

Gun Control in the United States

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Abstract

Guns in the United States are viewed as a sacred emblem to its independence from Great Britain. Recent mass shootings have reignited the gun-control/rights debate in the US. Gun violence can be described as the use of firearms to cause terror through harm or death to an individual or groups of people. It has claimed many innocent peoples' lives thus resulting in national tragedies in the U.S. The main issue lies in the ownership and issuances of unlicensed guns. Some argue that in order for the crime rates due to gun violence to decline, the U.S. government needs to directly control the distribution of guns. The 2nd amendment of the U.S. Constitution states that, "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed" (U.S. Const. Am. 2). Those who read the Constitution with a loose interpretation believe that gun control is not unconstitutional, however, those who read the Constitution with a strict interpretation believe that gun control would prohibit people from exercising their 2nd amendment right to keep and bear arms. The purpose of this literature review is to explore the scholarship on gun control by examining public opinion polls in the U.S., the ideological divide between advocates for gun control and gun rights, race and racial attitudes, self-interest theory, contemporary mass shootings and the future of gun control.

Keywords: 2nd amendment; Gun Control; Ideology; Legislative battle; Gun violence rates; Public opinion

Introduction

Kopel [1] stated in his article The ideology of gun ownership and gun control in the United States, that among the categories in crimes, gun violence is the most common type of crime that occurs on a regular basis in the U.S. He attributed this to how easily accessible guns are in the U.S. and argued that it acts as an obstacle in the legislative battle against gun violence. There are some other factors that need to be taken into consideration as to why the U.S. has such high gun violence rates. There is overwhelming consensus in the scholarship on gun control that it is inherent for the distribution of guns to be restricted in order for gun violence to decline in the U.S. Although many efforts have been inculcated in the war against gun violence and that despite the decline in gun violence from 1992-2012, a recent study by Daniel [2] revealed that gun violence cases are still high. As the world's richest and most-developed nation, the U.S. is the leading country with the highest gun violence cases. Aborn and Koury [3] argued that the battle against gun violence is a collective responsibility that must include everyone regardless of race, age or gender.

The debate on gun control and the meaning and implications of the 2nd Amendment of the U.S. Constitution is controversial and provoking. Ik-Whan G. Kwon [4] stated in their study that there are currently 20,000 laws and regulations in the U.S. that attempt to contain the use of firearms but unfortunately this has not translated to a decline in gun violence. In 1992, deaths from gun violence almost reached 40,000 people. Singh [5] stated in his study that public pressure for gun control has been generated by large increases in the levels of violent crime.

Analysis on Past Policies

Kwon [4] conducted a study that statistically and empirically evaluated the effectiveness of gun control laws before and after they were implemented, such as the Brady Bill. The Brady Bill was a bill passed by Congress in 1993 that mandated federal background checks on firearm purchasers in the U.S. and imposed a five day waiting period on purchases. In spite of emotional debates and passages of numerous laws and regulations, no empirical studies had been done to evaluate the effectiveness of gun control laws in the U.S by 1997.

They used a multivariate statistical technique to establish a relationship between the number of gun related deaths by state and used sets of determinants including state laws and regulations on gun use. Their multivariate statistical regression model suggested that the existence of gun control laws had a deterrent effect on firearm deaths, though this relationship is weaker than previously reported. Kwon [4] were able to determine a correlation between the U.S. and Canada; that if the U.S. had a uniform gun control law similar to the 1977 Canadian law, the impact may have been stronger than that found here, since many states have differing gun laws. Since this study used state level data, Kwon [4] were able to determine a major correlation for gun violence victims and socioeconomic factors such as poverty levels and alcohol consumption. Therefore, Kwon [4] made the conclusion and policy implication that the U.S. should start directing its resources to combatting the issues that arise from low socio-economic areas; in order to combat gun violence and that fatalities will probably not decline whether the U.S. has gun control laws or not. Koper [2] agrees that even with numerous laws and regulations on gun control, the amount of gun related violence and crime had not significantly changed.

Koper [2] conducted a study to determine whether the Federal Assault Weapons Ban in 1994 was successful in limiting the availability of assault weapons and large capacity magazines; and whether this resulted in lowering gun violence in the U.S. The ban was set for ten years, however, Congress chose not to renew the ban in 2004. Koper's research team examined several indicators of trends in the lethality and injuriousness of gun violence throughout 1995-2002. These included "national-level analyses of gun murders, the percentage of violent gun crimes resulting in death, the share of gunfire cases resulting in wounded victims, the percentage of gunshot victimizations resulting in death, and

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the average number of victims per gun homicide incident". In selected localities, they also "examined trends in wounds per gunshot victim or the percentage of gunshot victims sustaining multiple wounds" (ibid). Overall, Kopel's studies showed no significant reduction in the lethality or injuriousness of gun violence from 1995-2002. For example, the percentage of violent gun crimes resulting in death was the same from 2001-2002 (2.9%) and from 1992-1999. Therefore it was difficult for Kopel's team to credit the Federal Assault Weapons Ban to the general decline in gun related violence in the 1990s.

Koper reached the conclusion in his study that there were mixed effects in reducing gun related crimes due to various exemptions and loopholes in the Federal Assault Weapons Ban. He found that the ban did not affect gun crime during the time it was in effect but some evidence suggested that if it were renewed in 2004, it may have modestly reduced gunshot victimization further. He further discussed the implications of prior bans and how the U.S. government should address gun control in the future; that if future legislation mimics prior bans, it will have little impact on most gun crimes, but it may prevent some shootings, particularly those involving high numbers of shots and victims. In his discussion of plausible future pieces of legislation combatting gun control; he asserted that restrictions focused on magazine capacity will have a greater chance of gaining sufficient public and political support for passage, instead of new restrictions on assault weapons. However, current polling suggests that both measures are supported by 75% of non-gun owners and nearly half of gun owners.

It is interesting to note that both Kwon [4] and Koper had similar conclusions in their respective studies with concerning the effectiveness of gun control laws such as the Brady Bill and the Federal Assault Weapons Ban. Both scholars had different approaches to how the U.S. government could tackle gun control for future legislation. To fully understand the history of gun control in this country within the world of academia, it is inherent to pay attention to the scholarship concerning public opinion.

Public Opinion

Singh [5] started his study by discussing the gun control debate in a historical context. He stated that public pressure for gun control in the U.S. was generated by two conditions: first, large increases in the levels of violent crime, as in during Prohibition and in the early 1990s. Secondly, the attempted or completed assassinations of Presidents, as in 1936, 1963 and 1981 and the assassination of other politically prominent individuals, such as Martin Luther King Jr and Robert Kennedy in 1968. However, only rarely have movements for tighter gun regulation been sufficiently significant enough to secure meaningful policy advances at either the state or federal level.

Webster et al. [2] examined public opinion polls regarding gun control in the aftermath of the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. As well as, policy proposals to reduce gun violence that were being actively debated at the national, state, and local levels. Within weeks of the mass shooting in Newtown, public opinion polls indicated a significant shift in views among Americans toward greater support for strengthening gun control laws. Webster [2] used data from Gallup and the Pew Center for the People and Press, that found that 58% of Americans supported stricter gun laws in December 2012, as opposed to 43% in an October 2011 poll. Webster [2] mentioned that in the current era of technology, it has become more appealing to utilize web-based panels over national telephone surveys, but there are limitations in both methods. Webster's team used GfK KnowledgePanel, which utilized probability-based recruitment tools

consistent with established standards; where they analyzed data by comparing detailed respondent socio-demographic characteristics with national rates to confirm their representativeness of the U.S. population.

As Webster [2] mentioned in their study, in the wake of the Sandy Hook shooting, policymakers started considering a much wider range of gun policy options than those assessed in recent public opinion polls. In addition, most recent polls did not examine how public opinion varied by gun ownership or by political party affiliation, and none oversampled gun owners to obtain more precise estimates of policy attitudes among this group. Prior evidence has shown that attitudes about gun policies vary significantly by gun ownership and by partisanship. Webster [2] claimed there was a fifteen year gap in the scholarship on gun control where the attitudes of Americans were examined about a broad set of public policies aimed at curbing gun violence. Their study concluded that a majority of Americans support increased government spending on mental health treatment as a policy to reduce gun violence. Since mental health in the U.S. is substantially undertreated, it is worth considering whether gun policies targeting persons with mental illness might negatively affect treatment-seeking behavior (ibid).

In Webster [2] study, they recognized that some of the polls they analyzed focused only on general attitudes about gun policy during a time of mourning in Newtown not for specific policy proposals to reduce gun violence. This is a small fault in public opinion polling that some academics may not pay close enough attention to, when conducting their own studies; the way a question is framed and what the question actually addresses will alter your results tremendously. Therefore, it is critical to interpret all public opinion data objectively to the language used to describe a particular policy. In their conclusion, they emphasized that their findings should only be assessed within the context of their specific methodological approach.

Vizzard [6] did not conduct a quantitative study in his analysis but more of a qualitative study analyzing the history of gun control legislation in the U.S., public opinion and interest group support and future plausible policy options based on history. Vizzard argued that there is actually a decline in public support for gun control from a couple of differing factors. He cited that the existence of the 2nd amendment and a persistent effort by opponents of gun control have shaped the argument to one on individual rights. Vizzard [6] discussed that the delegates associated with gun rights groups are not highlighted by other academics in their studies on gun control. He stated that the gun rights advocacy infrastructure far exceeds the meager gun control advocacy infrastructure and that they have two distinct advantages. Gun rights enthusiasts have more opportunities to organize around specific institutions and events such as gun stores, gun shows, shooting ranges, and shooting activities and that these institutions allow supporters to network (ibid). Furthermore, gun control advocates lack any such specific organizational advantages and most do not rank gun control as their primary issue. Vizzard's [6] conclusions are that the split between opponents of gun control and advocates of gun control was and may still be divided by ideology and that the institutions that represent both have a prominent influence on public opinion. As Haider-Markel [7] determined in their study in Kansas, the split in gun control policy favorability was by political party at one time.

Ideological Split

Haider-Markel [7] conducted a study emphasizing how the question in an opinion poll was framed concerning gun control, which

was a fault that Webster [2] noted could result in more accurate polls on more specific gun control policies. With an emphasis on the influence of how the questions of gun control were framed on the result of polls opinion, he utilized two frames. One based on public safety behind the requirements for owning a gun, a frame that aligned with the views of gun control advocates. The second frame focused on the individual's interpretation of the 2nd Amendment of the Constitution, the frame that aligned with opponents of gun control. Markel [7] concluded that the way you frame the question concerning gun control had an impact on Republicans and Independents but not for Democrats. The results of the study demonstrate that Democrats are not sensitive to the 2nd amendment, whereas, some Independents and most Republicans are sensitive to both frames that Markel [7] were addressing. Since Markel [7] used two different frames in their survey, their results; that more Democrats are gun control advocates over Republicans and Independents and more Republicans and Independents are opponents to gun control over Democrats, are more reliable and can speak to how to address this issue in future policy proposals and/or scholarship.

Shortly after the Columbine High school shooting, Markel [7] conducted another study, this time by telephone, using two frames. One based on attributing the incident on lax gun laws, a frame that is aligned with gun control advocated and second, attributing the incident on how much violence the media exposes to the American people, a frame that is aligned with opponents of gun control. The results of this second survey aligned with their first study; that Democrats attributed lax gun laws to the incident while Republicans attributed the incident to the media's exposure. These two studies show the predispositions that both parties have concerning gun control/rights.

JoEllen Pederson et al. conducted a study on gun ownership and attitudes toward gun control in older adults; where they found that 64% of Democrats favored stricter gun control and 52% of Republicans also favored some form of gun control. The study also found that the individual that is most likely to own a firearm would be a Republican male and similarly the individual that is least likely to own a firearm would be a Democrat female [8]. In their study, they cited a study conducted by Carter where he used data from the 2000 wave of the General Social Survey (GSS) and concluded that 55% of individuals that identified as conservatives reported owning some type of firearm in their home while only 22% of the individuals that identified as liberal reported owning a firearm in their home. In Pederson [8] study, they found a contradiction in these findings to Lott (1988), a well known political scientist, who claimed that the ownership of a firearm was proportional amongst the two main political parties. But based on Pederson [8] the most current empirical research argues that Democrats are more likely than Republicans to support stricter gun control while Republicans are more likely to own guns.

Vizzard [6] noticed in his study on the future of gun policy in the U.S., that as a result of the 2010 midterm elections; the Freedom Caucus became the defining majority of the Republicans in the House of Representatives. Subsequently, the balance of power in many state legislatures significantly shifted to conservatives that opposed gun control. The extent of this shift is evident by the attempt of several state legislatures to pass legislation that invalidates most federal gun laws and outlaws their enforcement. Since reapportionment will not occur until 2020, the political atmosphere of most state legislatures will most likely not see much change until then. However, Vizzard notes that a few state legislatures have enacted more strict gun control laws; "limited to additional restrictions on paramilitary firearms, limits on magazine capacity, and records checks for private buyers". Vizzard asserted that although some states have implemented gun control laws,

the likelihood of gun control legislation being passed at the federal level with the current political atmosphere is highly unlikely. These conclusions are all based on past policies that conservative control in politics meant that the gun rights advocates would ultimately prevail.

Gray [9] conducted a study on public opinion on gun control at the state level. Their research had two essential findings that linked public opinion to gun control. First, that interest groups had profound effects on the public's perception on gun violence in the U.S., but minimal effect on the outcome of public policy. In contrast to what other academics such as Markel [7] claim that ideologies hold specific views on gun control and gun rights. Secondly, that a state's gun laws do not have a correlation to whether or not that state is generally liberal or conservative.

Gray [9] discuss the debate in scholarship between pluralists and non-pluralists. They stated that despite the arguments of David Truman and other pluralists, organized interests are often assumed to thwart public opinion. They quote another scholar Jeffrey Beyer strengthen their point, "the popular perception is that interest groups are a cancer spreading unchecked throughout the body politics, making it gradually weaker, until they eventually kill it" [9].

Gray [9] study used an index that showed relatively how liberal and conservative every state's policies were concerning guns, welfare and abortion¹. Their study found that California had the most liberal laws concerning gun control, which is not unusual since California is also the most liberal state in the country. However, there are a few exceptions in this index that they claim need to be addressed in their study and future studies. For example, Vermont ranked third in the liberal index overall, but ranked fourth when it came to gun control laws. Oregon ranked seventh in the liberal index overall, but ranked twenty fourth when it came to gun control laws. Maine ranked fifteenth in the liberal index overall, but ranked fourth when it came to gun control laws. This ultimately meant that the ideological split between liberals and conservatives on gun control is not always concrete and therefore any bi-partisan pieces of legislation that confront gun control have more complexities to them.

La Valle [10] conducted a study on gun control that looked at why those who favored stricter "gun control" axiomatically opposed "right to carry" laws, and those who favor "right to carry" laws vociferously opposed "gun control" (La Valle, 1). I will further discuss his findings in the next section on "Self-Interest." In his study, he analyzed public opinion polls regarding gun control in the wake of Sandy Hook and found that public support for gun control rose significantly, but support for more specific types of policies was unclear. The poll also indicated little support for an outright ban of any specific type of gun.

"Gallup public opinion polls report (a) that the public prefers stricter enforcement of existing gun laws over the enactment of new ones 47% to 46%, (b) that most do not favor an assault weapons ban 51% to 44%, (c) that most do not favor a ban of handguns for all but law enforcement 74% to 24%, (d) that most favor closing the gun-show loophole 92% to 7%, and finally, (e) that most favor a ban on "feeding devices" (magazines) capable of holding more than 10 rounds of ammunition 62% to 35%".

La Valle notes that these polls indicate that deep ideological divisions are not true. Academics and policy analysts have historically examined gun control along these ideological divisions. Moreover, prior gun control laws were developed and enacted along these ideological divides. The results of this poll in the wake of the Sandy

¹Index included with references.

Hook shooting suggested that a significantly less ideologically grounded and more research-based approach to future gun-policy research and implementation is necessary.

Self-Interest Theory/Racism

La Valle [10] mentioned that his study utilized the methodological approaches recommended by a National Academy of Sciences Research Panel, and the results conditionally suggested that “right to carry” laws may have reduced both gun homicide rates and total homicide rates, whereas traditional “gun control” policies do not visibly effect either outcome.. La Valle’s study analyzes the effects of four different “gun control” measures and right to carry (RTC) laws on gun homicide rates and total homicide rates for 56 U.S. cities over 31 years. He acknowledged that a substantive limitation of his study is that it did not link RTC laws directly to crimes committed with actual permit holders, overall patterns of gun carrying, guns owned by permit holders, guns stolen from permit holders, or actual incidents of permit holders defending themselves with guns. La Valle rightfully claimed it is naturally erroneous to take his results to advocate that guns protect citizens against criminals more frequently than guns are used to commit deadly gun crimes. La Valle [9] pointed out that the statistical limitation of his study is that the observed RTC effects may be endogenous since most of the states that have RTC laws enacted them during the national 20-year decline in homicide rates. Therefore, the observed effects may be due to indeterminate factors and not from the presently observed RTC effects.

Kerry O’Brien [11] conducted a study on how biased attitudes in white Americans has an influence on policy decisions. Racism is related to policy preferences and behaviors that adversely affect African Americans and appear related to a fear of blacks. Their study examined whether racism was also related to gun ownership and opposition to gun controls in U.S. whites. O’Brien [11] used the most recent data from the American National Election Study, to test relationships between racism, gun ownership, and opposition to gun control in U.S. whites. The explanatory variables they used were: age, gender, education, income, conservatism. Their outcome variables were having a gun in the home, opposition to bans on handguns in the home, support for permits to carry concealed handguns.

O’Brien [11] performed logistical regressions that found for every one point increase in symbolic racism, there was a 50% increase in the odds of having a gun at home. In addition, after accounting for having a gun in the home, there was still a 28% increase in support for permits to carry concealed handguns, for each one point increase in symbolic racism. The relationship between symbolic racism and opposition to banning handguns in the home was reduced to non-significant after accounting for having a gun in the home, which likely represented self-interest in protecting their property.

O’Brien [11] study found that symbolic racism did have a correlation to having a gun in the home and opposition to gun control policies in U.S. whites. Their study also helped explain the paradoxical attitudes towards gun control that U.S. whites have. It is more than likely that these attitudes have an unfavorable influence on U.S. gun control policy debates and decisions. Their study examined for the first time whether racism was related to gun ownership and the opposition to gun control in U.S. whites. The results of their tests support the hypothesis by showing that greater symbolic racism was related to the increased likelihood of having a gun in the home and greater opposition to gun control. O’Brien [11] emphasized that the relationship between symbolic racism and the gun-related outcomes was maintained in the presence of conservative ideologies, political affiliation, opposition

to government control, and being from a southern state, which are otherwise strong predictors of gun ownership and opposition to gun reform. O’Brien [11] pointed out that existing scholarship shows a correlation between implicit racism and policy decision making but their study did not have this conclusion after accounting for other variables.

Pederson [8] study examined self interest theory in gun control toward older adults. They stated that the existing scholarship on gun control consistently argued that self-interest was an important predicting factor in determining whether someone favored or opposed gun control measures. For obvious reasons, this was determined by whether that person owned a gun or not. Pederson [8] tested this theory towards older adults, since the existing scholarship on gun control shows that there is a positive correlation between age and a desire to own guns. Their study used the 2012 wave of the General Social Survey to test self-interest and attitudes toward gun control specifically in older adult populations.

There is a clear divergence in the findings of Pederson [8] and O’Brien [11]. O’Brien [11] found symbolic racism to be a predictor of attitudes toward gun control. Pederson [8] study pointed out that the variable in the GSS they used to measure subjective racism was not a significant predictor of gun control attitudes. They pointed out however that race was not the main focus of their study but age was. The scholarship on gun control is extremely diverse; either from the ideology the author has, the source from which they use their statistics or from variables they are looking at (if they are using a quantitative methodology).

Contemporary Mass Shootings

Vizzard [6] qualitative study uses mass shootings as its framework to discuss the future of gun control policies in the U.S. He starts his article by asserting that,

“Despite the mass shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado; Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia; a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado; Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut; and the attempted assassination of U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords and accompanying mass shooting in Tucson, Arizona, no gun control legislation has passed either house of Congress since the sunset of the assault weapons ban”

This is a powerful indictment to state in the beginning of his study. As mentioned earlier in this literature review, Vizzard does not believe gun control legislation will pass at the federal level until the next time reapportionment occurs but notes that a few state legislatures have been far more active. He asserted that given the limited options for gun control in the U.S., advocates must focus on limited, pragmatic goals that include reducing gun possession and carrying by high-risk individuals, restricting access to firearms by prohibited persons, and utilizing firearms laws to incapacitate violent, career offenders.

Vizzard discussed the narrative that scholars such as Lott and Kleck [12,13] have created in the discussion of gun control, the crime narrative. They have argued that firearms are used as many as 2.5 million times per year to defend against crime. They based their conclusions on random telephone surveys that asked about the defensive use of guns. Vizzard pointed out that the Bureau of Justice Statistics’ National Crime Victims Survey (NCVS) produced an estimate closer to 70,000. As much as Lott’s and Kleck’s work stand out from the rest of the scholarship on gun control, Lott’s work has been widely read and his thesis is regularly appraised, even by legislators. Vizzard asserted that violent crime rates did decline between 1992 and 2012 in spite of the

ever-increasing number of firearms in American society. Although this rough correlation does not constitute evidence that firearms reduce crime, it served to weaken previous arguments that accessibility to guns constituted the main driver of earlier increases in violent crime rates.

Kleck [12,13] a Florida State University professor, has conducted several studies with different scholars on gun control. His findings are more controversial than the average scholar on gun control, he stated that, "when firearms are present they appear to inhibit attack and, in the case of an attack, to reduce the probability of injury, whereas, once an injury occurs, they appear to increase the probability of death." His main argument is that scholars and policymakers that use mass shootings in schools as a way to gather support for gun control legislation is not a good idea. is not smart. He argued that using a mass shooting as a juncture for advocating legislation to confront ordinary violence carries with it a serious risk; those who recognize the measure's irrelevance to preventing mass shootings may be persuaded to reject measures that might be effective for preventing ordinary violence. He stated that the exploitation of school shootings for the advocacy of irrelevant gun controls may have obscured the genuine merits of various gun control measures for reducing "ordinary" gun violence. He pointed out in his study that there is an irony in some of the proposed gun control measures, that they would have been impractical for preventing either Columbine or the other mass school shootings of the late 1990s might be perfectly reasonable measures for preventing ordinary gun violence. Accordingly, his argument is that mass school shootings provided the worst possible basis for supporting gun control.

Kleck [13] used the Columbine school shooting to try and prove his point. He pointed out that since the crimes were premeditated; they have a determined constant desire to acquire the tools of murder, not a short-term desire. Therefore, gun control measures that delay gun acquisition are irrelevant, because time is not what is at stake. His next argument is that most guns that are used in mass shooting typically already belonged to the shooters prior to their plans or were acquired by theft. Therefore, restrictions on gun shows are irrelevant, both to Columbine and other mass school shootings.

La Valle [10] stated in his conclusion for possible future gun control laws to include a government approved locking container that should be required for all gun purchases and secondary access by individuals under the age of 21. Kleck [13] attempted to disprove La Valle [10] and the inspirational scholars who influenced La Valle to hold that view by crediting locking devices to be irrelevant to blocking access to a shooter's own gun. However, Kleck does argue that guns should be locked up when not in use at the discretion of the owner not the federal government. Kleck's next argument against gun control is that people who seek to inflict large numbers of casualties typically use multiple guns. Hence, guns with large-capacity magazines were unnecessary to inflict even the very large numbers of casualties inflicted in these incidents without reloading. Therefore, gun control legislation that attempts to limit large capacity magazines are irrelevant to either preventing these incidents or reducing their victim counts. Kleck's last argument is that mass shootings, generally, take a long time to carry out, and that a ban on rapid-fire guns is unnecessary since it is highly likely that possible shooters could inflict the same amount of damage using slower firing guns.

Kleck [13,14] stated in the conclusion of his study that since the people in these attacks are powerfully motivated to die for their cause; that these are the hardest acts of violence to prevent. He admitted that some of the legislation that addressed gun control proposed in the aftermath of Columbine, "have a good deal of merit with regard

to ordinary violence". Kleck made the conclusion that it would be a reasonable option for the purpose of reducing ordinary gun violence, to extend background checks on gun purchasers to cover transactions between private parties. But he emphasized that this would prevent mass shootings by youth, either because they stole their murder weapons, or received guns from their, but it could prevent casually motivated gun acquisition by convicted criminals who are less powerfully motivated than mass killers to acquire guns irrespective of the obstacles (ibid) [15].

Conclusion

Gun control is a highly contested issue in the United States, it is not a newly researched issue Over the past 30 years, research has addressed attitudes toward gun control in a various ways. Studies have examined attitudes by political ideology, race and racial attitudes, the effects of gun control legislation enacted in the early 1990s, as well as, in the aftermath of mass shootings. However, the scholarship on gun control has many gaps and limitations to it. For example, Pederson [8] stated in their study that citizens across the U.S. have diverse reasons as to why they support or oppose gun control. However, self-interest has continually been mentioned in prior research as one of the most likely factors in people's attitudes and what has been overlooked by prior research is the impact of age on how self-interest influences attitudes toward gun control. Pederson [8] study addressed older adults in their discussion of self-interest theory on gun control. However, does that completely invalidate prior research. Another issue in the scholarship on gun control that needs to be confronted is the role of ideology in proposing future gun control legislation. Studies conducted by Markel [7], Vizzard [6], Pederson [8] made substantial conclusions that the role of political party and ideology had a crucial role in determining public opinion, as well as, whether or not legislation on gun control had a chance of being implemented on the federal level. But the study on the liberal index by state conducted by Gray [9] exposed that their are limitations and complexities to the argument that the role of political parties and ideology have an effect on public opinion by state and the likelihood of gun control legislation being passed. Does Gray [9] study completely invalidate the findings of those scholars who tested the role of political parties and ideology concerning public opinion and likelihood of gun control legislation being implemented? Studies that have addressed a link between racism and gun control have clear contradictions in them. O'Brien [11] found symbolic racism to be a predictor of attitudes toward gun control while Pederson [8] study pointed out that the variable in the GSS they used to measure subjective racism was not a significant predictor of gun control attitudes. The scholarship on gun control is extremely diverse; either from the ideology the author has, the source from which they use their statistics or from variables they are looking at (if they are using a quantitative methodology).

Many scholars have proposed their own solutions to the gun violence epidemic in the U.S., for example La Valle [10] proposed that prospective gun buyers should be required to provide a full list of all who will have secondary access to the guns, and each individual listed should be subject to the same background checks as the purchaser. If a secondary gun-user is disqualified, the buyer must provide evidence that the guns are going to be kept in a government approved locking device, and that there will be no secondary access whatsoever to the guns by anyone. To better assure the effectiveness of all of the presently proposed gun-policy revisions, the gun show loophole should be closed indefinitely. La Valle [10] articulately described the most common opinions of proponents of gun rights and gun control; that the mentally disturbed should not possess firearms and that there is a

need for greater responsibility on the part of gun owners. He used the findings of his study and these two most commonly held opinions on both sides to capitalize the apolitical people in the U.S. and try to curb future mass shootings in the most effective manner.

Given the current political conversation about gun control in the U.S., it is important to understand how the population feels about gun control. This literature review suggests that most people in the U.S. are in favor of stricter gun control laws, there are a few scholars who argue otherwise due to a plethora of differences in research style and methodology. Pederson [8] found in their study that this view is held largely among those over the age of 50, who also have high levels of owning guns and of voting participation. By 2050, about 20% of the total U.S. population will be 65 years of age and older. According to Pederson [8] the aging population has many implication for the U.S. and that has a direct correlation to the implications for possible future gun control policy in the U.S. Therefore, with a high favorability among public opinion polls on gun control and gun control policy being implemented on the state level, the American people should not lose faith that one day at the federal level, there will be a gun control policy that is implemented and takes into account most of the limitations that scholars have pointed out in their studies.

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