Exploring the Effectiveness of State-Level Gun Control Policies on Homicides Involving Firearms

Honors Thesis Layperson Summary

Alyssa R. Jones

In 2013, 11,208 persons in the United States died as a result of homicides involving firearms (Xu, Murphy, Kochanek, Bastian, 2016). This number includes all forms of gun-related homicide, from mass shootings to domestic disputes. Many of these incidents are highly-publicized and add more fuel to the hotly-burning debate over guns. While there are many sides to the debate (and exponentially more personal opinions), many Americans agree on one thing – they are not satisfied with the current gun legislation. A Gallup poll conducted in early 2016 states that 62% of the sample interviewed was dissatisfied with U.S. firearm legislation. Gallup points out that this is the highest number they have recorded since their first poll asking this question, conducted in 2001. For comparison, Gallup reported that 51% of the sample interviewed in 2015 was dissatisfied with U.S. firearm legislation, meaning there was a substantial jump within a year (Gallup, 2016).

With so much pressure for change regarding “Gun Control” (referred to as Firearm Legislation in this study), there is a need for data-driven guidance. Many Americans dream of a nationwide standard policy regarding firearms – such a policy would need copious amounts of research on which to base decisions. This study is an attempt to operationalize gun legislation, a very necessary step in developing such research, and using this operationalization, analyze the effects of state-level firearm legislation on the rate of homicide involving firearms in that state.

This study will be a statistical analysis and visualization of the effects of state firearm legislation on the rates of homicide involving firearms. Using state and national data, this study is designed to compare the homicide by firearm rates in each state over the past ten years, marking differences when there were legislation changes and controlling for highly publicized firearm incidents. Using data from the FBI’s Uniform Crime Report (UCR) and the Center for Disease Control Vital Statistics, the homicide rate in each of the fifty states will be compared over a ten year period, taking into consideration any new legislation pertaining to firearms that year. Variables measuring political climate, population, and highly publicized firearm incidents will also be included as control measures.

The results from this analysis will show which policies are most effective in decreasing the homicide rate to avoid diminishing returns. Several other benefits of
this research include (but are not limited to): a graphic representation of gun legislation changes in the United States over ten years, a representation of gun sales relative to gun legislation changes and active killings, and a representation of legislative changes in response to changes in homicide rates and active killings. The data compiled by this study can also be used by other students and researchers in other projects that require an operationalized measure of “gun control” or gun legislation. Moving forward, the results of this study and future studies using the data compiled, will be able to give a more accurate picture of the gun violence epidemic that the US has been facing for years now. As voices call for change, there is a great need for empirical, data-driven studies to provide guidance as to what type of legislative change the country should pursue. Hopefully, this study can contribute to that need.
Current Bibliography


Moorhouse, J. C., & Wanner, B. (January 01, 2006). Does Gun Control Reduce Crime Or Does Crime Increase Gun Control?. Cato Journal, 26, 1.)
