

Comparing Two Samples on the Issue of Gun Control:
A Student Sample and the General Population

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis compares and contrasts attitudes on the issue of gun control between the general population and a student sample in the United States today. Through a comparative survey analysis design, this study aims to better understand attitudes towards gun control in the United States. Due to the fact that students may believe they are at a higher risk of gun violence, and because of their increased participation in gun control activism, this thesis hypothesizes that students will be more likely to favor restrictions on gun regulation. Although both samples share similar attitudes, these results show that students held much more passionate, negative, and dissatisfied attitudes and opinions on the current gun climate in the United States, relative to the general public. However, students are less in favor than the sample of the general public in supporting gun-safety policies when in the context of school-settings.

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Introduction

A 2019 poll taken by the Gallup organization finds that nearly half of all Americans in the United States fear being a victim of a mass shooting (Gallup, 2019). Mass shootings in the United States occur at higher frequencies than anywhere else in the world (PolitiFact, 2019). Yet there is little to no consensus on what classifies a mass shooting from another episode of gun violence. Researchers, the media, and government officials all have different opinions as to what constitutes a mass shooting (Stevens, 2019). Pending the absence of a concrete definition of the term “mass shooting,” one area of general consensus is that school campuses are an area with increased likelihood of susceptibility to mass shootings.

Seventeen high school students lost their lives in the Parkland, Florida shooting on Valentine’s Day in 2018. Twelve high school students (and one teacher) lost their lives in Colorado’s tragic Columbine shooting in 1999. Twenty-six individuals lost their lives in the horrific Sandy Hook elementary shooting of 2012. Twenty of those twenty-six were aged six to seven years old. It is no surprise that 57% of teens say that they fear a school shooting could occur at their school (Pew Research Center, 2018).

In the aftermath of the Parkland shootings, many students began to champion the importance of gun control legislation, becoming leading activists for the issue of gun control in the United States. As a result of their efforts, the issue of gun violence was (once again) pushed onto the national stage for the midterm elections in 2018 (New York Times, 2018). For instance, the “March for Our Lives” movement lead by former Parkland students garnered significant attention in the media and by legislators.

While the issue of gun violence gained salience in the wake of recent mass shootings, researchers show that the mass public is divided on gun control with opinions strong, deep, and widespread (Wright, 1981; Wozniack, 2017). While membership in the National Rifle Association is flattening out, the group continues to play an influential role in the gun control debate in America (Ingraham, 2018). That said, research shows that people generally support measures that regulate guns, increase safety, and reduce violence (Wright, 1981; Wozniack, 2017).

In this paper, I hypothesize that students, because of their increased personal risk to mass shootings, are more likely to support gun control measures. With the increasing salience of the student-led gun control movement, I expect that students' attitudes and levels of support for gun control will be stronger than the general population. I will test my hypothesis by comparing attitudes towards gun control and gun rights issues across a student sample and a national representative sample of adults. By comparing students with a more general adult sample, we will improve our understanding regarding opinions about gun control legislation as well as speculate about future changes in legislation regarding guns.

The salience of researching this issue is two-fold. For starters, it is important to measure public opinion to gauge the nation's current attitudes on gun control. From here, we can further estimate the path of gun-control legislation in the short-term. Secondly, there is additional salience in comparing a youth sample to an adult general sample for a multitude of reasons. For starters, this contrast allows us to see a glimpse as to where the debate surrounding attitudes towards gun control is heading in the future. Current students are the future of the United States. As the student population ages and shapes

more of the voting electorate in America, it is beneficial to be able to estimate the trajectory of attitudes on the issue of gun control.

Furthermore, another reason for the comparison between samples is that this contrast also allows us to observe whether or not students, who may feel that they are at greater risk for mass shootings, hold different attitudes towards gun control legislation than the general population. More explicitly stated, this research allows for further exploration into whether one's proximity to mass shooting exposure transfers to a desire for increased policy on gun control. As a result of this proximity assumption, the hypothesis is made that the student sample will desire stricter gun control legislation than the general population sample. I begin by discussing existing research regarding gun control, then I will present my hypotheses, followed by a discussion of the research design, the empirical results, and I will conclude by discussing the implication of my findings.

Prior Research

Pollsters have been measuring American attitudes toward firearms for more than sixty years; during this period, a majority of Americans has consistently supported stronger gun regulation (Hemenway, 2004). Independent polling organizations such as Gallup, Roper, Harris, Yankelovich, NORC, CBS, ABC, and CNN have reported similar findings; most Americans, including most gun-owning Americans, favor regulation over gun rights (Hemenway, 2004). For example, Gallup and the NORC have conducted a survey every year since 1959 asking random samples of adults the same question: "Would you favor or oppose a law which would require a person to obtain a police permit before he or she could buy a gun?" Ever since 1959, the "yes" answers have ranged from

69 to 81 percent (Young et al. 1996). As recently as 2018, data from the General Social Survey (GSS) shows that roughly 75% of respondents favor obtaining a police permit prior to gun ownership (GSS, 2018).

In addition, the findings from three NORC surveys between 1996 to 1998 show that Americans are in favor of gun control regulation with the exception of legislation advocating for a complete ban on handguns or long guns (Smith, 2002). The NORC surveys posed twenty-five questions regarding a variety of gun control measures not currently mandated by federal law. These measures included requiring mandatory gun training; background checks; banning the sale of all high capacity gun magazines; and requiring the use of trigger locks. Of these twenty-five measures, the majority supported all but two. The two measures that were largely opposed were the most extreme: a call for “a total ban on handguns” and restricting handgun possession to only “police and other authorized persons” (Smith, 2002). These results indicate that Americans are ready to see a change in federal government regulation but are not willing to support extreme measures like complete bans.

Additionally, polling by Gallup and Pew find that support for gun control measures often spike in the wake of the deadliest mass shootings. For example, support for legislation to increase gun safety increased from 45% to 51% between April 2012 and January 2013. Researchers agree that this spike was influenced by the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown Connecticut in December of 2012 in which 26 people lost their lives, including 20 young students (Wozniak, 2017). As Wozniak emphasizes, the Sandy Hook mass school shooting received an immense amount of

media coverage, shaping public opinion for a brief time. However, shortly after the end of the intense media exposure, public opinion returned to pre-Sandy Hook levels.

To properly understand public opinion on the issue of gun control, it is useful to review the contemporary history of gun regulation in the United States. The first attention given to the gun control movement occurred during the 1960s and 1970s. As Singh (1998) stated, the pressure to reform gun control policy occurred in the aftermath of the assassinations of prominent American figures such as JFK in 1963 and Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy in 1968. (Hunsaker & Smith, 1976, Singh 1998). In response to mass opinion, the Gun Control Act of 1968 was passed to limit the ability of individuals to possess firearms.

A few years later, the Supreme Court ruling in *United States v. Freed* (1971) declared that certain weapons are not “innocent” and are subject to criminal liability (Caplan, 1976). Changes in regulation of guns continued with the passage of The Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act of 1993. The legislation was named in honor of James Scott Brady, President Ronald Reagan’s press secretary, who was shot and injured in the assassination attempt on President Reagan. The Brady Law enforced a strict five-day waiting period to purchase handguns and required background checks on gun purchasers.¹ Scholars have argued that the attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan in 1981 helped gun control activists further their goal of increasing restrictions on guns (Singh, 1998; Vizzard, 1999).

The issue of gun control is complicated and multi-dimensional. Although the majority of the public approves of gun control, the opposition has been successful in

¹ In 1997, a Supreme Court decision declared the Brady Act unconstitutional (*Printz v. the United States*).

framing the gun issue in ideological terms, contributing to polarization on this issue. Politically powerful organizations like the NRA claim that protecting society requires more access to guns. As NRA Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre stated after the Sandy Hook shootings, “the only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun” (NPR, 2012). In addition, Constitutionalists argue that the right to bear arms is undeniable under the Second Amendment and any such violation would be seen as government oppression of freedom.

Opinions about restrictions on guns do fall along ideological and partisan lines (Pew Research Center, 2011). Perhaps because of ideological framing, the public’s view of gun control is often conflicting. For example, Kleck et. al. (2009) shows that people believe that gun control could both reduce violence as well as reducing protection from violence. Furthermore, Kleck et. al. (2009) finds that most people believe banning handguns is an effective method for reducing public violence, while other research shows that most people feel that banning guns is not “disarming criminals,” but rather “decreasing the potential for protection” (Tyler & Lavrakas, 1983).

In addition to these inconsistencies in public opinion on gun policy, many misconceptions about gun control regulation exists among the general public. For example, a nationally representative survey of more than one-thousand respondents found that 41% of respondents falsely believe that federal law already requires universal background checks for gun purchases. (Aronow, 2016). Public confusion and misconceptions may help explain why there is a disconnection between public opinion and government policies.

Public support for gun control measures varies across social demographic categories (Smith, 2002; Kleck et. al., 2009). For example, research shows that white, male, and conservatives are the least likely group to support gun control policies compared to other groups because they are more likely to strongly believe that they have a constitutional right to own a firearm (Stell, 2001; Smith 2002; Cornell, 2004). Furthermore, Smith (2002) found that women are more likely than men to support gun control measures.

Most relevant for the present study, the relationship between age and support for gun policies is unclear. It may be the case that students are more likely to support gun control measures because they are more likely to believe they will be victims of school shootings, thereby potentially affected by gun violence personally. And, since younger adults and students are currently leading the gun control movement, this may increase young people's support for gun control legislation. However, prior research found that older respondents are more likely to support gun control policies (Dowler, 2002; Kleck et. al., 2009). More recent data (Gallup poll, 2019) suggests no real differences between support for stricter gun laws when comparing respondents under 30 years old, with older respondents. Therefore, the relationship between age and support for gun control is mixed and warrants further exploration.

Furthermore, Lewis, LoCurto, Brown, Stowell, Maryman, Dean, McNair, Ojeda, and Siwierka (2015) find that college students are supportive of gun control policies. In a survey analysis of 419 college students from a Midwestern University, Lewis et. al. (2015) asked students about their views on gun violence. Overall, 54% of respondents advocated for a ban on military assault weapons. Additionally, Lewis et. al. (2015) found

that 53% of students in the survey analysis agreed with the proposal that allowing teachers to carry firearms on campus would be a good idea. The median age of this student sample was 25 years old, slightly larger than the average age of traditional college students. Nonetheless, this research highlights that students favor broad gun control policies, and also school safety specific policies such as arming teachers.

Additionally, using a sample of 1,518 students enrolled in three universities across two regions of the United States, Krus, Wentling, Heirigs, and Ishoy (2019) compare gun control favorability among students. Krus et. al. (2019) find that students in the Northeast part of the United States are more likely to have access to every other type of firearm, aside from military style rifles. However, those students were also less likely to have completed a gun safety course. Moreover, gun legislation knowledge was an impactful variable for predicting support for gun control policies. However, this relationship was mediated by race. Nonetheless, Krus et. al. (2019) highlight that there may be a need for formal gun safety education courses among college students.

Clearly, a great deal of research has examined public support for gun control. However, little attention has been devoted to comparing the opinions of students to a more general population regarding opinions on gun control legislation. The ability to understand the point of view of students is critical, as they often are the ones subjected to gun violence by simply being on a school campus. With that being said, the younger generation of students are now more than students – they are activists on a mission to change gun control legislation in the United States. Young people are now the current leaders of grassroots movements for more and stricter gun control measures. For example, after the Parkland shooting in Florida, two high school students co-founded the

“March for Our Lives” a youth-led protest movement that occurs across many universities and high school campuses across the nation. Given the important role of student leaders in the gun control movement as well as the mixed results regarding the relationship between age and attitudes toward gun regulation, it is important to compare student and adult attitudes toward gun policy.

Hypotheses

It is no secret that mass shootings occur on school campuses at alarming rates. Since 2000, 43 states have experienced a school shooting (The Washington Post, 2018). As students spend significant amounts of their time on school campuses, they are increasing their likelihood of exposure to a mass shooting. In comparison, the general population also suffers a risk – but potentially not to the same magnitude as students. Since students may see themselves as more vulnerable to gun violence, students may have more negative views towards current gun policy. Specifically, ***H1 is as follows: The student sample is more likely to display negative attitudes towards the current gun climate in the United States.*** In addition, given that students may feel at greater risk to gun violence, they may have more progressive views regarding specific changes in gun legislation. Thus, ***H2: The student sample is more likely to favor the incorporation of specific-policy proposals in regard to gun control legislation.***

To summarize, shootings in the United States are occurring at high rates, and one of the most frequent locations for gun violence is on school campuses. As a result of that, this thesis contends that students will have more negative evaluations of the current atmosphere of guns in the United States. Furthermore, students will be more likely than the general population sample to favor specific policy proposals to reduce gun violence.

With the implementation of stricter gun control legislation, students will feel less threatened by the potential of gun violence. In the next section, I will discuss the research design and methods used to tests these two hypotheses regarding attitudes towards guns among students and the public, more generally.

Methodology

Description of Sample. The student sample was drawn from a large southwestern university where the students participated in the survey for course credit. In total, 275 students participated in the survey. To test opinions of gun control for the general public, Research Now SSI was hired to distribute the survey to over 700 individuals nationwide. Research Now SSI is a reputable survey company that uses a multi-sourcing panel recruitment process to reduce potential bias. Specifically, Research Now SSI does not just use one avenue to recruit participants – it works through various channels, such as the internet, mail surveys, and telephone interviews, to draw a representative sample. Therefore, it was clear that Research Now SSI was a credible source to use to gauge the general publics’ attitudes on gun control. The student and SSI survey were delivered online.

Measurement. I hypothesize that students and the general public will differ on two different dimensions: attitudes **towards America’s current gun climate and opinion about specific policy proposals to decrease gun violence.** **Table 1 presents** questions that served as dimensions to create two indexes to test the second hypothesis. The six questions used to measure gun safety in the United States are listed in the first column of Table 1. The second index was created using four different questions to serve

as a measurement for attitudes towards school specific safety proposals. These questions can also be found in Table 1.

For the attitudinal hypothesis, I expect that students would be more likely to consider gun violence as a more important problem, compared to the general sample. Respondents were also asked to indicate how satisfied they are regarding current gun laws in the United States. Additionally, respondents were asked to rate their feelings towards the NRA, and in a separate question address how much influence the NRA has in America. Again, I hypothesize that students will hold more progressive attitudes towards these specific policy proposals when compared to the general public sample.

Table 1: Questions Used for Both Indexes

Gun Safety Proposals:	School Safety Proposals:
Barring gun purchases by people on the federal no-fly or watch lists	Installing more security checkpoints and security systems for allowing people into schools
Preventing people with mental illnesses from purchasing guns	Instituting new programs to identify, assess and manage certain students who may pose a threat
Banning assault-style weapons	Having teachers and other school officials with appropriate training carry guns at school
Creating a federal government database to track all gun sales	Raising the purchasing age for gun sales
Banning high-capacity ammunition magazines	
Making private gun sales and sales at gun shows subject to background checks	

In developing the surveys, care was taken to avoid common pitfalls in the design of questionnaire. First, the exact sample question wording and ordering was employed with the student survey and the general public survey. In addition, the mode of the

survey (i.e., an internet survey) is the same across the two samples. By keeping the two survey experiences the same, I enhance my ability to make comparisons across samples.

Second, the questionnaire was composed of a series ordinal level questions that could be used to gauge participants' opinions towards gun control.² An ordinal level measurement is critical to understanding attitudes towards gun control as it allows for the ability to rank responses. An example of a question that was asked on an ordinal level would be: "How much of a problem is gun violence in the United States?" where answer responses could vary from 1) Not a problem, 2) A small problem, 3) A moderately big problem, 4) A very big problem. The ordinal ranking of responses provides more information about attitudes, compared to a nominal response of approve or disapprove. The use of ordinal level questions throughout the survey can be beneficial to understand participants' attitudes about gun control.

Without doubt, the order in which questions are asked is an important element of all survey research. Thus, questions that were more cognitively challenging or questions that took more time to think and answer, were posed later in the survey. In a survey, it is best to initially approach the participant with questions that are easier to answer. For example, the first question of the survey was "Some people don't pay much attention to the news. How about you? Would you say that you follow news a great deal, sometimes, or not very often?"

Furthermore, respondent fatigue is a challenge to surveys and can hurt the quality of responses. Thus, if a respondent is asked to answer challenging questions from the beginning, by the time the end of the survey, the participant is less likely to give accurate

² Not all questions on the survey were asked with an ordinal format. For example, the NRA feeling thermometer is an interval measure.

responses. Or, even worse, participants might decide to stop taking the survey, resulting in increased mortality. Therefore, one of the mechanisms employed in the survey to halt respondent fatigue was to utilize closed-ended questions. Closed-ended questions, opposed to open-ended questions, allow for less cognitive effort as the respondents simply can rely on selecting an answer option presented.

In addition, it is critical to understand the importance of writing unbiased questions in survey analysis. The phrasing of each question is crucial for the reliability and validity of the survey. For example, if some questions are worded in a manner that leads one way or the other, it can skew the results of the survey, decreasing validity. For example, if asking a question regarding the NRA's influence in America, and the question is posed as follows: "Do you think the NRA has too much influence in America today?" the results will be skewed because this question is worded as a leading question, ultimately hurting the validity of the survey. Thus, to control for a wording effect, it is critical to phrase such a question in a balanced manner such as: "How much influence do you think the NRA has in the United States today?" and then provide the participant with an ordinal Likert scale to respond.

Another issue with question wording is the necessity of providing unambiguous questions. It is crucial to make sure that the questions are clear and concise in order to not confuse the respondent. If a question is worded in an unclear fashion, the respondent will not know how to accurately answer the question, leading to unreliable results. In the survey devised for both the student population and general sample, an example of a clear and concise question is: "On a scale ranging from strongly approve to strongly

disapprove, indicate your views regarding the following proposal: Preventing people with mental illnesses from purchasing a gun.”

Aside from being clear, questions should also not be doubled barreled. A double-barreled question is one that asks two questions in a single question (e.g., Are you in favor of abolishing the Second Amendment and banning assault weapons?) To ensure the quality of the survey, a team of coders piloted the survey to catch potential pitfalls prior to administration to the samples. Potential problems were identified and corrected.

And, it is critical understand the role of framing each question in survey analysis. The phrasing of each question is crucial to the reliability of the survey. If some questions are framed in a manner that leads one way or the other, it can skew the results of the survey, decreasing reliability. For example, if asking a question regarding the NRA’s influence in America, and the question is posed as follows: “Do you think the NRA has too much influence in America today?” the results will be skewed because this question is framed as a leading question, ultimately hurting the validity of the survey. Thus, in order to control for a framing affect, it is critical to phrase such a question in a manner as follows: “How much influence do you think the NRA has in the United States today?” and then provide the participant with an ordinal Likert scale to answer from.

Finally, it is essential to address the importance of question order in survey research. In our survey we posed the questions in a strategic manner in order to steer clear of any potential priming effects. Priming and question order are linked as sometimes in surveys previous questions can prime the participant to answer future questions in a certain way. For example, if a participant is asked to rank how they feel about the NRA on a feeling thermometer, and then the next question asks the participant

if they support interest groups fighting for gun rights in America, the participant will have been primed by the NRA feeling thermometer, potentially skewing the results. In order to reduce the potential of a priming effect, the questions were ordered in such a manner that the respondent would not be able to be affected by desire to be appear consistent across related questions. Therefore, by monitoring question order and establishing methods to stop against priming, such as being cognizant of a potential consistency effect, the surveys reliability and validity is enhanced.

Survey research can be an effective mode to assess attitudes about gun control. Approaching this research question from a survey approach is beneficial as surveys can be easily administered to large number of respondents. Nevertheless, caution is necessary to avoid potential question ordering and question wording problems when developing a survey instrument. I now turn to examining peoples' attitudes towards the issue of gun violence and policy proposals for strengthening gun control.

Analysis

I begin my analysis by testing **Hypothesis 1: *The student sample is more likely to display negative attitudes towards the current climate of gun legislation in the United States.*** . While I am mainly interested in examining whether students and the general sample differ significantly in their attitudes towards guns, it is important to control for rival factors. For instance, as I discussed earlier, people's ideological and partisan attachments are related to their views on guns. Therefore, it is important to control for the respondents' ideological and party affiliation when predicting attitudes about guns. In addition, I hypothesize that students – because they may be the most at risk regarding mass shootings – would be more negative in their attitudes towards gun-

related issues. Therefore, it is important for me to control for age since age is correlated with being a student. Finally, the review of the literature suggests that women have more negative attitudes towards guns, so I control for the gender of the respondent in the analyses.

I begin by looking at people’s assessment of the National Rifle Association on a 100-point feeling thermometer. In particular, I rely on OLS regression to predict people’s ratings for the NRA from very cold (0) to very warm (100). The results (see Table 2) show that the two samples have significantly different ratings of the NRA. In particular, the OLS regression results indicate that the general public sample average almost 18 point higher (i.e., 17.75) on the NRA feeling thermometer, compared to the student sample. Just as predicted, the student sample has significantly more negative views of the NRA than the general sample. This difference is particularly impressive since the OLS regression equation controls for ideology, partisanship, and age.

Table 2: OLS Regression Predicting Thermometer Ratings for the National Rifle Association³

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	11.061	3.674		3.010	.003
	Party Identification	5.167	.578	.351	8.945	.000
	Sample	17.750	2.851	.228	6.225	.000
	Gender	-6.901	2.108	-.098	-3.273	.001
	Ideology	4.397	.797	.219	5.517	.000
	Age	-.440	.088	-.185	-4.992	.000
R ²		.32				
N		765				

³ For each regression I analyzed age and gender with only the adult sample to test if different findings would emerge. However, when isolated to only the adult sample, the findings for gender and age do not change. Therefore, I combine both of the samples in my analysis.

In addition, we see that party identification is strongly related to views of the NRA. Moving from strong Democrat to strong Republican leads to significantly more positive evaluations of the NRA. Similarly, as one moves from very liberal to very conservative, evaluations of the NRA increase significantly. These findings support previous research regarding the polarization in people’s views of issues related to guns. Furthermore, as expected, women have more negative views of the NRA, compared to men. Finally, controlling for all rival factors, the OLS results suggest that as people age, respondents are less positive about the NRA. The fact that age is negatively related to views of the NRA, while students are more negative than the general sample, suggests that being a student who may be more vulnerable to mass shootings, may be instrumental in explaining attitudes towards the NRA.

A second way of assessing attitudes towards guns can be measured by the open-ended survey question asking people to identify the most important problem facing the nation. I recode people’s answers to this question to 1 (gun violence) and 0 (other). I expect that students will be more likely to list gun violence as the most important problem, compared to the general public sample. Since the dependent variable is dichotomous (1 or 0), I utilize logistic regression. In the model, I include the same independent variables as in the previous analysis (see Table 3)

Table 3. Logistic Regression Predicting Gun Violence as Most Important Problem

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Party Identification	-.056	.057	.962	1	.327	.946
Sample	-.332	.241	1.891	1	.169	.718
Gender	1.105	.216	26.247	1	.000	3.019
Ideology	-.063	.076	.670	1	.413	.939

Age	-.029	.009	11.545	1	.001	.971
Constant	-.768	.346	4.919	1	.027	.464
Percent Correctly Predicted	86%					
Cox & Snell R ²	.06					
N	947					

In the logistic regression, only two of the five variables reach conventional levels of significance: age and gender. Just as in the previous analysis, we see that women are more likely than men to mention gun violence as the most important problem facing the nation. We find that as people age, they are **less** likely to view gun violence as an important problem. While older people are more likely to view the NRA negatively, they are not more likely to see gun violence as an important issue.

The negative correlation coefficient for sample suggests that students are more likely than the general sample to identify gun violence as an important problem. However, the coefficient for the sample does not reach statistical significance. Surprisingly, party and ideology are not related to whether the respondent mentions gun violence as an important problem. With this open-ended question, ideology and party identification may be less important since people list a variety of different topics (e.g., immigration, crime, terrorism, the economy) when asked to identify the most important problem facing the country and gun violence is only mentioned by 14% (135 respondents).

To assess the importance of gun violence, survey respondents were also asked to rate the importance of gun violence on a four-point scale from “not a problem” to “a very big problem.” For the ease of interpretation, I rely on OLS regression to predict people’s

views of gun violence. As the data in Table 4 shows, students are significantly more likely than the general sample to view gun violence as a serious problem. Again, as hypothesized, students have more negative views about gun violence than a more representative sample.

We also see the ideology and party identification are significantly related to views about gun violence, with Democrats and liberals being significantly more likely to view gun violence as an important problem. We also continue to see that women are significantly more likely than men to view gun violence as a serious problem. Finally, and echoing the finding regarding assessments of the NRA, we see as people age, they are more likely to view gun violence as an important problem.

Table 4: OLS Regression Predicting Assessment of Gun Violence as an Important Problem

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.651	.085		43.123	.000
	Party Identification	-.052	.013	-.152	-3.874	.000
	Sample	-.121	.065	-.069	-1.861	.063
	Gender	.226	.048	.142	4.656	.000
	Ideology	-.098	.018	-.214	-5.398	.000
	Age	.009	.002	.166	4.445	.000
R ²		.14				
N		939				

Note: Party identification is measured from 1 (strong Democrat) to 7 (strong Republican). Sample is coded 1 for general public sample and 0 for student sample. Gender is coded 1 for female and 0 for male. Ideology is coded 1 (very liberal) to 7 (very conservative). Age ranges from 18 to 70.

Now, I turn to analyzing my second hypothesis: ***H2: The student sample is more likely to favor the incorporation of specific-policy proposals in regard to gun control legislation.*** Recall from **Table 1** that I created two specific indexes for my analysis. The first index is comprised of questions regarding gun policy. Furthermore, the second index is

created using the questions from the survey that should predict increased preferences for school safety.

For the index regarding gun safety proposals the corresponding Cronbach's Alpha level is .86. For the second index used to analyze school safety proposals the Cronbach's Alpha level is .54. While the Cronbach's Alpha level for the second index is lower than usual, this may be because of only having four measures included in the index. In the future, a larger index should be created to increase the Cronbach's Alpha level for the second index. Similar to the testing done for **H1**, once again I control for the same rival factors. Therefore, ideology, partisan attachment, age, and gender are also included the OLS regressions to test my second hypothesis.

To start, I begin by analyzing the OLS regression corresponding to the index for gun safety policy proposals. Indicative of the OLS regression presented in **Table 5**, the student sample is more likely to support these proposals than the general sample. Therefore, the OLS regression presented in Table 5 leads to support for H2. Students are more likely to support proposals that increase gun safety. One of the reasons as to why this result may have emerged is due to the increased threat of gun violence students may feel, as I speculated earlier.

Furthermore, **Table 5** highlights that as people age, they become less supportive of policy related to gun safety. Therefore, it is no surprise that students, who tend to be younger, are more likely to be in favor of gun safety policy proposals. Furthermore, women have slightly more positive feelings towards gun safety policy than do men. While this is only slightly the case, this finding is consistent with the literature (Smith, 2002). Additionally, party identification does not seem to have a significant impact on

predicting support for the gun policy index. Finally, it is worth noting the low R-squared values of the regression. A value of .20 is nowhere near the threshold for building a robust model. Therefore, in the future, it may have been beneficial to control for political knowledge, previous exposure to gun violence, or other measures of the sort to increase the strength of the model.

Table 5. OLS Regression Predicting Gun Policy Index

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	20.815	.475		43.816	.000
	Party Identification	-.160	.076	-.086	-2.119	.034
	Sample	-.630	.366	-.065	-1.721	.086
	gender	1.170	.273	.133	4.287	.000
	Ideology	-.830	.103	-.329	-8.040	.000
	Age	.077	.011	.259	6.752	.000
R ²		.20				
N		843				

However, by analyzing the second index – the one regarding school safety proposals – the findings do not support my hypothesis. Surprisingly, **Table 6** illustrates that non-students are more supportive of policies to reduce gun violence in schools. There may be multiple reasons worth speculating as to why this is the case. First of all, students may not be in favor of policies such as arming teachers because they view that policy as increasing the stakes of a potential school-shooter situation. More specifically, students may fear that a teacher could bring their troubles into the classroom and from that trigger a scenario of gun violence.

Another potential reason for this finding, among similar lines, would be the rationale that students fear other students, rather than teachers, use of seizing a firearm. For example, one day a student could potentially walk into the classroom and take hold of the firearm and use that firearm for catastrophically violent purposes. While the incorporation of the policy to arm teachers would most likely ensure the security of the gun be locked and stored in a reasonable manner, students are intelligent and watch everything teachers do. Thus, students may feel that by having a gun in the classroom allows for potential disaster.

Another probable reason for the findings that students are less in-favor of incorporating policies to reduce school gun-violence would be the lack of desire to relieve privacy. For example, one of the questions used as a measure included in the index (see **Table 1**) was in regard to increasing school security checkpoints. By implementing metal detectors and things of the sort students give up a large part of their privacy. Therefore, students may not feel that giving up privacy is worth the trade-off of securing a safer school campus. In essence, it may be perceived that security from gun violence comes at the risk of lower security for other potential matters such as privacy.

While analyzing the rival factors for **Table 6**, the school-safety measures, an interesting finding emerges. Party identification becomes significant, whereas in the previous regression predicting support for gun policy in a general sense, this was not the case. Furthermore, gender and ideology are both not significant in predicting support for school-safety gun related proposals. Lastly, once again, it is worth noting that the interpretation of these results needs to be met with caution because of the corresponding R-Squared score. Once again, the incorporation of other measures into the model (for

example, political knowledge) would be beneficial in strengthening the model.

Nonetheless, I advocate that the model still yields interesting findings worth analyzing.

Table 6. OLS Regression Predicting School Safety Index

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	9.993	.272		36.779	.000
Party Identification	.156	.043	.156	3.653	.000
Sample	.980	.210	.191	4.675	.000
Gender	.321	.156	.068	2.065	.039
Ideology	.002	.058	.001	.027	.979
Age	.017	.007	.107	2.602	.009
R ²	.11				
N	822				

Note: Party identification is measured from 1 (strong Democrat) to 7 (strong Republican). Sample is coded 1 for general public sample and 0 for student sample. Gender is coded 1 for female and 0 for male. Ideology is coded 1 (very liberal) to 7 (very conservative). Age ranges from 18 to 70.

In summary, I find support for my first hypothesis that students are more likely than the general population to display negative attitudes about the current gun control climate in the United States. These results are evident even after controlling for rival factors, as presented in multiple OLS regressions. As for the second hypothesis regarding gun policy proposals, I only find partial support. Table 5 highlighted that students are more likely than the general population to favor general gun policy proposals. However, Table 6 indicates that when the gun safety proposals are taking place in the context of the schools, students turn their backs on their original feelings. Next, I turn to the conclusion of this thesis where speculation about the implications of this study are discussed.

Conclusion:

This thesis has attempted to illustrate the notion that students would be more likely than the general population to express negative feelings towards the current gun climate facing the United States today. Additionally, this thesis also hypothesized that students would be more likely than the general population to support gun-policy proposals. While I find support for my first hypothesis, I only find partial support for the second. As speculated in the analysis of this paper, students seem to be more than willing to adopt gun policy proposals: Except for when they are asked to change their lives directly. In theory, then, students talk the talk regarding gun control legislation – yet they fail to always walk the walk.

However, one thing is clear from this paper, and even crystalized by the regression presented in **Table 3**: The issue of gun violence is an important one to students and the general population. While the student population was more inclined to suggest that gun violence was the most important issue facing the United States today, the general sample did not lag dramatically far behind. As the issue of gun violence in the United States continues to haunt the lives of many, it does not appear that this trend will stagger. And, as the frequency of mass shootings in the United States increases, the salience of gun reform in the United States today as an issue may potentially be more prominent than ever.

These findings beg the question as to where the trajectory of the United States gun policy reform goes from here. The simple answer is that I cannot give you one. However, the lack of ability to answer said question allows for room for future research. While the students are more likely than the current general population to display negative attitudes

regarding the gun climate in the United States, only time will tell if those attitudes are long-lasting. Age was a factor analyzed in each regression model presented, and that was not by accident. As age increases people tend to have more conservative views on gun control legislation. However, that does not mean that the current student population will follow suit. Instead, it is entirely possible that the student sample breaks this mold as a result of being raised in an unprecedented time of mass shootings.

In the future, other areas of research should be analyzed to better understand this comparison. Specifically, it would be a substantial improvement upon this current thesis if a similar study could be conducted utilizing panel data. With panel data of five to ten years, we can see whether those students who adopted pro-gun control stances change their views once they leave the education system. As a result of being the generation of students who have experienced the highest frequency of exposure to mass shootings, I suspect that these students' attitudes will be stable over time. Specifically, if a mass shooting is a formative first memory for students, those students should hold onto strong negative attitudes of guns for longer periods of time. For example, if a student was an early adolescent (aged 10-14) during the Sandy Hook shooting in 2012 that student should have strengthened attitudes towards the issue of gun control. This should hold true based off the claim of Nieme and Sobieszek (1977) that policy learning occurs during early adolescence. The crystallization of the attitude stems from exposure to the mass media reporting on the topic of gun violence. And, especially because socialization of attitudes towards politics is reinforced in the context of a school setting (Nieme and Sobieszek (1977). Therefore, it is not radical to suggest that the combination of media exposure and discourse among peers at school can influence the attitudes of students.

Furthermore, a study using high-school students would be beneficial because they are the ones who are most likely to be susceptible to the proposed school safety measures such as increased security checkpoints. Additionally, this study would benefit from the incorporation of interviews with those who have tragically been involved in shootings. With that information at hand a researcher could develop qualitative analysis regarding the severity of shootings and how that forms opinions. From there, those interviews (combined potentially with panel data) would grant us with a better understanding on how varying the severity of a shooting (location, deaths, age, etc.) can impact the stabilization of attitudes.

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APPENDIX:

IRB APPROVAL:

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Notification of Approval	
To:	Kim Fridkin
Link:	MOD00008533
P.I.:	Kim Fridkin
Title:	The Source and Framing of the Gun Issue
Description:	This submission has been approved. You can access the correspondence letter using the following link: Correspondence_for_MOD00008533.pdf(0.01) To review additional details, click the link above to access the project workspace.

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