

Packing Heat: Guns in Public Spaces

Gun Ownership Identity and Public Safety

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Abstract

Americans increasingly perceive that guns make individuals and society safer, but the public remains polarized at this point. Given recent expansions of concealed carry laws and 'stand your ground' policies, it is clear that public attitudes about guns and safety have real implications for public policy. This research seeks to understand the social and psychological roots of divergent attitudes on this issue. I hypothesize that social and political identities motivate beliefs about guns and safety. These identities lead their adherents to engage in a form of motivated reasoning that results in preferences and beliefs that protect self-interests. I test these hypotheses through analysis of a recent national survey of American adults. These results suggest that gun-owners, men, Republicans and conservatives are the most likely to believe that guns make us safer, which conforms to the self-interests of these groups.

Research Question

How are attitudes towards guns in public spaces affected by gun ownership?

Literature

Motivated reasoning - Kunda (1990), Lodge and Taber (2013)

Symbolic politics of guns - Wolpert and Gimpel (1998), Celinska (2007)

Gun ownership as an identity - Carlson (2015), Joslyn et al. (2017), Joslyn and Haider-Markel (2017)

Theory and Hypotheses

H_1 : Among all respondents, attitudes towards guns in public spaces and safety should be affected by gunownership, gender, ideology and party identity.

H_2 : Among gunowners, attitudes towards guns in public spaces and safety should be affected by strength of gun ownership as an identity.

Data and Methods

- National survey of American adults ($N = 2088$) conducted in summer 2017

- Oversample of gunowners; $N_{gunowners} = 855$

- Due to censored/truncated nature of additive index DV, analysis uses Tobit model

Variables

- DV: Guns and Public Safety Index (additive, coded 5-25, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.81$)

- IV1: Gun in the Home (Dichotomous, coded 1 if gun present)

- IV2: Gun Ownership Identity (additive, coded 4-28, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.76$)

- Controls: Ideology (1-7), Age, Education (1-7), Income, White (dummy), Republican (dummy), Democrat (dummy)

Results

	Model 1 Estimate (S.E.)	Model 2 Estimate (S.E.)	Model 3 Estimate (S.E.)
Gun in the Home	5.179*** (0.209)	4.258*** (0.190)	
Gun Identity			0.171*** (0.021)
Ideology		0.964*** (0.068)	0.636*** (0.090)
Gender		0.777*** (0.185)	-0.257 (0.257)
Age		-0.011 (0.007)	0.022* (0.009)
Education		-0.253*** (0.070)	-0.114 (0.098)
Income		-0.118** (0.045)	0.073 (0.066)
White		-0.052 (0.235)	0.503 (0.357)
Republican		0.701*** (0.248)	-0.181 (0.313)
Democrat		-1.305*** (0.236)	-0.885* (0.364)
Constant	13.348*** (0.147)	17.047*** (1.269)	12.950*** (1.854)
Var.	21.001 (0.711)	15.878 (0.537)	11.884 (0.624)
N	1945	1945	807
LR χ^2	537.10	1065.55	224.28
Prob > χ^2	0.000	0.000	0.000
Pseudo R^2	0.047	0.092	0.052
Log-likelihood	-5508.724	-5244.502	-2064.103

* $p \leq 0.05$ ** $p \leq 0.01$ *** $p \leq 0.001$

Conclusions

- Among all respondents, support for guns in public spaces being positive for safety are affected by the presence of a gun in the home, ideology, gender, education, income, and party identity, consistent with previous research.
- Among gunowners, gun identity, ideology, age and being a Democrat affect these attitudes. This is consistent with the hypothesized expectation that gun identity exerts a positive effect on attitudes towards guns and public safety.
- Ideology does exert a nearly 0.5 unit higher impact on the gun-safety index than identity, which is not particularly surprising.
- However, the strength of the gun identity effect ($p < 0.001$) points to its importance in unwraveling differing political preferences between non-gunowners and gunowners.

References

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