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Gun Control: Republican Views for Common Ground

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Walden University

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Ruth Y. Molina

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Gun Control: Republican Views for Common Ground

by

Ruth Y. Molina

MS, Strayer University, 2016

BS, University of Phoenix, 2013

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy Administration

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October 2021

Abstract

Public and political opinion regarding gun regulation in the United States are sharply split across the political divide. The purpose of this research was to determine the common ground among the Republican Party supporters concerning gun control legislations in the United States. The frame for the study poised into determining in what ways does an affiliation to the Republican Party influence a supporters' views on state and federal gun laws and if members of the Republican Party believe that a common ground may exist with Democrats for passable gun control legislation. Partisan motivated reasoning theory was used to frame the study. Out of 50 applicants, ten were selected to participate in the semi-structured interviews. Five were chosen for the online focus group that were conducted with party members. The sample was composed of political professionals including lobbyists, special interest groups, and political action committees were used to understand how political rhetoric influences Republican Party members' opinions regarding gun control. NVivo 12 software was used to organize the data for analysis of common themes. Themes included: harmonization of state laws into a single federal law, promoting policies on background and mental health checks before issuing guns to buyers, and intensifying public education on safe gun use and storage. Affiliates of the Republican Party identified common ground areas such as background and mental health checks and public education as it pertains to passable legislation towards gun control. This information can be used towards forming policies on gun control despite the political divide. The study found that when a common ground exists amongst the political parties it can be a positive impact towards social change.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my beloved father, mother and daughter who are the source for my determination. Words cannot express how blessed I am for having you as my foundation.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Background.....	4
Problem Statement.....	6
Purpose of the Study.....	8
Research Questions.....	9
Nature of the Study.....	9
Definitions.....	11
Assumptions.....	13
Scope and Delimitations.....	13
Limitations.....	14
Significance.....	15
Summary.....	17
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	19
Introduction.....	19
Literature Search Strategy.....	20
Theoretical Foundation.....	20
Institutional Rational Choice Framework (IRC).....	21
Theory of Motivated Reasoning.....	23
Partisan Motivated Reasoning Theory.....	26
Literature Review.....	28

Perceptions of Gun Control Policies in the U.S.....	28
Potential Agreement on Gun Policies.....	39
Permissive Regulatory Polices.....	39
Restrictive Regulatory Policies.....	42
Democrats and Republicans on Gun Control.....	45
Areas of Divergences and Similarities in the Republicans' View of Gun Control in the U.S	49
Summary	51
Chapter 3: Methodology	53
Introduction.....	53
Research Design and Rationale	53
Role of the Researcher	54
Methodology	55
Sampling Procedure	55
Data Collection	60
Data Analysis Plan.....	62
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	63
Ethical Procedures	65
Summary.....	66
Chapter 4: Results Possible Common Grounds for Policy	67
Introduction.....	67
Pilot Study.....	67

Study Setting.....	68
Participant Demographics.....	70
Data Collection	71
Data Recording	72
Decoding/Transcription	73
Results.....	74
Factors Associated with Safety.....	74
Areas of Convergence in Gun Control Measures	76
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	79
Credibility	79
Confirmability.....	81
Dependability	81
Transferability.....	82
Summary.....	83
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions.....	84
Introduction.....	84
Interpretation of the Findings.....	85
Limitations of the Study.....	94
Recommendations.....	95
Implications for Positive Social Change.....	96
Conclusion	97
References.....	99

Appendix A: Participants' Invitation.....111
Appendix B: Initial and Focus Group Semistructured Interview Questions112

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Political parties consistently influence and shape citizens' opinions on public policies and perception through mobilization. The purpose of this study was to investigate how an affiliation with the Republican Party influences the position of its supporters in South Florida towards federal firearm laws in the United States. Additionally, I sought to find out if common ground could be found on gun laws. The findings will inform public debate and help to find sensible solutions for gun control in South Florida and the country at large, influencing as well as structuring people's choices towards certain political alternatives (Husak, 2019; Leeper & Slothuus, 2014). Cohen (2003) found that Republican supporters would often support policies and opinions which are conservative when such opinions are held by the Republican Party and oppose the same policies when supported by the Democratic Party. Conversely, liberal Americans tend to support positions supported by the Democratic Party. For instance, the Washington Post (2017) report showed that the number of Republican supporters in favor of missile strikes against Syria quadrupled in 2017 after President Trump decided to strike Syrian forces. These findings serve as evidence that elected officials and political parties exert a significant influence on public opinions. The findings also shed light on why American opinions remain divided concerning the need for gun control and regulations by law.

Husak (2019) found that the discussions around gun control policies stir different emotions in all Americans, based on whether they are Republicans, Democrats,

independents, liberal, or conservative. Husak concluded that the emotional differences were because of a lack of common political view of the matter between the opposing factions. The divergent view, according to Husak, was mainly influenced by each participant's affiliations to their respective political party ideologies. Consequently, increasing divergences has been blamed for the difficulty in achieving negotiated solutions to the rising cases of gun violence across the country (Husak, 2019). There is a view among American political analysts that Republicans tend to favor the laws that block laws likely to place limits on gun ownership while the democrats hold the contrary opinion (Spitzer, 2017).

This study explored areas for negotiation among Republican Party supporters in the South Florida region of the state. Spitzer (2017) states that there are various convergent opinions regarding gun laws among the Republicans that can be rallied to develop a common ground view on effective gun control laws. For instance, Spitzer observed that while some Republican Party supporters subscribe to the section that dismisses any significant issues regarding the matter such as upholding the rights of every American to own guns freely, others believe that gun control remains a topic for the Federal Supreme Court to explore further given the rising cases of gun-related violence across the country (Spitzer, 2017). However, the policies and laws designed to handle the issue at the time have not achieved much success (Husak, 2019). Still, another convergent view holds that there are enough laws in place to address the problem and only needs to be implemented correctly to solve the problem of guns proliferation and misuse in the United States. At the same time, the last group highlighted in Spitzer's

study believes that there are too many laws that infringe upon the Second Amendment, and the constitutional rights of U.S. citizens (Spitzer, 2017). Given the current problem of gun control in the United States amidst divergent opinions regarding gun control policies, a qualitative study should be conducted on the United States citizens to explore how partisan adherence to political party ideologies influence the Republican Party supporters' opinions on gun ownership and control laws and what common grounds exist between the opposing opinions that can be explored further to resolve the current stalemate on gun control legislations. In this study, I intended to inform public debate on gun control legislations and seek sensible solutions for gun violence by injecting a new approach to the debates based on research data and theory.

Gun-related injuries are not only a problem unique to South Florida; instead, they are a problem across the United States, where gun-related injuries are among the leading causes of death (GunPolicy.Org, 2020). While the number of households owning guns in Florida was 65% of the state population in 2016, the number of deaths resulting from gun-related aggression increased from 1,692 in 2000 to 2,724 in 2017 (GunPolicy.Org, 2020). Although gun regulations in South Florida are categorized as permissive, extraordinarily little gun control legislations have been made in the state. Civilians in Florida are permitted to possess machine guns manufactured before 19th May 1986, assault weapons (including semi-automatic assault weapons), caliber rifles, and large capacity ammunition magazines (GunPolicy.Org, 2020), which can be used to commit large-scale crimes with far-reaching consequences. Despite the proliferation of guns being a significant problem in South Florida, the supporters of the Republican Party, or

Grand Old Party (GOP), across the state, just as others around the country, have generally maintained strong views on gun control. Therefore, it was interesting to find out how affiliation to the party influences views on the existing firearms control legislations amid escalating violence and deaths resulting from guns. This chapter includes background information on the politics of gun ownership, the research problem, research questions, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance, and summary.

Background

The research investigated how Republican Party affiliation influences the position of its supporters in South Florida towards federal firearm laws in America. As a nation, the American society has a close and enduring connection to firearms. Therefore, gun ownership remains an aspect of pride among many Americans and strongly imbued into American society's fabric. Traditionally, Americans used guns to hunt and for self-defense. The primary aim of the National Rifle Association (NRA), as stated on their website, is to protect as well as defend the United States Constitution, enhance public safety, educate, train law enforcement agencies, promote the safety of hunters, and encourage the adoption of shooting sports in the country (NRA, 2020). The NRA, as a gun lobbying group, focuses on a wide range of issues. In 2014, the top issues lobbied by the NRA included increased firearms ownership (mainly to increase its membership and negotiation power), guns and ammunition, increasing federal budget and appropriations, promoting the civil rights and liberties of Americans, protection of natural resources and taxes, among others (NRA, 2020).

Consequently, Braman et al. (2005) observed that the NRA favors gun control laws that promote Americans' rights to own guns for self-protection, as enabled in the Second Amendment. Policies and laws on gun control began in the wake of the 1930s, when the mafia and a crime boss, Al Capone, was involved in mass public shootings. In response to the shootings, Congress (made up of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives) enacted the national gun registry to sell all firearms (Zimring, 1975). The consequent assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and President John F. Kennedy prompted further legislation that led to the creation of the Gun Control Act of 1968. In 1986, the NRA lobbied to implement the Firearms Owner's Protection Act (Cook, 2018).

The recent mass shootings have been fueled by illegal firearms owned predominantly by individuals with criminal histories or documented mental health issues (Metzl, 2015). These happenings call for the need to exert controls on gun ownership and use across the United States, as argued in Cook's (2018) article. Understanding the root causes of the divergent views regarding gun ownership can help achieve common ground policies suitable to the opposing opinions and advance constructive debates on the matter. According to McGinty et al. (2016), for the most part, Americans support the expansion of federal background checks of gun owners. Most of the democratic candidates on the frontline in the run for the U. S. Presidency in 2020, including Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders, support a ban on assault weapons ownership by civilians (ABC News, 2020).

Most Republican supporters advocate gun-holding rights by the Second Amendment to the United States Constitution (Gramlich & Schaeffer, 2019). Studies

have demonstrated that partisan, divergent politics, and party affiliations influence individuals' points of view on public policies and laws, making it difficult to achieve common ground (Cook, 2018; Gramlich & Schaeffer, 2019; McGinty et al. 2016). Although studies such as Ward (2015), Roskam and Chaplin (2017), and RAND.org, (2020) have highlighted lack of common grounds on the debates focusing on gun control laws due to political, ideological differences, no study has investigated why the Republican Party affiliates hold divergent views about the same matter as they do on federal gun legislation in the United States. Therefore, this study investigated how Republican Party affiliation influences the position of its supporters in South Florida towards federal firearm laws in the United States of America and the possible common grounds between the opposing viewpoints. The study helped fill the gaps in policy and literature regarding guns legislations by availing research-based evidence that can be used to hold healthy debates on gun control laws and develop common ground laws on the matter.

Problem Statement

Firearms are profoundly entrenched within American society. Gramlich and Schaeffer (2019) reported that three out of 10 adults in the United States own a firearm. Besides, most Americans who own firearms believe that the right to bear a gun is critical to their sense of freedom and safety (Beck, 2013). Not all gun owners in North America use them strictly for self-protection as evident by the high number of gun-related violence and mass shooting incidences in the country over the past several years. While historically, gun-related violence was linked to drugs and gangs, these days, such

violence also occurs in public places like parks, schools, and movie theatres, with some perpetrators having no past criminal records (Spitzer, 2017). From mass shootings to murders taking place in big American cities, gun violence in the country has prompted heated debates in state legislatures, and in the United States, Congress is seeking to restrict access to and use of firearms. In the year 2017, almost 40,000 Americans died owing to gun-related violence (Gramlich & Schaeffer, 2019). This figure included suicide and murder cases accomplished using firearms. This number, according to Gramlich and Schaeffer, was the highest yearly total in many years of gun-related violence.

Party affiliation has played a critical role in influencing the positions of the American public regarding various policy issues. The Republican Party traditionally holds strong views supporting a citizens' right to possess firearms as enshrined in the Second Amendment. On the contrary, the Democratic Party supporters advocate gun ownership in line with the Second Amendment but favor policies that would impose stricter regulations on gun ownership (Gramlich & Schaeffer, 2019). Many independents hold liberal opinions regarding the matter with no specific ideological stance on gun control laws (Gramlich & Schaeffer, 2019). However, the proportion of independents in the American political mainstream is too small to sway firearms legislation significantly in the house or public debates (US News, 2020). Consequently, the lack of a common ground understanding facilitated by strong and divergent political opinions between the opposing factions of American society has made it impossible for state legislatures and the United States Congress to come up with effective laws on access, ownership, and use of guns throughout the country. As a result, firearms control is amongst the most divisive

issues in American political arena and society. At the same time, America continues to experience increasing incidences of mass shootings and homicide as new trends in gun violence (Cornell & DeDino, 2004). Identifying a common ground view from the divergent partisan political opinions can facilitate the formation of effective policies on gun control and curb the rising cases of mass shootings and gun violence in South Florida and the United States at large (Cook, 2018). Therefore, with this study, I attempted to shed light on how affiliation to the Republican Party influences public opinion on gun control legislations and establish possible common grounds between the divergent opinions. The study availed the information needed to hold healthy debates on gun control and develop common ground laws on firearms control laws in the United States

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study investigates how affiliation to the Republican Party influences public opinions on gun control legislations in South Florida and the common grounds between the party's supporters. Public opinions play a critical role in influencing policy and laws in a country. The concept of interest is built exclusively on motivated reasoning. Notably, partisan motivated reasoning theory upholds the influence of motivation on individuals' unconscious tendency to process information and make conclusions that suit their motivation. This study explores how U.S. voters' adherence to political party ideologies motivates their perceptions of important policy areas such as gun control laws and the possible common grounds in their perceptions that can be exploited to develop favorable and sustainable gun legislations for the United States. Understanding political party positions regarding gun control policies and the reasons for

the development of such policies can help to highlight if these parties influence people's perceptions of policies and laws that affect their daily lives and the possible common grounds that exist despite differential opinions held by each faction.

Primary data on party affiliations and opinions on gun control were sought from the American public who are registered voters and affiliated to the Republican Party. I also sought information from other experts such as lobbyists, special interest groups, and political action committees regarding the collective influence of conservative views. This study is informed by the fact that lack of a common ground views regarding gun control between the Republican Party supporters is the primary cause of the divergent views and lack of strong policies on gun control in the country (RAND.org, 2020; Roskam & Chaplin, 2017; Ward, 2015). Identifying a common ground view between the divergent opinions, therefore, can facilitate the formation of effective policies on gun control and curb the rising cases of mass shootings and gun violence (Cook, 2018).

Research Questions

The following research questions serve as the foundation for the study:

1. In what ways does an affiliation to the Republican Party influence supporters' views on state and federal gun laws?
2. What do Republican Party members believe is the potential common ground that may be possible for passing federal and state gun control legislation?

Nature of the Study

This qualitative study investigated how affiliation to the Republican Party influences public positions on gun control legislations in South Florida and the common

grounds between the opposing factions. Qualitative research is primarily an inductive method of inquiry that involves the organization of data into categories to identify the patterns or relationships among the specific categories created. Consequently, data and meanings in qualitative studies emerge organically from within the research context. Qualitative researchers are primarily concerned with understanding how specific phenomena of interest can be interpreted, understood, or produced (Maxwell, 2008). The primary reason for performing a qualitative study on the topic is that the qualitative approach enables the researcher to adopt an inductive mode during the research process and, as a result, allow the data to speak for itself. This strength allows the researcher to create a holistic view of the problem under investigation and make educated generalizations that can be transferred to other similar contexts (Astalin, 2013). Qualitative studies obtain non-numerical data from observations, interviews, or discussions.

Consequently, this study, like other qualitative studies, uses semi-structured interviews and focused group discussions on gathering the opinions of Republican Party supporters from South Florida regarding the existing federal firearms control laws. Given the qualitative nature of the data, qualitative techniques were used to categorize and analyze the data. Consequently, the data obtained from these sources were coded manually and organized into themes and analyzed qualitatively.

Definitions

This section provides the definition of the keywords used in the study. The keywords are defined in this section to enable consistency in understanding the meanings implied throughout the research.

Conservative: These are individual or collective beliefs in traditional ways of doing things, traditional politics and values, and urgent sense of nationalism even amid monumental changes occurring in the surrounding environments (Pew Research Center, 2019).

Democrats: Democrats are individuals or groups of American citizens who are registered members of the Democratic Party (Pew Research Center, 2019).

Federal gun legislation: This refers to laws, acts, and regulations enacted by the federal law-making body (Congress) and used to control acquisition, ownership, and use of guns in the United States of America.

Gun/firearm control: This refers to government policies aimed at regulating the production, sale, purchase, ownership, and/or use of firearms by ordinary people (Wildeman et al., 2015). It includes legal measures put in place for the purpose of restricting and/or preventing use or possession of firearms.

Independents: These are individuals or groups of American citizens alleging no affiliation to either the Democratic Party or the Republican Party (Pew Research Center, 2019).

Liberal: Liberals constitute a section of the American society that embraces diverse views on specific aspects of society depending on their understanding of the

underlying principles and the changing environment around them (Pew Research Center, 2019).

Mass shooting: This refers to a single shooting incident in which four or more people are shot and killed (RAND, 2021).

National Rifle Association (NRA): This refers to a gun rights advocacy organization that was formed in the year 1871 (NRA, 2020).

Partisan motivated reasoning theory: This is a theory that attempts to explain how a person's viewpoint about a certain policy is influenced by their affiliation to a party. They are likely to support a policy if the political party that they are affiliated to also supports it and vice versa (Bolsen et al., 2014).

Party membership: Party membership describes an affiliation of individuals or groups to a political party in the United States that assigns certain obligations and privileges to the affiliates because of their affiliation.

Progressive common ground view: This is a stance that is shared or supported by members of both the Republican and Democratic Parties.

Republicans: These are individuals or groups of American citizens who allege affiliation to and are registered members of the Republican Party (Pew Research Center, 2019).

Second Amendment: This is an amendment to the American constitution highlighting that "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed" (FindLaw, 2020).

State gun legislation: These are laws, acts, and regulations enacted by the state law-making bodies in the United States that are used to control acquisition, ownership, and use of guns in the state.

Assumptions

The study had a few assumptions. Firstly, it is assumed that the research methodology is suitable for the purpose of this study and the problem being addressed. Specifically, I assumed that the qualitative research approach would be appropriate to address the research questions. Secondly, it is also assumed that any data collected would contain information needed to draw conclusions that are both reliable and valid. Thirdly, it is assumed that the results could be generalized to broader populations and settings. The last assumption is that the results of this study would be meaningful. These assumptions are necessary for the context of the study.

Scope and Delimitations

This research focused on partisan adherence to political party ideologies and how this influences public opinions on gun control among voters in the United States as well as the possible common grounds on the laws. It also focused on how Republican Party affiliation influences public perception and personal views on state and federal gun laws and potential common ground that may be possible amongst the opposing factions for passable gun legislation. These specific aspects were chosen as they enabled me to collect appropriate data that helped to address the research questions adequately. Regarding the boundaries of the study, the populations included in this study comprised Republican

politicians and supporters. Those that were excluded from the study were politicians and supporters of the Democratic Party.

Limitations

Every research has its strengths and limitations. The strengths and challenges are particularly more pronounced in social science studies, such as the current research. Consequently, various challenges, limitations, and barriers experienced in this study have been identified alongside their remedial measures. The significant challenges experienced in this study are attributed to the research approach. Given that the study deals with human participants, and I did not have direct contact with the participants, it was challenging to determine the reliability of the responses given or determine the demographic variables of the participants such as ages, income levels, education levels, and whether the information they gave was in harmony with their thoughts. As a result, the results were used only on the assumption of congruity.

Secondly, data collection was an integral part of any study, which often presents some challenges. A study with sound validity and reliability draws responses or data from a large sample drawn from a homogenous population. Although the homogeneity of the study was guaranteed through purposive sampling, it is possible that a respondent could be interviewed more than once if they gave false and misleading information during the recruitment process due to a lack of researcher presence. Using the follow-up interviews, however, helped to verify the participants and filter out redundant cases and ensure the validity and accuracy of the responses given hence ensure the internal validity of the data obtained. Consequently, the research was expected to provide a valid argument in the

end. In providing a compelling case, I reflected the purpose of the investigation and ensured that the gaps identified from the literature were filled adequately as purported in the study.

Significance

Gun ownership and use remain a significant challenge that is strongly associated with increased cases of mass shootings and gun violence across the United States. The recent mass murders in schools such as Parklands (Florida) and Santa Fe (Texas), at a newsroom in Maryland and places of worships in Poway (California), Pittsburgh, Sutherland, and Springs (Texas) and Charleston (South Carolina) have shocked many people from around the world and renewed debate on gun control. Despite these concerns, the opinions of Republicans Party supporters converge regarding gun control policies. There are few areas where the extreme ideological factions agree, such as the need to prevent people with mental illness from holding firearms, banning gun purchases by individuals on federal watch lists or declared flight risks, and conducting elaborate background checks before selling guns to individuals. The convergences have however not been sufficient in developing effective deterrence laws capable of reducing the number of people who own guns and controlling how they use the guns to minimize firearms-related violence in the country. Without exercising proper controls on gun ownership going beyond background checks and restricting ownership to eligible citizens, it is impossible to curb the rising incidences of gun-related violence in the United States. There is need, therefore, to solicit the opinions Republican Party

supporters regarding the possible common grounds on guns legislations measures necessary for exercising elaborate controls.

There exist sharp partisan differences regarding the key areas of deterrence that should be addressed through legislations and how gun control measures should be implemented. Understanding the role of politics and public affiliations to political parties and consequent public buy-in on party ideologies in fueling divergent stance on gun control legislations can be the first step in facilitating a political compromise and successfully bringing both parties to the same page. While partisan divisions continue to mar policy formulation and lack of laws governing gun possession and use in the United States, fears continue to mount regarding where and when the next attacks would be perpetrated. There is an imperative need to begin serious debates on gun control among U.S. citizens. Consequently, it is important to understand how political party affiliation affects or sways individuals' positions on gun laws. Party politics and affiliation also seem to be a determining factor causing divisiveness on the issue (Braman et al., 2005). When individuals have a mutual understanding of the issues affecting them, common ground views can be achieved, and agreements reached.

The lack of common ground is due to the different views held amongst factions of the Republican Party. The information drawn from the data gathered in this study can be useful for lawmakers, law enforcers, and public administrators in finding and developing sustainable policies on gun control and address the crimes associated with illegal use of guns across the United States (McGinty et al., 2016). The potential significance of this

study is that it provides a premise for understanding how political affiliations influence public opinions otherwise.

The study has important implications for positive social change. Given the societal concern on the problem investigated in this study, it is anticipated that the results generated can impact the political landscape and shape policy approaches in the United States by highlighting the role of partisan political influences on societal perceptions and policy-making processes. Political party affiliation and its influence in policymaking are less considered in the law-making processes within mature democracies such as the United States. As Mahadevan (2019) observed, the public and policy advocates often assume that legislators in mature democracies would be non-partisan when debating and passing legislations that affect the public. However, recent developments in the U.S. political landscape after the election of Donald Trump have shown that partisan political positions grossly influence the nature of policies approved in both U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. Therefore, this study can help develop a platform for reasoning and understanding, hence helping reach a compromise on key policy issues. The topic itself is a policy issue. This falls under the legislative aspect of public policy and administration. Identifying a common ground can enable a bipartisan approach to policy development. If the common ground had been found, incidents such as Sandy Hook and the shootings in Parkland, Florida may have been avoided.

Summary

The issue of gun control remains highly controversial in America today, with people of different political parties holding diverse views. I sought to investigate how

partisan adherence to political party ideologies influences public opinions on gun control among voters in the United States. The research questions addressed are: In what ways does a Republican Party affiliation influence their perception and personal views on state and federal gun laws? What is the potential common ground that may be possible amongst Republicans for passable of gun control legislation? The most suitable theoretical framework for this study is the partisan motivated reasoning theory. Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews and focused group discussions. Samples of Republican supporters and politicians took part in the study. In Chapter 2, the literature on gun controls and the political rhetoric about it is clarified and discussed.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The Republicans' persistent ideological and political differences on firearms control legislations have made it challenging to develop effective firearms laws amid escalating incidences of gun-related violence across the United States. This research investigated how affiliation to the Republican Party influences public positions on gun control legislations in South Florida and the common grounds on firearms legislations between the opposing ideological standpoints. Gun ownership and control remains a significant political and social issue in the United States owing to the partisan approaches to it. The two major political parties hold significantly divergent opinions about gun control in the United States, making it difficult to achieve a bipartisan approach. As the rivalries between supporters of the Republican Party as well as rivalries between the Republicans and Democrats continue to hinder effective policy formation on guns, homicide cases and other guns-related crimes continue to rise across the United States. This study argues that understanding the influence of politics on public perceptions about key policy issues such as gun control is instrumental in rallying support for a bipartisan approach when seeking effective policy approaches. The overall objective of this research is to unearth a politically viable strategy through which Americans can have a common ground approach to developing effective policies on gun control through political compromise. This section presents the theoretical framework used in the study and synthesizes the literature on gun control policies and its politics. Consequently, the section addresses the public perceptions about gun control laws in the United States and

potential common ground policies about gun control. The review looks at the historical development of gun control laws in the United States since 1934 and the role that politics have played in influencing and shaping the laws over time.

Literature Search Strategy

A great deal of literature has been published on gun control policies and politics in the United States due to the rampant cases of gun-related violence in the region. In this research, the literature reviewed was drawn from Google, Google Scholar, ProQuest Central, SAGE Journals, Political Science Complete, AARP State Data Center, American National Election Studies, Data USA, Federal Agency Participation, The National Academic Press, General Society Survey, and Google Public Data Directory websites. The websites were preferred because of the availability of adequate free-access research articles. A systematic strategy to scholarly literature was conducted using specific key terms such as *gun control in the United States*, *gun control policies in the United States*, *gun violence in the United States*, *Republican's policy approach on gun control*, *Democrats' policy approach on gun control*, *politics and public policymaking*, and *party politics on gun policies in the USA*. The relevance of the articles retrieved from the sources was determined by reviewing their titles, abstracts, and conclusions.

Theoretical Foundation

Ideological polarization is a visible and peculiar feature of American democracy (Pew Research Center, 2020), occasionally pitching opposing views such as the Democrats and Republicans, and conservatives and liberals against one another regarding the possible tradeoffs between law and order and civil liberties. Divergent opinions have

also been witnessed between supporters of the same parties. For instance, Spitzer (2017) highlighted several divergences in the opinions of Republican Party supporters regarding gun control legislations in the United States. While some supporters of the party think that gun control laws should be reviewed by the country's judicial system, others believe that expanding the rights of Americans to own guns is consistent with the constitution of the United States and should not be curtailed in any way (Spitzer, 2017). In strong and stable democracies such as the United States, power and influence are not rewarding; they are obtained after stiff competition and conflicts of opinions. The most active groups in such contests are political parties involved in a constant fight to sway public opinions as a means of winning legitimacy in public office and policy formulation. Studies on voting and election during political contests tend to focus on the votes and how to obtain it from the voter (Bolsen et al., 2014; Luse et al., 2012). Therefore, political scientists have made different models and theories to help explain the factors that lead voters to make certain decisions. In this study, three theories have been analyzed to understand how politicians influence public perceptions of public policies. These include partisan motivated reasoning theory, the theory of motivated learning, and institutional rational choice framework (IRC). The three theories are highlighted in this section.

Institutional Rational Choice Framework (IRC)

The IRC was conceived by Kiser and Ostrom in 1982. The framework was developed on the understanding that public policy as a product of rational institutional engagement comprising of a set of rules and norms that govern how different actors interact and strategize to come up with the common ground solutions to problems of

societal interest. According to the IRC framework, public policies are formed by rational actors who continuously strive to attain specific collective goals by reconfiguring the existing institutional and legal conditions to suit the society's needs. The proponents of the framework argue that since individual actors (mainly the political elite) cannot alter the physical and material circumstances and attributes, they tend to focus attention and energies in trying to change the rules that govern the daily lives and behavior of the communities to inspire collective agreement on issues that are consistent with their advocacies. The only way through which actors can influence such alteration is by influencing policies. The IRC considers actors in two categories: individuals with great influence in the society and functioning groups such as corporates who tend to exert influence through the individuals.

The IRC applies squarely to the process of policy formation in the United States illustrating that effective policy is a product of in-depth negotiations achieved through the interventions of rational actors. United States politics and policies are primarily influenced by both the individual and corporate actors who influence policies from various angles and in different perspectives. The individual actors include politicians, activists, lobby groups, and opinion leaders in communities, while corporates include powerful and highly influential groups such as the NRA, insurance companies, political parties, and associations of healthcare service providers and workers, among others. The politicians carry and try to incorporate the messages and concerns of the individuals and corporate organizations that sponsor them. However, Kiser and Ostrom (1982) observed that actors are rational and fallible learners who weigh the effects of their actions against

possible outcomes to select the preferred cause of action. Based on these rational perceptions, they choose and design their campaign rhetoric to appeal to the audience (public) in the best way possible. Rational political rhetoric can however be achieved only when there is a common ground on a particular issue between various opposing factions (Kiser & Ostrom, 1982).

According to Kiser and Ostrom (1982), therefore, individual actors are like marketing professionals who must design their political messages handsomely to sell corporate (institutional actors such as political parties, and other organizations) ideas to the market (public). In the 2016 Presidential election alone, the NRA spent more than \$54 million in federal elections. About \$37 million was spent against the Democrats and \$17 million to support Republican Party campaigns. At the same time, the NRA spent only \$265 to support the Democrats campaign (PowerShift, 2018). If the NRA supports and sponsors the Republican campaigns more than the Democrats to sell their ideologies during elections, the Republican politicians must package their message to appeal to the majority of the Republican supporters to gain the necessary support. This way, the Republican Party carries the NRA policy perspective on gun control to the American voter. The resultant policy approach on gun control supported by the public, therefore, becomes one that favors the Republican Party and the NRA preferences (PowerShift, 2018).

Theory of Motivated Reasoning

The term motivation refers to a process by which people acquire process and form affiliated conclusions concerning the new information (Bolsen & Palm, 2019). Although

people seek out information to fulfill certain goals, the theory of motivated reasoning assumes that people seek information to justify pre-existing beliefs (Bolsen & Palm, 2019). The theory is constructed on the assumption that before people head out to vote, they learn something about the candidates, compare them, and make choices based on what they deem favorable. The theory of motivated reasoning, therefore, makes two assumptions. The first assumption is that voters are naturally Bayesian updaters who consider new information as they come in and compare them to prior preferences; they update their preferences accurately and effectively. In updating preferences, voters lower their evaluations when they encounter negative information about the candidates and increase their evaluations upon encountering positive information. By positive information, the proponents of the theory refer to information that is deemed favorable or serves the interests of the voter.

The other assumption is that people can be motivated to seek and evaluate information in certain ways that seems to correspond to their prior beliefs, threats, social identities, and cultural influences on their worldviews. When people engage in the latter form of reasoning, they tend to seek out only information that tries to confirm their existing beliefs and, in the process, produce what Redlawsk (2002) referred to as confirmation bias. They tend to view information that confirms their views as stronger or superior to that that opposes their worldviews, thus producing what is referred to in theory as the prior attitude effect. When this is achieved, people spend a lot of time counter-arguing, processing, and attacking information they perceive to be challenging their beliefs or evoking disconfirmation bias.

Understanding the relationships between motivation and opinion formation allows us to understand how dominant political ideologies influence public opinions on key policy issues in the United States such as gun control and, in the process, strive to achieve common ground. In exploring the problem, we can investigate why specific segments of American society hold certain views and whether influencing political opinions can help change the public views on key policy issues affecting most citizens. A secondary theory that informs my research is motivated reasoning theory because it highlights the political processes needed to apply towards understanding and addressing the existing problem effectively by explaining people's behaviors through environmental influences (Grant & Osanloo, 2015). The theory is deemed relevant to the current research because it accounts for both political party influence and public opinions regarding policy matters of concern (Luse et al., 2012).

Consequently, the theoretical framework assisted in constructing and illustrating a potential relationship between gun control and the progressive viewpoints of a Republican on the matter. The research-based data collected enhanced the understanding of the subject matter in this research. Political science structures the vision for a precise study. This framework allows the organized flow of research and provides a logical structure for the concepts of this study. It highlights the importance of understanding the participants' personal beliefs and their contribution to their views on gun control. This theoretical framework conceptualizes the effects that political factors tend to impact public behaviors towards key policy issues such as gun control (Luse et al. 2012).

Partisan Motivated Reasoning Theory

The theory that applies to this research study is the partisan motivated reasoning theory. It was conceptualized by Bolse et al. (2014). Motivated reasoning, as Bolse et al. pointed out, is understood as a person's goal to form an attitude. There are two primary motivations in the process of opinion formation, namely, accuracy and directional goals. A directional goal is when an individual is motivated to reach a particular conclusion, for instance, a conclusion that agrees with the individual's party identification (Taber & Lodge, 2006). When motivated by a directional goal in forming an evaluation, people weigh up information compatible with their social identities or beliefs more heavily than contradictory information. Due to motivated directional reasoning, individuals search for information that confirms their beliefs, counter-argue, and dismiss information that is not compatible with their beliefs, no matter the objective accuracy of the belief, and view the evidence that is compatible with their views as stronger (Slothuus & de Vreese, 2010).

Partisan motivated reasoning, that is, directional goals intended to protect a person's partisan identification, has a high likelihood of occurring when a person particularly pays attention to agree with their partisan identity. Partisan identity, as Lavine et al. (2012) pointed out, plays an integral role in the formation of public opinion and directional reasoning is typically driven by the desire of a person to be consistent with and loyal to one's political party and maximize dissimilarities with the out-party (Bolse et al., 2014). This, therefore, implies that Democrats are likely to see a policy sponsored by members of the Democratic Party as effective and support it, while they view the same policy as less effective and be against it if the politicians sponsoring it are

those of the Republican Party (Bolsen & Palm, 2019). When a person engages in motivated reasoning, they tend to miss on the pertinent information, which may otherwise be helpful. An accuracy goal is when a person is motivated to evaluate information to result in an accurate opinion or belief (Leeper & Slothuus, 2014). Notably, the objective of forming an accurate belief implies that a person would assess political arguments hoping that they arrive at an outcome that is the best or accurate conclusion. In determining the best outcome, one of the criteria is that a person considers the available information and considers pertinent arguments to form an evaluation that is compatible with their partisan identity (Bolsen et al., 2014).

Summarily, partisan motivated reasoning theory is deemed a relevant approach and research questions for this research. This is because it helps to understand how political parties in the United States influence public opinion of ordinary citizens affiliated with them. For example, the theory helped to understand how the Republican Party's position on gun control influenced the Republican voters' views on the issue of gun control. Based on this theoretical framework, I tried to generate data to ascertain the influence of politics on public opinions about gun ownership and controls. The results allowed me to explain the leading causes of divisiveness in addressing the concerns around gun ownership in the United States based on the Republicans' viewpoint. The theory was also deemed relevant to the current research because it accounts for both political party influence and public opinions regarding policy matters of concern (Luse et al., 2012). Consequently, the theoretical framework was useful in constructing and illustrating the potential relationship between gun control and the progressive viewpoints

of a Republican on the matter. The results then allowed me to explain the leading causes of divisiveness in addressing the concerns around gun ownership in the United States based on the Republicans' viewpoint.

Literature Review

Perceptions of Gun Control Policies in the U.S

American major cities remain some of the most dangerous places to be in the world (Fox, et al., 2018). One can be murdered or robbed at gunpoint in most U.S. major cities than in any other major city in high-income countries around the world (Fox, et al., 2018). This situation presents a scenario of hopelessness and grave danger, especially to most citizens who do not always possess guns or do not walk with guns. Nevertheless, is gun control feasible in a highly divisive society such as the United States? This research argues that it is possible to maintain effective control of gun possession and use in any society with proper laws and regulatory frameworks. However, the political connection between gun control and politics in the United States since 1968 has made it difficult to achieve this effect. The signing of Gun Control Act into law in 1968 was perceived by gun control activists as a good step towards victory in guns control. The laws banned interstate gun purchases through interstate mails, sale to minors, drugs addicts, people of unsound mindsets, convicted felons and prohibited purchase of guns from foreign dealers except those used for sporting purposes (Times Magazine, 2018). Another important contribution of the law is the introduction of scrutiny; licensing and record-keeping requirements by all gun dealers who were virtually not undertaken allowing them to sell guns to anyone capable of buying them. However, many were disappointed with the law

for its inadequacy in exercising proper controls to ownership and use of guns.

Particularly, the laws did not include measures such as firearms registration and enactment of far-reaching federal or state licensing requirements for people who purchase and use guns in the United States (Times Magazine, 2018). As Fox, et al. (2018) highlight, to the extent that policies on gun control are politically feasible, they become modest measures in addressing the problem. Through effective political coordination, policymakers can develop laws that govern trigger locks, effective and elaborate background checks, and proper waiting periods to ensure that the people who own guns are well-vetted and approved on merit. These observations call on American society to reconcile themselves with the necessary conditions for making excellent policies on gun control or be content with the small achievements and gun-related crimes lurking around them. However, this is conventional wisdom that must be achieved only when the society comes together and holds a conversation on the matter.

Donohue (2016) argues that gun control in any society, including in the United States, is both politically and socially feasible. However, this argument does not mean that all control policies will be useful in putting effective control measures. However, what Donohue (2016) infers in his discussion is that the societies that have weak control laws on guns handling and use such as witnessed in Latin American countries (Mexico, Honduras, and Brazil among others) face significant problems and that a strong antidote is available: taking collective responsibility in addressing the challenges on controls. Unfortunately, many control ideas advocated in the United States currently are placebos rather than offer the right antidote. That is, the debaters involved in discussing gun

control policies have chosen what to push through based on what they expect to gain from the laws and not if the laws are built on good grounds capable of addressing the problem. As a result, calculating the political feasibility of gun control laws remains controversial in the United States currently.

The rampant political divisions regarding gun control in the United States has only shown that both the citizens and the politicians are not ready to take the necessary actions in addressing the real problem and instead prefer incremental gains. Metzler (2018) argued that gun control movements in the United States should be based on the realization that the strategies that have been used to pursue the matter in over thirty years have been futile, and thus there is a need to change tact. Also, the very feasible solutions that research talks about are the most politically feasible (Wells, 2019). However, the strategies considered to be politically possible change from time to time, depending on each regime's political priorities and the reigning political environment. Therefore, the most feasible control measures in the United States may be subject to change every four to eight years as regimes change. According to Wells (2019), the most relevant way to have the Americans accept the real medicine on gun control is to avoid starting from feeding the population with false elixirs based on political rhetoric that can kill the patients' faith in the physician. Instead, there is a need to base the debates on honest and outright illustrations of the proposed interventions and make them believe that the proposed solutions will work. However, such debates require mature, determined, sustained, and politically correct campaigns informed by the willingness to address the problem as a societal concern rather than individual gains.

It is notable that with every mass shooting in the country, which is characterized by at least four victims having been randomly killed, antagonism increases the opposing sides of the firearm control argument (Braman, et al., 2005). Those who support more stringent firearm laws tend to fear for their safety. A Small Arms Survey revealed that for every 100 Americans, there is an average of 88 firearms (Schuster, 2020). It is estimated that about 114,990 Americans are shot at annually, including suicides and murders, suicide attempts, police interventions, accidents, and assaults (Schuster, 2020). Even so, people who oppose increased regulation often fear a loss of safety. According to them, limiting citizens' right to own guns will prevent people from being able to protect themselves in their day-to-day lives or even from a government that turns against their people (Wildeman et al, 2015).

However, the ground is shifting in America regarding the firearm control issue as well as stopping the increase of guns in the country. This was unimaginable a few years back. Street (2016) mentioned that the gun lobby, which used to be immensely powerful, is now weakening as public support for firearm controls continues to increase beyond party lines. The firearm control movement seems to focus its efforts on universal background checks and other half measures, which are not enough to effectively tackle the scourge of gun violence in America (Love, 2019). Even so, the signs of changing public attitudes regarding gun control are evident. As a case in point, Walmart stopped selling all handgun bullets. This retailer has also asked all shoppers to stop openly carrying their firearms into Walmart stores (Love, 2019). Other companies across the nation have followed suit.

Nevertheless, the Republican Party continues to uphold people's right to own guns (Gramlich & Schaeffer, 2019). From the onset, Gramlich and Schaeffer (2019) observe that the Republican Party has publicized its dedication to the paramount nature of freedom and individual responsibility, a belief that is considered a fundamental principle of the Republic Party. Consequently, the people affiliated to this party generally support a smaller federal government without many regulations. They hold the belief that such conditions result in a more efficient way of managing a country's affairs (Republican Views, 2013). This political stance of the Republicans extends to people's right to possess guns in America (Cook & Goss, 2014). According to them, therefore, Americans have the right to utilize, carry, and possess firearms. The Republican Party acknowledges, supports, and defends the citizen's right of self-defense, a right which they maintain was given by God (Cook & Goss, 2014). The Supreme Court of the United States also affirmed citizens' rights to own guns for personal protection in the *Chicago v. McDonald's* case and *Heller v. District of Columbia* cases. Furthermore, the Party acknowledges the responsibility of a firearm owner to store and use guns in a responsible manner.

The belief among Republicans that people in America have the right to bear and utilize firearms is rooted in an ideological notion founded upon the Party's fundamental philosophy and the interpretation of the country's Constitution (Gramlich & Schaeffer, 2019). Their posture on the issue of gun control is like the Republican Party's fundamental principles: that the 10 Amendments to the United States Constitution describe all Americans (Republican Views, 2013). Consequently, the Republicans believe

that the right to carry guns is one of these undeniable rights, as elucidated in the Second Amendment.

In general, Republicans hold the belief that changes in sociological norms do not influence or affect the freedoms and rights that the United States' Bill of Rights and the Constitution have defined (Republican Views, 2013). The Republican Party maintains that their stance on gun rights does not arise out of a fondness for firearms. Instead, their position on the issue arises out of a fundamental principle that necessitates supporting and advocating some rights that the United States was built upon (Republican Views, 2013). According to Republicans, governmental regulation of guns is, for the most part, against the Constitution. Hence many gun laws violate the right of the individual to carry guns (Cook & Goss, 2014). In this regard, the central point that Republicans make is that the 2nd Amendment gives the right to the individual to protect herself, her property, and her family.

In general, Republicans do not think that all citizens in the country have the right to have possession of a firearm (Republican Views, 2013). They believe that the inviolability of firearm ownership rights is something that should be left to each state in the country to choose (Republican Views, 2019). To this extent, the conservative posture on the 2nd Amendment has been formed by cultural influences related to traditions such as shooting, fishing, and hunting sports popular with the residents of states which traditionally supported the Republican Party (Republican Views, 2013).

As has been demonstrated herein, the Republican Party supports a law-abiding citizen's fundamental right to defend themselves whenever he/she is in a place that he/she

has a legal right. As a result, the Republican Party supporters have often voted in favor of the federal law that will increase the exercise of this fundamental right by permitting people who have carry permits issued by their states to carry guns in all other states that give carry permits to their residents (OnTheIssues, 2018). Additionally, the Party is in opposition to national firearm registration and the licensing of firearm owners as an invasion of people's privacy and an infringement of the Second Amendment (Cornell, 2008). In general, these stances of the Republican Party may greatly influence an individual's position toward the country's federal firearm laws.

Part of the reason why the Republican Party opposes more stringent gun control measures is partly because of the financial support they get from the National Rifle Association (NRA) (Berlatsky, 2019). The NRA makes regular financial contributions to the Republican Party and to Republicans in the United States Congress, who, in turn, support the positions of the National Rifle Association. In this way, Republican congress people oppose gun control laws since they have been bribed (Berlatsky, 2019). Nevertheless, money from contributors only plays a small part in influencing the positions of Republicans on guns. The main reason why Republicans are opposed to firearm controls is that the Republican identity and firearm ownership have become indivisible. Notably, the most fervent Republican's view firearms as an integral component of who they are (Berlatsky, 2019). Guns are also a hot topic during campaigns and elections (Husak, 2019). Exit poll surveys reported in The New York Times revealed that 63% of families that own firearms went to Donald Trump in the 2016 general elections, and 65% of families that do not own firearms went to Hillary Clinton

(Berlatsky, 2019). This implies that gun ownership is a more reliable predictor than the rural/urban divide, socioeconomic class, and ethnicity/race. Indeed, Kamal and Burton (2018) noted that Republicans and Democrats as well as the Republicans themselves hold diverse views about firearm and firearm control.

Overall, Republican politicians tend to be more opposed to firearm control than Republican voters (Bacon, 2019). Bacon mentioned that Republicans give top priority to firearm rights over firearm control, although they are not collectively against gun controls. According to Bacon, most of the Republican politicians have, for a long time, backed legislation seeking to increase background checks and the red flag provisions that allow law enforcement officers to confiscate firearms from individuals who are considered dangerous by a judge. Nonetheless, the Republican-controlled U.S. Senate has been reluctant to take any serious action on firearm restrictions after the El Paso and Dayton mass shootings. Specifically, they have been unwilling to pass a bill adopted by the Democratic-controlled House, which seeks to put universal background checks (Bacon, 2019).

In the past, several prominent leaders in the GOP had backed some firearms control measures when it was politically attainable. The Undetectable Firearms of 1998 was passed by the United States Congress in 1998 and signed by the President. Almost all Republican congress people voted for it (Republican Views, 2013). This Act barred the production or ownership of guns that could not be detected by metal detectors or X-ray machines at security checkpoints nationwide (Republican Views, 2013). As enacted, the original law had a 10-year sunset provision, and it has been extended two times over the

last three decades. This Act was going to expire in 2013 but was extended by another 10 years, thanks to a vote in the United States House of Representatives, which endorsed the extension (Bacon, 2019). Many Republicans considered the subject of undetectable plastic firearms as an issue of law-and-order and voted to support the extension. Several Republican members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives thought that pushing for a clean and quick extension of the law instead of negotiating with members of the Democratic Party was sensible (Republican Views, 2013). Some Democrats wanted to amend the bill after news reports revealed that advancements in three-dimensional printing technology were enabling people to make their plastic pistols.

Not all members of the GOP think similarly regarding every single aspect of the issue of firearm control. Husak (2019) pointed out that differences between prominent and influential individuals in the party as regards firearm rights can be drawn because of the party positions they hold and the geographical parts of the country they hail. The trouble with finding a unifying principle concerning firearm rights within the GOP is made more frustrating by news reports of firearm violence in schools, parks, bars, and other public places in which the person shooting randomly at others uses some sort of high-capacity or high-powered gun (Husak, 2019). Soon after the mass shooting in Sandy Hook Elementary School in the year 2012, Wayne LaPierre, who is a senior official in the NRA, stated that a reasonable person with a firearm is the only thing that can stop a bad person who has a firearm (Republican Views, 2013). This statement was construed as requiring every school to have armed security personnel (Republican Views, 2013). As

expressed by NRA's top official, this position was not an easy one for all Republicans countrywide to consider.

From Maine, Senator Susan Collins is a moderate Republican who was among the few Republican congress people to back a proposal to expand background checks for people who wanted to purchase a firearm (Beck, 2013). Former Republican Senator John McCain admitted to supporting the United States Senate proposal requiring background checks for everyone who purchases a firearm (Beck, 2013). He had a B+ rating from the NRA. Chris Christie, the former Republican Governor of New Jersey, backed firearm control legislation and pointed out that firearm control should be part of a national discussion (Oliphant, 2017). However, there are also some hardliners in the party. A few weeks after the mass shooting in Sandy Hook, public polling of firearm control changed to some extent in support of more government intervention (Oliphant, 2017). This did not sway GOP's more conservative members such as South Carolina's Republican Senator Lindsay Graham and former Ohio Republican Representative Steve LaTourette, who thought the problem of mass shootings in the country, could not be fixed by banning assault weapons (Republican Views, 2013). Many Republican lawmakers also did not change in the wake of other mass shooting incidents in Orlando, San Bernadino, and Newtown (Elliott & Hennigan, 2018). On the state level, various Republican legislators pushed forward laws that relaxed the existing firearm laws. The House Bill 436 in Missouri proposed to make it an offense for the national government to enforce background checks of, or make public or collect a listing of, people who own firearms within Missouri (Elliott & Hennigan, 2018). Michael Leara, a former Republican State

Representative in St. Louis, introduced a bill prohibiting any sort of gun control proposals in Missouri (Republican Views, 2013). Despite a few differences between some GOP members, all these members are strong advocates for gun rights.

The Democratic Party also has its firm position on the gun control issue. Unsurprisingly, the posture of this Party on rights described in the Second Amendment and on issues that pertain to firearm control is more sympathetic to the reliance upon the government to keep people safe from firearm violence (Oliphant, 2017). Even though the second Amendment does recognize the right of the American people to carry handguns, the Democratic Party maintains that those rights are subject to reasonable regulations, as indicated by the United States Supreme Court (Oliphant, 2017). Many Democratic Party members feel that effective law enforcement could be improved when the background check system currently exists is made more robust. For their part, the Democrats succeeded in passing the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act into law in 1993. In the subsequent year of 1994, they managed to pass an Assault Weapons Ban (Republican Views, 2013). As a prerequisite for buying a firearm, the Democratic Party supports compulsory child safety locks, compulsory firearm safety tests, background checks, and a photo I.D. license. This is contrary to the Republican Party stance on firearm control, which does not accept nearly all these Democratic Party positions as a matter of principle (Oliphant, 2017). Reaching a common ground between Republican and Democratic politicians is integral in finding appropriate solutions to gun violence and mass shootings in the nation. Harmonizing the views of the Republicans can help to create a common

ground with the Democrats and develop sustainable firearms legislations in the United States

Potential Agreement on Gun Policies

Studies have analyzed various proposals on gun control that can also apply in the United States if managed effectively (Coates & Pearson-Merkowitz, 2017; Lewis, 2018; Wells, 2019). Two approaches, however, stand out and are elaborated in this discussion. The first proposal is allowing all citizens to own guns and protect themselves against any aggressor, as established in the Second Amendment to the United States Constitution. However, this proposal excludes those who fall in the category of prohibited to hold handguns such as the mentally unstable, children, convicted felons, and people who present significant identifiable risks of misusing the weapons. This approach is referred to as the permissive regulatory approach (Hurka & Knill, 2020). The second strategy is not allowing anyone to own handguns unless they fall under authorized persons such as military and security officers, licensed guards, and civilians who are specially and rigorously vetted and deemed fit to hold handguns. This proposal is what Cook and Donohue (2017) refer to as the restrictive systems approach. This section provides a critical review of the two proposals and their feasibility in America from a policy perspective. The analysis also looks at the political polarity regarding the two strategies in the United States currently and in the past.

Permissive Regulatory Policies

The first approach, the permissive regulatory approach is pretty much what the United States has currently and supported by the provisions of the Second Amendment to

the Constitution of the United States. America is so far the most heavily armed society in the developed world. More than half the households in the US have guns. Consequently, the levels of homicide in the country are also estimated between two and ten times that experienced in other developed countries of the world (Pritchard, et al., 2020). The proliferation of guns in American society is primarily aided by-laws that punish guns' misuse after gun-related violence has occurred as opposed to laws that focus on preventing the violence from occurring. In the past, some of the policies that have been promoted in the United States include the introduction of metal detectors in buildings, voluntary buybacks of weapons held illegally or legally, allocating more resources to internal security departments, offering longer sentences to people involved in gun-related crimes, enacting lawsuits against the gun industry in the event of irresponsible sale of the weapons they manufacture or sell, and creating public awareness on gun-violence and personal protection against gun-related aggressions (Pritchard, et al., 2020).

The permissive regulatory policies used in the U.S., as outlined above, are built on the stand-your-ground laws based on self-defense principles. The self-defense has been used as a defense mechanism against aggression for centuries. However, the laws also impose the duty to retreat before using the intended force, which is an act or refrains from committing an offense (Hurka & Knill, 2020). The stand-your-ground laws, commonly referred to as shoot first laws, tend to remove the duty to retreat. In the United States, these laws are not new. For instance, the second amendment upholds stand-your-ground policies and has inspired gun-related policies in the United States to date. Utah, for instance, passed the stand-your-ground laws in 1994 and began implementing the

changes in 2005. In the same year, Florida adopted similar stand-your-ground laws and created a model later adopted by the American Legislative Exchange Council. The following decades saw 26 other American States pass stand-your-ground laws based on the provisions of the second amendment and the need to give individuals the power to exercise self-defense.

For instance, Utah's law states that any known person must retreat from a force or a threatening force likely to cause threat or death or injury to an individual's body. The law therefore justifies and encourages the public to have guns. Florida's laws on the stand-your-ground are somewhat like those of Utah. The Florida law states that individual who is attacked by an aggressor in their places of abode, including dwellings, residences, or vehicles have no duty to retreat but must stand their grounds. The laws go further to highlight that under such circumstances, the individuals can use or threaten to use and have the right to use force, including a deadly force. Again, the Florida laws justify the use of deadly force to prevent imminent death or danger that can cause bodily harm to oneself and prevent a possible commission of a felony. The other states that ratified the stand-your-ground laws after Utah and Florida modified their gun control legislation based on those of the two states (Utah and Florida). However, there are a few deviations. For instance, Mississippi uses the word felony instead of forcible felony used in Utah and Florida statutes.

Other states do not explicitly state the absence of a duty to retreat in case of aggression but do allow their citizen to use deadly force in preventing felonies. For instance, West Virginia permits stand-your-ground only in the event of civil actions but

does not prohibit individuals from using deadly force when facing imminent threat of death to their lives or possible commission of an act of felony in their places of residence. Similarly, in North Dakota, stand-your-ground laws apply specifically when facing aggressive acts in individuals' homes, workplaces, or vehicles. As has been highlighted earlier, the rising number of homicide and other gun-related crimes currently experienced across the United States are highly likely to be inspired by the stand-your-ground laws. However, instances of misuse of guns by errant gun holders also contribute to the rising cases of homicide in the country. Basing on the adverse effects of stand-your-ground laws that permit people to hold guns, alternative approaches to addressing the gun ownership problem in the United States is desirable. This alternative approach is undoubtedly the restrictive systems approach.

Restrictive Regulatory Policies

The restrictive method, as opposed to the permissive approach, which is currently used in the United States, limits gun possession only to individuals permitted to possess the weapons. Under the restrictive approach, gun holders are vetted closely to prevent misuse and guns getting to the hands of errant citizens who can use them for purposes other than self-defense when facing aggression with no options for retreat. The restrictive method, therefore, potentially reduces the number of people possessing handguns and reduces the general circulation of these weapons among the citizens. Although policies informed by the restrictive philosophies are hailed for their effectiveness in enforcing proper gun control measures, we also understand that the policies may be constrained by specific aspects such as geography and politics. For instance, criminals will always

maneuver their ways to get guns irrespective of the type of laws existing in the country (Lewis, 2018). For instance, criminals may go to stores located outside the country to get guns that they use within the country in case they cannot acquire guns through legal means in their home countries. We also know that criminals can purchase guns illegally through proxies such as friends, factory workers, corrupt government officials, and the police. Therefore, it makes sense that there is a need to achieve political goodwill and rally the entire society behind community policing to prevent illegal firearms from leaking into the community.

Although studies and expert opinions agree that the restrictive approach to gun control can address the persistent problems associated with a lack of proper gun control in the US, little efforts have been made from a legislative perspective. For instance, following the establishment of the first piece of gun control legislation, only three changes have been made to it in the last seventy-five years. The first significant piece of legislation on firearms control was passed in 1934 through the establishment of the National Firearms Act (NFA) (Coates & Pearson-Merkowitz, 2017). The key milestones that the act made towards establishing the restrictive control strategies included banning the sale of machine guns, shotguns, and rifles below 18 inches barrel length, muffles, and the silencers to civilians. The act also required that all guns, including those already in the hands of registered owners, be registered. Most significantly, however, is the imposition of \$200 tax on making and the transfer of weapons and occupational taxes on individuals and entities involved in the manufacturing and sale of guns (Coates & Pearson-Merkowitz, 2017). Soon afterward, Senator Thomas Dodd (Connecticut-

Democrat) sponsored a bill that sought to restrict the sale of handguns via mail orders, although the bill failed to gain significant traction due to political differences (Coates & Pearson-Merkowitz, 2017). After crime rates began to rise in the US five years later, the United States Senate and House of Representatives began paying attention to Senator Dodd's proposals, and the United States Senate opened debate on the bill.

After the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. and J.F. Kennedy, there was political goodwill across the United States to enable the development of gun control laws. As a result, the US Congress passed the Gun Control Act (GCA) to fix the NFA's flaws. However, the gains achieved under the NFA requiring persons already holding guns to have them registered received a backlash after the Supreme Court ruled in *Haynes v U.S.* that such requirements were unconstitutional and violated individuals' rights against self-discrimination as stipulated under the Fifth Amendment. These events point to the need for a unified debate about gun controls involving all sectors of the society, including the political factions, the judiciary, and the society at large. Since the enactment of the GCA in 1968 as the key federal law on gun control, it has only elicited opposition from various quarters since then (Coates & Pearson-Merkowitz, 2017). Organized opposition to control laws involving politicians, political parties, and gun manufacturers, distributors, and owners have become more organized in the recent past. For instance, the Firearm Owners' Protection Act of 1986 reduced the records of licensed dealers, reduced charges on falsified records by dealers, and redefined the act of dealing in firearms business (Coates & Pearson-Merkowitz, 2017). The enactment of these laws and

regulatory frameworks is fueled by the politics of pro-gun communities based on their belief in the Second Amendment and the right to own and defend themselves.

Democrats and Republicans on Gun Control

Gun Control remains a thorny issue in the United States that continues to spark debates from all American society, including politicians, the youths, corporate organizations, religious leaders, and many others. Unfortunately, with public opinions being divided along party lines (between Democrats and Republicans), there seems to be no compromise or rational discussions among American citizens regarding gun control policies. However, the larger American society seems to have strong and diverse opinions regarding the nuances on gun control policies with the controversies remaining seriously divergent along party lines (Husak, 2019). The debates around gun control policies in America tend to center around the Second Amendment to the US constitution and their constitutional right to bear arms. Therefore, the debates around the topic often heighten individuals' feelings about the second amendment and personal security.

Presently the issue of gun control features frequently in the political realms making it more of an emotional issue devoid of rational thinking. According to Husak (2019), the information people get from the politicians often tilts towards individual and party preferences and biases that raise feelings instead of encouraging rational thinking—analyzing the influence of politics on key policy issues such as gun control is thus crucial in understanding public opinions about the specific policies as well as policy-making processes. Once we can do this, then we can determine the intentions of politicians towards such an issue. Husak provides a comparative review of the polarizing spectrums

on gun control policy issues in the United States. For policies to be developed successfully, there must be a compromise between the stakeholders to achieve common ground. However, concerning gun control policies in the United States, reaching a compromise between the contrary opinions is far from being achieved due to the sharp political divide between the major parties in the US (Democrats and the Republicans). As a result, obtaining a partisan issue regarding the matter remains a mirage (Husak, 2019).

Often, politicians' primary goal is to win huge following by exciting the crowds to convince them to buy their ideas about various issues affecting the society at specific times. To achieve this effect, the messages that politicians pass to society often ignite serious controversies. When people can listen to one another and reason together, they are highly likely to reach a compromise amid controversies. According to the Constitutional Rights Foundation report published in 2012, over 200 million Americans hold firearms. The Constitutional Rights Foundation (2012) further noted that close to 640,000 violent crimes involving guns occurred in the U.S. in 2012, resulting in 12,000 murders. Policies that promote strict gun ownership, such as those used in Canada, can reduce bloodshed resulting from gun violence. However, such strict laws are far from being achieved in the United States due to partisan political opinions. Husak (2019) discusses why gun control is so hard to achieve in the US. Specifically, Husak (2019) points out the need for a bipartisan approach in addressing the issue by ensuring that the center of the debate on enriching the safety and well-being of the entire society instead of focusing on partisan preferences. According to the Gallup Poll conducted in 2011, one year before the 2012 presidential election, the American public was split almost midway,

with 44 percent supporting stricter gun laws than the existing ones while 43 percent were in favor of keeping the existing relaxed laws. 11 percent, however, was in favor of making the laws less strict and allowed more Americans to own guns and protect themselves (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2012).

The two major political parties in the United States are the Democratic and Republican Parties. They have remarkable gun control differences in the country. While the Democrats favor stricter gun control laws than the existing ones, most Republicans favor less restriction. The independents, however, often have balanced views about policies on gun control (Pew Research Center, 2020). Also, both the democrats and republicans respond differently to incidences of a mass shooting in the USA. For instance, Luca, et al. (2020) found out that following gun shooting incidences, republicans tend to introduce more legislation that loosens gun control while democrats introduce laws that make gun ownership stricter. These results portrayed in Luca et al. (2020) findings above are like those provided across various models that use variables such as count of fatalities as opposed to the shooting indicators, victim thresholds, and year-fixed effects. As Luca et al. (2020) observe, the democrats have often believed that there is a need to enact stricter enforcement policies on gun ownership and use. On the contrary, the Republicans hold the perception of individual responsibility and freedom, which have defined the key tenets of the party since its inception. At the center of their debates, therefore, have been to champion the right of Americans to own guns and protect themselves in line with the provisions of the Second Amendment.

From the onset, the Republican Party politicians have emphasized to the public their commitment to upholding the individual rights, responsibilities, and freedoms, a principle that has been in tandem with the fundamental principles of the party's philosophy and ideological perspectives. As Ram (2017) observes, the Republican Party ideologies favor smaller governments with lesser regulatory powers on the citizens. The party believes that such systems would result in more effective and efficient governance systems where the citizens determine the democratic space and the kind of freedoms they require. This political ideology stretches to emphasizing the right of American citizens to own and use firearms in self-defense. For instance, the Republican Party members and their supporters tend to emphasize individual gun ownership rights, the right to carry firearms and use them as required in self-defense (Ram, 2020). The Republicans' ideological perspective, therefore, centers mainly on the principle of constitutional interpretation. For instance, the first ten amendments to the United States constitution uphold the right of citizens. Amongst these is the second amendment, which stands tall in emphasizing the right of American citizens to own firearms. Accordingly, the party's supporters believe that any form of moderation on society's social norms cannot interfere with the fundamental freedoms and rights of the citizens as enshrined in the constitution. As Quinn (2019) observes, this ideological perspective is, however, oblivious of the dangers that certain freedoms and rights can inflict on society. As a result, the Republican's position on gun control can be understood from the party's political rhetoric perspectives and attempts to sway public opinions to support their position. The rhetoric

is also culturally and politically imbued in American society leading to the segregation of the society into red and blue states.

Areas of Divergences and Similarities in the Republicans' View of Gun Control in the U.S

The most widely quoted reason given to justify the Republicans' agitation for guns right is safety and self-protection. However, studies have revealed that the republicans hold to diverse opinions for advocating gun rights in the United States A Pew Research (2013) study for instance found out most of the Republican Party supporters say that they feel safe when having guns. The study showed that the number of the party's supporters that subscribe to this opinion has increased consistently across the United States since 1999 while those who support the view of using guns for hunting has decreased over time. Approximately 48% of the Republican Party supporters who were surveyed in the Pew Research Center (2013) study cited self-protection as their main reason for advocating gun rights. Another 32% said they need guns for hunting purposes while 14% needed guns for sporting and other reasons. An even smaller minority of the population 4% advocate gun rights to support gun rights as a constitutional right enshrined in the 2nd amendment and for use in advancing their hobbies. Still, another 1% of the party's supporters interviewed in the Pew Research Center (2013) report did not know why they advocate gun rights. Among the people who perceived gun rights as essential for self-defense also responded that restricting such rights would make it difficult for them to protect their homes and families. A similar opinion was also held by the Republican supporters who did not have guns. On the contrary, an even higher

number of non-gun holders in the U.S. (66%) surveyed in the Pew Research Center (2013) study also believed that restricting citizens access to guns would reduce the number of mass shootings and violence resulting from guns ownership and use in the country.

The Pew Research Center (2013) report above show that Republican Party supporters hold remarkably diverse views regarding their support for gun rights and upholding the provisions of the 2nd amendment on self-protection. The study, like Pierre (2019) classifies the Republican opinions about guns into three categories including, those who subscribe to the belief that increased gun ownership in the US is a menace to public safety, an essential tool for self-preservation as stipulated in the 2nd amendment and those who do not have a specific reason to support their reasons for advocating gun rights. The diverse opinions among the Republican Party supporters are incomparable with most of the democrats (79%) reported in the Pew Research Center (2013) report who believe that limiting gun ownership in the country would enhance security and diminish the cases of mass shooting in the country. Other studies such as Rostron (2018) also concur with the Democrats position that widespread gun ownership causes significantly more harm than good including increasing the risks of homicide and suicides. Consequently, it is apparently clear that there are cognitive biases in the psychological understanding of the Republicans' attitudes towards gun ownership.

Another study by Wozniack (2015) reported stark variations in the opinions regarding gun control legislations in the country. According to the study, the Democrats, women, and the urban dwellers are highly likely to support laws that restrict gun

ownership in the country. On the contrary, the Republicans, conservatives and rural dwellers were found to be more likely to oppose the laws which restricted guns ownership. Among the Republicans, the study also highlighted stark variations. Most of the Republicans (34%) surveyed in the study wanted stricter gun control laws, same as the democrats (83%). Another 14% of the Republicans wanted firearms legislations in the country to remain unchanged while a small percentage of the Republican Party supporters (2%) wanted the existing firearms legislations to be made less strict and allow many Americans to own guns for self-defense. Wozniack findings highly contrast the results shown in most of the studies suggesting that most of the Republican Party supporters generally support less strict firearms control legislations. These findings can be attributed to the fact that the survey was conducted four months after the Sandy Hook shooting. Wozniack's (2015) study also agrees with the existing literature that most of the Americans who support stricter gun control legislations at the time were the Democrats while the number of Republicans who support similar legislations trail behind the Democrats by a significant majority.

Summary

Gun control remains a serious policy area that continues to elicit divergent opinions across the United States. The political influence on gun control policies in the U.S. can be understood mostly from the motivated reasoning theory perspective (Kuru, et al., 2017). That is, politicians' primary goal is to persuade the masses to think in a specific way that suits the individual and party-political stance. The review provided herein demonstrates that it is possible to develop active policies on gun control that can

be used to curtail the current gun-related violence experienced across the United States based on the common grounds established through research. However, such can be achieved only through a bipartisan approach involving all members of the political divide. Understanding the influences of political parties on gun control policies is therefore expected to help achieve a common ground through which the American society can unite and agree on an appropriate gun control policy.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research was to investigate how Republican Party affiliation influences the position of its supporters in South Florida towards federal firearm laws in the United States of America and the possible common grounds between the opposing viewpoints. This chapter illustrates the methodological approaches used to achieve the purpose of the study including an illustration of the sample participants, sampling and research designs, data collection analysis and presentation mechanisms, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and ethical issues observed. The participants needed to be current residents of South Florida. The participants were identified purposively based on their affiliation to the Republican Party and recruited at random through a podcast titled “My Point of View” that I currently host. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focused group discussions. Data from semi-structured interviews and focused group discussions were analyzed thematically.

Research Design and Rationale

A qualitative research design was adopted for probing the opinions of Republican Party supporters regarding the existing federal gun control laws and the possible common grounds on the matter. Qualitative inquiry is an inductive approach whereby the researchers explore the meanings as well as insights of the participants regarding the research question (Levitt et al. 2017). The design traces its root to social and cultural disciplines such as sociology, philosophy, psychology, and anthropology, among others. The primary goal of the qualitative tradition is to obtain a deep understanding of the

underlying issue being investigated. Its primary purpose is to systematically provide a vivid description and interpretation of the specific issues or phenomena from the participants' points of view (Viswambharan & Priya, 2016). The type informs the choice of qualitative design for this study of research questions formulated in this study and the preferred methods of data collection. As Gopaldas (2016) observed, the qualitative research approach uses several data collection and analysis techniques such as semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, which are considered relevant to this study given the nature of data collected (opinions). Qualitative studies, therefore, are a useful study model that can be used effectively in a natural setting, thereby enabling the researcher to generate adequate details generated from high involvements with the participants in subjective experiences. Using data collection methods such as semi-structured interviews and focused group discussions, the study yielded non-numerical data that were consequently analyzed and used to interpret meanings to help understand participants' perceptions that can be generalized to the target population. Semi-structured interviews and focus group data helped answer the two research questions: (a) In what ways does affiliation to the Republican Parties influence their views on state and federal gun laws? (b) What do Republican Party members believe is the potential common ground that may be possible for passable of gun control legislation?

Role of the Researcher

I played an active rather than a passive role in the study from the beginning to the end. Particularly, I was responsible for conceptualizing the research topic, designing data collection techniques, gathering the relevant data, determining the appropriate research

design, analyzing the data, and presenting it. I also identified and contacted the participants, designed, and administered the questionnaires, conducted the semi-structured interviews with the participants, led the focused group discussions, and oversaw the data analysis. To avoid researcher biases in the analysis, a professional analyst was contacted to help verify the inclusivity and objectivity of the analysis performed on the semi-structured interview and focused group discussion data. The expert data analyst was compensated commensurably for the work done.

Methodology

Sampling Procedure

In generalizing the findings, the sample's representativeness is an essential attribute of qualitative studies, which helps in ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings obtained and the generalizations made. Consequently, the sampling process in qualitative research is built on the assumption that it is impractical or unviable to gather data from the entire population in a large area such as South Florida within the limits of time and money available (Galsow, 2005). For instance, in this study, it would be practically impossible to reach out to all Republican Party supporters from across South Florida, gather their opinions, and receive their responses regarding the federal gun laws. Based on this reality, it was only essential that a representative sample of Republican Party affiliates was extracted from the larger population of South Florida, their opinions queried, and the findings generalized to the larger population of Republican Party supporters in the country.

Sampling Plan and Participant Characteristics

A sampling plan was developed based on the characteristics and distribution of the participants across the study region (South Florida). A sampling plan, according to Moser and Korstjens (2018), is an approach that is used to identify, characterize, and select a representative sample size from the target population. The sample plan helped me select the sample, determine the adequate sample size, and decide on the appropriate media to gather the relevant data from the participants. I have a social media outlet in the form of a podcast. The podcast called upon viewers to assist with being participants to the research study. Moser and Korstjens advised that the sampling approach should relate to the design and the anticipated data sets. To come up with an appropriate sampling approach, therefore, it is essential to define the population accurately and understand its characteristics such as geographical distribution, reachability, education levels, socioeconomic statuses, gender, and ages, among others. Therefore, based on these considerations, I settled on drawing a representative sample from among the Republican Party supporters who voted in the 2016 presidential election. To narrow the participants' choice further, Moser and Korstjens highlighted the need for the geographical distribution of the target population to help decide on a sample that is easily accessible, responsive, and as homogenous as possible. Thus, the question that I asked at this stage was whether the sample would be drawn from a community, a tribe, a city, town, or a region. Given that the Republican politicians and supporters are distributed across the country (all U.S. states), zooming in on the party supporters from a single state was deemed suitable. Consequently, I settled on Republican Party supporters from South Florida who participated in the 2016 general election.

Since the resultant participant group comprised of Republican Party supporters in South Florida, their opinions on gun control legislations as influenced by their political affiliations and personal beliefs were expected to be homogenous (O'Sullivan, 2017), a reflection of their party-motivated positions. Regarding the sample characteristics, it was anticipated that the participants also had perceptions on gun laws that reflect those of the Republican Party owing to their affiliations to the party and its philosophical beliefs, as explained in the motivated reasoning theory. These similarities helped me address the research questions effectively based on the participants' responses (O'Sullivan, 2017). Republicans played a critical role in the political formation of security policies in the United States through their 2016 votes. The expected outcome, as O'Sullivan (2017) observed, is to try to understand how the party position on gun laws influences their voting patterns, opinions on the existing federal firearms legislation, and recommendations on what needs to be done to resolve the legislative stalemates on gun control efforts in the country.

Sampling Strategy

As pointed out above, the current study targeted the Republican Party supporters exclusively; selecting a representative sample was crucial to eliminate biases relating to my preferences. Purposive sampling was the sampling strategy used to select and recruit study participants. Purposive sampling is a nonprobability sampling approach whereby the researcher identifies the study participants based on predetermined characteristics. The method is an inexpensive and effective way of identifying a preferred population faster. In a large population such as the Republican supporters in South Florida,

purposive sampling helped to identify and recruit the Republican supporters in the state. Also, Palinkas et al. (2015) noted that the approach is essential when the researcher wants to recruit individuals who are willing and ready to participate in the study based on their schedules.

In this study, party affiliation (Republican Party politicians and supporters) was the predetermined attribute used to identify and single out the participants through the participant participation selection questionnaire. Participants disclosed their affiliations to their respective parties. This then was verified through the State of Florida Voter Registration website. The site verified their memberships to the parties based on their registration statuses. A participant was therefore recruited into the study if they are registered members of their respective parties. Random sampling (a probability sampling approach) was used in the second stage of participants' selection whereby those who expressed interest in participating in the study were recruited at random. The randomization process assumes that the number of people who expressed interest from the podcast call for participation would surpass the required number of participants needed for the study hence prompting the need to select a suitable sample from the initial list. This assumption is based on the popularity of the show in Florida as evident by the large viewership it has recorded over time occasioned by the rising enthusiasm that the viewers have expressed in contributing to important political topics discussed on the show. Probability sampling approaches such as random sampling give all participants in the population equal chances of being included in the final sample frame. That is, none of the participants had an absolute right of incorporation into the sample frame. This

approach was particularly important in eliminating the biases resulting from purposive sampling and ensuring that a highly representative sample was attained. In this study, the participants were identified and recruited randomly through the podcast titled “My Point of View,” which I currently host. The program discusses current political issues that impact American society, gun laws being among them, and the influence of politics on society’s perceptions on such issues. The show draws its guests from various political parties in the United States and around the world. For purposes of randomization and the geographical distribution of the target population, online participants answered an identification questionnaire to screen and recruit participants. The Survey Monkey link was embedded on the podcast website and broadcast during the show, and the show’s followers encouraged signing up. The link was publicized after the Institutional Review Board approval along with the email requests and informed consent forms. Walden University’s approval number for this study was 10-21-20-0676672. The participants had a period of 1 month to complete the online questionnaire and sign up for the study. Only participants who included their contact details, such as email and telephone numbers, were recruited. This approach ensured that all participants recruited were self-identified as Republican or Democratic Party supporters with a profound knowledge of the past and current gun legislations in the United States.

The randomization of participant identification and recruitment survey was undertaken based on a stage-wise criterion. The first stage involved assessing the participants’ political affiliation and their understanding of gun control. Responses to this question were used to determine if they should continue to the next questions or not. Only

those who declared being Republican Party affiliates were permitted to continue to the next questions. The filtering process at this stage formed an important inclusion criterion in ensuring that the right participants are recruited. The next question asked the participants to fill in their ages and whether they voted in the 2016 general election in the United States and qualified based on their responses. This process was essential in ensuring the proper screening of the participants. A maximum of 50 eligible respondents were recruited through this process. If the required number was not reached in the first broadcast window, additional time was provided to ensure that the required sample was attained. Going by the current viewership trends on the Podcast show, I anticipated that the number of applicants would surpass the required number of participants on the first broadcast prompting the need for random selection of the applicants. Therefore, the strategy allowed me to screen participants based on their minimum knowledge about the problem being investigated (gun control laws) and assessed their opinions on the issue (O'Sullivan, 2017).

Data Collection

Instrumentation

This section describes the various instruments used to gather data. Two instruments, including semi-structured interviews and focused group discussions, were used to gather the required data. A discussion on the two instruments and how they were used to gather the required data is provided in the following section. Data collection was accomplished in two phases. The first phase involved conducting semi-structured interviews with a selected sample drawn from the target population. The second phase

involved focused group discussions with participants recruited from amongst the interview participants.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants affiliated to the Republican Party recruited from the podcast and who have knowledge of the current federal firearm laws enacted in the United States. The questions within the online questionnaire provided scrutiny towards the recruitment of the 10 selected participants for the interviews. A total of 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted in mid-August 2020. Owing to the current health environment characterized by a global pandemic, online interviews through Skype or Zoom applications are preferred. Each session lasted at most 30 minutes and was conducted at the participant's free time. The period of conducting the interviews lasted 1 month. Conducting semi-structured interviews allowed for the researcher to delve deep into the participants' beliefs about gun control laws and the sources of those beliefs. Kiser and Ostrom (1982) outlined that in a theoretical framework, the question of political party affiliation is the gateway to how people think about key policy issues in the country, such as gun laws. Gun laws are societal concerns with far-reaching impacts on most American people, making it an essential area for policy development. The point to confirm through semi-structured interviews was whether the partisan beliefs built during political campaigns affect how legislations are formed based on the political party affiliation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Follow-up interviews with the participants were conducted to verify the validity of the

responses given. This step is crucial in ensuring reliability of the data and the results presented.

Focus Group Discussions

Focused group discussions were held with 10 participants identified from the semi-structured interview based on the details provided during the interviews. The discussion was held via Zoom to avoid physical contacts and the risks of contracting or spreading diseases. The number of discussants was kept low to facilitate active participation and accommodate all discussants in a single meeting. The discussions lasted approximately one hour and thirty minutes. Two discussion sessions comprising of five discussants each were conducted to ensure the reliability and trustworthiness of the data/themes obtained. In the focus group each participant was identified by participant number. The same questions utilized in the individual interviews were asked in the focus group. If there was a variation from their original response, it was brought forth into the focus group for discussion. A discussion was had as to why the change occurred in their response and the opinion of the other participants was vocalized causing for interactive and engaging conversations. This was done to further discuss the variety of responses towards the topic.

Data Analysis Plan

After collecting the data needed for the study, the next stage of research is data analysis and presentation. The responses received from the participants were coded into NVivo first for thematic analysis. Hand coding was used to operationalize the data collected. The process enables subjective data generated to be identified and classified

based on specific attributes such as age, gender, level of education, and income levels, among others. The classification technique enhances further unfolding of specific attributes of the data, such as cultural and demographic frames (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The data generated from semi-structured interviews and focused group discussions was scrutinized to identify emerging themes and characterized thematically. Thematic analysis was performed systematically to ensure that all relevant themes were captured in the final analysis. I began by reading all interviews independently and then focused group responses to familiarize myself with the data generated. This stage was helpful in assigning preliminary codes to the data that would be used to describe the content generated. After generating the codes, I proceeded to search the themes as provided in my codes across the interview and focused group responses. I then reviewed the themes generated and changes or modifications made accordingly. Upon completing this stage, I isolated my preferred themes that were used to produce the final report. The results drawn from the analysis helped to develop bipartisanship approaches useful in implementing the gun laws by obtaining a common ground.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Dependability and trustworthiness are to qualitative research as reliability is to quantitative studies. In qualitative studies, therefore, there must be credited to ensure dependability. To ensure the credibility of the study, various measures were taken to account. For instance, triangulation of data collection methodologies, including questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focused group discussions was used to ascertain the credibility of the data (themes) analyzed. Data collection tools such as

surveys, interviews, and discussion questions can be grossly misleading if not tested, and their dependability ascertained before use to collect data. After developing the interview and discussion questions, therefore, they were piloted on a proto sample to ascertain the instrument's ability to gather the required data when administered to the target sample. Therefore, the pre-testing stage helped to ascertain the instrument's validity as far as gathering the relevant data is concerned. After coding the interviews and focused group discussions, the participants were presented with the coded data to check and ascertain their accuracy. Full descriptions of the data using theoretical applications and the literature were adopted to establish the transferability of the results. The analysis provided an in-depth evaluation of literary knowledge on gun laws and the views of Republicans on the research problem. That is, an evaluation and tabulation of the results was completed. According to Cohen (2003) the chosen research problem studied in this study often sparks emotions in every election year in the US with party politics playing a central role in defining the divergent views. As legislations are debated and implemented, political party positions play a significant role in influencing the nature of laws and policies developed. Dependability in the study was guaranteed through audit trails detailing the complete coding process. To ensure conformability, the participants were asked to confirm that their views and opinions were captured accurately by reading the interview notes, listening to the discussion recording, and crosschecking the coded data. Lastly, the standards for reporting procedures for qualitative studies were implemented. The checklist for the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) was utilized at the analytical stage, as described by Tong (2007). By confirming how

each party leans towards gun laws in the United States, Nishishiba (2014) observes that policymakers can utilize the findings from this study to develop policies that address all parties.

Ethical Procedures

No significant ethical concerns have been identified that may influence successful completion of the current study. However potential limitations to this study include possible difficulty in recruiting participants for the semi-structured interviews without the risk of bias. Ensuring a clear separation of my role at the institution from my role as a researcher may also be a challenge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Every research has its strengths and limitations. The strengths and challenges are particularly more pronounced in social science studies, such as the current research. Consequently, various challenges, limitations, and barriers likely to be experienced in this study were identified alongside their remedial measures. The significant challenges likely to be experienced in this study were attributed to the research approach.

A study with sound reliability is one that draws responses or data from a large sample drawn from a homogenous population. Although the homogeneity was guaranteed through purposive sampling, the researcher could predict with complete accuracy, whether an adequate number of respondents. A respondent to the participant selection questionnaire may give false and misleading information due to a lack of researcher presence. However, follow-up interviews with the participants helped verify the validity and accuracy of the responses given, hence ensuring the internal validity of the data obtained. Consequently, the research is expected to provide a valid argument in

the end. In providing a compelling case, the researcher reflected on the purpose of the investigation and ensures that the gaps identified from the literature are filled adequately as purported in the study.

Summary

Chapter 3 has detailed the methodological procedure that were followed to identify data sources, gather relevant data, analyze, and present the findings most scientifically and professionally. The results of the data collected and analyzed using the methods outlined in this chapter are presented in Chapter 4 including the participants' demographic data, frequency tables, and other relevant statistical information showing the connection between affiliation to the Republican Party and perceptions on the existing federal firearms control laws in the United States.

Chapter 4: Results Possible Common Grounds for Policy

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research was to investigate how Republican Party affiliation influences the position of its supporters in South Florida towards federal firearm laws in the United States of America and the possible common grounds between the opposing viewpoints. While the supporters of the Democratic Party in the United States have often advocated for stricter gun control laws in the country, the supporters of the Republican Party often hold the contrary opinion, preferring to put more guns in the hands of more Americans for purposes of self-defense. The result of this study helps in determining some key areas of convergence between the supporters of the Republican Party to enable exercising acceptable and agreeable gun control policies in the United States. The guiding research questions for the study were: In what ways does a Republican Party affiliation influence their views on state and federal gun laws? What do Republican Party members believe is the potential common ground with Democrats that may be possible for passable of gun control legislation? In this chapter, I review key areas of the research including a description of the pilot study, research setting, participant demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and conclusions. Before I began with the full study, I began with a pilot study.

Pilot Study

A pilot study is a micro-study of the larger study to be conducted (In, 2017). Its main goal is to help decide the best strategies for conducting the large-scale study. Based on the findings of the pilot study, a researcher assesses and identifies any flaws in the

tools for data collection and analysis as well as how well the sub-questions answer the main research question (Astalin, 2013). It is at this stage that the researcher refines the research questions to align to the main topic by removing any ambiguity, refines the methods and instruments of data collection as per the identified issues, and estimates the time and resources that were needed to complete the large-scale research. This study was piloted on a test sample made up of five participants. The participants in the pilot study were identified at random from South Florida. Once identified, they were interviewed and involved in discussion using the pre-designed questionnaire. The goal of piloting was to test the accuracy of the research instruments, the interview and discussion questions, by testing if the results generated from them answered the research question effectively. The sample used in the pilot study was my colleagues in the workplace (two individuals), a neighbor (one individual), and friends (two individuals), for a total of five respondents. After administering the pilot interviews, I analyzed the results and was convinced that the questions generated reliable responses that answered the research question accurately. No adjustments were made to the questions or the topic of the contents of the study. The questions were then used to gather data for large-scale study.

Study Setting

The setting of a research is defined by Noble and Smith (2015) as the location of a study. A study setting is a confluence of the physical, social, and experimental contexts in which research is performed. A proper description of a research setting is essential because the interpretation of the results depend on the setting (Noble & Smith, 2015). The setting of a research study therefore has a significant influence on the validity and

reliability of the results obtained (Noble & Smith, 2015). This study was conducted in South Florida, the southernmost section of the United States being the state of Florida. South Florida is one of the state's three directional regions besides central and north Florida. According to the United States Census Bureau (2021) report, most South Florida residents are non-Hispanic White Americans comprising 75.12% of the population. The census report of 2021 further showed that African Americans make up 16.07% of the region's population, and other races, including people of mixed races, Asian-Americans, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders, comprise 8.81% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). 32.2% of the population was born in the state, 33.0% were born elsewhere in the U.S. and migrated into South Florida, and 34.8% immigrated from outside the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Traditionally, non-Hispanic White Americans have a bias towards the Republican Party, while minority races tend to support the Democratic Party (Iyengar, et al., 2019). In the last U.S. Presidential election conducted in 2020, South Florida largely voted for the Republican Party. As Barda (2020) recorded, the Republican Party won 33 out of the 55 counties in Florida in 2020, making the state one of the Republican strongholds in the United States.

The participants in this study were identified through a podcast titled "My Point of View," where I am the current host. To recruit the participants, I sent out a call during broadcast to ask listeners to enroll in the survey and research as a voluntary participant (See Appendix A). The advertisement was run for a period of 1 week to recruit as many participants as possible. The participants were informed from the beginning that enrollment in the study would be voluntary and that there were no benefits given for

registration. The purpose and social objective of the study was communicated in the daily appeals so that those who registered as participants did so out of full consent. Moreover, all followers of the podcast were free to register irrespective of their party affiliations (the listeners were not informed that only Republican Party supporters would be incorporated in the final study sample). The decision was informed by the desire to eliminate perception bias among participants which could potentially impact participant responses by possibly invoking the feeling of a contest between the Republican and Democratic Party supporters in the region. The sample size of a study has significant effect on the findings and transferability of the findings since it directly influences the internal and external validities. As Noble and Smith (2015) opined, a large study sample increases the power of the study thereby reducing the margin of error that have direct effects on the internal and external validities of findings presented. Because of this effect, it was necessary that a large sample size was obtained to guarantee the reliability of the study findings and consequently its transferability to external scenarios such as supporting policy decision-making.

Participant Demographics

At the end of 1 week of advertising for voluntary enrollment into the study, a total of 40 participants enrolled. Twenty-four (60%) of the participants identified themselves with the Republican Party while 16 (40%) were supporters of the Democratic Party. A total of 22 (90%) of the Republican Party supporters who enrolled for the study lived in South Florida while two (10%) were not residents of South Florida at the time of their enrollment. Sixteen (72.5%) of them voted in the 2016 Presidential elections while six

(27.5%) did not. Ten (62.5%) of them were licensed firearm holders at the time of this study while six (37.5%) were not firearm holders at the time.

Data Collection

A total of 10 participants were secured from the screening and were then included in the final sample based on their qualification as Republican Party supporters who lived in South Florida who were residents of the region, voted in the 2016 Presidential elections, and were licensed firearm holders at the time of the study. The final in-depth interview was therefore administered to the final sample, the results analyzed and used to inform the conclusions made and presented in this study. Following the completion of the screening and recruitment of the participants, each of the selected participants were contacted and semi-structured interview sessions schedules were set. Each participant was asked to provide the best time and means of interview such as physical, virtual, or telephone. The participants were at liberty to choose the most convenient format based on individual preferences. I wanted to make the engagements as flexible to the participants as possible so that they could participate in the interviews comfortably. Initially, I intended to conduct the interviews either virtually or via telephone interviews because of the effects of COVID-19 pandemic and the social distancing rules. However, as the rules eased on the run-up to the 2020 presidential elections, three participants preferred face-to-face interviews. The rest of the interviews were conducted via various teleconferencing platforms including Skype, Zoom, and Cisco WebEx, depending on the participants' most preferred electronic platform.

The interviews schedules were slotted for a period of 1 month. However, the sessions ended up taking longer than the anticipated period. The first interview was expected to be conducted in mid-August 2020 but ended up being conducted in January 2021. This scenario was largely brought about by a wide range of issues that were participant-specific including the 2020 Presidential election, COVID-19 containment measures, and the pandemic, among others. A sample size of 20 was anticipated in the proposal. Although a total of 40 people expressed willingness in participating in the current study, 10 were deemed eligible for the final study after screening based on the criteria outlined in the previous section. This was half the total number of participants anticipated for the study. Also, five out of the projected 10 focused group discussants were available for the discussions. Data saturation was achieved based on the discussions that were held on the Google Zoom platform because of its convenience and accessibility. All participants had access and understood its operability based upon the COVID-19 lockdowns occurring across the United States.

Data Recording

All interviews and focused groups discussions were recorded with a voice recording application with the consent of the participants. The participants were informed in advance that the interviews would be recorded for purpose of the study. The procedures for ensuring privacy of the recorded data were also explained to the participants including keeping the tapes in my safe custody during data analysis and destroying it once the study was completed. I also assured the study participants that the contents of the recordings would not be reproduced or used for any other purpose other

than the intended purpose of this study. The contents of the interviews and discussions were replayed to the participants to verify that the recorded data was their true contributions. The purpose of recording the data during the interviews and focused group discussions was to enable seamless discussions or interviews and allow the participants and me to concentrate fully in the process. By not recording the data in writing during the interviews, both the participants and I were able to contribute actively during the discussion and interviews. For instance, I was able to ask the right questions and ensure the logical flow of the questions (See Appendix B). Whenever the participants shared an idea and failed to expound on it, I asked them to clarify what they meant. Once the analysis was completed, the records were destroyed by burning to avoid physical retrieval of the recorded information. The approach was pursued to help restrict the participants' contributions to this study only.

Decoding/Transcription

The data obtained from the interviews and focused group discussions were decoded by transferring the ideas onto paper. Once the transfer was completed, the transcribed information was shared with the participants for verification so that the participants could confirm that the information transcribed were their ideas. The transcribed data were reviewed and coded into NVivo to analyze the themes presented therein. Hand coding was used to operationalize the data. Through hand coding, the subjective data were identified and classified. The data were further scrutinized to further affirm the themes identified through NVivo in preparation for the final stage of analysis. The identified themes were listed down and presented in the final analysis. During the

period of decoding the data, I kept a diary detailing my emotional description. No transcriptions were done on the days when I felt that my bad emotional state would influence the transcription outcome. If any transcription were done at a time when my emotional conditions would influence the outcome of transcription through subjectivity, the data were relooked into on another day when I felt emotionally stable. The rationale for keeping the diary was to ensure that my moods did not interfere with the interpretations made.

Results

Data analysis followed a thematic approach whereby the themes emerging from the survey were identified, categorized, and analyzed. The first section assessed the respondent's conception of security. That is, the mode of security they preferred. The results are provided in the subsequent sub-sections.

Factors Associated With Safety

The analysis, as has been outlined in the previous section, was done qualitatively through thematic analysis. The interviews were used to assess the respondent's perceptions about safety under various circumstances such as owning a dog, under home security, through neighborhood watch, by owning a gun, or when protected by a security officer such as an agency or a guard. The top three most preferred modes of ensuring individual and collective safety were home security systems (90%), security (agency or guards; 90%), and owning a gun (100%). Neighborhood watch was the least preferred method of security among the participants. Sixty percent of the respondents said they do not feel secure when subjected to neighborhood watch programs. Owning a firearm made

the respondents feel safest compared to the other options. The respondents felt that they could protect themselves with the firearms when attacked by an intruder. This form of security was considered most effective among the respondents because it was a way through which they could provide immediate defense to themselves and their properties before the police or neighbors came to their defense. For instance, Respondent 1 considered firearm ownership a safe way of ensuring personal security, saying:

Nowadays with so many people with different types of weapons, it is kind of hard at this point. I mean firearms have two things you can use it to defend yourself, but it could be used against you too. So, what I mean is, if an intruder were to come into your house, you can be easy to take it and use it against each other. I do see it where I do feel safer. I do have some in my house.

Neighborhood watch was the least preferred security model among the participants. Most participants felt that neighborhood security programs were not effective in most regions and therefore could not guarantee the security of the respondents, their families, and properties. For instance, Respondent 8 opined that most neighborhood security programs do not function efficiently because society has changed significantly with each person minding their own businesses and trying as much as possible not to get involved in other people's problems:

I mean some neighborhood watch programs. I really do not think they really work to be honest since you know, the society nowadays [is] more about staying in home and not getting into trouble due to the fact of so many people with guns or

with other type of weapons on them. So, it is extremely hard to really see how they can be effective, you know.

From the findings, it was demonstrated that most of the participants favored firearms ownership for self-defense against external aggression as opposed to other forms of protection. This was mainly due to the individualistic nature of the society which makes neighborhood security programs ineffective. Most respondents considered widespread availability of firearms in their neighborhoods as a threat which made it necessary to arm oneself. Besides, widespread distrust made it impossible to know the true intent of people in the neighborhoods further escalating security risks which required self-protection. Asked whether teachers and schools workers should carry guns to schools for self-defense, 10 (100%) of the respondents were in favor of the idea saying it will make schools safer and help teachers secure themselves and the students.

Areas of Convergence in Gun Control Measures

Regarding the solutions to gun control, the participants provided a wide range of solutions converged as discussed in this section. The participants were strongly opposed to measures limit the number of guns that individuals could have at any time with 90% opposing the move. 90% of the participants were also opposed to measures that would restrict gun ownership only to scenarios where one is subject to significant and verifiable security threat. The most common argument in opposing the measures was that any move to restrict gun ownership in the American society would amount to a violation of their rights to self-security and a violation of the second amendment to the constitution of the

United States. The 4th respondent assertively defended the need of the federal and state governments to uphold the second amendment saying.

You cannot restrict that. Another thing is you should not restrict the person to have a gun. If so, you must prove that that person is or could be a potential danger to society. So, what I mean by that, I mean you should have a way to prove that a person is a danger to other people so that you can take away his right to bear arm. Otherwise, you should respect and protect his right to bear arm. It is a principle that we should protect. Everybody should protect it. Well, at least it is my belief. We must protect that.

It is important to note in the findings is that the respondents considered federal ban on certain firearms such as high caliber firearms would make the United States more unsafe. In this regard, the respondents favored the right to not putting restrictions on the type of guns one can own.

Despite the oppositions to restricting gun ownership, the participants agreed on certain measures to prevent guns from going into the hands of dangerous people and the need to restrict their ability to access and use guns. For instance, 90% of the participants were in support of the strategies to initiate and strengthen background checks to restrict gun access to persons deemed dangerous to the American society. 90% of the participants also supported any federal actions that uphold mental health checks as a gun's ownership policy. To this effect, all respondents were in support of repealing the existing state gun laws in favor of nationwide policies on gun control. The main argument in support of this move is that it would harmonize gun laws throughout the country and create a sense of

uniformity across the United States as far as guns ownership and use is concerned. The participants, for instance considered too many laws enacted at the state level and which varied from one state to another as a hindrance to effective control of firearms ownership across the United States

The participants' opinions were sought regarding the second amendment to the US constitution and what it meant to them. All respondents argued positively about the law referring to it as a good law (50%) that guarantees every American citizen the right to self-protection (30%). Most participants felt that the second amendment gives them the right to bear arms and which no one can take away from them. For instance, one respondent argued saying that the second amendment gives certain powers, the power to pursue freedoms and that the country [the United States] was founded on those very principles

Contingents of proposals were given by the respondents concerning the most effective ways to resolve the guns menace in the country. The most popular argument was that too many laws on gun control were to blame for the proliferation of guns across the United States According to the proponents of this solution, too many laws which varied across different states made it difficult to harmonize gun control practices. To control gun easy access to guns across the nation, therefore, harmonization of the laws into a single federal law that applied across all states was perceived to be an effective control measure. Educating the public about the benefits and dangers of illegal gun possession and use was also considered a suitable approach to address the current gun

menace in the country. For instance, one participant noted that public education would help remove guns off the streets saying.

I think that education is an important solution towards solving the situation [the gun menace]. The focus of education should be on programs for buying back guns. This will allow us to take guns off the street.

Other reasons given by the respondents included educating the American public to be responsible with the guns, strengthening the second amendment, restricting gun ownership to individuals who pass the specific set criteria, conducting psychological and background checks on the individuals seeking to buy guns, and strengthening federal and constitutional laws regulating gun laws. A federal ban on certain types of weapons such as assault rifles and high-power magazines was also considered to be an effective approach to addressing the guns issue.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Qualitative studies such as this often run the risk of trustworthiness mainly because it is impossible to address their reliability and validity in the same manner as naturalistic studies. However, studies have shown how qualitative researchers can address this problem. In this study, Shenton (2004) four criteria of addressing the issues of trustworthiness in qualitative studies such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were used.

Credibility

The concept of credibility in qualitative studies is based on how well the findings from a study are closest to the reality. In qualitative studies, therefore, ensuring

credibility of studies is the most important proof of trustworthiness. In this study, the credibility of the findings was determined in two main ways: using well-established methods of data collection and analysis and through triangulation of methods. To begin with, it was important to incorporate correct operational definition of the specific measures being studied. This move was important to create a clear understanding of the aspects under study. Consequently, the specific procedures used during data collection such as the mode of questioning the participants during interviews as well as the methods of data analysis were based on the strategies that had been successfully tested and approved in the past. For instance, the mode of identifying and recruiting participants into the study followed a well-defined criterion which involved identifying only Republican Party supporters who resides in Southern Florida and who voted in the 2016 Presidential election. This move helped to ensure that the information was provided by the participants who were well versed with the issue under study. Besides, since the participants were self-proclaimed supporters of the Republican Party, their responses were deemed to be a true reflection of their position on gun legislations as inspired by the party's philosophy. Self-identification with the Republican Party also helped to eliminate the effects of possible confounding factors such as the questionnaires being administered remotely via Survey Monkey.

The second strategy used to uphold the credibility of the study was using triangulation. Triangulation of study methodologies involves the use of different research methodologies to gather data. In this study, interviews schedules were complemented with focused groups' discussions involving professionals who are well-versed with the

issue at hand. According to Shenton (2004), using different but complementary methodologies such as interviews and focused group discussions compensates for the limitations of each methodology when used singly. Besides, using a wide range of informants in the interviews and focused group discussions helped to verify the individual viewpoints and experiences against those of other informants in the group. This approach helped to come up with a rich picture of the problem under study leading to a high credibility of the findings used in the analysis.

Confirmability

The concept of confirmability relates to the ability of a researcher to compare the concerns to objectivity. In this study, objectivity was achieved by ensuring that the results used in the analysis were the true reflection of the participants' opinions and experiences and that possible researcher biases were contained. Confirmability was assured through various techniques. The first approach was to ensure that the researcher's emotions did not influence data interpretation. The researcher kept a diary of her emotions during the period of transcription to ensure that the researcher's emotional cues did not influence the process of transcribing and interpreting the respondents' responses. Further, triangulation of data collection methods including interviews and focused group discussions were used to reduce the effects of researcher biases or methodology bias.

Dependability

To uphold the reliability of a study, researchers must provide adequate proof to show that if the study was repeated within the same environment using the same methods and same instruments, the repeat study will obtain the same results (Shenton, 2004).

Sometimes, this can be affected by the changing nature of the social aspects of the society including political influences from within the country and beyond. In this study, dependability of the study was addressed directly by reporting the methodology used in the study in great details to enable repeatability in future studies. Through the vivid description of the study methodology, this study qualifies as a prototype model for future studies. The in-depth coverage of the study methodology allows readers and researchers to assess how well the research practices have been followed so that they can repeat the same methods in future studies on the subject. To ensure that the methods were well-designed and targeted to collect the required data, the instruments were piloted on a proto sample to test its credibility. The piloting allowed the researcher to assess sections of the instrument that had flaws and the necessary corrections made to improve its accuracy and reliability.

Transferability

Transferability of a study refers to the extent to which study findings can be generalized to the larger population with similar characteristics as the population studied in research. The transferability of the study findings was upheld by maintaining the credibility of the study findings, confirmability of the data and the analysis presented and dependability of the data collection methods. As a result, the findings obtained, and the conclusions made from the analysis were deemed accurate and transferable to the larger population. The results therefore can be used to make concrete decisions and inform relevant policies on the subject matter.

Summary

This chapter has reported the findings from the interviews and focused group discussions with the participants. The participants were opposed to measures which would restrict gun ownership among the American public's arguing such a move would be a violation of the second amendment to the constitution of the United States which permits every individual to own a gun for self-protection. However, most of the participants supported measures that institutes background checks and mental health checks to ensure that the guns are not sold to the wrong people who could use them to cause harm to the society. Public education remained the most preferred intervention on guns control among the participants besides background checks and mental health checks. The mode of public education recommended by the participants involved enlightening the American publics on safe use of guns. The aim of education, according to the respondents, was to encourage responsible use of guns and avoidance of the dangers associated with unintended use. The findings provided in this chapter are further discussed in Chapter 5 in accordance with the applicable theory and research.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

Debate on gun ownership and use in the United States can be traced back to the 1700s through congressional policymaking (Rønnedal, 2019). Calls to enact proper controls on gun ownership and use across the country have grown louder with each passing moment with each faction of the political divide (Democrats and Republicans) advocating opposing ideas. While the Democrats have often lobbied for stricter gun control laws to avoid violent use, the Republican Party supports the second amendment to the United States, which permits gun ownership for self-defense and sports. While the second amendment is intended to promote security, widespread gun ownership and use in the United States has been blamed for increased violence. Incidences of homicide and mass shootings have increased in the United States in the recent past leading to mixed calls on control measures. The republicans believe that increased gun ownership among the American publics would enhance security (Rønnedal, 2019). However, democrats believe that taking guns away from the hands of ineligible people would reduce the incidences of gun violence across the country. According to Rønnedal, most of the democrats believe that such results can only be achieved by enacting stricter gun control measures, which include strict scrutiny to avoid selling guns to unauthorized persons.

This study investigated how Republican Party affiliation influences the position of its supporters in South Florida towards federal firearm laws in the United States of America and the possible common grounds between the opposing viewpoints. Opinions on gun control in the United States are divided largely along party lines is not a new

phenomenon. Party affiliation is therefore a possible predictor of public opinions on firearms legislations and control measures across the nation. Finding a common ground among the Republican Party supporters can help in shaping federal legislations on gun control.

Interpretation of the Findings

Public opinion regarding guns and guns control thereof is divided sharply across the United States based on two primary facts: to impose stricter controls or to ease gun laws and allow many Americans to own guns for personal protection and freedom. Longitudinal studies using retrospective data in the United States have shown that American's opinions over stricter gun controls declined consistently between 1990 and 2010 but began to increase afterwards (Rønnedal, 2019). For instance, Rønnedal observed that most Americans support policies that restrict the manufacture and sale of guns across the United States to prevent many people from acquiring and using guns. This category of the society comprises mainly of the supporters of the Democratic Party. Concurrently, polls also show that an increasing number of people in the United States also oppose a complete ban of individuals' ability to own and use guns. Besides, hunting and recreational uses (such as target shooting and pinking, among others) of guns in the United States are some of the most common historical reasons for gun ownership among the Democrats and the Republicans alike. These debates on gun control therefore tend to revolve around what Rønnedal attributed to a riddle on whether guns kill people or people kill people.

The proponents of gun restriction believe that widespread possession of guns contribute to the menace of public safety. However, proponents of the second amendment, who are predominantly republicans, believe that guns are important tools for self and public protection (Jouet, 2019; Rønnedal, 2019). The findings of this study concur with findings in the literature that pitch the republicans as the main proponents of widespread gun ownership for self-protection and self-preservation. A full 90% of the Republican respondents who participated in this study were opposed to any move limiting the number of guns individuals own any moment as well as restricting the ownership rights. The common ground among the Republican Party supporters show that they do not associate gun ownership to security risks such as mass shootings and the rising cases of homicide in the country contrary to the suggestions in the literature. In a 30-year study conducted by the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported by Rostron (2018), guns were found to be statistically correlated with personal hazard and less statistically correlated to personal benefits. Efforts to address the adverse effects of gun menace in the country therefore may want to address issues such as safety and security among the republican wing of the U.S. population before enacting control measures. Consequently, all respondents (100%) who participated in this study considered themselves most secure when they had guns than any other safety seeking behavior. However, there seemed to be an opportunity for regulating some or all classifications of guns by ensuring the safety and security of the people. Although the majority considered themselves safe when having guns, 90% also felt comfortable with a proper home security system in place or a security agency such as a guard deployed to

their neighborhood. Hence, safety and security emerged as strong common grounds among Republican Party supporters in relation to gun ownership.

Three social contract philosophers, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau offered ideas regarding the state of nature within predated societies in ways that apply particularly to the Republicans' perception of security and gun ownership as presented in this study. Hobbes held that the state of nature is determined primarily by sordid and gloomy instinct: the solitary, the poor, the nasty, and the brutish nature (Navari, 1996). Hobbes concluded that societies establish social contracts by surrendering their will to the king. Locke however stated that nature exists in a state of perfect tranquility, equality, and freedom as governed by the natural laws (Hindess, 2007). According to Locke, the establishment of a civil society such as the United States was a result of the desire to further the peaceful nature of the pre-civil societies. That is, the individual only becomes part of a civil society out of choice or individual consent but retains certain rights which they exercise when the ruler becomes unjust or unruly and act against their wishes. Rousseau's state of nature is largely conceived around the concept of the General Will. According to Rousseau, being part of the civil society does not make one surrender their freedoms totally to the General Will (Shklar & Shklar, 1985). As a result, they remain free to their will as of the free state of nature. The state of nature, as explained by these philosophers, determines the society's response towards their safety and security. The most common claim among the Republican Party supporters was that owning a gun made them feel secure more than any other thing. Lack of trust in government's ability to protect its citizens, therefore, explains the republican's love of the gun.

The ideological reasoning that led to the establishment of the second amendment has a mixed historical logic. The right to own firearms is perceived among the Republican Party supporters as a classical liberal philosophy that defines the foundational principles of the contemporary American society. Particularly, the natural right to self-preservation is unalienable among most conservative Americans as the pursuit of happiness, liberty, and life as proclaimed at independence. The establishment of the second amendment that gave the right to bear arms is therefore perceived as a form of restorative justice. Although the framers of the constitution of the United States had a different reasoning that is quite different from that of self-preservation as is known today, the frailty of this constitutional proclamation still hound the people of the U.S. to date. Worse still is the increasing politicization of the issue of gun control. According to Augustine (2019), the framers of the second amendment intended to have militant checks on the American standing army by sharing military powers with the people but rather created conflicting provisions. Augustine observed that it is these conflicting provisions that have led to increased politicization of the matter to date making it difficult to resolve the issues surrounding gun control in the country to date.

The Lockean state of nature has been profound in reinforcing the Americans' view of gun ownership over the years. Thomas Jefferson's proclamation of life, liberty, and property as the inalienable rights of every American has been instrumental in reinforcing Americans' perception of gun ownership and the second amendment. Consequently, the right to bear arms emerged strongly from the participants' responses. The second amendment was perceived as anchoring the right to self-preservation and

security. As a result, the respondents noted that any regulations or legislations seeing to regulate guns in the country should also protect the fundamental rights of the people to bear guns as enshrined in the second amendment. This interpretation of the second amendment among the participants was different from the Supreme Court interpretation in 1873 following the Colfax Massacre that led to the death of more than 100 African Americans. In their ruling, the Supreme Court of the United States concluded that the right to bear arms is not in any way proclaimed by the constitution of the United States or in any way guaranteed by the second amendment. Instead, the court clarified that the second amendment was designed primarily to curtail the military powers of the federal government and that it does not in any way apply to the states of private individuals.

Based on the Supreme Court interpretation of the Second Amendment following the Colfax Massacre in 1873, the popular belief that the second amendment gives Americans the right to bear arms is politically motivated rather than anchored in the constitution. The theory of motivated reasoning assumes that people seek information to justify pre-existing beliefs (Bolsen & Palm, 2019). That is, people seek information to justify pre-existing opinions about a phenomenon. According to the theory of motivated reasoning, the motive of seeking out information falls in two broad classes: to seek accuracy goals and to achieve partisan outcomes. When the motive is to achieve accurate information, people tend to seek out relevant evidence that justifies the suitability of an ideology. Accuracy seekers tend to be non-partisan when seeking out information. However, when citizens are motivated to achieve partisan goals, they tend to be selective regarding the type and quality of information that they seek to consume. That is, they are

motivated to apply their reasoning capabilities only to seek and consume only information that justifies and defends prior conclusions. Unfortunately, political motivations often seek to achieve partisan political goals whereby the followers of a party tend to seek and consume information that justifies and defend the ideologies of the parties to which they are affiliated. It is because of these partisan views that individuals identify themselves with certain political parties and not others.

The NRA, through the Republican Party politicians, promotes both its merchandise and political agenda to the people using the simple equation: more guns, more freedom. When former NRA president Charlton Heston argued that freedom is not free and that anyone who wishes to take away their guns would only pry them out of their cold, dead hands (Horowitz & Anderson, 2009), he was advancing the theory that associates firearms to freedom. That is, anyone taking away their firearms equally takes away their freedom. This interpretation has grossly influenced the expansive reading of the second amendment in defense of freedom especially among the Republican Party supporters and NRA gun enthusiasts. In the same manner, the republican supporters who took part in this study perceived the second amendment as a law that defends the freedom of the private citizens.

In Rousseau's state of nature, the depth of freedom expressed by the republicans' interpretation of the second amendment has something in specific that stretches beyond the general meaning of freedom (Alberg, 2018). This interpretation of freedom, as Rousseau puts it, is the freedom from oppression or neglect by the government (Alberg, 2018). In their opinion, the unfettered access to guns is perceived as the main ingredient

to defending the individual rights from infringement either by the government's overreaching actions or aggression from other citizens facilitated by government's neglect of public security (Shklar & Shklar, 1985). This idea, which Horowitz and Anderson (2009) referred to as insurrectionism, forms the backdrop of the strong and activist ideology behind gun enthusiasm among the Republican Party supporters. For the insurrectionists, Horowitz and Anderson observed that weapons (guns) are symbols and tools of freedom. That is, the idea that one must always be prepared to confront aggression violently. Although insurrectionism is in sync with the worldview supporting the necessity of hostilities towards the public, immigration, or international institutions that intend to take away the rights and freedom to life, it is not necessary where government security is widespread as in the United States.

Respondents agreed on a host of measures to resolve the guns menace in the country. The themes that emerged from the responses included educating the American public to be responsible with the guns, strengthening the second amendment, restricting gun ownership to individuals who pass the specific set criteria, conducting psychological and background checks on the individuals seeking to buy guns, and strengthening federal and constitutional laws regulating gun laws. Most of these themes have emerged in a wide range of research and policy documents. The ban on possession of large-capacity ammunition clips carry more than 10 rounds has been in the public debate for long-time following instances of mass shooting in the United States (Rostron, 2018). Supporters of this approach argue that such clips are not suitable for hunting or self-defense but have

been designed for war and mass killings. However, there are others who have argued that the high-capacity ammunitions can be useful when one is attacked by mobs.

Education programs to achieve gun control in the United States tend to focus on three key areas: educating the public about guns, gangs, and violence. These programs focus on gun violence not from a criminal justice problem but from a public health hazard perspective. For instance, the NRA training counselors, through their instructors, conduct training programs on basic firearm handling which equip gun owners with safety handling and use measures to avoid accidental shooting. As a result, the strategies are directed to prevent gun violence before it occurs, identify effective policies and programs to control guns, and integrate the input of different organizations in sensitizing the public concerning guns and gun-related violence. While these programs largely focus on safety training, there is no evidence that safety training exercises would alter the behavior of rogue gun owners. Up to the time of publishing this study, there was no evidence from the literature suggesting that people who had been educated on gun safety were likely to be non-violent or use their guns effectively solely for self-protection or hunting. However, the work of researchers such as Rostron (2018), and Kangas and Calvert (2014) supported safety education and safe storage of guns and related lethal weapons thereby reducing accidental harm.

Calls for background checks and mental health checks prior to allowing the sale of a gun have risen in preference in the recent past with the increase in mass shootings. Background checks and mental health checks also emerged from the participants' proposals regarding the best strategies for controlling the proliferation of guns across the

United States. The participants in this study argued that these strategies would help to reduce the number of guns falling in the hands of dangerous and unauthorized persons. The checks, according to this study, are to prevent people with a history of violence and people who are living with mental illness from owning guns. Findings from this study are in sync with the literature on gun violence and mental health. Experts and politicians believe that health background checks can provide possible solution to the problem of gun violence in the country (Kangas & Calvert, 2014). It is now emerging that background checks can be effective in preventing gun violence by persons with history of mental health issues. However, it may be ineffective if the perpetrators are first offenders with the first onset of mental illness. Focusing on mental health and background checks alone therefore may not be solely effectively; additional measures are therefore necessary.

Background checks are largely designed to prevent convicted felons from accessing and using guns. Other category of the population targeted with the policy is prohibited possessors including minors, fugitives, substance users and abusers, dishonorably discharged military officials, people who renounced their U.S. citizenship, people with restraining orders, people who have been convicted of violent offenses and people who live in the United States illegally (Augustine, 2019). Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act of 1994 for instance imposes federal guidelines on background checks that licensed gun dealers can use when selling guns to the public (Augustine, 2019). However even this law does not apply for private sales of guns and transfer of ownerships such as when guns are given to one as a gift. These limitations have been

resolved through the adoption of universal background check laws. However, the checks are largely imperfect especially when people with hideous means hide their intentions to obtain guns. Studies, show that background checks and mental health checks, as suggested by the respondents in this study, has the potential of reducing the prevalence of gun-related homicides, and suicides by preventing dangerous persons from owning the weapons.

Limitations of the Study

Although there were no significant limitations that had the potential of threatening the trustworthiness and reliability of the findings presented in the current study, there were some challenges encountered in the process of conducting this study. Out of the anticipated 20 participants contacted to take part in this study, 10 were available at the time of this study. This limitation was treated as a case of missing data. Missing data in qualitative studies such as the current study occur in three main ways as described by Merriam & Tisdell (2015). The first occurrence can be because of participants rescinding the offer to participate in a study. This affects the response rate in a qualitative study. The other causes include questions left unanswered leading to missing data and the participants who cannot be reached in follow-ups. The main challenges of the missing data are varied and have different impacts on validity and reliability of the studies. For instance, missing data can lead to biased findings. However, biases can occur only when the people from who data is sought are systematically different. On the contrary, the participants in this study were drawn from a homogeneous population comprising exclusively of the supporters of the Republican Party who reside in South Florida and

voted in the 2016 presidential election. The criterion used in selecting the participants for the study therefore addressed the limitations imposed by systemic differences in the sample population. Secondly, missing data in research can also lead to inefficient statistical estimates because of inadequate information. Far from statistical analyses, this study adopted qualitative (thematic) approach in its analysis making the effects of inadequate statistical estimates due to limited data inconsequential to the current study. Lastly, missing data can increase the complexity of data analysis when statistical techniques are used since statistical procedures work accurately when each case presented has complete datasets. Since statistical analytical techniques were not used in this study, this limitation was also deemed inconsequential to the validity and reliability of the current study. Ultimately, data saturation was achieved with ten participants.

Recommendations

This study showed that there is critical common ground in the considerations of the supporters of the Republican Party in South Florida about legislations on gun control in the country is concerned. Overwhelmingly, participants agreed on areas such as background and mental checks to ensure that guns fall only into the hands of people who can use them responsibly and for the intended purposes such as hunting and self-defense. However, it has also been established that background and mental health checks can only be effective in people with histories of mental health issues or tainted backgrounds. Relying on the universal background evaluation provisions can help to address these challenges by enabling comprehensive checks in all gun holding scenarios. If implemented correctly, background and mental health screenings can help to prevent a lot

of preventable gun violence that characterize the American society at present. In addition, the participants shared that educating the public on responsible gun use would go a long way in preventing accidental and unauthorized usage of guns. For instance, public education programs focusing on gun storage can go a long way in preventing accidents that may occur because of poor storage or handling of guns. This study therefore recommended intensifying these education programs throughout the United States as an essential step towards addressing accidental use of guns and the possible effects it may have on the American society. Lastly, most of the participants cited numerous laws on gun control which vary significantly across various states throughout the US. The numerous laws were deemed inconsistent and deterrent to successful control of gun possession throughout the United States. Harmonizing these laws into a single, federally adopted, legislation will therefore provide a clear solution to the gun control legislation in the country. Although the second amendment exists to this extent, its interpretation has been fluid over the years rendering it incapable of addressing the guns menace in the country.

Implications for Positive Social Change

This study is deemed to have far-reaching implications on policy and research. Firearms use is one of the top causes of death in the United States In 2018; more than 39,740 deaths were because of firearms use with 61% of these deaths being because of suicide and 35.1% being as a result of homicide (RAND, 2021). Certainly no one across the political divide believes that this level of anger, sorrow and violence should be tolerated. However, there is a prolonged disagreement among the US citizens regarding

how the crimes should be mitigated. At the center of this disagreement are the policies to control gun ownership and use in the country. Coming up with an agreeable policy that is supported by both the Republicans and the Democrats can go a long way in solving the problem of gun violence currently witnessed across the country. The findings presented in this study can be used both at the state and federal levels to inform in the formulation of gun legislation. The long-term goal of this implication is to promote social security, safety, and peaceful coexistence among the American populace. Secondly, the methodology used in this study can be applied in other studies focusing on similar or related topics as the one covered in this study in the future. To aid transferability of the methodology, a vivid, step-by-step description of the methodological procedures used in data collection, analysis and presentation was provided. It is therefore easy for future researchers willing to use the methodological approaches used in this study to adapt them accurately, improve the weaknesses observed in the study and advance research on this subject matter or related topics.

Conclusion

This study has investigated how Republican Party affiliation influences the position of its supporters in South Florida towards federal firearm laws in the United States of America to find out if a common ground can be found on gun laws. The findings drawn from the study showed remarkable common ground opinions among the supporters of the Republican Party. Participants agreed that legislation focusing on background and mental health checks would be essential in preventing guns from landing into the hands of people who might use them to cause harm to themselves and to the

public. If executed effectively, these checks can go a long way in reducing the prevalence of gun violence in the country. The study also found out that other interventions such as educating the public on safe use and storage of guns were favored among the Republican Party supporters in an effort towards preventing accidental gun use, accidental fatalities and comorbidities resulting from such accidental use. The study found out that the laws on gun laws are varied across different states making it difficult to maintain consistent supervision on gun purchases and use across various states. Therefore, it was concluded that the participants' affiliation to the Republican Party had a significant influence in their perceptions about guns and gun control legislation in the United States. However, the common grounds among the party's supporters included the need for laws on background and mental health checks on all persons seeking to buy guns, harmonization of state laws on gun control into one federal law, and public education on safe gun use.

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Appendix A: Participants' Invitation

Hello this is Mi Punto De Vista/ Sabor Latino TV Online. I am your Host Ruthy Molina

Dear viewers:

I need volunteers for my doctoral research study. With your voluntary assistance and participation, it will assist me in this process with completing my doctoral degree.

The research is about impacting our communities and causing for social change. The research has no monetary compensation. Your input is invaluable. It will assist with determining if there is a common ground for passable legislation as it pertains to gun control.

If you are a SOUTH FLORIDA REPUBLICAN interested in participating, please contact me at XXXXXX for a participant questionnaire to see if you qualify to be a part of this study.

The study consists of a participant questionnaire which has qualifier questions for the study.

Should you qualify then you pass on to the individual interviews.

Ultimately you may even be asked to be a part of a focus group.

I look forward to hearing from you on this important project.

I greatly appreciate your support and participation.

Thank you so much for viewing me and Mi punto de vista.

Appendix B: Initial and Focus Group Semi Structured Interview Questions

1) How safe do you think your family could be, because of the following?

Neighborhood Watch
 Home Security System
 Security Agency
 Having a Dog
 Possession of a Firearm

2) Please state your level of agreement for the following statements

The federal law which requires background checks is a good thing
 Laws covering sale of guns should be made more strict
 Stricter gun laws will reduce violence and deaths
 There should be a limit on the number of guns a person can own
 Possession of guns should be allowed only if there is a viable safety concern
 Restriction on guns will reduce suicide rates

3) To prevent future deaths from mass shootings, would you prioritize federal action on mental health checks or gun policy

4) Do you think the following firearms should be banned?

5) Do you think a federal ban on certain firearms would make the U.S. safer or more dangerous?

6) Do you support or oppose setting a national minimum age to buy any firearm?

7) Do you think teachers and school officials carrying guns or armed guards as protection would make school much safer or more dangerous?

8) Do you favor or oppose for enacting all existing state gun laws or repealing them where they are currently in place for nationwide consistency and uniformity?

9) What do you think the second amendment to the U.S. constitution, i.e., “A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed,” mean?

10) In your opinion, please state what can be the solution to gun problem.