GUN OWNERSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES

A Response to Diminishing Social Capital and Distrust

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Introduction

There is not a substantial body of empirical research on the direct question for how socioeconomic decline relates to gun ownership. Nascent literature has prioritized the debate around whether firearms are deemed necessary for self-defense and crime reduction. However, scholars argue that even with the best available evidence, it is statistically difficult to identify, with solely survey data, how defensive gun usage can lead to successful victim resistance. These studies have garnered important discourse around the impact of gun availability on rates of violence, but the impact that communities and social networks and trust have on people's propensity toward gun attitudes is both woefully missing and urgently necessary. Arguably, a more promising approach regarding the firearm debate would be to identify which predictors contribute to people's desires around heightened protection.

RESEARCH QUESTION

- Can feelings of social precariousness and lack of trust predict people's attitudes towards guns, and did these sentiments potentially influence Trump's victory?
- I will study how many of poor American cities/rural areas are aggravated by crime and corruption, and how people's anxieties and lack of community are potential motivations for growing allegiance to gun culture. Additionally, my research will examine whether the publicly declared support against violent crime and poverty that Trump made during his campaign, incentivized individuals fearful for their safety to contribute to his vote.

Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: Social capital predicts gun ownership
Hypothesis 2: Gun ownership predicts Donald Trump's support
Hypothesis 3: The interaction combination: social capital and gun ownership uniquely predicts Trump support

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Data and Explanatory Variables

We disentangle various aspects of how social capital can predict gun ownership, and the impact this may have had on the 2016 election. The data used in this study was obtained from the 2019 General Social Survey. As of 2019, the GSS targets a sample size of approximately 20,000 respondents aged 15 and over at the time of recruitment. They are drawn from a combination of self-completed online questionnaires and telephone interviews through a multi-stage stratified cluster sample. The hypotheses pertain to the following variables from GSS2019: trust ($x1$), owngun ($x2$), and pres16 (y). Eight independent variables total were utilized in the overall analysis. Each model uses the same independent variables and methods.

MODELING STRATEGY

- The first part of our analysis consists of the simple relationship between our three primary independent and dependent variables.
- To help formalize the connection between distrust and gun ownership, we conduct a multivariate regression by regressing distrust (x1) on owning a gun (x2).
- Lastly, we conduct a multivariate regression with the interaction term (trust and gun ownership) to determine further significance.

Bivariate Results

Bivariate regression equation and path diagram (with standardized Betas)

Owngun2 = .3554688 + -.015766 (distrustful)
(.0297529)   (.0369646)
(11.95)   (-0.43)

N= 727
R^2= 0.0003

Votetrump = .2879079 + .2907271 (owngun2)
(.0205851)   (.0328459)
(13.99)   (8.85)

N= 858
R^2= 0.0838

Multivariate Regression Results

. regress owngun2 distrustful votetrump totalsocialcapital1 republicanism ruralarea MALE to
> talincome1 raceWHITE totaleducation1

Source	SS	df	MS		
Model	11.3141881	9	1.25713201	Number of obs =	332
Residual	66.3725589	322	.206125959	F(9, 322) =	6.10
				Prob > F =	0.0000
				R-squared =	0.1456
				Adj R-squared =	0.1218
Total	77.686747	331	.234703163	Root MSE =	.45401

owngun2	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P>|t|	[95% Conf. Interval]
distrustful	.1419728	.0568601	2.50	0.013	.0301086 .2538371
votetrump	-.0244719	.086916	-0.28	0.778	-.1954668 .146523
totalsocialcapital1	-.0165655	.06336	-0.26	0.794	-.1412174 .1080863
republicanism	.2490271	.1085993	2.29	0.022	.0353733 .4626809
ruralarea	.2510136	.0959256	2.62	0.009	.0622935 .4397337
MALE	.1733351	.0512702	3.38	0.001	.0724682 .274202
totalincome1	.5088884	.1731638	2.94	0.004	.1682132 .8495636
raceWHITE	.0608643	.0669261	0.91	0.364	-.0708033 .1925319
totaleducation1	-.0976664	.212151	-0.46	0.646	-.5150435 .3197108
_cons	-.4096057	.213291	-1.92	0.056	-.8292255 .0100141

Source	SS	df	MS		
Model	50.2068919	9	5.57854355	Number of obs =	332
Residual	27.223831	322	.084546059	F(9, 322) =	65.98
				Prob > F =	0.0000
				R-squared =	0.6484
				Adj R-squared =	0.6386
Total	77.4307229	331	.233929676	Root MSE =	.29077

votetrump	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P>|t|	[95% Conf. Interval]
owngun2	-.0114737	.0357283	-0.32	0.748	-.0817641 .0588167
republicanism	.9228433	.0480062	19.22	0.000	.8283979 1.017289
ruralarea	.1368874	.0614657	2.23	0.027	.0159622 .2578125
MALE	.0781494	.0331388	2.36	0.019	.0129535 .1433453
totalincome1	.2202299	.111656	1.97	0.049	.0005625 .4398973
raceWHITE	.1595531	.0420213	3.80	0.000	.0768821 .2422242
totaleducation1	-.432089	.1373032	-3.15	0.002	-.7022136 -.1619643
distrustful	.0210748	.0368429	0.57	0.568	-.0514084 .0935579
totalsocialcapital2	.005478	.0067134	0.82	0.415	-.0077297 .0186856
_cons	-.1615093	.1555547	-1.04	0.300	-.4675412 .1445225

Conclusions

Ultimately my analysis has demonstrated that distrust is a strong predictor of gun ownership in the United States. As a result of social and economic precariousness, men have reacted to these fears with the use of guns that help remedy these fears and represent safety and consistency. Perhaps, the optimistic takeaway is that identifying distrust as a dominant predictor for gun ownership, provides gun control activists the opportunity to reorient their strategies to address concerns around social capital and community cohesion. Here, our results imply that one of the most productive ways to reduce the propensity for gun ownership, is to focus on the prevalence of distrust in the United States and within communities crippled with economic disparity.