERKELEY MEDIA STUDIES GROUP



Californians made history in 1996: across the state, 29 cities and counties voted to ban “junk guns” – the small, cheap handguns used disproportionately in crime. By the end of 1996, more than 8 million Californians – over a quarter of the state’s population – lived in areas covered by “Saturday night special” bans.¹ National advocates view these actions as a bellwether for gun control efforts elsewhere, anticipating that the events in California presage future battles across the country.

In the United States today, three times as many children are murdered with guns as in 1950, and firearms suicide rates for children and young people have quadrupled.² In California and eight other states, guns have surpassed motor vehicle crashes as the leading killer of young people.³ In response, public health and violence prevention advocates have worked to increase support for grassroots gun control efforts. The junk gun ban movement in California is the latest and most visible effort to reduce the toll of injury and death from handguns.

Abundant evidence indicates that the news media play a powerful role in setting policy agendas and framing the way the public and policy makers think about and respond to issues.⁴ If public health advocates are to advance the gun control debate in California, they must understand how the issue is being presented in public discussions. They must be able to make strong yet concise arguments for reasonable firearm restrictions, as well as anticipate and counter arguments opposing such restrictions.

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Background

In 1968, Congress banned the importation of nonsporting handguns, commonly called Saturday night specials or junk guns. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (BATF) classifies handguns as nonsporting handguns according to the quality of the metal, size, caliber, safety and other features of the weapon.⁵ Domestic production of these guns was not covered by the 1968 Gun Act because, at the time, few junk guns were manufactured in the U.S. Since then, however, a handful of firearms manufacturers in southern California have emerged as the nation’s leading junk gun producers, making 80% of the cheap handguns sold in the U.S.⁶

¹ The terms “junk gun” and “Saturday night special” are used interchangeably in this article to refer to the same type of guns.

² Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Rates of Homicide, Suicide, and Firearm-Related Death Among Children – 26 Industrialized Countries. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (46) 5, Feb. 7, 1997.

³ Injury Control and Surveillance Branch, California Department of Health Services, 1995.

⁴ Rogers, E., Dearing, J., and Bregman, D. The anatomy of agenda-setting research. *Journal of Communication*, 43(2):68-84, 1993.

⁵ For more information about the technical specifications of junk guns, see “Addressing Gun Violence Through Local Ordinances: A Legal Resource Manual For California Cities and Counties, 1997 Supplement,” San Francisco, CA; Legal Community Against Violence, 1997.

⁶ Wintemute, GJ. “Ring of Fire: The Handgun Makers of Southern California.” Sacramento, CA; Violence Prevention Research Program, 1994.

In May 1995, for the first time in state history, the California Senate voted to ban the manufacture, possession, and sale of nonsporting handguns as defined by the BATF. The bill died in the Assembly Public Safety Committee. However, communities throughout the state, such as San Francisco, Oakland, Los Angeles, and West Hollywood, have pursued bans on junk guns at the local level.⁷

On January 16, 1996, West Hollywood became the first California city to pass an ordinance banning junk guns, based on evidence demonstrating the threat to public health and safety presented by these firearms. The California Rifle and Pistol Association, National Rifle Association, and four individual plaintiffs filed suit against West Hollywood in response to its ban, arguing that state law pre-empts the ordinance. On November 15, 1996, a state court ruled in favor of West Hollywood and upheld the ban ordinance.⁷ (As of this writing, an appeal is pending.) Gun control advocates see the ruling as a green light to continue their work to reduce the number of junk guns in circulation.

Why Junk Guns?

Violence prevention advocates have focused specifically on junk guns because their small size and low price make them particularly attractive to criminals and their poor construction makes them unsafe to users. The BATF found that junk guns are 3.4 times more likely to be involved in violent crimes than other handguns. Seven of the 10 guns traced most often by the BATF in 1994 were junk guns made in California.⁸

Because they are made of lower quality materials and lack safety devices, junk guns can hurt the user. According to the U.S. General Accounting Office, about 30% of all unintentional shootings could be prevented if domestic handguns were made at least as safe as imported handguns.⁹ Junk guns often fail simple drop tests, and have no safety devices such as a loaded chamber indicator or trigger lock to prevent unintended discharges.

Californians overwhelmingly support the ban of these weapons. In 1995 polls, 78% of California voters – including 72% of handgun owners – favored the ban.¹⁰ After hearing that most of the nation's junk guns are made in this state, the overwhelming majority (78%) said they would favor a ban on the guns' manufacture in California.

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⁷ "Addressing Gun Violence Through Local Ordinances: A Legal Resource Manual For California Cities and Counties, 1997 Supplement." San Francisco, CA; Legal Community Against Violence, 1997.

⁸ Zawitz, M. W. Guns Used in Crime. Washington, D. C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics, July, 1995, Doc. No. NCJ-14820. p. 5.

⁹ U.S. General Accounting Office. "Accidental Shooting: Many Death and Injuries Caused by Firearms Could be Prevented." Washington, D.C.: 1993.

¹⁰ EDK Associates random poll of 500 California voters conducted for The California Wellness Foundation, January 24-26, 1995. Margin of error is ± 4.4% at the 95% confidence level.

Junk Gun Bans in California Newspapers

To assess the range of arguments and symbols used in the debate over junk gun laws, we examined California newspaper coverage of this issue. We conducted a qualitative and quantitative content analysis of 1996 newspaper coverage of local junk gun bans in California cities and counties where junk gun ban votes took place. We searched the Lexis/Nexis database plus additional California newspapers¹¹ for news articles and opinion or editorial pieces that mentioned “gun,” “Saturday night special,” “handgun,” “pre-emption,” “firearm,” “NRA” or “National Rifle Association,” “homerule,” or “weapon” in their headline or lead paragraph. We compiled pieces printed the day before, day of, and five days following the city council or county board of supervisor votes.¹²

Each piece was coded for its news type (news vs. opinion) and primary subject matter. Articles primarily about junk gun bans were further coded for how the issue was framed, who was speaking (politician, law enforcement, businessperson, youth, etc.), what the major quotes or catch phrases were, what visual images or metaphors were used, and what statistics were given. We also noted the city or county ban being discussed and tallied the number of quotes from advocates on either side of the issue.

We found 107 pieces specifically about gun issues, of which 62 focused primarily on junk gun bans. Of these 62, there were 49 news articles, nine letters to the editor and four editorials on the bans.

¹¹ Sources were: *The Alameda Times Star*, *The Argus* (Fremont), *Contra Costa Times*, *The Daily Breeze* (Inglewood), *Daily Review* (Hayward), *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Ledger Dispatch* (Contra Costa County), *The Oakland Tribune*, *The Outlook* (Santa Monica), *Sacramento Bee*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *San Gabriel Valley Tribune*, *San Jose Mercury News*, *San Mateo County Times*, *San Ramon Valley Times*, *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*, *Tri-Valley Herald* (Livermore), *West County Times* (San Pablo, Richmond, Pinole, Contra Costa County). The Pasadena local paper, *Pasadena Star-News*, was not reviewed because past editions were not available.

¹² We searched the *Sacramento Bee* for the entire year because of its influence as the paper of record for the State Capitol.

Who Speaks?

In the 62 pieces on junk gun bans in our sample, the most common speakers were politicians, who were quoted in 39 (63%) of the pieces. (See table.) Health professionals and gunshot victims and their families were rarely quoted, while educators and young people were entirely absent from the debate.

Table: Who Speaks on the Junk Gun Ban?

Role	Quoted in # of articles	% of sample¹³
Politician	39	63%
Advocate (both pro- and anti-ban)	20	32%
National Rifle Assoc./California Rifle and Pistol Assoc. official	17	28%
Law enforcement	15	24%
Lawyer/judge	15	24%
Businessperson	11	18%
Health professional	2	3%
Gunshot victim/family member	1	2%
Educator	0	0%
Youth	0	0%

Gunshot victims and their families were rarely quoted, while educators and young people were entirely absent from the debate

¹³ The percentages indicate the portion of pieces in which this type of speaker appeared. For example, several politicians could speak in a single article; in this table, each article is counted, not each speaker. More than one type of speaker could be quoted in each piece, so the percentages will not sum to 100%.

Identifying the Frames

Journalists organize, or frame, news in order to make sense out of infinitely sided and shaded issues. Inevitably, some things are left out of the frame while others are included. Similarly, some features may be pushed to the edge of the frame, while others remain more central. The frame is important because whatever facts, values, or images are included are accorded legitimacy, while those mentioned at the fringe or not included may be marginalized or left out of public discussion. The frame will significantly contribute to how the issue is “felt” and talked about by decision-makers and the public.

As we read the junk gun ban pieces, we looked for the dominant frames on both sides of the debate. Because 79% of the pieces were news or feature articles and therefore written by journalists rather than advocates, the majority of the pieces we examined were technically balanced – that is, they contained both pro- and anti-ban arguments. Even so, there were 100 direct quotes in support of the junk gun bans, and 69 quotes opposing the ban.

We identified 11 major frames on the issue: five pro-ban, six anti-ban. (See framing matrices, pages 12-15.) There were also several frames on each side that were less frequent; arguments that appeared in fewer than 10 articles were not analyzed in depth.

The facts, values and images included are accorded legitimacy, while those not mentioned may be left out of public discussion

Frames Supporting a Ban on Junk Guns

Too Many Guns:

The most common frame, expressed in 56%¹⁴ of the pieces reviewed, argues that the ready availability of guns in our society has dramatically increased the number of injuries and deaths. According to this frame, the epidemic of violence and unintentional shootings has increased fear and risk, and must be stopped. As San Francisco Supervisor Amos Brown pleaded, “We cannot tolerate situations where children lose their lives and seniors are afraid to come out of their houses.”¹⁵

Proponents of *Too Many Guns* used statistics to quantify the toll guns have taken and to compare the “carnage” to deaths from other critical causes: “Handguns are the number one killer of California kids” (cited in 11% of the pieces); “More people are killed by guns than in car crashes.” Many pieces included local statistics showing the number of people killed in that city or county with handguns in general or junk guns in particular. Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky noted that “not surprisingly, where there is a preponderance of gun sales, there is also a preponderance of violence.” A resident of Compton appealed to common sense in making the link between gun proliferation and public safety: “There is just too much shooting. If ain’t nobody got no guns, then can’t nobody kill nobody.”

Send a Message:

The second most frequent frame, appearing in 52% of the sample, asserts that local communities must band together to enact gun laws and send a message to the state and federal legislatures. Noting that “the state legislature has repeatedly refused to address this alarming and tragic problem,” local advocates seemed to take pride in taking matters into their own hands. Oakland Mayor Elihu Harris noted that “politicians on the state and federal level, quite frankly, are afraid of the gun lobby.” The local politicians, by comparison, were portrayed as courageous for standing up to the pressures of the NRA and similar organizations.

Los Angeles City Councilmember Jackie Goldberg compared the junk gun ban movement to the assault weapons ban efforts of several years ago. In that case, the state legislature did not consider a ban until several city councils throughout the state led the way with local ordinances. The article states, “Goldberg said she hopes the Los Angeles [junk gun] ban would spur the state Legislature to take similar steps.” Especially in the pieces printed toward the end of 1996, advocates noted that more and more cities and counties are passing junk gun bans, creating a “snowballing” momentum toward a statewide bill.

Too Easy to Get, Too Easy to Hide:

The third most common frame, found in 42% of pieces, focuses on junk guns as a uniquely abhorrent type of gun. Proponents of this frame claimed that because they are small and inexpensive, junk guns are too easy to get and conceal – making them the criminals’ weapons of choice. As Mark Pertschuk of Californians for Responsible Gun Laws said, “These guns are designed for mischief, and it’s good to get them off the streets.”

¹⁴ The percentages indicate the portion of items in which that particular frame appeared. These frames are not mutually exclusive; several frames may have appeared in the same piece and therefore the percentages will not sum to 100%.

¹⁵ All quotations in the frame descriptions and matrices are taken from the articles and opinion pieces in our sample.

Advocates noted that junk guns are “priced for youth consumption”; one article described San Francisco Supervisor Michael Yaki holding a \$70 gun in one hand and a \$100 pair of sneakers in the other. Referring to junk guns as “starter guns” for juvenile offenders, advocates called for these guns to be banned so that they could be kept out of the hands of criminals and young people.

Proponents of *Too Easy to Get, Too Easy to Hide* used many statistics to illustrate that junk guns are used more often in crimes than other types of firearms:

- “According to the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, eight of the 10 guns most frequently traced at crime scenes in 1995 were so-called junk guns.”
- “An LA Police Dept. survey found that during criminal investigations last year, 1,427 pistols made by seven Southern California makers of Saturday night specials were confiscated. They were found at the scenes of 64 murders, 56 robberies, [and] 109 assaults... 20 were taken on school grounds.”
- “San Jose police recovered these guns in 24% of violent crime cases in 1995. Yet they constituted only 2% of gun sales in San Jose.”

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Unsafe Consumer Product:

Appearing in 26% of the sample, the next most common pro-ban frame posits that because these guns lack safety devices and are made from inferior materials, they are inherently unsafe consumer products and should be subject to stricter manufacturing regulations. Junk guns’ shoddy quality makes them useless for any legitimate sporting or self-defense purposes. As U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer noted, “If you need a weapon to defend yourself, it ought to be one that is reliable and accurate, not one that can blow up in your face.”

Proponents of this frame compared the number of regulations covering the manufacture of junk guns with those covering other consumer products, such as cars, toasters and toys. “Just as there are cars that are unsafe at any speed and never belong on our highways, there are guns which should never be permitted to be sold,” an emergency room physician claimed. “I consider Saturday night specials in that category.” Sacramento police Chief Arturo Venegas noted that “it is more difficult in the U.S. to manufacture and sell a teddy bear than it is to manufacture and sell these types of guns.” Advocates highlighted the irony inherent in the claim that there are more regulations on the manufacture of toy guns than on junk guns.

Must Start Somewhere:

In 16% of the pieces we examined, advocates frankly acknowledged that a ban on junk guns will not solve all the problems associated with violence, and may even be purely symbolic. But, they argued, the crisis of gun injuries is so severe that “we must start somewhere.” They referred to attempts to “patch together a solution” out of various approaches, and to reducing the flow of guns “one by one if necessary.” As Los Angeles City Councilmember Jackie Goldberg noted, “We are not so naive as to think this is going to take all these guns off the street... [But] if it decreases our murder rate by one, that one person is going to be grateful for his or her life.”

Must Start Somewhere argues that we cannot afford to wait to act until we have determined the ideal response to gun violence; the situation is urgent and requires an immediate response. As *The Oakland Tribune* editorialized, “The NRA likes to argue over whether the gun, or the person shooting the gun, is responsible for the carnage. With bodies dropping all around us from gunfire, that’s like standing in front of a burning building and trying to figure out who started the fire. It’s time to stop talking and douse the flames.”

Other Pro-Ban Frames:

Other arguments supporting a ban on junk guns appeared in fewer than 10 articles each:

- *Inconsistent policy:* Junk guns cannot be imported legally, so they shouldn’t be made here (appeared in six pieces);
- *Public opinion:* Californians support the ban (five pieces); and
- *Special responsibility:* We have an extra responsibility to ban Saturday night specials because they are made here in California (two pieces).

Frames Opposing a Ban on Junk Guns

Illegal/Unconstitutional Policy:

One of the two most common frames opposing the junk gun bans appeared in 34% of the sample; it posits that the bans are illegal because the Second Amendment and/or state law prohibits local communities from limiting individuals' rights to bear arms. This argument formed the core of the legal case against West Hollywood's junk gun ordinance. Proponents appealed to fairness in establishing a consistent application of the right to bear arms. One speaker at a Pinole city council meeting asked, "The guy who lives in [unincorporated] Contra Costa County or the guy who lives in Tracy, he has more rights than I do as an American citizen?"

Concerns about whether the local bans could be enforced were cited by a number of local city councilmembers who urged their colleagues to delay a vote until the West Hollywood case was resolved.

Ineffective Policy:

In the other leading anti-ban frame (also appearing in 34% of the pieces reviewed), proponents claimed that junk gun bans would not reduce crime or injuries. People will still be able to get junk guns in the next town, they asserted, or the ban will be ineffective because black market sales or other types of guns are the real problem. "Gangsters and drug dealers don't use these little guns anyway," one gun dealer claimed.

In some smaller cities, proponents of *Ineffective Policy* pointed out that few or no junk guns are sold in the city, making the local ban a useless measure. Pittsburg police Sgt. William Sbacnic noted, "I'm not sure that this is going to have much of an impact on Pittsburg; I doubt it will significantly decrease the flow of guns."

Other proponents noted that the ban won't work because, by definition, criminals don't obey laws. Chuck Michel, the Los Angeles attorney representing the California Rifle and Pistol Association and NRA in the West Hollywood suit, claimed, "To the extent these kinds of guns are involved in crimes at all, all this ordinance will cause is criminals to go out and steal more money to buy a better gun."

Elitist Policy:

The next most common anti-ban frame was seen in 32% of the sample; it claims that the ban is "discriminatory and elitist" because it denies self-protection to those who can't afford to buy more expensive guns. Jim Waldorf, president of Lorcin Engineering, one of the makers of Saturday night specials, said "By getting rid of \$130 guns, you've just priced 80% of Americans out of the ability to own a handgun. They are not junk guns but affordable guns." Proponents invoked the image of single women and the elderly on fixed incomes who need guns for self defense.

Some proponents of *Elitist Policy* implied that it is hypocritical for city councils to revoke the rights to cheap guns since the same politicians have failed to provide adequate resources for police and other public safety services. One resident of Compton asked, "How are people out here going to protect themselves if they ban the guns? The police don't come when you call them. You got to wait, and wait, and call again. We need some kind of recourse out here."

Political Posturing:

More than 26% of the articles reviewed contained the argument that the junk gun ban is nothing but a "feel-good" ordinance promoted by politicians who want to appear tough on crime. "This is strictly a grandstand play to impress voters that they're anti-crime," one gun dealer claimed. Dublin Mayor Guy Houston chastised his colleagues for jumping on the ban bandwagon: "Passing a law and patting yourself on the back isn't going to [reduce crime]."

The spokeswoman for Gun Owners of California called Senator Boxer's federal junk gun ban efforts "shameful": "She's chosen what many people consider to be an emotional issue to gain help on her approval ratings."

Slippery Slope:

Almost one quarter (24%) of the pieces contained the argument that the junk gun ban represents a dangerous first step toward total gun control and ultimate tyranny. Proponents of this frame accused ban promoters of “demonizing” one category of guns as a first step toward an ultimate ban on all guns. Proponents of *Slippery Slope* typically represented the junk gun ban measures as broader than they really are: “They want to confiscate every firearm from every private person in the world”; “The whole point of these laws is to take guns out of the public’s hands.”

This frame encompasses the libertarian conviction that total freedom to possess firearms is necessary in order to safeguard other liberties. “Our guns are the first thing the politicians must take away,” one letter writer claimed, “so when they come for our other freedoms, we have no way to defend those freedoms.” Analogies to Hitler’s Germany were used to demonstrate that without free access to guns, citizens have no way to halt potential oppression. “The political step you seek is to disarm the common people,” one advocate claimed. “The threat of tyranny and oppression is alive on our soil today.”

Enforce Existing Laws:

The final major anti-ban frame, appearing in 16% of the sample, posits that the junk gun ban is unnecessary: we should focus on enforcing existing gun laws and cracking down on criminals instead. As one proponent pointed out, “...the current law doesn’t even allow sale of handguns to minors, [so] how can you claim that ‘junk guns’ are easy for young people to obtain?” Appealing to the principle of efficiency in government, proponents claimed new laws are a waste of taxpayers’ money.

An infrequent but significant corollary to this frame notes that guns aren’t the problem; people who misuse guns are. Based on past analysis of gun arguments, we expected to find the argument that “guns don’t kill people, people kill people”; however, it rarely appeared in this sample. In one of the few cases where it did appear, a gun shop owner asked “What makes an inexpensive gun a bad gun? It doesn’t do anything other than what the person who holds it allows it to do. Let’s focus on that person’s actions, not the gun.” This frame calls for increased personal responsibility rather than increased regulation.

Other Anti-Ban Frames:

Other arguments opposing a ban on junk guns appeared in fewer than 10 articles each:

- *Avoid Litigation:* If the ban is passed, the NRA will sue and the city will spend too much money on litigation (appeared in seven pieces);
- *Doesn’t Address Root Problems:* The ban does nothing to address the roots of violence: poverty, family disintegration, and so on (five pieces);
- *Gun Problem? What Gun Problem?:* We don’t need the ban because the gun problem is exaggerated or doesn’t exist here (five pieces); and
- *Anti-business:* The ban unfairly limits business owners’ ability to make money selling a legal product (two pieces).

Discussion

This survey of the frames on both sides of the junk gun ban issue in California reveals that pro-ban advocates have made significant inroads in shaping the debate. First, advocates have set the agenda and established the terms of debate. Junk guns are clearly seen as the agents of excessive injury, with *Too Many Guns* appearing in 56% of the sample. By contrast, the most common anti-ban frames, *Illegal/Unconstitutional Policy* and *Ineffective Policy*, each appeared in only 34% of the pieces we surveyed. Similarly, the greater number of discrete pro-ban quotes (100 vs. 69 opposing the bans) illustrates that those who initiate newsworthy action often set the frame of the story. Opponents to the ban largely appear in a responsive mode, and often only at the end of the story.

Typically, public health issues are debated along a continuum from personal responsibility to social accountability. In these articles however, the debate focused almost entirely at the social end of the scale, within the realm of government action. Because the articles report on a specific gun control policy, the environmental, primary-prevention approaches are accorded legitimacy. The individual-oriented argument that “guns don’t kill people, people kill people” was virtually absent from debate in these pieces.

Our analysis suggests that positions and arguments that have traditionally been liabilities for gun control advocates no longer seem to have such negative power. For instance, politicians who supported gun control were once chastised by pro-gun forces for being too squeamish to take the tough, punitive actions that would *really* affect crime rates. Now, the tables have turned: anti-ban advocates accuse politicians of using the gun ban to tout their tough-on-crime credentials and pander to public opinion. In fact, implicit in *Political Posturing* is the assumption that voters support these bans; this is why Senator Boxer, for instance, could use the issue to “gain help on her approval ratings,” as one anti-ban advocate accused. These articles legitimize gun control as a serious crime-fighting measure and support polling data showing that the tide of public opinion has turned in favor of measures such as junk gun bans.

Further, pro-ban advocates’ perspective that the epidemic of gun injuries calls for immediate action seems to outweigh the traditionally powerful *Slippery Slope* and Second Amendment arguments. The call to save lives and prevent tragedy has a moral appeal to common good that appears stronger than the other side’s arguments about politics and absolute individual rights. In these articles, the junk gun ban is not portrayed primarily as a violation of civil rights or a first step toward oppression but rather as a reasonable response to dire conditions. As *The Oakland Tribune* noted, given current gun injury rates, “The NRA’s gut-level fear that if you take their rocket launchers today you’ll be after their slingshots tomorrow is growing anachronistic and almost quaint. It’s time to leave it in the dumpster of history.”

Similarly, the possibility that a given locality’s ban on junk guns may not immediately reduce local crime rates does not seem to hinder the bans’ progress in the state. As seen in *Must Start Somewhere*, advocates freely admit that the bans will not solve the whole problem; however, gun violence is seen as so pressing an issue that there is great support for even marginally effective measures. Advocates acknowledged that junk gun bans are part of the solution, not the entire solution.

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Frames Supporting Junk Gun Ban Ordinances

Frame	Core position	Catch-phrases and Quotes
<p><u>Too many guns</u> (appeared in 56% of sample)</p>	<p>Too many guns leads to too many injuries and deaths. Ready access to guns has increased the lethality of otherwise mundane conflicts.</p>	<p>“We must put a stop to the tremendous loss of life and injury due to handguns.” “We cannot tolerate situations where children lose their lives and seniors are afraid to come out of their houses.” “The introduction of huge numbers of guns in our society has made (violence) lethal. What used to be petty kinds of fights now become life-threatening encounters.”</p>
<p><u>Send a message</u> (appeared in 52% of sample)</p>	<p>Local communities must act together to send a message to the state and federal legislatures.</p>	<p>“While the state legislature has been unable to stem the flow of junk guns into our communities, we have successfully taken this critical public safety issue into our own hands.” “Politicians on the state and federal level, quite frankly, are afraid of the gun lobby.” “We’re sending a really big message to Sacramento and Washington. And the message is, Get busy folks, have some gun control, because people want it.”</p>
<p><u>Too easy to get, too easy to hide</u> (appeared in 42% of sample)</p>	<p>Because they are small and cheap, Saturday night specials are uniquely deserving of a ban — they are too easy to obtain and conceal.</p>	<p>“...almost anyone can plunk down a few bucks and buy a Saturday night special...” The purpose of the ban is “real straightforward: to keep junk guns out of the hands of criminals and kids.” These are “starter guns” for juvenile criminals. “priced for youth consumption” Junk guns are the “criminal’s weapon of choice.”</p>
<p><u>Unsafe consumer product</u> (appeared in 26% of sample)</p>	<p>SNSs are junk: their lack of safety devices and inferior construction means they are unsafe and should be subject to stricter manufacturing regulations.</p>	<p>“If you need a weapon to defend yourself, it ought to be one that is reliable and accurate, not one that can blow up in your face.” “The potential for failure of these guns and injuries to users is extreme. These guns short-cut the safeguards.”</p>
<p><u>Must start somewhere</u> (appeared in 16% of sample)</p>	<p>The ban won’t solve the entire violence problem — it may even be purely symbolic — but we have to start somewhere.</p>	<p>“Maybe it won’t stop smuggling or crime... Symbolic? Maybe, maybe not. But we’ve got to try.” “I think you’ve just got to keep trying, any way that you can, to get at the problem. Hopefully, someday, we can end up with something more comprehensive.” “We are not so naive as to think this is going to take all these guns off the street... [but] if it decreases our murder rate by one, that one person is going to be grateful for his or her life.”</p>

Symbol/Analogy/Visual Image	Appeal to Principle	Key Statistics
<p>“Epidemic” of gun violence</p> <p>Junk guns are “messengers of death.”</p> <p>“People are dropping like flies... because of the availability of guns.”</p> <p>“carnage in our communities”</p>	<p>Public safety, common sense</p>	<p>“Handguns are the number one killer of California kids.”</p> <p>“In California, more people are killed by guns than in car crashes.”</p> <p>Local statistics: “61 people in San Mateo county died from firearms injuries in 1994”; “In Oakland, 95 out of 153 killings last year were by handguns, and most of those were by the types of [guns] that would be outlawed.”</p>
<p>Analogy to assault weapons ban, which was passed by several local communities before the state legislature took action on a state-wide ban</p> <p>Momentum toward a statewide junk gun ban building like a snowball rolling downhill</p>	<p>Self-determination</p> <p>Courage (to stand up to the gun lobby)</p> <p>Strength in numbers</p>	<p>29 cities and counties have passed the ban as of the end of 1996</p>
<p>Politician holding a \$70 gun in one hand and a \$100 pair of sneakers in the other</p>	<p>Prevention: keep potential danger out of reach</p>	<p>“According to the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, eight of the 10 guns most frequently traced at crime scenes in 1995 were so-called junk guns.”</p> <p>“An LA Police Dept. survey found that during criminal investigations last year, 1,427 pistols made by seven Southern California makers of Saturday night specials were confiscated. They were found at the scenes of 64 murders, 56 robberies, 109 assaults... 20 were taken on school grounds.”</p> <p>“San Jose police recovered these guns in 24% of violent crime cases in 1995. Yet they constituted just two percent of gun sales in San Jose.”</p> <p>“A junk gun can sell for about \$50 while a quality-made handgun can be purchased for as much as 10 times that amount.”</p>
<p>“We regulate toasters in this country... but have very little regulation of the manufacturing of handguns.”</p> <p>“Just as there are cars that never belong on our highways, there are guns which should never be permitted to be sold. I consider Saturday night specials in that category.”</p> <p>“It is more difficult in the U.S. to manufacture and sell a teddy bear than it is to manufacture and sell these types of guns.”</p>	<p>Reason, basic consumer protection</p> <p>Equity: treat guns like other consumer products</p>	<p>“According to the General Accounting Office, trigger locks or other safety mechanisms could reduce accidental gun deaths by 38%.”</p> <p>Number of manufacturing and safety regulations for toy guns compared to real Saturday night specials</p>
<p>The importance of taking a stand against guns, even if it's largely symbolic</p> <p>“The NRA likes to argue over whether the gun, or the person shooting the gun, is responsible for the carnage. With bodies dropping all around us from gunfire, that's like standing in front of a burning building and trying to figure out who started the fire. It's time to stop talking and douse the flames.”</p>	<p>Responsibility, leadership</p>	<p>None used</p>

Frames Opposing Junk Gun Ban Ordinances

Frame	Core position	Catch-phrases and Quotes
<p><u>Illegal/unconstitutional policy</u> (appeared in 34% of sample)</p>	<p>The junk gun ban violates Second Amendment and/or state pre-emption laws.</p>	<p>“We think all these [local ordinances] are a clear violation of the state’s pre-emption on gun laws.” “I’m still very much unconvinced that the city can enforce the ordinance... We’re dealing in Never-Never land.”</p>
<p><u>Ineffective policy</u> (appeared in 34% of sample)</p>	<p>Eliminating junk guns won’t reduce crime, violence or injuries — either because these guns aren’t the biggest part of the problem or because criminals won’t obey the ban.</p>	<p>“Gangsters and drug dealers don’t use these little guns anyway.” “We will applaud any legitimate means to fight crime... [But] this is a handgun control ordinance being sold on a pretext of crime control. All it’s going to do is cost cities money.” The ban’s only effect on crime will be to “cause criminals to go out and steal more money to buy a better gun.”</p>
<p><u>Elitist policy</u> (appeared in 32% of sample)</p>	<p>The ban will deny protection to those with the least resources.</p>	<p>“What you are doing is denying law-abiding citizens the ability to self-defend because you and the police can’t do it for them.” “They are not junk guns but affordable guns.” “Are they saying that a poor person who wants a gun but can’t afford to spend \$400 can’t have one?” “I’d rather be caught with a pistol than without one. You can’t get rid of the guns — we need them for protection.”</p>
<p><u>Political posturing</u> (appeared in 26% of sample)</p>	<p>Politicians are using the ban to try to look tough on crime.</p>	<p>“This is strictly a grandstand play to impress voters that [the City Council is] anti-crime.” “It’s shameful that [Boxer] is doing this. She’s chosen what many people consider to be an emotional issue to gain help on her approval ratings.” If they want to reduce crime, “passing a law and patting yourself on the back isn’t going to do it.”</p>
<p><u>Slippery slope</u> (appeared in 24% of sample)</p>	<p>The ban is the first step to total gun control and ultimate tyranny.</p>	<p>“The political step you seek is to disarm the common people... The threat of tyranny and oppression is alive on our soil today.” The ban is a “backdoor attempt to control the right of self-defense right out of existence.” “Understanding the public would be against an outright handgun ban, what [they’ve done] is pick out a category of guns and demonize them.” One speaker said he was “distressed and disgusted” to see public officials “willing to give up freedoms for a little safety.”</p>
<p><u>Enforce existing laws</u> (appeared in 16% of sample)</p>	<p>If we’d enforce existing gun laws and crack down on criminals, the ban wouldn’t be necessary.</p>	<p>“If the current law doesn’t even allow sale of handguns to minors, then how can you claim that ‘junk guns’ are easy for young people to obtain?” “What makes an inexpensive gun a bad gun? It doesn’t do anything other than what the person who holds it allows it to do. Let’s focus on that person’s actions, not the gun.”</p>

Symbol/Analogy/Visual Image	Appeal to Principle	Key Statistics
Founding Fathers guaranteed our rights to bear arms	Higher law	None used
"Band-Aid" measures that don't have a real effect	Effectiveness	None used
<p>"What about the elderly lady living alone who can't afford a nice Browning Hi-Power or a Colt Python?"</p> <p>"...the people who are the targets of this kind of law are at the bottom of the totem pole in this country. They are also the ones who are the most victimized by criminals."</p>	<p>Fairness</p> <p>Protection for the poor and helpless</p>	None used
opportunistic, cynical politician	Leadership	None used
<p>"Hitler and Nazi Germany started with [gun control] measures like this. Let's not let it happen here."</p> <p>Minutemen, freedom fighters</p> <p>Modern-day "tyrants and serfs"</p>	Liberty	None used
ineffective law enforcement	<p>Less government</p> <p>Personal responsibility</p>	None used

Opportunities for Violence Prevention Advocates

Our analysis shows that despite the strong gains made to date in the public debate over junk gun bans, advocates for these measures do have some opportunities to improve and extend news coverage of the issue. First, the debate is currently dominated by politicians, law enforcement, and serious advocates on both sides of the issue. There are relatively few quotes from average citizens, and none from young people. Advocates should be sure that health professionals, educators, youth, and especially gunshot survivors and victims' family members are speaking out on the issue. Those who have the most experience with the problem have powerful perspectives to offer, yet their voices are seldom heard.

One way to amplify these voices in the public debate is to write op-ed pieces and letters to the editor. In our sample, these channels were greatly underused: there were only 13 opinion pieces, and most of those opposed the ban. In most communities where junk gun ban votes took place, the debate was not covered on the local paper's opinion pages during the time frames of our sample. This is an opportunity for gun-control advocates: opinion pieces can influence policy, as legislators typically look to opinion pages to gauge community sentiment on controversial issues.

Advocates should be sure to make the most of the favorable Superior Court ruling (November 1996) that upheld West Hollywood's junk gun ban. Superior Court Judge David Horowitz found that the state of California has occupied "the whole field of regulation of the registration or licensing" of firearms; however, local communities may still regulate firearms *sale* and *manufacturing*. This finding, together with the fact that the U.S. Supreme Court has interpreted the Second Amendment very narrowly in its few rulings on gun control cases, effectively counters the anti-ban advocates' claims that junk gun bans are illegal or unconstitutional. In fact, several articles late in 1996 reported on the fact that with the first major legal obstacle out of the way, more communities are expected to pass and implement junk gun bans.

Finally, while much of the coverage we saw reflected the implicit assumption that public opinion supports junk gun bans and similar measures, this fact was only made explicit in five of the pieces in our sample. The most recent polls show that 78% of California voters favor banning junk guns, as do 72% of handgun owners. In order to strengthen the political will toward a statewide ban, advocates should emphasize the voting public's strong support for reasonable gun laws such as the junk gun ban.

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