

The Gun Policy, Crime Rate, and Public Attitudes in the U.S.

Jiayi Hu ^{1, a,*}

¹*Department of Sociology, Korea University, 145 Anam-ro, Seongbuk-gu, Seoul, 02841, Korea*

a. christina0703@korea.ac.kr

**corresponding author*

Abstract: This paper shows the connection between gun policy and crime rate and the public attitude towards the gun policy after a mass shooting and discusses how to prevent gun shootings in the United States. We found that there is less connection between gun policy and crime rate. Mass shootings are highly related to the death rate. The public's attitude also relates to mass shootings and gun policy. By studying the papers of others, we found that gun policies have a powerful impact on American society, especially after significant shootings. People's attitudes towards gun policy will change after a principal shooting, whether by gun owners or non-gun owners, but the change will not last long. At the same time, different states under different parties will have different ways of implementing gun policies. Many investigators have suggested that the federal government should strengthen background checks on applicants to prevent mass shootings. Gun policies need to be more strictly enforced, not only by the government but also by communities and individuals within their spheres. This has a more noticeable effect on preventing large-scale shootings.

Keywords: gun policy, mass shooting, public attitude, crime rate, death rate

1. Introduction

Several people have died due to gun shootings in the United States. According to research, 12 children are killed in school shootings daily, and 37 children might be injured or shot. The firearm mortality rate in the United States is much higher than in most developed countries, although far less than in some Latin American countries. In 2016, it reached 10.6 deaths per 100,000 people [1]. Additionally, gun shootings have become the leading cause of death among American children and teenagers, and approximately 10% of gun deaths are at the age of 19 or even younger [2]. In the United States, the constitution protects American citizens' freedom to hold guns. Therefore, even though many countries allow individuals to have their guns in some special situations, the United States is the only country with a substantial number of gun events. Research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States claimed that the homicide rate in 2020 increased by 7.8 per 100,000 [3]. In other words, the rising homicide rate and victims in these cases are more likely to relate to the policy of ownership of taking guns. In addition, there are a lot of mass shootings that happened in America under the gun policy. On December 14th, 2012, a mass shooting occurred at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown [4]. This paper will examine the connection between criminal behavior and crime rate and the policy of ownership of guns in America. To search how gun violence and the household of gun relates to the crime rate and point out the uniqueness of the policy.

Due to American federal government policy, different states have different constraints on the system of policy. This paper will explain the policies set in place under the federal government's laws and declare state policies on firearms under different political parties and the impact on each state, thus demonstrating that gun policies are leading to an increasing trend in crime in America.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Definition of Gun Violence

This section must be in one column. Since this paper will talk about gun ownership, gun violence should be focused on. According to Amnesty International, gun violence is defined as a violent behavior a gun uses [5]. For example, school shooting events and suicide with guns can be called gun violence. In other words, gun violence manifests in not only a homicide but also suicide. This research claimed that approximately 134,000 people died or were injured by gun violence. Additionally, the evidence showed that over 500 people died from gun violence in one day [5]. Gun violence has become an important social problem in the United States. In the States, an estimated 46% of cases of gun violence are suicide [5]. Gun violence led to a lot of death in the United States.

Different kinds of people have different perspectives on the policy of ownership of guns. Crifasi et al.'s research split people into different groups by race to examine their opinion on gun policy [6]. According to their research, the policy of repealing the ownership of guns obtained remote support from black people compared to white, and they found that the reason for this stems from a lack of trust in US policy and the justice system. Black people believe they suffer from inequality in different positions in the United States [6]. Therefore, discussing the American gun policy is necessary.

2.2. Public Perspective and Policy in the United States

2.2.1. Discuss of the American Gun Policy

Gun violence is a serious social issue in America. Due to America's open gun ownership policy, many American citizens are holding their guns. According to Masters, his research declared that America has the largest population of guns for civilian use in the world, with a figure of 46%. Additionally, America also has the highest rate of gun-shooting homicide among the developed countries of all [7]. However, gun shootings are rarely manifested in homicide but in suicide. Over 48,800 people in the United States died because of a gun shooting in 2021, and over half of it was suicide but not homicide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.). Moreover, some research found that gun policies are highly related to gun violence. More than 600 mass shootings happened in the last three years, and two events per day on average, the mass shootings rate is increasing significantly [8]. Gun policy has led to an increase in the crime rate and death rate.

2.2.2. How Did the Public Consider the Gun Policy

Due to the particular social contracture and policy system in the United States, the public perspective on the gun policy must be discussed. Crifasi et al.'s research divided the sample into two communities by race [6]. According to the result of this paper, people with black skin color had a low support rate for banning gun ownership policy in the United States compared to white people. In addition, black people also had a meagre support rate for law enforcement-initiated firearm removal policy. In summary, black people do not want the federal government to abolish the civilian use of firearms. Crifasi et al. declared that the leading cause of this situation is black people's distrust of the federal government and the injustices they suffer in society [6]. Additionally, their low support for policies

that restrict access to firearms based on less serious crimes might be due to higher rates of victimization and a lack of trust.

Moreover, the support of forbidding the policy of civilization of firearms after a gun violent event also should be considered. Research showed a difference in the support rate after a gun violent event in Newtown [4]. The decline in policy support for gun ownership occurs almost exclusively among non-owners, and the rate has a sharply decreasing. For instance, the support for prohibiting offensive weapons reduced from 69% to 63%, and the support for banning selling capacity magazines decreased from 68% to 60% in two years. On the contrary, little change in the attitudes of gun owners [4]. The Public's positive attitude toward restricting gun policy only happens when there is a mass shooting happened

2.2.3. The Impaction of Gun Policy in the United States

There are a lot of shooting events that happened in the United States. According to Gramlich's calculation, approximately 79% of murders were involved in guns in 2020, and only 53% of suicide cases used guns [1]. In other words, the using of gun lead to a substantial number of shooting events, and meanwhile, these shootings have involved mainly human lives. As mentioned in the previous section, whenever a significant shooting results in a loss of life, the American people's reaction to gun policy becomes violent, and support for gun control policy increases relatively. However, according to the research of Luca et al., the impact on gun policy varies significantly from state to state under the control of different parties [9]. Gun crime will increase in states under Republican leadership while gun control is relaxed. On the contrary, gun crime rates in states under Democratic leadership do not change any more or less because of loosening or tightening gun policies. This means that all articles discussing the increase or decrease in crime due to gun policies in the US and the reactions of US citizens need to be discussed separately for states that are not led under the same party affiliation. Gun shootings often happen in states with high gun household rates [10-12]. Additionally, in Newman and Hartman's research, shooting event has influent the support of gun policy a lot. The shorter the time shootings occur, the higher the support for strict gun control policies will be [10]. Although this article has a similar statement to Luca et al., Newman and Hartman's paper argued that the impact of shooting events has no connection with different parties in different states but is deeply involved with the extent of the shooting event.

2.3. Prevention

Fewer papers declared that the United States citizens' opinion might directly connect with shooting events. This means that even though there are a large number of shootings in America, the public's opinion might change shortly after mass shootings. Therefore, changing the gun policy may be the way can prevent mass shootings, but hard to get to the root of the issue. Therefore, a strict gun policy might be a better way to reduce the mass shooting rate than repealing the gun policy. Newman & Hartman suggested that the federal government should make a strict gun policy, for instance, legislation to change the types of firearms that can be applied for, reduce the types of firearms that are relatively lethal, amend the loopholes in the law, raise the threshold for licensed gun applicants, strengthen background checks on licensed gun applicants, and reduce the number of online purchase channels and try to purchase only from places and websites that are allowed by the federal government [10]. Moreover, this restricted policy has got public support; supporters include not only gun owners but also non-gun owners [4]. Furthermore, not all shooting events involved mass killing but also suicide. Therefore, when the media published a negative attitude that mental illnesses are having, the public broadened support for policies restricting firearms for mental illnesses [11]. Additionally, the community also needs to take precautions. For example, identifying the mentally ill and providing

psychological treatment can prevent gun violence [13]. In addition, there is a policy called FAWB-- Federal Assault Weapons Ban. Post et al. examined using FAWB, and the result yielded a positive outcome. FAWB showed a dramatic decrease in mass shootings rate, and they predicted that implementing FAWB could prevent approximately 30 mass shootings. Fewer people will be killed [14]. Therefore, the policy can be the leading solution to reduce crime.

It is difficult for the government, community, and individuals to prevent gun shootings. It is less likely to abolish the gun policy in America due to American gun policy has been a part of society for a long time. Therefore, from the government's feature, they should strictly enforce the gun policy, raise the background requirements for applicants, and crack down on illegal gun possession. Secondly, from the community's aspect, they should count the number of gun owners and arrange free counselling each year to determine if they are still eligible to own a firearm and lectures on gun ownership. Lastly, from the individual's aspect, both gun owners and non-owners should support the tightening of gun policies, not only when mass shootings happen.

3. Inspiration

When people think about criminal behaviour, they might only think about this through psychological analysis. However, I want to talk about policy because I want to watch crime rates and criminal behaviour from a sociological perspective. Unlike most articles that discuss criminal behaviour, the vast majority go more into analysing their psychological and mental state, often ignoring that sometimes policies can also lead to criminal behaviour. For example, this article mentions the gun policy in the United States. The United States does not regulate guns as strictly as other countries, and after a series of procedures, US citizens are allowed to apply to own private firearms. When a person owns a gun, they can significantly impact society, regardless of whether or not they commit an act that is harmful to society, such as a mass shooting. I believe this may be a criminal act caused by the policy. Therefore, I am collecting data to prove my hypothesis, and I hope to collect primary data for quantitative analysis to prove my conjecture further.

In this article, the discussion of gun policy needs to be accompanied by an analysis of the political structure of the United States. The previous section showed that different states, led by different parties, reacted differently to the gun policy after significant shooting events. With this finding, I believe the US gun policy does not need to be compared to other developed countries or countries that can own private guns. Comparisons can be made between different states within the United States. That is what I am doing with this article is just an analysis of gun policy in the American context. One, because US gun policy is very typical of the world, and two, because of the different political structure of the US, where each state has a different policy and legal system without violating federal law.

A considerable limitation of this paper is no serial data is shown. We mentioned some differences between each state in the United States, but we do not have enough data to strengthen our arguments only using others' examination.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, the gun policy in the United States led to a very high death rate, and it is not only homicides but suicides that account for almost half of the deaths due to shootings. Almost all of this stems from the fact that gun policies in America are not overly strict. Nearly half of the people in the United States can own a firearm, and this figure is limited to those legally in possession and does not count the number of illegal gun owners. Many people have died from being shot or committing suicide with guns under the US gun policy. The gun policy in the United States is highly related to the public's attitude. People's attitude toward restricting the gun policy is positive when a mass

shooting happens. This means once the shootings end, the public's attitude toward the need for gun policies will change. They may continue to believe that gun policies need to be stricter, but it is also possible that they will change their minds and believe that they do not need to be too strict. Additionally, no intuitive data shows that gun policy is highly connected with the crime rate. However, there is no doubt that America has a high rate of death because of gun shoot among all the developed countries.

Meanwhile, mass shootings are easy to happen in the United States. Because of the unique political structure of the United States, a large proportion of mass shootings in America occur in states led by one political party. In contrast, most states led by another party have relatively few shootings. This also shows that gun policy affects American society under different states and political parties. To prevent this situation, not only just the government should restrict the gun policy and enhance background checks. Communities and individuals must actively pursue the government's proposed tightening of gun policies. Therefore, implementing strict gun policies is the only way to have a chance of reducing mortality and affecting crime rates.

References

- [1] Gramlich, J. (2022). *What the data says about gun deaths in the U.S.* Pew Research Center. Retrieved from: <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/2232815/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths-in-the-us/2990720/> on 05 Mar 2023. CID: 20.500.12592/d8nqw9
- [2] Sandy Hook Promise. (2023). *16 Facts About Gun Violence And School Shootings*. Sandy Hook Promise. Retrieved from: https://xueshu.studiodahu.com/scholar?hl=zhCN&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=16+Facts+About+Gun+Violence+And+School+Shootings&btnG=
- [3] Homicide Rate. (2020). *New CDC/NCHS Data Confirm Largest One-Year Increase in U.S.* Retrieved from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0091743522002912>
- [4] Barry, C. L., McGinty, E. E., Vernick, J. S., Webster, D. W. (2015). *Two years after Newtown—public opinion on gun policy revisited*. *Preventive Medicine*, 79, 55–58.
- [5] Cukier, W., Eagen, S. A. (2018). *Gun violence*. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 19, 109–112.
- [6] Crifasi, C. K., Ward, J. A., McGinty, E. E., Webster, D. W., & Barry, C. L. (2021). *Public opinion on gun policy by race and gun ownership status*. *Preventive Medicine*, 149, 106607.
- [7] Masters, J. (2022). *U.S. Gun Policy: Global Comparisons*. Council on Foreign Relations Press.
- [8] BBC News. (2023). *Gun violence in US and what the statistics tell us*. BBC Press.
- [9] Luca, M., Malhotra, D., Poliquin, C. (2020). *The impact of mass shootings on gun policy*. *Journal of Public Economics*, 181, 104083.
- [10] Newman, B. J., Hartman, T. K. (2017). *Mass Shootings and Public Support for Gun Control*. *British Journal of Political Science*, 49(4), 1527–1553.
- [11] McGinty, Webster, D. W., Barry, C. L. (2013). *Effects of News Media Messages About Mass Shootings on Attitudes Toward Persons With Serious Mental Illness and Public Support for Gun Control Policies*. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 170(5), 494–501.
- [12] Fridel, E. E. (2020). *Comparing the Impact of Household Gun Ownership and Concealed Carry Legislation on the Frequency of Mass Shootings and Firearms Homicide*. *Justice Quarterly*, 38(5), 892–915.
- [13] American Psychological Association. (2013). *Gun Violence: Prediction, Prevention, and Policy*. PsycEXTRA Dataset Press.
- [14] Post, Mason, M., Singh, L. N., Wleklinski, N. P., Moss, C. B., Mohammad, H., Issa, T. Z., Akhetuamhen, A., Brandt, C. A., Welch, S. B., Oehmke, J. F. (2021). *Impact of Firearm Surveillance on Gun Control Policy: Regression Discontinuity Analysis*. *JMIR Public Health and Surveillance*, 7(4), e26042–e26042.