

The Other Side of the Coin

DEMAND FOR SMALL ARMS

This chapter takes stock of the emerging debate on small arms demand and points to future directions for research and policy. It shows that the reduction in firearms demand may be as important as, or even more important than, the physical collection of weapons. The chapter situates demand reduction at the intersection of security and development and assumes that efforts to reduce socio-economic inequality can contribute to sustained security.

Above all, the chapter seeks to generate practical insight for strengthening concrete violence reduction and arms control measures. There is little chance that measures to reduce small arms supply will succeed over the longer term if demand for these weapons remains constant. The chapter draws on the preliminary findings of a project initiated by the Small Arms Survey and several partners to explore the intricacies of small arms demand.

Demand is increasingly seen as an integral element of arms control and disarmament. Though consciousness of its importance has been slow to evolve in multilateral negotiations, practitioners on the ground have begun to incorporate, at least implicitly, a demand perspective in their small arms work. The chapter provides a general overview of current debates on small arms demand and distills a number of lessons from empirical research on Brazil, Colombia, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and South Africa.

The chapter asks the following questions:

- What are the constitutive elements of small arms demand?
- How have these elements been taken into account in specific policy interventions?
- How can a demand perspective be mainstreamed into current arms control practice?

A woman walks past a mobile gun collection station in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in November 2004. The sign reads: 'Finish with your gun before your gun finishes you off.'
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The chapter conceives of small arms demand as a function of motivations and means. On the motivations side, a *deep preference* for security, for example, can be satisfied by a *derived preference* for firearms acquisition and use, but also by alternative choices such as reliance on the provision of security by government institutions or community policing. Comprehensive disarmament policy aims at increasing people's incentives to prefer the latter. The means side concerns *resources* and *prices*, which can also be changed through policy intervention.

Connecting this theoretical model with the case studies on Brazil, Colombia, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and South Africa, the chapter concludes the following:

- Small arms demand can be described as the 'other side' of the small arms 'coin'. Analysing small arms control from a purely supply-side perspective risks misunderstanding the issue and misdiagnosing problems.
- Demand can be understood as the interplay between motivations (deep and derived preferences) and means (prices and resources). If interventions to reduce demand do not take these factors into account, they are likely to fail.
- The design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of small arms reduction interventions must adopt a demand-sensitive perspective. Successful arms reduction is often locally hewn, is sensitive to political and social context, draws on public-private partnerships, and takes a flexible, participatory approach.
- Sustained empirical research on demand reduction is needed. At the same time, lessons from the many innovative and dynamic interventions currently underway around the world need to be learned and disseminated.

In particular, the chapter finds that DDR, arms control, and violence-reduction programmes must also address the question of preferences. While arms buy-back programmes can have an indirect effect on means by raising the relative prices of firearms, they must be complemented by explicit measures designed to reshape derived preferences if they are to generate any dividends. Individual demand can be curbed through national gun-control legislation combined with disarmament and citizenship campaigns, as in the cases of Brazil and Colombia. Group pressure can push individual members of a society to dispense with firearms, as has occurred in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and South Africa.

The case studies show that intervention programmes work best where they are designed from the bottom up in a participatory fashion. In such cases, affected populations must feel ownership of the intervention programme in order for it to be successful. Government-civil society partnerships are critical to the effective implementation of demand reduction programmes, as exemplified by the South African Gun-free Zones project. A participatory approach can help identify derived preferences that satisfy deep preferences, but do not involve firearms. ▀