presidential candidates through any manner they choose” (p. 221). However, what would have strengthened this argument is a larger discussion of how the rules often dictate candidate strategy. Jewitt acknowledges the rules’ impact, noting that “behavior is likely to change under different rules. Candidates and campaigns are strategic and seek to maximize benefits given the constraints at play” (p. 207). What she fails to acknowledge is that the rules allow for party control not only of how nominating contests are run but also of how candidates campaign. If candidates are devising strategies based on rules changes, this provides the party another avenue of power.

The opening chapter highlights nicely the various pieces of the complex process of nominating presidential candidates, laying the foundation for Jewitt’s thesis that rules matter and both candidates and voters are largely bound by those rules. She contextualizes well the roles of voters and parties in the current, post-reform process. The second chapter builds on this contextualization by thoroughly discussing, as the title of the chapter states, how we got here. It is mostly an historical analysis of the evolution of the nomination process, from “King Caucus” to our current system. Additionally, she provides significant detail on the several commissions put together post-reform to tinker with the rules in response to the various foibles that inevitably come with each round of nominating contests.

A major concern of both parties over roughly the past three decades has been an increasingly front-loaded calendar, which is the subject of the third chapter. An important contribution of The Primary Rules comes in this chapter, in which Jewitt explicates her novel measure: the “front-loading discount score.” This score provides nominations scholars with a useful quantitative measurement of front-loading, based largely on the timing of the contest while accounting for the “linearly diminishing” feature of front-loading (p. 69). It also provides a singular measurement of front-loading for each nomination contest and allows for a comparative analysis of the amount that occurs across cycles. Using this measure, Jewitt is able to demonstrate that front-loading has indeed become more common recently, but it is not the case that each contest has become more front-loaded than the last.

This new front-loading discount score is used in the fourth chapter to test for the impact of front-loading on turnout rates. Jewitt demonstrates that the conventional wisdom that front-loaded nominating contests tend to end sooner, leaving less time for meaningful participation, is not always the case. Through her thorough analysis of all contests post-reform, she concludes that front-loading actually provides voters with an increased ability to meaningfully participate because the attrition process has not effectively winnowed the candidate field down to a singular presumptive nominee in a majority of states, especially when a contest includes multiple strong candidates. Although this implication goes unmentioned, this finding seems to support the rationale for a same-day national primary. Reform plans are not the centerpiece of The Primary Rules, yet this finding raises an interesting question of whether parties are attempting to reduce front-loading in an effort to diminish the idea of a national primary.

The fifth chapter examines the impact of the rules—specifically the type, openness, and timing of contests and delegate allocation rules—on turnout rates, while controlling for competitiveness. The interesting finding here is that delegate allocation rules have no impact on turnout rates, with similar null results for the timing of the contest. However, coefficient testing of the appropriate linear combinations of this timing measure does demonstrate that turnout is positive or statistically significant in several cases. This implies that front-loading does not lead to increased turnout, with Jewitt concluding that “turnout is boosted when a contest is held later in the competitive portion of the nomination” (p. 157). This is a compelling finding, but would benefit from a more detailed explication of these linear combination tests, as well as a larger discussion of how state parties may best be able to predict when the competitive window will close.

Finally, in the sixth chapter, Jewitt offers a comprehensive analysis of how all post-reform nomination outcomes would have changed under different delegate allocation rules, finding that several contests would have resulted in a different nominee had the rules been different. This is indeed an interesting exercise that clearly demonstrates the importance of the rules governing nominating contests. However, and Jewitt does acknowledge this, changing the allocation rules would also change the behavior of the candidates. Candidates devise strategies based on the rules used; thus it is impossible to tell whether the actual results would have changed if the rules were different.

This criticism regarding candidate behavior is largely beyond the scope of The Primary Rules. Jewitt’s goal in her comprehensive look at the rules governing nominating contests post-reform is to demonstrate the power parties have over the nomination process because of their ability to set the rules. Considering the increasing complexity of these rules, this is a laudable goal and one Jewitt undeniably accomplishes.


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These two new books both seem to be aimed at expanding perspectives on gun policy. The first, despite
its title, is principally concerned with the evolution and interrelationship between public and private violence. The second is very much focused on the gun as a totemic American object. Both books make important and valuable contributions.

Governmental control of the use of force is an indispensable attribute of governance. Yet the American governing tradition has been characterized by a dual system in which police power has been exercised both by governmental entities—the military, including militias, and state and local police agencies—and by private entities, running the gamut from vigilante groups and privateers to the Pinkerton agencies. In the modern era, think private detectives like Dashiell Hammett’s hard-boiled Sam Spade and private law enforcement entrepreneurs like bounty hunters (yes, even Dog the Bounty Hunter).

In The Six-Shooter State, Jonathan Obert examines how and why this dual law enforcement system arose. Both public and private security systems existed simultaneously early in the country’s history, for the obvious reason that the existing governmental order lacked the resources, skills, expertise, and maturity to assume exclusive police power. As public and private enforcement entities grew, they typically worked together in a manner that made “coercive enforcement appear as though there really was no distinction between public security and private effort” (p. 8). Obert refers to this as the “coupling” of power. Predictably, such private involvement was especially important in the most lawless areas of the young nation: the South and the western frontier. In the process, a “jurisdictional decoupling” (p. 7) often occurred between public and private.

Obert attributes this key shift to major developments in the nineteenth century, including the market revolution and the Civil War, which caused social and rule instability. Underdeveloped local systems of governance often could not respond effectively to the rapidly changing social dynamics of the developing nation, which in turn led to decoupling. This bifurcation helps explain the contemporary American contradiction whereby a large public police bureaucracy exists simultaneously with a seemingly contrary tradition of private self-defense values of individualism and self-reliance and suspicion of governmental authority—especially law enforcement. Even as public and private policing matures, the “divide between public and private violence” continues to “blur and unsettle” (p. 16).

The heart of Obert’s analysis is a series of deep case studies, mostly from the nineteenth-century Midwest. Chapter 2 lays out his theory of institutional change as it shapes the coercive environment. Chapter 3 is a detailed look at two Illinois counties from the 1840s where the public–private dynamic played out in different but instructive ways. In Chapter 4 the author turns to Chicago to apply his analysis to that large and rapidly growing urban area. Chapter 5 examines militia activity in the post–Civil War South, focusing on Louisiana. Chapter 6 examines Western gunfighters who often functioned in both public and private law enforcement capacities on both sides of the law. The final chapter examines the legacy of jurisdictional decoupling.

Obert’s analysis falters when he extrapolates his findings to the modern era. It overstates the extent to which modern private law enforcement activities are either significant or necessary to effectuate societal order. The evolution of the old militia system illustrates the systematic elimination of any private militia activity with respect to organization, law enforcement, or policing. Indeed, every state in the country outlaws any kind of private or paramilitary activity. Obert also misunderstands the founders’ feelings about militias, asserting that they would have recoiled at the integration of the militias mentioned in the Second Amendment with a “powerful military bureaucracy,” seeing that integration as the essence of “the tyranny of a powerful, coercive state” (p. 239). In fact, Alexander Hamilton extolled the select militias in the Federalist Papers, just as the Constitution gave nearly exclusive control over the militias to the federal government. The “tyranny of a powerful, coercive state” that many founders feared was of a large, professional standing army controlled by the federal government—even as the Constitution granted Congress that very power. The founders would have been shocked by the United States’ large, permanent standing military force, but not by how the militia system evolved into the modern National Guard.

In his discussion of the 2008 Supreme Court ruling, D.C. v. Heller, Obert correctly notes that it embraces the republican-based idea of personal gun ownership for self-protection in the home. But it is an authority granted by the government, which does not imply any right to exercise public authority in the manner of a posse or vigilantes. And Obert’s conclusion that the controversial Heller decision has generated “plenty of heat and no light” (p. 253) that “has gone nowhere” (p. 254) because it has not occurred in the context of his state formation analysis is one that cannot be sustained by any fair reading of the extensive debate over the ruling. In the modern era, private values survive—individualism, suspicion of government, belief in privatization—but the previously vibrant system of private violence is vibrant no more.

The Lives of Guns is predicated on a plain but useful conceit: that guns are not merely “passive object[s]” but rather “have their own ‘lives’” (p. 1) or agency. As the editors correctly assert, guns (and other implements of destruction) are transformative, both in social terms and in their practical effects.

Elisabeth Anker’s leadoff chapter explores the core belief among many gun owners that gun ownership and
especially gun carrying vest them with a feeling of personal sovereignty. And thanks to the combined recent spread of relaxed concealed carry laws and heightened “stand your ground” laws, individuals at times have exercised such semi-autonomous power, as George Zimmerman’s 2012 killing of Trayvon Martin in Florida dramatized. Unfortunately, Anker gets two important things wrong: Zimmerman did not mount a “stand your ground” defense at his trial, although the recently changed Florida law was important for the way it constrained or altered the behavior of police and prosecutors and even the jury instructions, all to Zimmerman’s benefit. Second, it is not true that “more people than ever own guns” (p. 21). Gun ownership in the United States has been gradually declining for decades, although the average number of guns per owner has skyrocketed.

Andrew Poe’s chapter is one of the first significant analyses of the personal production of 3D self-printed plastic guns. Although the technology is still relatively primitive and unreliable, one truism about technology is that it improves as costs decline. Poe draws out the prospect of how privately produced firearms, made without serial numbers, could fundamentally transform the relationship between citizens and the state with respect to the use of violence and the state’s traditional monopoly over the use of force. Poe’s analysis is both persuasive and disturbing.

Timothy W. Luke’s chapter on assault weapons parses one of the most important symbolically fraught firearms, the AR-15 assault rifle. With one exception, Luke’s narrative is an exceptionally skillful and insightful account that interweaves technological changes with symbolic and marketing considerations. Luke’s one disputable claim is his insistence that civilian versions of military assault rifles are not in fact assault rifles, a term he (and others) insist is inappropriate because they fire only in semiautomatic mode, whereas the military versions can fire either semi- or fully automatically. To support his claim he says that the civilian versions were intentionally named “Modern Sporting Rifles” and sold with low-capacity magazines. But the gun industry’s rebranding was just that—a marketing ploy. The absence of a fully auto fire mode for civilian weapons is just and only that. Whether civilian or military, assault weapons are still configured to lay down spray fire.

Weaponized drones represent a different instance in which technology allows for the detachment of the destructive device from those who control it, but where, unlike a cannon or mortar or gravity bomb, the explosive charge is guided directly to its target from a very far distance. Detachment, control, and precision have all made such weapons seductively appealing, as Heather Ashley Hayes notes. With the operators safely removed from harm, drone use has skyrocketed in the last decade, as have casualty figures, including of many innocents. Part of the “social life” of drones is their accompanying sound, which has had a terrifying effect on daily life in Pakistan and elsewhere.

The social life of bullets is the subject of Joanna Bourke’s chapter—specifically, a rolling controversy at the turn of the twentieth century over “dum-dum” bullets, which expanded on hitting their targets, magnifying their destructive capabilities. Oddly, the fierce debate over these bullets overshadowed the introduction of far more destructive weapons and devices. This fascinating historical account finds that the bullets were fetishized as independent actors.

Renowned criminologist Franklin E. Zimring analyzes police shootings of unarmed African Americans to address two key questions: why they face an unusually high risk of death at the hands of police and what might be done to reduce this death toll. Zimring offers five remedies. I bet you did not know that concealed carrying of guns is now a “lifestyle.” The old gun culture that centered on hunting, sporting, and recreational gun uses has been eclipsed by a Gun Culture 2.0, claims David Yamane, in which armed citizenship focuses on self-defense, bringing together gun marketing and the ideology of personal self-defense.

Harel Shapira brings in the role of the body in human behavior to dissect the gun experience with respect to how people hold, shoot, and carry guns. Even loading a gun has become highly ritualized. Both of these books seek to think outside of the box. That in itself is a worthy enterprise, especially for an issue as intractable as this one. Obert’s contribution in The Six-Shooter State is not quite as successful as his sometimes breathless analysis suggests; still its central analysis is important in understanding the interrelationship between public and private policing and what it reveals about state power when it collides with a fierce counter-belief that government power is better exercised when it is in private hands. The Lives of Guns is and will be important if it moves forward in the new research and new thinking it touts, and sometimes achieves, about guns in America. Political science has come late to the study of gun policy, but these works show that it has much to offer. Just when you think there is really not much more to say, along comes writing like this.


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