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THE ARMED HOME AND SUPPORT FOR TRUMP: PREDICTORS OF AMERICANS' ATTITUDES TOWARD GUN VIOLENCE

ThuyMi Vu Phung, B.A.
University of Washington, USA

Maria R. Lowe, Ph.D.
Southwestern University, USA

Abstract

The existing body of sociological research exploring the legitimization of guns in the U.S. has used either quantitative or qualitative methodology, focusing almost exclusively on predictors of gun ownership and attitudes towards gun policies. Using a mixed methods approach, two factors that may serve as predictors of Americans' attitudes toward gun violence are examined: beliefs about whether guns make the home safer or more dangerous and reported voting behavior in the 2020 presidential election. Results show that respondents who believe a gun in the home makes it safer are more likely than their counterparts to say that gun violence is a very big problem. Additionally, those who voted for Donald Trump are less likely than those who did not vote for him to say that gun violence is a very big problem. Qualitative findings explain these patterns, showing that responsible gun ownership is key to how participants view gun violence. Foregrounding the significance of the home setting, the concept of "the armed home" is developed to capture the legitimization of guns in the home and the role that the home plays in predicting Americans' attitudes toward gun violence.

AUTHOR NOTE: Please address all correspondence to ThuyMi Phung, University of Washington, Department of Health Systems and Population Health, 3980 15th Ave NE, Fourth Floor, Box 35621, Seattle, WA 98195, USA. Email: phungt@alumni.southwestern.edu

INTRODUCTION

"As the age-old saying goes: 'The only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun.'" These words were spoken by then president Donald Trump when he addressed the 2022 National Rifle Association (NRA) conference in Houston, Texas, an event attended by many influential politicians of the Republican Party (Allen & Smith, 2022). What is particularly notable about the 2022 NRA conference is that it took place three days after the mass shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, where an eighteen-year-old man killed nineteen children and two adults using an AR-15 style rifle (Coronado & Vertuno, 2024), and thirteen days after another eighteen-year-old man used an AR-15 to kill ten people in a racially motivated shooting in Buffalo, New York (Pilkington & Paul, 2022). These were just two of the over 600 mass shootings[1] in the U.S. in 2022 (Gal et al., 2022; Gun Violence Archive, n.d.).

Mass shootings are not the only type of gun violence that occurs in the U.S. Others include homicides, suicides, accidental firearm discharges, and self-defense (Gun Violence Archive, n.d.; Rees et al., 2022). According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the majority of gun-related deaths in 2021 were from suicides at 54%, followed by homicides at 43% (Gramlich, 2023). While gun violence in public spaces has received most of the media attention (Lopez, 2022; Zaiets & Petras, 2022), the majority of fatal shootings in the U.S. have actually occurred in private settings such as the home (Zaiets & Petras, 2022). Indeed, when a firearm is present in the home, the odds that an inhabitant will die by suicide or homicide increase dramatically (Anglemyer et al., 2014; Blocher, 2020; Hemenway, 2011; Studdert et al., 2022).

Gun ownership in the U.S. rose approximately 1.5 times (from 55 to 75 million owners) between 2015 and 2021 (Beckett, 2022). In the same period, gun-related deaths in both private and public spaces have also been on the rise (Gal et al., 2022; Lopez, 2022), reaching a high of 48,953 deaths in 2021 (Rees et al., 2022). In 2020, guns were declared the number one cause of death among American children and teenagers, ahead of car crashes, other injuries, and congenital disease (Gal et al., 2022; Lopez, 2022; Papenfuss, 2022). Individuals directly impacted by gun violence, including those who have lost loved ones in mass shootings, have advocated for stricter gun control policies (Alund, 2022; Foran, 2022; News Desk, 2022). In contrast, others, like then president Donald Trump and the attendees of the 2022 NRA conference, assert that guns are not the issue. Instead, they point to perceived societal problems such as the decline in two-parent households, leniency toward criminals, and growing mental health concerns as the main culprits behind the rise of gun deaths (Despart & Kriel, 2022).

These differing viewpoints are reflected in the political debates over gun policies (Foran, 2022; Pilkington & Paul, 2022). To help lower the number of gun-related deaths, the federal government has proposed legislation such as stricter background checks, placing age restrictions, and banning semi-automatic rifles (Busse, 2022; Coronado & Vertuno, 2024; LeBlanc, 2022). However, these types of efforts have been met with fierce

opposition, particularly from the Republican Party and its political candidates, many of whom are supported by the NRA (Berrebi & Yonah, 2020; Busse, 2022). Republicans, especially those who represent deeply conservative states, have steadfastly stood against new gun control regulations, which they argue take away a citizen's right to protect themselves (Hulse, 2022; LeBlanc, 2022). Not only is the topic of gun rights one of the most contentious social issues on the national level, but gun laws and regulations vary from state to state, making it difficult to reach a common solution to the growing crisis (Beckett, 2022; Gal et al., 2022).

With the increase in gun violence and the entrenched views of Americans on gun rights, sociologists have begun to explore these topics in greater detail. There has been a growing number of studies that examine predictors of gun ownership (Dowd-Arrow et al., 2019; Hamilton et al., 2018; Kelley & Ellison, 2021; LaPlant et al., 2021; Schutten et al., 2021) and attitudes towards gun control policies (Abramowitz, 2021; Burton et al., 2021a; Pearson-Merkowitz & Dyck, 2017). Of particular relevance is the sociological research that explores U.S. gun culture, specifically with respect to how individuals view and use guns in their daily lives (Carlson, 2015a; Carlson, 2015b; Shapira & Simon, 2018; Stroud, 2016, 2020; Warner & Ratcliff, 2020; Yamane, 2017). This research includes Yamane's (2017) work on the concept of "the armed citizen," and Stroud's (2012, 2016) scholarship on the sociological understanding of "good guys with guns."

Using Yamane (2017) and Stroud (2012, 2016) as starting points, this study explores how Americans view the problem of gun violence and the legitimization of gun use. Specifically, it examines whether Americans' attitudes about having a gun in the home and political partisanship help to predict their views on gun violence as a significant social problem. Also of interest is how some Americans may view themselves as "good guys" (Stroud, 2012, 2016) who use guns to defend their homes and loved ones, as opposed to "bad guys" who misuse guns and are responsible for the majority of the gun violence in this country. It should be noted that gun violence, as used throughout this paper, refers to gun-related incidents that lead to injury or death. These include but are not limited to mass shootings, gang violence, domestic violence, and suicide.

The following two research questions are examined: (1) How do respondents' attitudes on whether a gun in the home makes it a safer or more dangerous place affect their perception of how big a problem gun violence in the U.S. is today? and (2) How does respondents' reported voting behavior in the 2020 presidential election affect their perception of how big of a problem gun violence in the U.S. is today? Results indicate that respondents who believe having a gun in the home makes it safer are more likely than those who believe a gun in the home makes it more dangerous to say that gun violence is a very big problem. Additionally, those who voted for Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election are less likely than those who did not vote for him to say that gun violence is a very big problem. Qualitative findings help to explain these quantitative patterns. Based on

these results, the concept of "the armed home" is developed to capture the legitimization of gun use in the home.

This study contributes to the body of sociological research on guns in two important ways. First, a mixed methods approach is used, which allows the connection of aggregate patterns of Americans' views on gun violence with more detailed qualitative data. Second, the study explores how the private setting influences Americans' views on gun violence in different ways than the public setting.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is divided into two sections. First, it explores prior research on the legitimization of guns for self-defense and protection in public and private spaces. Second, it examines the existing scholarship on the relationship between the Republican Party, in general, and Donald Trump, in particular, and how guns are legitimized.

The Armed Citizen and the Legitimization of Gun Violence

Recently, sociologists have begun examining gun narratives through the lens of Max Weber's concept of "legitimate violence," defined as violence that is approved or delegated by the state (Stroud, 2020; Vila-Henninger, 2021). The right to self-defense, a private form of legitimate violence, has been examined by a number of scholars (Carlson, 2015a; Carlson, 2015b; Crane Jr., 2014; Filindra & Kaplan, 2016; Stroud, 2016, 2020; Warner & Ratcliff, 2021). Capturing his own and previous scholars' findings, Yamane (2017) developed the term the armed citizen to reference how individuals legitimize the right to bear arms through the perceived need for self-defense and protection.

Indeed, a majority of gun owners name protection as the primary reason for owning a gun (Carlson, 2015b; Gallup Inc., 2019; Igielnik & Brown, 2017). According to Filindra and Kaplan (2016), this reasoning reflects how society is divided between "us," consisting of citizens, taxpayers, and law-abiding gun owners, and "them," consisting of criminals, welfare recipients, and terrorists. Other studies build on this construction by looking at the cultural meanings attached to these two groups. They find that the use of guns as a means of self-defense and protection is gendered (Carlson, 2015a; Stroud, 2016; Warner & Ratcliff, 2021; Yamane et al., 2021) and racialized (Filindra et al., 2020; Stroud, 2012, 2016, 2020). In particular, Stroud's (2012, 2016) concept of good guys with guns is foundational, capturing how the use of guns by white men is legitimized by the duty to protect themselves and those around them. In contrast, "bad guys with guns," a stereotype that is associated with men of color, misuse guns and are responsible for the majority of gun violence in the U.S. (Stroud 2012, 2016). Another one of Stroud's (2012) key findings is that part of the responsibility of a good guy with a gun is to protect their family both in and outside of the home.

Prior literature has examined gun ownership as a predictor of attitudes towards gun control policies (Burton et al., 2021a; Filindra et al., 2020) and political advocacy on behalf of gun rights (Filindra et al., 2020). Relevant to this study, Dowd-Arrow et al. (2019) found minimal support for a relationship between gun ownership and fear of being a victim of gun violence. Other studies have found that Americans who say they are concerned about the risk of harm to self or others tend to be more supportive of gun control policies (Burton et al., 2021b) and less likely to own a gun (Schutten et al., 2021). In addition, findings by Schreck et al. (2018) suggest that individuals who are sensitive to the potential harm of owning a gun but who still seek protection and safety are likely to consider alternative means of protection.

In general, prior research on the legitimization of guns does not differentiate between public and private spaces, treating guns as something that can be carried and used anywhere to protect oneself and one's family (Carlson, 2015a; Stroud, 2012, 2016, 2020; Yamane, 2017). There are unique aspects of the home, however, that warrant a separate examination from public spaces. The home symbolizes a haven of safety and comfort (Tarr & Tebeau, 1996), especially for families and children (Tarr & Tebeau, 1996; Vila-Henninger, 2021). In fact, many homeowners in the U.S. purchase guns for the purpose of protecting their homes from external threats such as home invasions (Azrael & Hemenway, 2000; Carlson 2015b; Warr & Ellison, 2000). Heightened sensitivity to perceived threats may also motivate home gun ownership and intensify the feeling of security that a gun provides (Stroebe et al., 2017).

While protection may be a common reason for having a gun in the home, research has found that the presence of a gun in the home poses a significant risk of gun violence that is unrelated to an external threat, including domestic homicide (Anglemyer et al., 2014; Blocher, 2020; Hemenway, 2011; Studdert et al., 2022) suicide (Anglemyer et al., 2014; Hemenway, 2011; Miller et al., 2007), and domestic violence (Blocher, 2020; Hemenway, 2011). Because of the elevated risks associated with the presence of a gun in the home, it is important to isolate and examine the home setting with respect to Americans' perception of a gun being protective. This study contributes to the literature by exploring the relationship between people's beliefs about whether having a gun in the home makes it safer or more dangerous and their attitudes toward the issue of gun violence. Given that the perceived risk of gun-related injury or death has been shown to deter gun ownership (Burton et al., 2021b; Schutten et al., 2021), Americans who believe a gun makes the home safer may be underestimating or minimizing the risks associated with having a gun in the home and, by extension, the overall severity of gun violence.

In addition to the legitimization of guns in the home, Donald Trump is an important figure to examine because of his influence on the debate around gun rights. The following section provides a summary of prior research on his role in the gun debate.

Donald Trump and the Republican Party's Legitimization of Guns

The election of Donald Trump as president in 2016 raised the intensity of existing partisan debates with respect to a number of social issues in the U.S. (Abramowitz, 2021; Jacobson, 2016). Even after he left office in 2021, these conflicts have continued unabated (Abramowitz, 2021; Cagliuso, 2021; Parker & Sotomayor, 2021). Part of Trump's political advocacy and rhetoric regards the right to bear arms (Austermuehl, 2020; Berrebi & Yonah, 2020), often echoing the NRA (Houghton, 2017) and the Republican Party's unwavering support for guns (Burton et al., 2021a; Pearson-Merkowitz & Dyck, 2017; Vila-Henninger, 2021; Warner & Ratcliff, 2021). The Republican Party has argued that guns empower and protect ordinary citizens; for instance, they can help decrease crime (Allen & Smith, 2022; Meyer & Bourdon, 2020; Pearson-Merkowitz & Dyck, 2017) and allow people, particularly women, to defend themselves against domestic violence (Deckman, 2016; Pearson-Merkowitz & Dyck, 2017). These arguments appear to resonate with Republican voters who are more likely to voice support for gun rights (Pearson-Merkowitz & Dyck, 2017; Warner & Ratcliff, 2021), to be gun owners themselves (Berrebi & Yonah, 2020; Warner & Ratcliff, 2021), and to oppose gun-restrictive legislation (Baker et al., 2020; Berrebi & Yonah, 2020; Vila-Henninger, 2021).

In addition to advocating for gun ownership, Trump also regularly stokes anxiety and fear among his followers by portraying the U.S. as a country that is under a state of constant threat (Austermuehl, 2020; Cagliuso, 2021; Davis, 2017; Hall, 2021). For example, he depicts certain racial and ethnic groups, particularly Blacks and Latinos, as well as immigrants and some urban area residents as lawbreakers who threaten law-abiding American citizens (Austermuehl, 2020; Baker et al., 2020; Cagliuso, 2021, Hickel Jr. & Bredbenner, 2021; Jones & McBeth, 2020). Given Trump's and the Republican Party's advocacy for gun rights and his utilization of fear messaging (Baker et al., 2020; Cagliuso, 2021; Hall, 2021), it is important to determine whether Americans are more likely to support the use of guns for the purpose of self-defense and protection based on heightened perceptions of threat.

With this backdrop in mind, the current study examines two factors that may serve as predictors of Americans' attitudes toward gun violence: the belief about whether guns make the home safer or more dangerous and reported voting behavior in the 2020 presidential election. Specifically, the following are hypothesized: (1) Respondents who believe that having a gun in the home makes it a safer place are less likely than those who believe it makes the home a more dangerous place to agree that gun violence is a very big problem, and (2) Respondents who voted for Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election are less likely than those who did not vote for Trump to think that gun violence is a very big problem.

METHOD

This study uses data from a survey project that was developed by five sociology undergraduate students and one faculty member to gather Americans' attitudes about contemporary race and social issues in the U.S. In particular, the data is derived from nine demographic and attitudinal questions as well as one open-ended question. Data collection occurred in March of 2022. After receiving IRB approval, the survey was uploaded to Qualtrics, a software that allows for the creation and distribution of surveys. The survey was then integrated into the Prolific online survey platform for distribution. Prolific was chosen because it provides an effective means of collecting responses from paid participants across the U.S. The platform connects researchers to 200,000+ active participants and has higher data quality compared to other platforms, including MTurk (Peer et al., 2022).

Prolific distributed the survey to a national sample of 400 Americans, who were paid $12.27 per hour to take the survey. Overall, the survey took a median of 18 minutes to complete. Responses were then downloaded, coded, and entered into a Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) dataset. Of the 400 respondents, approximately 48.5% of survey respondents self-identify as men and 49.5% identify as women. Racially, 68.3% of participants identify as white and 31.7% as persons of color (13.8% as African American or Black, 7.5% as Asian American, 3.8% as bi-racial, 19% as Latinx, 1.5% as Native American, and 0.5% as other). Comparing the demographics of the sample to those of the U.S. population from the 2020 Census (United States Census Bureau, n.d.), the sample has a slightly lower percentage of men and whites. The final analytical sample for this study consists of 399 respondents who completed all survey questions of interest.

Measures

Dependent Variable. The dependent variable measures respondents' perceptions of the severity of gun violence as an issue. The direct question from the survey reads, "How big of a problem do you think gun violence is in the U.S. today?" (1="Not a problem at all," 2="A small problem," 3="A moderate problem," and 4="A very big problem"). "Not a problem at all" and "A small problem" were recoded into one category (1="Not at all or a small problem") because of the small number of participants who chose these responses.

Independent Variables. Two independent variables, based on themes in existing literature, were examined. Of interest to this paper is how people perceive the role of a gun in protecting the home, as protection is a primary rationale for owning a gun (Azrael & Hemenway, 2000; Carlson 2015b; Warr & Ellison, 2000). Thus, the first independent variable measures the belief of whether having a gun in the home makes it safer or more dangerous. Specifically, this measure draws from the following survey question: "Do you think having a gun in the house makes it a safer or more dangerous place to be in for the people who live there?" (1="A lot more dangerous," 2="Slightly more dangerous,"

3="Slightly safer," 4="A lot safer"). This variable was recoded into a dummy variable (0=more dangerous [referent], 1=safer) to allow for ease of analysis.

The second independent variable measures political partisanship by examining which candidate respondents voted for in the 2020 presidential election. The survey asks, "For whom did you vote in the 2020 U.S. presidential election?" (1="Donald Trump," 2="Joseph Biden," 3="Other," 4="I did not vote"). This variable was also recoded into a dummy variable (0=did not vote for Trump [referent]; 1=voted for Trump) to facilitate analysis.

Demographic Control Variables. This study controlled for variables that were deemed to be significant predictors of gun ownership and attitudes toward gun policy by previous literature. Where 0=all else, the dummy variables include gender with 1=men (Carlson, 2015a; Stroud, 2012, 2016), race with 1=white (Stroud, 2012, 2016), news source with 1=social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, or TikTok (LaPlant et al., 2021), kids with 1=having one or more children (LaPlant et al., 2021; Stroud, 2012), education with 1=less than a college degree (Warner & Ratcliff, 2021), and locality with 1=large city of 100,000 or more residents (Gordon, 2020).

Analytic Strategy

A mixed-methods approach was employed, a strategy that allows the connection of aggregate data of respondents' views on the severity of gun violence with their qualitative perceptions. The quantitative analysis includes descriptive statistics and three ordinal regression models. Informed by the quantitative analysis, the qualitative analysis relies on a rigorous iterative process of inductive data coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The author and another undergraduate sociology student coded responses to the following open-ended question: "Please elaborate on why you do or do not think gun violence is a problem in the United States today." Given the regression findings, they coded each response as "not at all or a small problem," "a moderate problem," or "a very big problem." They first independently read the open-ended survey responses and then, over the course of two weeks, met to discuss each open-ended survey response and compare their respective coding. Inter-coder reliability was extremely high (93.75%). When there was a discrepancy, they deliberated on the response, coding rationale, and the overall thematic categories until a unanimous decision about how to code the excerpt was reached. The response was then placed into the appropriate thematic category file. This process continued until all data were categorized. Excerpts from the qualitative responses that represent the regression findings are included in the results.

It is also important to acknowledge some of the ways that my positionality informed my interest in and analysis of the data. As an Asian American woman in my early twenties and raised in the South, my lived experience impacted my qualitative analysis. Exposure to gun violence, including school shooter threats and neighborhood crime, news coverage, and discussions on prevention strategies in my local community helped me to better

understand the qualitative data. Additionally, it has shaped my own understanding of gun violence as an issue.

RESULTS

According to the descriptive statistics, the mean of the recoded dependent variable is 2.49 (1=not at all or a small problem; 2=a moderate problem; 3=a very big problem). This value indicates that on average, participants believe that gun violence is a moderate to a very big problem (see Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive Characteristic of Analytic Sample (N=399)

	Mean	SD	Range
Dependent Variable			
Attitudes on gun violence as a problem	2.49	0.69	1-3
Independent Variables			
A gun in the home makes it safer	0.52	0.50	0-1
Voted Donald Trump in 2020 election	0.22	0.41	0-1
Individual Characteristics			
Social media as a news source	0.18	0.38	0-1
White	0.68	0.47	0-1
Has kids	0.47	0.50	0-1
Male	0.49	0.50	0-1
Has less than a college degree	0.44	0.50	0-1
Lives in urban area	0.30	0.46	0-1

Table 2 shows the ordinal regression results for three models that predict the likelihood of respondents believing that gun violence is a very big problem. The first model includes the belief that a gun in the home makes it safer. The second model includes the belief that a gun in the home makes it safer and voting for Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election. The third model incorporates the belief that a gun in the home makes it safer, voting for Donald Trump, and six control variables. The belief that a gun in the home makes it safer and voting for Donald Trump in 2020 remain statistically significant across all models at the p<.001 level. Looking at Model 3, because believing a gun in the home makes it safer and voting for Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election may be highly correlated, a correlation matrix was run to test collinearity across all variables; results show that there is no multicollinearity. Additionally, the test of parallel lines significance level is p=0.182, which meets the p>0.05 threshold for the proportional odds assumption. The Nagelkerke pseudo R squared in Model 3 indicates that the belief a gun

in the home makes it a safer place, voting for Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election, and control variables collectively explain 27.70% of whether people believe gun violence is a very big problem. Only one of the control variables is statistically significant in the third model; respondents who use social media as their main news source are less likely than respondents who use other news sources to say that gun violence is a very big problem.

Table 2. **Ordinal Regression Estimates Predicting Likelihood of Believing Gun Violence is a Very Big Problem**

	Model 1 b(SE)	Model 2 b(SE)	Model 3 b(SE)
Independent Variables			
A gun in the home makes it safer	1.360(.211)***	1.014(.222)***	1.119(.234)***
Voted Donald Trump in 2020 election		-1.765(.257)***	-1.718(.266)***
Individual Characteristics			
Social media as a news source			-.760(.267)**
White			-.238(.240)
Has kids			.270(.219)
Male			-.386(.214)
Has less than a college degree			.347(.241)
Lives in urban area			-.117(.242)
N=	399	399	399
Nagelkerke Pseudo R2	0.123	0.243	0.277

*Note: *** p<0.001, **p<.01*

Table 3 displays the coded qualitative data, showing how the majority of open-ended responses are coded as gun violence is "a very big problem." These qualitative findings help to explain the quantitative results.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Qualitative Data Coding (N=398)

	Number of Responses (%)
How big of a problem do you think gun violence is in the U.S. today?	
Not at all or a small problem	42 (10.6%)
A moderate problem	59 (14.8%)
A very big problem	295 (74.1%)
No opinion	2 (0.5%)

The Armed Home: Building On the Armed Citizen

Compared to those who believe having a gun in the home makes it more dangerous, respondents who think having a gun in the home makes it safer are 2.75 - 3.90 times more likely to say that gun violence is a very big problem. This finding is contrary to the first hypothesis, which is based on the premise set by Burton et al. (2021b) and Schutten et al. (2021) that the perceived risk of injury or death by a gun may deter many from viewing firearms as a means of increasing safety. Given the increased risk of gun violence when a gun is in the home (Anglemyer et al., 2014; Blocher, 2020; Hemenway, 2011; Miller et al., 2007; Studdert et al., 2022), it was posited that Americans who believe a gun in the home makes it safer would be less likely to view gun violence as a very big problem. However, a gun can provide a strong sense of security (Carlson, 2015b; Dowd-Arrow et al., 2019; Shapira & Simon, 2018), which may intensify in response to a higher sensitivity to threats from outside the home (Dowd-Arrow et al., 2019; Stroebe et al., 2017). Respondents who believe that a gun makes the home safer may have a heightened concern for external threats. Based on their qualitative responses, they also appear to associate the term gun violence primarily with threats that originate outside the home.

While these participants may not associate the threats that arise from having a gun in the home with an increased risk of gun violence, they do acknowledge that these threats exist. However, they say that there are certain circumstances that can mitigate the risks. Specifically, respondents believe the degree of safety depends on how responsible the gun owner is. One participant explains,

> *I would like to clarify that I believe that guns in the home make you slightly safer assuming you are a responsible gun owner. The majority of gun deaths in homes are children getting access to improperly stored firearms, with tragedy resulting.*

This respondent acknowledges that there are risks to having a gun in the home, such as children having access, while others mention the risk of accidental firearm discharges and suicide. However, they suggest that being a responsible gun owner will help to prevent such incidents. The emphasis on responsible gun ownership reflects the findings of Pallin et al. (2021) and Shapira and Simon (2018). These studies found that the characteristics of the gun owner can affect whether people believe guns make the home safer. For the current study, participants highlight the attribute of responsibility and other qualities that gun owners need in order to protect the home from external threats as well as prevent the misuse of a gun within the home.

Turning to their perspective that gun violence is a very big problem, respondents who believe a gun makes the home safer attribute the problem to guns being in the wrong hands. Some mention that mental health is an important characteristic for gun owners. For instance, one participant writes, "I think it's a problem because people who aren't right in the head can own a gun." Another says, "Too many guns in fanatics' hands. Shut it down." In other words, these respondents believe that mental health issues are a major underlying cause of gun violence.

Participants also underscore the importance of responsibility through their support for certain types of gun legislation. For example, one respondent explains, "It's one of the only modern countries that consistently makes headlines about shootings. The law should be more restrictive about ownership, and we need to hold owners more accountable." Another participant expands on what this accountability may look like, writing, "I would love to see additional protections put in place to make sure that guns are only going into the hands of people who are responsible enough to have them." Another adds, "We need stronger background checks, permits, and mandatory classes." These statements suggest that they do not view such policies as threats to the right to bear arms; as long as individuals provide evidence that they are responsible, they can still own a gun. This perspective is similar to Hamilton et al.'s (2018) finding that gun owners support legislation encouraging safer, more responsible storage practices in order to mitigate gun violence while safeguarding their right to own guns.

In addition to legislation that promotes responsible ownership, a few respondents also state that ownership of semi-automatic rifles, or what they call "assault weapons," should not be allowed. For example, one participant says,

> *The types of guns easily available are kinda absurd; I believe no citizen should have access to anything more than like a pistol for safety reasons, (hunting can have its own reform). Too much freedom with guns causes them to get into the hands of people who misuse them.*

Another adds,

>*I have no problem with a handgun at home for protection, for a sporting rifle or shotgun for their intended use. Only the military has a need for assault weapons and none should be in the hands of the public. Too many guns available to too many people who think a gun will settle a problem!*

Respondents who oppose ownership of semi-automatic rifles show an openness to certain gun-restrictive policies, not just legislation that promotes responsible ownership. This finding shows that support for gun rights is not an either-or proposition; those who support the usage of guns for self-defense may be open to certain types of gun-restrictive policies (e.g., background checks, permits, mandatory training, banning semi-automatic rifles).

In comparison, participants who believe that a gun in the home makes it a more dangerous place are actually less likely to say that gun violence is a very big problem. Specifically, they see gun violence as an issue that cannot be solved and accept it as a part of daily life. For instance, one respondent says, "I do think it's a problem but it's a problem just like drugs; nothing can be done about it." Another states,

>*I think it is a problem, but I'm not sure how to take care of the problem. I think you can get a nationwide directory as they do with medical records, but then there are so many illegal guns on the streets so that doesn't help that much. No matter what you choose to do there are so many illegal ways to get around it.*

Although these respondents acknowledge that gun violence occurs and is a problem, their attitudes are suggestive of a process of desensitization. In response to the growing number of gun violence incidents, the normalization of gun violence is a trend that has been noted by Li et al. (2017).

Participants' explanations of why gun violence is or is not a very big problem bring to light an aspect that prior researchers have not fully explored: the context of the home in the legitimization of guns for the purpose of self-defense and protection. Based on the findings of this study, the concept of the armed home is developed to capture the role of the home in the creation of unique narratives around the legitimization of guns. Building on Yamane's (2017) work on the armed citizen, which references how individuals legitimize the use of guns for self-defense and protection, the armed home refers to the legitimization of guns specifically for the purpose of protecting the home and its inhabitants. Within the framework of the armed home, responsibility plays an arguably more important role for two reasons: (1) the need to protect the home from external threats, and (2) the need to safeguard against the risks associated with having the gun in the home.

While respondents who believe that a gun makes the home safer acknowledge that there are risks associated with having a gun in the home such as accidental firearm discharges or suicide, they consider these risks as something responsible gun owners can

safeguard against. Their conception of a responsible gun owner is reminiscent of Stroud's (2012, 2016) good guys with guns in that these individuals are mentally stable, responsible, and/or trained in the use of a gun. Additionally, the type of legislation that these participants support (e.g., mandatory training, background checks, banning semi-automatic weapons) reflects their emphasis on responsible gun ownership. In contrast, though they do not explicitly mention the risks associated with having a gun in the home, participants who believe a gun in the home makes it more dangerous seem to think that the risks outweigh the danger from outside threats. Keeping their home safe therefore means not having a gun inside the home.

The emphasis on individual choice and the characteristics of gun owners is also reflected in the responses of those who voted for Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election.

The U.S.'s Crime Issue, Not Gun Issue

Respondents who voted for Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election have an 82.06 - 82.88% lower odds than respondents who voted for other candidates of viewing gun violence as a very big problem. This result is consistent with the second hypothesis. Instead of a gun violence problem, these participants believe that the U.S. has a problem with crime. For instance, one respondent who voted for Trump states,

> *The majority of gun violence is due to criminal behavior. Most of the gun violence involves the use of guns by criminals. Very rarely do you hear or see news about non-criminals involved in gun violence.*

Another writes, "Mass shootings do happen occasionally, but they aren't a huge problem. Making sure good people carry a gun will prevent a lot of lives from being taken by the shooter." These participants believe that gun violence is primarily perpetrated by criminals and that non-criminals with guns do not commit gun violence. In fact, the last quoted response shows the belief that "good people" are able to use guns to prevent the loss of lives. This differentiation between criminals and non-criminals is reflected in Stroud's (2012, 2016) work on how guns should only be used by good guys to heroically protect others against bad guys. While respondents link gun violence to criminals, in saying that gun violence is not a very big problem, they are reframing the issue of gun violence as one of crime.

These respondents also portray gun violence as individual acts and decisions, as one of them says, "I think it is the individual carrying the gun that matters the most." They argue that gun-restrictive policies would not help to prevent gun violence because bad people will continue to defy the law. One participant expresses this sentiment, saying, "Bottom line is that bad people will ALWAYS have access to weapons no matter what laws are created, bad guys don't respect laws." Another respondent adds,

> *No matter what kind of laws they pass, they will only affect law-abiding*
> *citizens and make them victims. Criminals aren't going to obey those laws.*
> *And we already know that the cities with the strictest gun laws end up with*
> *the most gun violence because decent people aren't able to defend*
> *themselves.*

Again, elements of Stroud's (2012, 2016) work are seen in how "criminals" are distinguished from "law-abiding citizens" who use guns for self-defense and protection. Participants are of the opinion that not only would gun policies be ineffective in stopping bad people's actions, but the creation of such policies would leave law-abiding people defenseless and susceptible to harm. These attitudes reflect Trump and the Republican Party's stance that law-abiding gun owners would only use guns to protect themselves and those around them (Berrebi & Yonah, 2020; Pearson-Merkowitz & Dyck, 2017; Vila-Henninger, 2021).

Other participants also view guns as a crime deterrent. For example, one respondent states, "If more people had legal guns, the criminals would be a little more selective with their crimes. I have a gun and would not hesitate to use it in the event I felt my life was being threatened." Another respondent says, "Even open carry would be a crime deterrent. Criminals would think twice about holding up a grocery store if there was a good chance that other customers were armed." These participants believe criminals would commit less crimes because of the potential threat from those who use guns for self-defense, a rationale that is similar to the arguments advocating the benefits of concealed carry (Meyer & Bourdon, 2020). However, looking at the response of the participant who supports open carry, the suggestion is that criminals would be less likely to carry out a crime if they can visibly see that others are armed. Framing the presence of guns as a way to deter crime is a position that is also supported by Trump and the Republican Party (Allen & Smith, 2022; Berrebi & Yonah, 2020; Meyer & Bourdon, 2020).

In contrast, those who did not vote for Trump view gun violence differently. They are more likely to say that it is a very big problem because they believe that U.S. gun laws are too lax. One participant says, "Look at the requirements to own a gun…that is your answer right there. It's too easy to own a gun," and another states, "People can just go buy guns without background checks on them." Other respondents also support the banning of semi-assault rifles, with one saying, "[gun control should] start with the assault type of guns whose only purpose is to kill as many people as possible in a short amount of time. No average citizen needs a weapon like that." Similarly, another participant says, "There are way too many mass shootings. If assault-type weapons were banned like in Australia, there would hardly be any mass shootings." Unlike respondents who voted for Trump, participants who did not vote for him focus on policies related to responsible ownership as well as specific gun restrictions.

The relationship between support for gun legislation and those who did not vote for Trump is similar to the findings of other studies where Democrat voters were more likely to support gun control policies (Pearson-Merkowitz & Dyck, 2017; Vila-Henninger, 2021; Warner & Ratcliff, 2021). Interestingly, in the previously quoted response, the participant refers to Australia as an example of a country that successfully implemented gun control policies to reduce gun violence. Other respondents cite the United Kingdom, other countries in general, or focus on how gun violence is unique to the U.S. As one participant explains, "The U.S. is the only country in the world where mass shootings have become so normalized and so many people die from guns daily." The view that the U.S. needs to lower the number of gun deaths by using gun legislation similar to other countries differs from Trump's portrayal of the right to bear arms as a distinct American value (Cagliuso, 2021; Vila-Henninger, 2021).

Finally, a few participants support the removal of the right to bear arms entirely, with one respondent stating that "banning all guns would be best." Another adds, "Gun violence is a huge problem and can be directly correlated to the sheer number of guns in the US. I personally feel that all guns should be eliminated." These respondents identify guns as the direct cause of all gun violence and believe their removal would result in the elimination of gun violence. However, only one percent of the respondents advocate for this policy. Trump, the NRA, and the Republican Party regularly present the complete removal of the right to bear arms as the goal of gun control advocates, and that any new gun control policy will infringe upon the right to bear arms; with this argument, they remain fixed in their opposition to any laws that would restrict gun ownership (Houghton, 2017; LeBlanc, 2022).

DISCUSSION

The sociology of gun culture is a growing area of research, and this mixed-methods study contributes to this important body of work by providing insight into how the context of the home and reported voting behavior impact one's attitudes toward gun violence. Contrary to the first hypothesis, the results show that respondents who believe that a gun in the home makes it a safer place are significantly more likely than their counterparts to say that gun violence is a very big problem. In line with the second hypothesis, respondents who voted for Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election are significantly less likely than those who did not vote for him to say that gun violence is a very big problem. Qualitative results reveal how differences in the way Americans view gun violence may impact their attitudes on the severity of the issue.

In particular, respondents who believe a gun makes the home safer appear to associate gun violence with external threats, viewing it as a very big problem. While they acknowledge that there are risks associated with having a gun in the home, such as

accidental firearm discharge or suicide, they believe those risks can be mitigated through responsible gun ownership. Unlike those who believe a gun makes the home safer, respondents who voted for Trump do not view gun violence as a very big problem. These respondents appear to be uncomfortable with the term "gun violence" itself, preferring to reframe gun violence as a problem of crime. Although they have differing opinions on the severity of gun violence, both groups focus on individual choice and the characteristics of gun owners reminiscent of Angela Stroud's (2012, 2016) concept of good guys and bad guys with guns.

There are three limitations to this study. First, the wording of the dependent variable question ("How big of a problem do you think gun violence is in the U.S. today?") does not match the wording of the open-ended question ("Please elaborate on why you do or do not think gun violence is a problem in the United States today."). This difference in language affects the coding of the data, making it difficult to accurately capture some of the respondents' attitudes on the severity of gun violence. Second, it would have been helpful to provide a clear definition of gun violence within the survey. A common understanding of gun violence may enhance the clarity and comparability of the results. It is not clear, however, how such a definition would affect the responses from Trump voters, especially given how they frame the issue of gun violence as one of crime. Finally, an interactional variable for gender and race to isolate white men's views on gun violence was not included. Given prior research that has found significant relationships between these variables (Carlson 2015a; Stroud 2012, 2016), the inclusion of this interactional variable may have been insightful, and future researchers who conduct mixed-methods on this topic should do so.

Gun violence is a significant public health issue (Byrdsong et al., 2015). The number of gun owners in the U.S. has been on the increase since 2015 (Beckett, 2022), leading to a concomitant rise in the number of people living with a firearm in their home (Beckett, 2022; Studdert et al., 2022). This study introduces the concept of the armed home as a new lens to view the role of guns as a means of self-defense and protection. Building on prior research that examines the legitimization of guns for self-defense and protection (Carlson, 2015a; Stroud, 2012, 2016; Yamane, 2017), the armed home captures how the setting of the home is associated with gun narratives that are distinct from those of public spaces. While there are similar elements with prior studies regarding the legitimization of gun use by "good" individuals (Stroud, 2012, 2016), the findings of this study show a greater emphasis on the role of responsibility when a gun is in the home. This responsibility encompasses both the need to protect the home from outside threats as well as the need to safeguard against the risks of having a gun in the home.

Based on the findings regarding the armed home, future research should investigate the association between guns and people's perceptions of safety based on the understanding that there may be differences depending on the setting, whether public or private. For instance, more needs to be known about the factors that predict the usage of guns to protect

the home, how far people are willing to go to defend their home from perceived threats, how people define responsible gun ownership within the home setting, and how these beliefs resonate across different groups. Although the discourse surrounding gun violence is extremely polarizing, it is clear that Americans share a common concern for safety regardless of how they view guns and gun violence. Given the growing number of firearms in the United States and the escalating toll of gun-related incidents, understanding Americans' attitudes towards guns and gun violence is essential for informing policy and fostering dialogue in an increasingly divided landscape.

Footnotes:

1. An event is considered a mass shooting when four or more victims are killed and/or injured

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AUTHOR INFORMATION:

ThuyMi Phung graduated from Southwestern University in May 2023 with a B.A. in Sociology and Business. Her research interests includes attitudes about gun violence, mental health, health equity, race, racial attitudes, and contemporary racism. She has experience with conducting quantitative and mixed-methods studies. ThuyMi's independent research, not yet published, includes examining the impact of adolescent mental health on later-life health-seeking behavior and exploring predictors of attitudes toward gun violence in the U.S. She is currently at the University of Washington, completing her Master's in Public Health.
Address: ThuyMi Phung, University of Washington, Department of Health Systems and Population Health, 3980 15th Ave NE, Fourth Floor, Box 35621, Seattle, WA 98195, USA.
Email: phungt@alumni.southwestern.edu

Maria R. Lowe is a Professor of Sociology and the Christine Robertson Morenz Endowed Professor at Southwestern University. Her research explores racialized and gendered inequalities in the contexts of neighborhood surveillance, higher education, social movements, and sports. She has published in a number of fields, including sociology, education, and history.
Address: Dr. Maria Lowe, Southwestern University, 1001 East University Avenue, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Georgetown, Texas 78626, USA.
Email: lowem@southwestern.edu

The URL for the department can be found here: https://www.southwestern.edu/sociology-and-anthropology/.