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Political Affiliation and Gun Ownership

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A04370036

Quantitative Methods

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April 27th, 2018,

Firearm violence has been the second leading cause of death among adolescents and young adults in the United States since 2000 (Lian, Abiero, & Kamara 2017). There has been plenty of research conducted on not only guns, but the topic of gun control as well. Gun control is a controversial topic that varies from individual to individual and even geographical. Gun ownership on the other hand is also a topic that can be controversial in terms of who should be able to own a gun and what a person has to do in order to own a gun. Political party affiliation is a characteristic that can play a role when talking about views on both gun control and gun ownership. Political candidates' views on gun ownership can very well be a mitigating factor in terms of whether or not the candidate gets elected. According to Kocsis, "compared to other major issues, the efficiency and mobilization of gun ownership has been an increasingly predominant factor at all levels of electoral politics nearly everywhere in the United States" (2015).

When a person identifies with a particular political party, it is because they agree with the stances of that party on a variety of topics that directly affect society. Kocsis describes such notion as it being ""republican" in the sense that American liberty is based on central documents to which all American citizens pledge allegiance" (2015). He goes on to say that "it is "democratic" in that liberty rights in the United States of America are enjoyed in the context of a society of equals". You can see here that both views are on opposite ends of the spectrum. Though this quote does not specify a person's views on gun control for obvious reasons, it serves as a marker for those who identify with the political parties, and can very well be applied to gun control.

In his essay, Kocsis states that "gun ownership can be said to give priority of place in the United States of America" (2015), which is an interesting point to take into consideration when

researching gun ownership and political affiliation, because it raises questions like "which party prioritizes gun ownership?" or "is gun ownership the main reason you identify with a particular party?". That is the purpose of this study. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between political party affiliation and gun ownership. This to me, is an interesting topic, because this is a debate that is on the rise and the conversation will only continue to grow as time goes on. It is sociological in that, this is a debate that directly affects our society and for some people their well-being. With the recent shootings in Parkland and Las Vegas, gun ownership is at the center of all debates, and it is important to gauge where we stand as a society, and more specifically, politically. The shootings that I mentioned serves as a motive for this study, among other things. The two variables I am going to examine are gun control and political affiliation. My research does not stop there however, I would also like to consider the education level of those who are affiliating themselves with a particular party, and I also want to take a look at how many of those who do actually own a gun have children in the home.

This research is relevant to the bigger picture so to speak and is sociological in nature, and that's why it is important to see where we stand a s a society from a variety of aspects, such as number of children, gun ownership, political affiliation and highest degree achieved. Examining these variables and comparing and contrasting them to one another can pay dividends, in that it can provide an analysis that let us as a society know where the bulk of agreement and disagreement lies, when talking about gun ownership. The other variables that I mentioned, can help get an idea of who is favoring gun ownership, from a demographic standpoint. Which is very important because it documents who these people are from different demographic aspects.

Literature Review

Gun ownership is a topic that has many aspects as well as different views and because of this, it is a very controversial topic of discussion. Topics that are usually discussed when talking about gun ownership include: who should own a gun, how easy should it is to obtain a license to carry, what type of guns should be legal. Gun ownership is a variable that can be influenced by political party affiliation. For example, if a certain party has a more favorable view on gun ownership, it is likely that the person interested in purchasing or somebody who already owns a gun will identify themselves with that party.

Research on the relationship between gun ownership and political affiliation suggests that those who own a gun are more likely to affiliate themselves with the republican party and those who do not own a gun affiliate themselves with the democratic party. Along with affiliating themselves with the democratic party, individuals that do not own guns also tend to favor gun control as well. In the article "Gun politics in America", Robert Singh states that "according to Federal Election Commission figures, the three most prominent gun rights groups (the NRA, Gun Owners of America, and Safari Club International) donated some $800,000 to federal candidates over 1997–98. 6 This overwhelmingly favored the Republican political party, who received 78%." (1999). He also stated that "the leading gun control lobby, Handgun Control, donated only $48,000 to candidates, 97% of which went to Democrats." This article focuses more on gun rights groups, but is relevant to the research, because it shows which political parties support which viewpoints.

The article "Packing Heat at the Polls", examines the influence of gun ownership on both political behavior and attitudes. James hypothesizes that NRA endorsements should affect the political choices of gun owners (1998). The results concluded that NRA endorsements had no to

no difference (James 1998). The article does mention that those who own firearms and support the NRA are predominantly republican. A weakness of this article right off the bat would be he date. The article is ten years old, and the view and opinions may have changed. The date can also be looked at as a strength because we can look at change over time.

In the journal article "Emerging political identities?", Joslyn, Haider, Baggs, and Bilbo study the attitudes of gun owners and non-gun owners. Their hypothesis is that the opposing viewpoints are a reflection of emerging political identities (2017). The scholars use voting patterns in presidential elections to get an idea of when exactly the difference in political behavior came about. In the results section, it was concluded that gun ownership was important during the elections studied. According to Joslyn, Haider, Baggs, and Bilbo "since the 1970s, possessing a firearm increases the likelihood of voting for Republican candidates." (2017). The article also finds that "the impact of gun ownership on the likelihood of voting for a Republican candidate increased across elections, reaching a level in 2012 nearly 50 percent higher than in 1972." (Joslyn et al. 2017). This article is very strong in that it speaks directly about the two variables.

The article "public opinion about gun control post-sandy hook", was conducted 4 months after the Sandy Hook shooting. The data was collected from a national opinion poll. This study aims to examine the predictors of gun control, public opinion, and policies. Wozniak concludes that "both instrumental concerns and cultural beliefs are significantly related to people's opinions about gun control, but the strongest, most consistent predictors of people's gun control preferences are their political beliefs and affiliations." Interestingly, after this tragedy safety would be a factor, however political affiliation still played a huge part.

The article "University Faculty Attitudes Toward Guns on Campus" examines attitudes of employees from a university concerning adding college campuses and churches to the list of places a concealed handgun could be carried. A survey documented 287 opinions of faculty along with administrators. The results to this study concluded that "a substantial majority of faculty opposes such legislation, but support or opposition is significantly determined by political party and gun ownership." (Bennett, Kraft and Grubb, 2012). This is significant to my research, because it fuels the notion that there is a significant relationship between political affiliation gun ownership. Bennet, Kraft, and Grub state that "political party identification as held by university faculty remains a significant determinant of allowing concealed carry of handguns on college campuses."(2012). Also fueling the relationship between political affiliation and gun ownership.

The general conclusions that were drawn from all five articles were very clear. The scholars either concluded or alluded to the fact that gun ownership and political party affiliation are related. More specifically, republicans were more likely to own a gun than democrats. They also had more favorable opinions on gun control. A common theme shared amongst the articles was the idea that there were owning a gun was associated with a certain political party.

Based on the conclusions drawn from the literature and the research I have conducted over the relationship between gun ownership and political affiliation, I have come up with three hypotheses. My first hypothesis is that Democrats have a significantly lower rate of gun ownership than Republicans. My second hypothesis is that those with children in the home will have a lower rate of gun ownership. My final hypothesis is that the more education the respondents have, the more likely they are to identify as democrat.

Methodology

  The data that I used for this study was collected for the 2016 GSS. GSS stands for General Social Survey, which is a survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC). "For more than four decades, the General Social Survey (GSS) has studied the growing complexity of American society. It is the only full-probability, personal-interview survey designed to monitor changes in both social characteristics and attitudes currently being conducted in the United States" (NORC 2016). I was able to evaluate the data using SPSS in order to answer the proposed hypotheses.

  The dependent variables for the proposed hypotheses are gun ownership and political affiliation. For the variable "gun ownership", respondents were asked "Do you happen to have in your home any guns or revolvers?". The responses were (1) Yes, (2) No, (3) Refused, (8) Don't Know, (9) No answer and (0) Not applicable. For the variable "political affiliation" the respondents were asked "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what?". The responses to the question were (0) Strong Democrat, (1) Not Strong Democrat, (2) Independent, near Democrat, (3) Independent, (4) Independent near Republican, (5) Not Strong Republican, (6) Strong Republican, (7) Other Party, (8) Don't Know, and (9) no answer. In order to get a clearer dataset, I recoded into 4 categories. I grouped those who identified as independent but leaning towards Republican or Democrat into one of the two parties. I determined which party to group them in by examining their behavior. If they behaved more republican, I categorized them as republican and if they behaved more as democrats I grouped them with the Democrats. The new categories are (1) Democrat, (2) Independent, (3) Republican and (4) Other. After the variables were recoded I executed a bivariate analysis in order to examine the relationship between highest degree achieved and political affiliation,

number of children and gun ownership, as well as the relationship between party affiliation and gun ownership. Being that the variables are dichotomous, I used Chi Square for the bivariate analysis. The variables are also nominal which also prompts me to use chi square

The independent variables for this study are number of children, highest degree achieved, and party affiliation. The question asked for number of children is "How many children have you ever had?" and the responses ranged from 0 to 7, (8) eight or more, and (9) Dk/na. The question associated with this variable is "respondent's degree" the responses were (0) less than high school, (1) high school, (2) junior college, (3) bachelor, (4) graduate, (8) don't know, (9) no answer. The questions and responses for the variable "party affiliation" is mentioned above. When examining the relationship between number of children and gun ownership, I used a chi square test, because both variables are nominal.

Just as any other study, this study had its limitations. For this study, I used the GSS 2016. Though it is a slight advantage because it is more current than a lot of data that I could have used, it is lacking in that it cannot measure change over time. That is to say that since this data only measures 2016 in specific, this study is not able to measure change over time, and that is unfortunate because it would be interesting to see the differences in views and opinions throughout the years and especially after a major event such as mass shootings or presidential elections. Even though this limitation existed, it was not enough to deter this study from its original goal, which was to test the hypotheses and obtain answers to the questions posed by the researcher.

Results

Bivariate Analysis

Chi-Square test was used to further examine if the views on gun ownership differed by political party. The Political parties include Democrat, Republican, and Independent.

Table 1.

Political Affiliation

	Democrat	Independent	Republican	Other	Total
YES	207 (11.0%)	99 (5.3%)	272 (14.6)	11 (.06%)	587 (31.5)
NO	689 (36.9%)	205 (11.0%)	304 (16.3%)	33 (1.8%)	1231 (66.0%)
REFUSED	13 (0.7%)	4 (0.2%)	28 (1.5%)	2 (0.1%)	47 (2.5%)
TOTAL	907 (48.6%)	308 (16.5%)	604 (32.4%)	46 (2.5%)	1865 (100.0%)

Table 2

	Value	DF	Asymptotic Significance
Pearson Chi-Squared	112.610[a]	6	.000
Likelihood Ratio	111.294	6	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	40.132	1	.000
N of valid Cases	1865		

Table 1 and 2 reveals that there is a statistically significant difference (p<0.05) between political affiliation and guns in the home. A chi square analysis was conducted in order to determine the relationship between political affiliation and gun ownership. Individuals that affiliated themselves with the republican party were more likely to have a gun in the home. Democrats were less likely to have a gun in the home. This supports my conclusion that those who are republican, are more likely to own a gun.

Table 3.

	Less than HS	High School	Junior College	Bachelor	Graduate	Total
Democrat	157	665	92	255	192	1361
Independent	89	258	42	52	31	472
Republican	72	488	70	210	86	926
Other	6	34	10	15	7	72
Total	324	1445	214	532	316	72

Table 4

	Value	DF	Asymptotic Significance (2 sided)
Pearson's Chi-Squared	88.775[a]	12	.000
Likelihood Ratio	88.835	12	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	.410	1	.522
N of Valid Cases	2831		

A chi square analysis was conducted in order to examine the relationship between political affiliation and highest degree achieved. Table 3 and 4 revealed that there is a statistically significant difference between ($p<.05$) political affiliation and highest degree achieved. The majority of respondents who were republican, reported having completed up to a high school diploma. The majority of respondents who were democrats, reported completing up to a high school Diploma. This confirms my hypothesis that the more education a person has, the more likely they are to identify as democrat.

Table 5.

A Chi-Square analysis was used in order to determine the relationship between number of children and guns in the home.

		HAVE GUN IN HOME			Total
		YES	NO	REFUSED	
0	Count	133	341	9	483

	% of Total	7.1%	18.1%	0.5%	25.6%
1	Count	99	202	8	309
	% of Total	5.3%	10.7%	0.4%	16.4%
2	Count	169	304	14	487
	% of Total	9.0%	16.1%	0.7%	25.8%
3	Count	117	200	9	326
	% of Total	6.2%	10.6%	0.5%	17.3%
4	Count	41	100	3	144
	% of Total	2.2%	5.3%	0.2%	7.6%
5	Count	19	49	1	69
	% of Total	1.0%	2.6%	0.1%	3.7%
6	Count	6	26	2	34
	% of Total	0.3%	1.4%	0.1%	1.8%
7	Count	4	13	0	17
	% of Total	0.2%	0.7%	0.0%	0.9%
8+	Count	5	9	1	15

		% of Total	0.3%	0.5%	0.1%		0.8%

Total	Count	593	1244	47	1884
	% of Total	31.5%	66.0%	2.5%	100.0%

Table 6.

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	18.837a	16	.277
Likelihood Ratio	18.993	16	.269
Linear-by-Linear Assoc.	000	1	.990
N of Valid Cases	1884		

Table 6 revealed a statistically significant difference between number of children and number of children in the home. This is because the p value was less than .05. As the number children increased, the number of guns in the home decreased. This supports my hypothesis that the more children there are in the household, the less likely there is to be a gun in the home. This also supports previous literature over this topic.

Conclusions

The two initial variables that I started with for this research project, were political affiliation and gun ownership. I wanted to examine the relationship in order to get a bigger picture of who owns a gun. I then narrowed the topic even further by examining the relationship between number of children and gun ownership as well as highest degree achieved and political

affiliation, in hopes for a better picture, demographically speaking. That is my contribution to this area of research. I set out to add to the demographics of this area of study, because I noticed during my research that there were not very many demographic specific papers. My research in essence bridges the gap and adds a little more of a specific and more narrow approach.

A limitation to this research would be the fact that the GSS is a survey that does not get an equal amount of say for example democrats and republicans, or number of people with a graduate's degree. A way to make this better is to get x amount of the specific variable and make it equal to the variable that it is being compared to in order to achieve a more accurate comparison. Another limitation to this research is that the GSS data was collected in 2016, so it is not able to measure change over time. I would be interested in seeing the change from then to now. There is still plenty to get done in this area of study such as following up with those who do have guns and recording the lasting effects it has on those in the home. I would also like to see more objective responses as to why a person chooses to own a gun and even why a person chooses a certain political party.

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Appendix

Table 1.

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