



Elections and Firepower: How Gun Ownership Influences Voting Behavior

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Research Question:

- How does gun ownership influence voting behavior in American presidential elections? How do rural/urban gun owners' voting behaviors differ? Does where gun owners live influence how they vote?



Main Argument



- Hypotheses:
 1. Gun owners are more likely to vote Republican in presidential elections than non-gun owners
 2. Rural gun owners and urban gun owners are equally likely to vote Republican

Why?

- Gun ownership is powerful predictor of voting behavior
- Owning a gun is a stronger predictor of voting behavior than NRA endorsements (Gimpel, 1998)
- Gun ownership is tied to specific cultural, gender, and racial identities
- Gun owners tend to be white males who view gun ownership as tied to their masculinity and social status (Melzer, 2009; Carlson, 2015; Filindra, 2016)

Data and Methodology

GSS Data Explorer

How did I address this question?

- GSS (General Social Survey)
- Variables:
 - PRES68-16 (who voted for in 1968-2016 presidential elections)
 - OWNGUN (own gun in home)
 - COMTYPE (where they live i.e. rural/urban/suburban)
- Controls:
 - Race
 - Age
 - Gender
- Methods:
 - Correlation tests
 - T-tests
 - Multivariate Regressions
 - Interaction Effects

```
dens <- density(data, n = npts)
dx <- dens$x
dy <- dens$y
if(add == TRUE)
  plot(0., 0., main,
       ylab,
       if(orientati == "y")
         dx2 <- (dx - min(dx), dx)
         x[1.]
         dy2 <- (dx - min(dx), dx)(dy)
         y[1.]
       seqbelow <- rep(y[1.], length(dx))
       if(Fill == T)
         confshade(dx2, seqbelow, dy2)
```

Gun owners are more likely to vote Republican

- Gun owners are more likely than non-gun owners to vote Republican
 - Correlation test and t-test both significant
 - Multivariate regression significant
 - Owning a gun correlates with voting Republican

2008 Election

★ <i>Own a Gun in the Home, 1- Yes, 2 - No, 3 - Refused, 8 - Don't Know, 9 - No Answer, 0 - Not Applicable</i>	-0.1012990*** (3.6e-07)
<i>Age (In Years)</i>	0.0005123 (0.40996)
<i>Race of the Respondent, 1 - White, 2 - Black, 3 - Other</i>	-0.2415481*** ($< 2e-16$)
<i>Sex of the Respondent, 1 - Male, 2 - Female</i>	-0.0596888** (0.00433)
<i>R²</i>	0.082
<i>Signif. codes</i>	0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

P-value $< 2.2e-16$

Residual Standard Error 0.5364 on 2724 degrees of freedom

2012 Election

★ <i>Own a Gun in the Home, 1- Yes, 2 - No, 3 - Refused, 8 - Don't Know, 9 - No Answer, 0 - Not Applicable</i>	-0.0834716*** (1.05e-05)
<i>Age (In Years)</i>	0.0011830* (0.0477)
<i>Race of the Respondent, 1 - White, 2 - Black, 3 - Other</i>	-0.2106375*** ($< 2e-16$)
<i>Sex of the Respondent, 1 - Male, 2 - Female</i>	-0.0807205*** (6.17e-05)
<i>R²</i>	0.06796
<i>Signif. codes</i>	0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

P-value $< 2.2e-16$

Residual Standard Error 0.5557 on 3148 degrees of freedom

Community type DOES influence how gun owners vote

- Gun owners from rural areas are more likely to vote Republican than their urban counterparts
 - Multivariate regression with interaction
 - Gun owners in rural areas are more likely to vote Republican, while gun owners in urban areas are less likely to vote republican when compared to one another

- Caveat: extremely limited data
 - Community type only gathered 3 years

1992 Election

<i>Community Type, 1 - Big City, 2 - Suburbs, 3 - Small Town, 4 -Country Village, 5 - Farm/Country Home</i>	-0.07283 (0.19872)
<i>Own a Gun in the Home, 1- Yes, 2 - No, 3 - Refused, 8 - Don't Know, 9 - No Answer; 0 - Not Applicable</i>	-0.43322*** (6.3e-05)
<i>Interaction Between Gun Ownership and Community Type</i>	0.09515** (0.00923)
<i>R²</i>	0.03344
<i>Signif. codes</i>	0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1
<i>P-value</i>	< 2.2e-16
<i>Residual Standard Error</i>	0.7841 on 1313 degrees of freedom



Conclusion

- Gun owners ARE more likely to vote Republican
- Urban and rural gun owners vote differently
 - Urban gun owners are still more likely to vote Republican than non-gun owners, but they are less likely to vote Republican than their rural counterparts



Implications?

- It is important to understand if environment mediates or exacerbates the effect of gun ownership on voting
- Whether gun ownership or community type is a stronger predictor of gun owners' voting behavior will inform future candidates' platforms and their positions on gun control legislation
- Gun control and regulation is a controversial topic in American politics which requires further research into how gun owners vote
- Future research should focus on how where gun owners live impacts who they vote for in American federal elections



Works Cited:

- Carlson, Jennifer. 2015. *Citizen-Protectors: The Everyday Politics of Guns in an Age of Decline*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gimpel, James G. 1998. "Packing heat at the polls: Gun ownership, interest group endorsements, and voting behavior in gubernatorial elections." *Social Science Quarterly*: 634-648.
- Filindra, Alexandra. 2016. "How racial prejudice helps drive opposition to gun control." *Washington Post Monkey Cage blog*.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/06/21/heres-the-surprising-reason-some-white-americans-oppose-gun-regulation/>
- Melzer, Scott. 2009. *Gun Crusaders: The NRA's Culture War*. New York: NYU Press.