How Does Aging Influence the Fear of Gun Control in America?

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How Does Aging Influence The Fear of Gun Control in America?

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Introduction to Research

• This study explores the extent to which age influences personal beliefs towards mass shootings and the issue of gun control.
• Research suggests that political affiliations can change with age.
  • Theory: Life Cycle Effect Theory
  • Studies point primarily to political affiliations influencing gun control beliefs
    • Likely due to the fact that stances on gun control are written into party agendas

Gun Control in Political Parties

• Republican Party
  • Supports the 2nd Amendment over gun regulations and see gun control as an attack on the legitimacy of the Constitution
  • Gun owners are more likely to be white, male, and conservative. (Orake et al., 2019)
• Democratic Party
  • Supports the regulation of firearms as a defense against the increase of mass shootings in recent years
  • Studies have shown Republican individuals are more likely to advocate for arming citizens as a defense to mass shootings than Democrats.

Mass Shootings in America

• There has always been gun violence in America, but the media has made the public more aware of the issue.
• Since the Columbine shooting, there have been around 2,000 victims of almost 100 mass shootings. (Canipe, 2021)
• Studies have shown that there is not a significant relationship between mass shootings and the passing of gun control legislation. (Luca et al., 2019)
  • Meaning that even though there is an observable increase in mass shootings, the government is not acting
  • Laws loosen in Republican majority states after a mass shooting and are introduced more in Democratic states. (Luca et al., 2019)

Life Cycle Effect Theory

• This theory states that as individuals age, they become more politically conservative.
• Attributed to becoming more economically secure, securing assets, and having a family (Crittenden, 1962)
• There is a general societal belief that Generation Z, usually defined as individuals born around 1998-current, is the most liberal generation
• According to this theory this belief may be true now, but it would suggest that individuals within the generation will drift to the right as they age

Hypotheses:

H1: Younger individuals are less likely to have a fear of restrictive gun legislation than older individuals.
H2: Older individuals are more likely to identify as Republican than younger individuals.
H3: Younger individuals are more likely to report fear of being a victim of a random/mass shooting than older individuals.
H4: Political affiliation influences the fear of gun control in individuals.
H5: Fear of random/mass shootings are influenced by political affiliation.

Data:

H2: Political Identification and Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Affiliation &amp; Age Cross-tabulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H3: Age and Fear of Random/Mass Shootings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fear of Random/Mass Shootings &amp; Age Cross-tabulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age: 18-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Afraid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afraid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Afraid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Afraid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H4: Political Affiliation and Fear of Gun Control

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Affiliation</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>-0.179*</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>0.355*</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings

H1: Age and Fear of Gun Control

There is no statistical significance between the variables in this hypothesis.

H2: Political Identification and Age

The results show that 32.5% of 50-64 year-olds identify as Republican, and 11.8% of 18-29 year olds identify as Republican. It is significant to note that while more older individuals identify as Republican, percentage wise, more individuals also identify as Democrats. 19.6% of 50-64 year olds identify as Democrats, and only 16.7% of 18-29 year-olds identify as Democrats.

H3: Age and Fear of Random/Mass Shootings

The results show that 18-29 year-olds were ranked higher in being very afraid and afraid of being a victim of a mass shooting. 50-64 year-olds reported higher percentages of being slightly afraid and not afraid.

H4: Political Affiliation and Fear of Gun Control

There is a slight, statistically-significant relationship between political identification and fears of gun control

H5: Political Affiliation and Fear of Mass Shootings

There is a mild, statistically significant relationship between political identification and fears of being a victim of a random/mass shooting.

Conclusions

• While there is a present difference between age group beliefs, age alone cannot be used to determine gun control beliefs.
• Age can be used to predict how fearful someone may be of being a victim in a mass shooting
  • Likely due to growing up in a climate of school shootings, and active shooter drills in classrooms
• Age is not a key factor considered while choosing a political party
• Political Affiliation is a more accurate predictor of gun control beliefs than age.
• Likely due to the fact that gun control beliefs are written into party agendas
• Overall, aging does not seem to influence gun control beliefs likely because beliefs towards gun control are chosen from personal experiences and beliefs not generational beliefs