

# *Political Science*

## **Bringing Statistics to a Gun Fight**

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### **Introduction**

In his 1996 song titled *Politics, Religion, and Her*, country singer Sammy Kershaw hits on two topics that are the understood topics not to be discussed with friends. There has been no quicker way to ruin a friendship throughout history than to argue politics and religion. As the chorus of his song says "Politics can start a fight, Religion's hard to know who's right, And one more topic I won't touch..." His third topic is a little different, but in American society today there is another topic that leads to heated debate. Gun control is one of the most controversial topics in the news today.

Over the past year there has been an uncommon trend of random shootings across the country. Events like the horrors at the Sandy Hook Elementary School and the movie theatre in Colorado have made gun control one of the most talked about issues in our country. This paper will examine, on a state level and city level, the effects gun legislation has on an area. I will look at the number of laws a specific area has and compare that with the safety of the same area in an attempt to determine what, if anything makes people safe.

Gun control is a trending topic in America today. It has always been an issue of relative importance, but the recent attacks around the country in the past year have significantly upped the importance of the debate. The majority of America has some sort of an opinion on this issue. A 2013 Time Magazine and CNN poll showed that "55% of Americans support stricter gun control laws. 44% oppose stricter gun control laws (Time Magazine 2013: 32)." However, many people including politicians have very narrow minded views on the subject. This debate often gets heated very quickly because the opinions expressed are usually focused on one side or the other. There is a divide right down the middle with neither side willing to compromise. Gun control is not a new idea to American politicians. This has been an issue for a long time. Throughout American history, high-profile gun violence has focused the national spotlight on gun control. The December 14, 2012 tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School, Colorado movie theatre shooting and the deadliest school shooting to date at Virginia Polytechnic Institute are always followed by a public debate of gun safety and gun owners'

rights in America. But despite these debates there has been little response from Congress in the form of new federal gun control legislation. The last significant federal gun law was the “Public Safety and Recreational Firearms Use Protection Act, with a subtitle of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (Van Orden 2003).” It is more commonly known and referred to as the 1994 Assault Weapons Ban. It was passed five years before the Columbine High School shooting, and expired in 2004.

On January 16, 2013, President Obama held a press conference to announce his plan for changing the face of gun ownership in this country. Among his suggested initiatives are universal background checks for gun sales, the reinstatement and strengthening of the assault weapons ban, limiting ammunition magazines to a 10-round capacity, providing schools with resource officers and counselors, putting more police officers on the streets, establishing stronger punishments for gun trafficking, and offering more comprehensive insurance coverage for mental health. Some of the measures outlined in his speech the President intends to achieve through 23 executive actions, while he called on Congress to do its part to enact stricter gun control legislation (Wheaton: 2013). The following will be an overview of federal legislation related to gun control. President Obama has called for stricter federal gun laws to combat recent shooting rampages, but a review of recent state laws by *The Washington Times* shows “no discernible correlation between stricter rules and lower gun-crime rates in the states (Sherfinski 2013).” States that ranked high in terms of making records available to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System also tended to have tighter gun laws, but their gun-crime rates ranged widely. The same was true for states that ranked poorly on disclosure and were deemed to have much less stringent gun-possession laws. For example, New York, even before it approved the strictest gun-control measures in the country, was ranked “fourth among the states in strength of gun laws by the Brady Campaign to End Gun Violence, but was also in the top 10 in firearm homicide rates in 2011 (JAMA 2013).” Meanwhile, North Dakota was near the bottom in its firearm homicide, firearm robbery and firearm assault rates, but also had some of the “loosest gun laws and worst compliance with turning over mental health records to the background check system (JAMA 2013).” Analysts said the data underscore that there are no simple or easy broad answers to combating gun violence, which is a complex equation involving gun-ownership rates, how ready authorities are to prosecute gun crimes and how widely they ban ownership.

## History

The gun control legislation timeline begins with the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution being ratified in 1791 which states 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.” The next notable enactment occurred nearly a century later when the National Rifle Association was formed in 1871. It

was founded Union soldiers Colonel William C. Church and General George Wingate found the NRA to “promote and encourage rifle shooting on a scientific basis (NRA.org, history).” Civil War General Ambrose Burnside, who was also the former governor of Rhode Island and a U.S. Senator, serves as the organization’s first president.

The first piece of “gun limitation” legislation was introduced in the form of the “National Firearm Act in 1934 (Time Magazine 2013).” It was brought about by the lawlessness and rise of gangster culture during prohibition, President Franklin D. Roosevelt hoped this act would eliminate automatic-fire weapons like machine guns from America’s streets. Other firearms such as short-barreled shotguns and rifles, parts of guns like silencers, as well as other “gadget-type” firearms hidden in canes and such were also targeted. “All gun sales and gun manufacturers were slapped with a \$200 tax (no small amount for Americans in the middle in the Great Depression; that would be like a tax of \$2,525 today) on each firearm, and all buyers were required to fill out paperwork subject to Treasury Department approval (Time Magazine 2013).”

The next law comes a mere four years later in 1938. It is known as the “Federal Firearms Act (St. John’s Law Review 1939).” Congress aimed this law at those involved in selling and shipping firearms through interstate or foreign commerce channels. Anyone involved in the selling of firearms was required “to obtain a Federal Firearms License from the Secretary of Commerce. They were also required to record the names and addresses of everyone they sold guns to and were prohibited from selling to those people who were convicted of certain crimes or lacked a permit (St. John’s Law Review 1939).”

A few decades later came the “Gun Control Act” in 1968 (Time Magazine 2013).” The assassination of John F. Kennedy, who was killed by a mail-order gun that belonged to Lee Harvey Oswald, inspired this major revision to federal gun laws. The subsequent assassinations of Martin Luther King and presidential candidate Robert Kennedy fueled its quick passage. License requirements were “expanded to include more dealers, and more detailed record keeping was expected of them; handgun sales over state lines were restricted; the list of persons dealers could not sell to grew to include those convicted of felonies (with some exceptions), those found mentally incompetent, drug users and more. The act also defined persons who were banned from possessing firearms. The key element of this bill outlawed mail order sales of rifles and shotguns; Up until this law, mail order consumers only had to sign a statement that they were over 21 years of age for a handgun (18 for rifle or shotgun); it also detailed more persons who were banned from possessing certain guns, including drug users, and further restricted shotgun and rifles sales (Time Magazine 2013).” 1972 saw the formation of the “Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms. Enforcement of the Gun Control Act was given to the Department of the Treasury’s Alcohol and Tobacco Tax Division of the Internal Revenue Service (Allgov 2003).” The organization replaced “tax” with “firearms,”

nearly doubled in size, and became the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF).

In the year 1986 there were two laws put into effect. The first was "Law Enforcement Officers Protection Act which made it illegal for anyone to manufacture or import armor piercing ammunition, or 'cop-killer bullets,' which are capable of penetrating bulletproof clothing (Biaggi 1985)." The second was "Firearms Owners' Protection Act which eased restrictions on gun sellers and the sale of some guns. It also imposed additional penalties for persons using a firearm during certain crimes and persons with robbery or burglary convictions who are illegally shipping guns (NRA 2012)."

Finally in 1994 the most recent laws were passed they are known as the "Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act which imposed, on an interim basis, a five-day waiting period and background check before a licensed gun importer, but a manufacturer or dealer can sell or deliver a handgun to an unlicensed individual. It also required a new National Instant Criminal Background Check System, to be run by the FBI. The new background check system will apply to all firearms and will allow checks to be done over the phone or electronically with results returned immediately in most cases. The second law of 1994 was the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act (VanOrden 2003). Commonly referred to as the "Assault Weapons Ban," this bill banned the manufacture, possession, and importation of new semiautomatic assault weapons and large-capacity ammunition feeding devices (or magazines) for civilian use.

This list highlights the main laws that have been passed in the history of America that pertain to guns. It is not a comprehensive or complete list of every piece of legislation that involves gun control. However, they are some of the most debated and controversial laws. President Obama proposed a sweeping change to gun control laws earlier in 2013. In response to recent massacres, including the killing of 20 first graders in Newtown, Connecticut and 12 moviegoers in Aurora, Colorado he introduced proposals to tighten gun control laws. His plan includes universal background checks for gun sales, the reinstatement and strengthening of the assault weapons ban, limiting ammunition magazines to a 10-round capacity along with some other measures. The question everyone has that arises from his proposals is, "Will it work?"

This is where the controversy begins. Party loyalty and division between Democrats and Republicans on this issue and their basic respective ideologies result in controversial ideas that no one can seem to agree on. There are a lot of highly respected people that make outrageous statements in the heat of the moment which does nothing but build tension. It can be inferred fairly easily who will support the President's ideas when you know their party affiliation. However, it is sometimes confusing. So, to ease confusion, henceforth I will refer to them as gun rights activists and gun control activists. Gun rights activists will be the people who are against inputting more legislation and gun control activists will be

the group that supports more legislation. This will provide a clearer understanding on people's positions on the idea and hopefully remove any unwanted bias.

I will begin with the gun control activist's point of view. These will be the most basic and simply worded arguments to avoid confusion. More complex reasons will be addressed later. Arguments in favor of more restrictive gun laws are societal needs for reasonable gun control laws, the high rate of gun related violence and death, and that the Second Amendment does not provide for individual gun rights but for militia purposes.

### **Societal Needs for Reasonable Gun Control**

The federal, state and local governments enact laws to protect and defend the people and property of the United States. Proponents of more restrictive gun ownership laws contend that under regulation puts U.S. residents at unreasonable risk. A 1999 Harvard School of Public Health study revealed that "Americans feel less safe as more people in their community being to carry guns, and that 90% believe that 'regular' citizens should be prohibited from bringing guns into most public places, including stadiums, restaurants, hospitals, college campuses and places of worship (Hemenway 2011: 86)." U.S. residents have a right to reasonable protection from dangers, including danger from guns. Examples cited include the "2007 Virginia Tech shooting deaths of 32 students and teachers and the 1999 killings at Colorado's Columbine High School of 13 students and teachers as well as the Aurora Colorado movie theatre massacre and the Newton Connecticut Elementary School shooting in 2012"(Hemenway 2011: 71).

### **High Rate of Gun-Related Crime**

Americans favoring more restrictive gun ownership/use laws believe that such measures will reduce gun-related crime, homicide and suicide in the U.S. "About 80 million Americans, representing 50% of U.S homes, own 223 million guns, easily the highest private gun ownership rate of any country in the world. Gun use in the United States is associated with the majority of homicides and over half the suicide. More than 30,000 U.S. men, women and children die each year from gunshot wounds, the highest homicide rate from guns in the world. Of those 30,000 deaths, only about 1,500 are due to accidental shootings (Basken 2013: A3)". The Harvard 1999 study revealed most Americans believe that "U.S. gun violence and homicide would decrease by reducing the private ownership and use of guns (Hemenway 2011: 72).

## **Constitution Does Not Provide for Individual Gun Rights**

A common source of disagreement that this argument begins with is the interpretation of the constitution. "... nine federal appeals courts around the nation have adopted the collective rights view, opposing the notion that the amendment protects individual gun rights. The only exceptions are the Fifth Circuit, in New Orleans, and the District of Columbia Circuit,"(Urbina: 2008). For hundreds of years, the prevailing opinion of Constitutional scholars has been that the Second Amendment does not address private gun ownership rights, but only guarantees the collective right of states to maintain militias.

These are the basic arguments for more gun control legislation from gun control activists.

The following is the gun rights activist's point of view. Again, the arguments presented will be basic to avoid confusion and to establish basic understanding of positions on the issue. More complex reasons will be addressed later. Arguments in favor of less restrictive gun laws include individual resistance to tyranny is a civil right guaranteed by the Second Amendment, the right to self-defense, and the recreational use of guns.

### **Individual Resistance to Tyranny Is a Constitutional Right**

No one disputes that the intended purpose of the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is to empower U.S. residents to resist governmental tyranny. The controversy is whether that empowerment is intended to be on an individual or collective basis. "Holders of the individual rights position, which is considered the conservative stance, believe that the Second Amendment gives private gun ownership and use to individuals as a basic civil right to protection from government tyranny, such as the tyranny faced by the founders of the United States (Liptak: 2007)."

### **Self-Defense in Response to Crime and Violence**

Holders of the individual rights position believe that allowing increased private ownership and use of guns as self-protection is the effective response to controlling gun violence and homicide. The argument is if gun ownership is legally restricted, then all and only law-abiding Americans will be unarmed, and therefore would be the easy prey of criminals and law-breakers. Proponents of less restric-

tive gun laws cite a number of instances in which stringent new laws resulted in a dramatic increase, not decrease, in gun-related crimes and violence.

### **Recreational Use of Guns**

In many states, majority of citizens contend that restrictive gun ownership/use laws impede safe hunting and shooting, which to them are important cultural traditions and popular recreational pursuits. "For us, guns and hunting is a way of life," said Mr. Helms, the manager of Marstiller's Gun Shop in Morgantown, West Virginia (Urbina: 2008)." A study done by the National Institute of Justice found that the "most common motivation for owning firearms was recreation, including hunting and sport shooting."

#### ***These are the gun rights activist's basic arguments.***

The more complex differences between gun control activists and gun rights activists aren't always as simple to distinguish. When gun rights activists make their case against gun control in term papers, newspaper columns, internet message board postings and emails to friends and colleagues, as often as not they'll include numbers to support their argument that are the result of studies conducted by Dr. Gary Kleck. He is a Criminology Professor at Florida State University and probably the most cited individual by gun rights activists. He is known as the Criminologist whose self-defense research destroyed gun control arguments. He is one of the most commonly recognized experts in this field.

In his 1997 book, *Targeting Guns*, Kleck revealed that he is a member of several liberal organizations, including the American Civil Liberties Union, Amnesty International, and Democrats 2000. He is registered as an active Democrat and has contributed financially to the campaigns of Democrat political candidates. He is not a member of the National Rifle Association, or any other pro-gun organization. Yet Kleck's 1993 study on guns and their use in self-defense proved to be one of the most damaging arguments against restricted gun rights as the gun control movement reached its peak in American politics. Kleck surveyed 2,000 households across the nation, and then examined the data to reach his findings. In the process, he managed to shatter many previous survey claims and found that guns are used far more often for self-defense than they are used to commit crimes. His findings were unprecedented and invaluable to the gun rights argument. He found that "For every use of a gun to commit a crime, there are three to four cases of guns being used in self-defense of a crime. Assault and robbery rates

are lower when victims are armed with a gun. A gun is used in self-defense to protect its owner from crime 2.5 million times per year, an average of once every 13 seconds. Fifteen percent of the gun defenders interviewed believed someone would have died if they had not been armed. If true, that's an average of one life saved due to firearm self-defense every 1.3 minutes. In nearly 75% of the cases, the victim did not know his attackers. In nearly 50% of the cases, he faced at least two attackers and in nearly 25% of the cases, there were three or more attackers. A quarter of the incidents of self-defense occurred away from the home (Kleck and Gertz: 1995).” Kleck’s National Self-Defense Survey findings provided a strong argument for concealed carry laws and keeping guns in the home for self-defense purposes. It also provided a counter argument to other surveys at the time which claimed that keeping guns for the purpose of self-defense was inadvisable due to their overall danger to the gun owner and his family members. This information is the basis for a lot of gun rights activist’s arguments. They claim that this study provides statistical data that more gun legislation is unnecessary.

Gun control activists respond to this with studies such as *Your Brain Under Fire* by Amanda Ripley in a recent *Time Magazine* article. The article is about a retired police officer who takes you through an incident he responded to that required him to use his gun. It explains what exactly happens to your brain during the moments of a gun fight. The article begins with two officers knocking on the door of a condominium with a robbery suspect inside. There is no answer until the door bursts open and a pistol emerges. The two officers jump out of the way and struggle to get to safety. Throughout the incident the officer begins to say things that appear strange. He describes the situation as dream-like. “This happens for most people in life-or-death situations, his brain began to manipulate his perception of time, slowing down the motion as he fled down the corridor. ‘The hallway looked like one of those dreams where it is just really, really long,’ he says. Later he would guess that it was 250 feet long; it was really 79 feet (Ripley 2013: 40).”

The officer is an instructor at the Police Academy and very well trained. He goes on to describe the situation further. “In a flash, his brain reprioritized, shifting finite resources to the cause of survival. As he ran, rounds bursting behind him ‘like cannon shots,’ he suddenly fell flat on his face in the carpeted hallway, tearing skin off his hands and knees (Ripley 2013: 40).” The story concludes with the suspect running out of bullets and surrendering, being arrested, and both officers surviving. The point of the story, and what gun control activists say is that police officers aren’t always trained well enough to respond correctly to those situations, so why would it benefit ordinary citizens that have no training to be armed and capable of deadly force?

This paper will look at a number of things related to gun control and its importance in our society today. Gun control legislation is one of the most talked about topics in our country today. There are endless statistics all over the media that support both sides of the argument. This makes knowing what is factual and

what is possibly manipulated statistics extremely difficult. To determine what is accurate and what is not, research must be done to uncover the unbiased truth.

A theory is defined as a set of empirical generalizations about a topic (Monroe 2000: 17). My theory is that gun legislation has a direct correlation with the safety of an area. During this study I will explore this idea on a state and city level. For this study there are two variables. An independent variable is defined as those presumed in the theory underlying the hypothesis to be the cause while the dependent variable is defined as the effect (Monroe 2000:19). My independent variable is the level of restrictiveness in an area. The level of restrictiveness is defined by the number and/ or types of gun control laws in the respective area. My dependent variable is the level of safety in the corresponding area. The level of safety is defined by the crime rates pertaining to gun crime and violent crime in each corresponding area. A hypothesis is defined as an empirical statement derived from a theory (Monroe 2000:18). Based on this, I hypothesize that the greater the number of gun laws an area has, the greater the resulting effect will be on the crime rate of a particular area. Finally, my null hypothesis is the level of restriction on guns does not have a truly significant impact on crime rates. Due to the quantity of research that is being examined in this study, I will divide it into two parts: state level analysis and city level Analysis.

There is a lot of support from each side of the argument to support my theory and hypothesis. Gun control activists would argue that the more gun laws an area has, the safer that area will be. Gun rights activists would counter with examples like Chicago and their restrictive gun laws and the lack of safety the city has. So which one is it? Do gun laws actually affect the safety of an area?

#### Research Design

For this study I looked at things as straightforward as possible. This topic often results in biased studies and manipulated statistics that are bent to say what the author wants them to say. As previously stated, for this study I divided the information into two parts: state level analysis and city level analysis.

The state level analysis is a comprehensive list of all 50 states in the United States. The study began by examining each states level of restrictiveness on guns. The Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting (WISQAR) have a ranking of this. They rank the states from one to fifty based on the number of gun laws that the state has and their overall restrictiveness towards guns. There is a lot that goes into their ranking of states. They score each state on a scale of 1 to 28. The states respective rankings come from five different categories. First is the firearm trafficking which includes laws that pertain to gun dealer regulations, bulk purchases, gun identification, and reporting of lost or stolen guns. The second category is the strength of the Brady background checks. Laws examined in this category are related to universal background checks, gun shows, permit to purchase, and ammunition. The third category is about child safety. This includes regulations about childproof handguns, child safety locks, child access, and juvenile handgun pur-

chases. The next category is about regulating military-style assault weapons and if they are banned or not. The final category includes laws about guns in public places. Points are earned by restricting guns in the workplace, restricting guns on college campuses, restricting concealed-carry permits, and local communities following the state laws. The states were scored on these requirements then ranked one through fifty. WISQAR also included firearm fatality rates for each state. They were not ranked, but simply listed with their corresponding state.

Data was obtained from the U.S. Department of Justice on suicide rates and homicide rates. These were important because the WISQAR study had data on firearm fatalities which included suicide and homicide rates and a comparison was needed. Data was also obtained from the United States Peace Index. This source provided a list of the top 100 most dangerous cities in the country as well as a list of the top 100 safest cities in the United States. The only requirement was to be a city with a population over 25,000 people. The purpose of looking at these cities was to see which states had a lot of dangerous cities and to compare that with the WISQAR ranking. This would simply provide another way to help determine if the number laws had an effect on the safety of the state.

All of the data used in this study is the most up to date that I could find. The WISQAR state rankings were based on current laws and their firearm fatalities, suicide rates, and homicide rates were an average from 2007- 2010 per 100,000 people. The United States Peace Index data came from 2011.

The state level analysis data focuses on three cities from around the country. The three cities are Kennesaw Georgia, Port Chester New York, and La Porte Texas. To make the study fair, three cities were compared that had as close to the same demographics as possible. Kennesaw has a population of 30,196 with a median household income of \$59,196 and is a suburb of Atlanta. Port Chester Village has a population of 29,967 with a median household income of \$54,649 and is a suburb of New York City. La Porte has a population of 33,736 with a median household income of \$56,522 per year. All of this came from a 2010 survey on a website called CityRanking.com. The website has data for almost every city in the country including crime rates. Their crime rate data comes from the FBI Report to Offenses Known to Law Enforcement. This data will be displayed in a chart later. These cities were chosen because of their population, median household income, location near a major city, and their differing gun control legislation which will also be addressed later.

For the city level analysis data was used from CityRanking.com as well as a website called City-Data.com. Their information is from 2011 and includes crime rates and an overall crime index rating for each city. A chart with this will also be displayed later.

## Results

To determine if the level of restrictiveness on guns in an area had an effect on that area's safety, I tested the data to determine if there was a statistically

significant correlation between the variables. The test that was run was a simple Pearson Correlation test. A Pearson Correlation test is a simple side by side comparison that is calculated to determine the correlation value between one variable and another. "It is a measure of association, that is, of the strength of the relationship (Monroe 2000: 144)."

The first test I ran was the comparison between the WISQAR rankings (number of laws in each state) and the firearm fatality rate (per 100,000 people in the same state).

### State level analysis

Correlations

		WISQAR (ranking by number of laws) 1= most # of laws 50= least #of laws	Firearm Fatalities per 100,000 people (average 2007-2010)
WISQAR(ranking by number of laws) 1= most # of laws 50= least #of laws	Pearson Correlation	1	.624**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	50	50
Firearm Fatalities per 100,000 people (average 2007-2010)	Pearson Correlation	.624**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	50	50

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

This table shows the rankings and the correlation. In the first column it has the one to fifty ranking. The one represents the state with the highest level of restrictiveness and the fifty is the lowest level based on the aforementioned criteria. This table shows a positive correlation between the variables. This means that based on this data the states with a higher level of restrictiveness have a lower firearm fatality rate.

There is more to be investigated however. While researching I came across many firearm fatality rates. What the majority of them do not tell you is that they include suicide by firearm fatalities. Therefore the next logical thing to do was to determine how much of a correlation the WISQAR rankings had with suicide rates in each state.

## Correlations

		WISQAR (ranking by number of laws) 1= most # of laws 50= least #of laws	Suicide by firearm per 100,000 (average 2007-2010)
WISQAR(ranking by number of laws) 1= most # of laws 50= least #of laws	Pearson Correlation	1	.725**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	50	50
Suicide by firearm per 100,000 (average 2007- 2010)	Pearson Correlation	.725**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	50	50

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

This is one of the most significant findings. Everything in the first column is ranked the same as in the previous table and after running the Pearson Correlation test this is what resulted. The table shows that there is a positive correlation between the levels of restrictiveness suicide by firearm rates. This means that the states with the more restriction have lower suicide rates.

There is still more to be investigated though. If the suicide rates have such a strong correlation what does that mean for the homicide rates? After all, that is the other type of death by firearm (except for accidental) and is most likely what people really care about when talking about firearm fatalities. This was the next test to be run.

## Correlations

		WISQAR (ranking by number of laws) 1= most # of laws 50= least #of laws	Homicide by firearm per 100,000 (average 2007-2010)
WISQAR(ranking by number of laws) 1= most # of laws 50= least #of laws	Pearson Correlation	1	.119
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.410
	N	50	50
Homicide by firearm per 100,000 (average 2007- 2010)	Pearson Correlation	.119	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.410	
	N	50	50

Once again the Pearson Correlation test is used. The same WISQAR ranking is used and this time is compared against the homicide by firearm fatality rate. The results are very interesting. They show that there is no correlation between the

level of restrictiveness and the homicide rate of the corresponding state.

The final test that was done for state level analysis was to compare the WISQAR data with the data from the United States Peace Index. This data told me the top 100 most dangerous cities and the top 100 safest cities in the United States. I took those cities and tallied them to their respective states. I then ranked the states one to fifty and compared them to the WISQAR data.

**Correlations**

		WISQAR (ranking by number of laws) 1= most # of laws 50= least #of laws	Safest states (United States Peace Index) 1= most safe 50= least safe
WISQAR(ranking by number of laws) 1= most # of laws 50= least #of laws	Pearson Correlation	1	.173
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.230
	N	50	50
Safest states(United States Peace Index) 1= most safe 50= least safe	Pearson Correlation	.173	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.230	
	N	50	50

This test also turned up with no correlation between the two variables. This told me that the level of restrictiveness, as ranked by WISQAR, did not necessarily result in a safer state.

**City level analysis**

The next part of the results comes from the city level analysis. I compared Kennesaw Georgia, Port Chester Village New York, and La Porte Texas.

Kennesaw, Georgia is commonly known as "Gun Town USA". They passed a bill in 1982 where citizens voted and unanimously passed an ordinance requiring each head of household to own and maintain a gun. This drastic measure was done in response to the town of Morton Grove, Illinois adopting a total handgun ban. Since then, despite dire predictions of "Wild West" showdowns and increased violence and accidents, not a single resident had been involved in a fatal shooting.

The crime rate initially plummeted for several years after the passage of the ordinance, with the 2005 per capita crime rate actually significantly lower than it was in 1981, the year before passage of the law. Prior to enactment of the law, Kennesaw had a population of just 5,242 but a crime rate significantly higher (4,332 per 100,000) than the national average (3,899 per 100,000). Crime statistics from 2005 show the rate at 2,027 per 100,000 with the population then being 28,617(City- Data.com)."

By comparison, the population of Morton Grove, the first city in Illinois to adopt a gun ban for anyone other than police officers, has actually dropped

slightly and stands at “22,202, according to 2005 statistics. In 2011 it was 23,847 (Violence Policy Center).” More significantly, perhaps, the city’s crime rate increased by “15.7 percent immediately after the gun ban, even though the overall crime rate in Cook County (the county Morton Grove is in) rose only 3 percent. Today, by comparison, the township’s crime rate stands at 2,268 per 100,000 (Violence Policy Center 2011).” I chose not to include Morton Grove in the data because its population is too low and median household income is higher than what is being analyzed.

What I am looking for in this study is if Kennesaw is a fluke society, or if cities with less restrictive gun laws are safer in general. This is the data that I uncovered.

2 Kennesaw Georgia Crime Statistics Population- 30,196			Port Chester Village New York Crime Statistics Population 28,967		La Porte Texas Crime Statistics Population- 33,736 (2010)		
3							
4	Aggravated Assault	13		21		27	
5	Arson	0		0		7	
6	Burglary	110		92		165	
7	Forcible Rape	2		2		6	
8	Larceny and Theft	394		558		487	
9	Motor Vehicle Theft	22		28		54	
10	Murder and manslaughter	0		0		0	
11	Robbery	5		28		14	
12	Crime Rate (Total Incidents)	541		758		759	
13	Property Crime	526		678		706	
14	Violent Crime	20		51		47	
15	Median Household Income	59,345		54,649		56,522	
16							
17 Kennesaw Georgia Crime Stats (2011) CI Per 100,000			Port Chester Village Crime Stats (2011) City-Data.com Per 100,000		La Porte TX Crime Statistics (2011) City-Per 100,000		
18							
19	Murders	0	0	1	3.4	0	0
20	Rapes	0	0	2	6.9	18	52.2
21	Robberies	6	19.9	45	154.7	10	29
22	Assaults	15	49.7	29	99.7	18	52.1
23	Burglaries	121	401	85	292.1	152	440.4
24	Thefts	425	1408.5	740	2543.2	441	1277.9
25	Auto Thefts	25	82.9	57	185.9	49	142
26	Arson	0	0	0	0	5	14.5
27	Crime Index- US Average is 30:	111		218.5		162.1	

As mentioned before, the three cities in the study are all relatively close in median income, population, and location to a major city. Port Chester Village is the most restrictive of the three, while La Porte is less restrictive, and Kennesaw is the least restrictive. The chart is divided into two “mini-studies”. The first has data that comes from the FBI Report to Offenses Known to Law Enforcement from the year 2010. The most important numbers in the first part of the study are the violent crime statistics. Kennesaw reported just 20 violent crimes in 2011, while Port Chester had 51, and La Porte had 47. In violent crime there seems to be a significant difference. However when the actual crime rate (total incidents) is examined there is not much difference. Kennesaw has almost 200 crimes a year less than the other two. There is also little difference in the property crime rate.

The most important number to focus on in the second part is the Crime Index row. The information for this entire section came from the website City-data.com including the Crime Index. The Crime Index is the websites way of calculating all of the crimes (violent and property) in a city and scoring them. The national average is 301. Kennesaw received a score of 111. Port Chester Village got a 218.5. La Porte got a 162.1. Again Kennesaw is the lowest and a look at the reasoning

behind the scoring shows why. The other two have much higher violent crime statistics (murders, rapes and robberies) in 2011.

### **Analysis**

This study involved a lot of different data and comparing it to many different things. So what does it all mean? Like the rest of this study I will divide this into two parts; first the state level analysis. My original theory was that gun legislation has a direct correlation with the safety of an area. The data does not support or deny the theory. In fact, it is mixed. It is unquestionable that the data shows a correlation between the level of restrictiveness and the overall firearm fatality rate and suicide rate. However the data is misleading. It shows that there is not a correlation between the level of restrictiveness and the homicide rate and the rate of safe cities in a state. The data is overall inconclusive. The inconclusiveness only provides for more reason for debate. One of the most interesting things I found in this study was that most firearm fatality rates include suicides by firearm. I am not contending that it should not be included; however when it accounts for such a great portion of the fatalities, that information should be disclosed up front. It causes misleading data on a topic that is already difficult to discern what truth is and what is not.

I hypothesized that the greater the number of gun laws an area has, the greater the resulting effect will be on the crime rate of a particular area. This also was not confirmed. Certainly on an individual state by state basis, one could find examples of this. But, overall the data proved to be inconclusive on this as well. There are individual cases that support the hypothesis as well as some that would turn the hypothesis around to show that the less gun laws an area has the greater the effect will be on that area's crime rate.

My null hypothesis was the level of restriction on guns does not have a truly significant impact on crime rates. This turned out to be true. Although the data was inconclusive it did show that the level of restriction on guns does not have a truly significant impact on crime rates.

The city level analysis turned out to be just as inconclusive. The data did not suggest that increased restrictions on guns would increase or decrease crime rates. The only conclusive piece of information that came from the city data was that Kennesaw, Georgia is somewhat of a fluke in regard to their extremely low levels of crime. From this study it cannot be concluded that less restrictions on guns in a particular city will result in lower crime rates.

Both levels of analysis tell the same story. They both say that more gun laws will not lower crime rates. They both say that less gun laws will not lower crime rates either. That leads to the next question. With all of these awful events happening across our country, what can be done if legislation is not the answer?

### **Conclusion**

This study has shown that an increased level of restrictiveness in gun

control legislation does not result in a safer area. It has also shown that lesser restrictive gun laws do not result in a safer area either. To have a successful solution to the issue of guns in America today that will have a long term impact, not just an immediate impact that goes away, there must be common ground established. There is no way that gun control activists would allow gun laws to be dropped to the level of somewhere like Kennesaw across the country. At the same time the gun right's activists will not allow gun rights to be infringed upon in any way. There must be a compromise reached that satisfies both sides as much as possible.

Dr. Don B. Kates Jr. offers an interesting insight to the issue. In his study titled *Gun Control: A Realistic Assessment*, he analyzes from every angle the effects of gun control. His answer is simple. "The U.S. already has some 20,000 federal, state and local gun laws which cover almost every approach to achieving even the inherently limited benefits gun control offer by way of reducing crime. Though I have offered suggestions for fine-tuning those laws, the real problem lies not in the scope or precise provisions of current controls, but in the lack of consistent enforcement and resources for enforcement. The premier study of gun law enforcement concludes: It is very possible that, if gun laws do potentially reduce gun-related crime, the present laws are all that is needed if they are enforced. What good would stronger laws do when the court have demonstrated that they will not enforce them? (Kates: 1990)." He goes on later to summarize his findings. "The lack of resources needed to prosecute and incapacitate by long incarceration felons who are caught with guns before they commit heinous crimes, destroys gun controls' potential for preventing those crimes (Kates: 1990)."

What is truly interesting about Dr. Kates interpretation of the issue is that it was written more than 20 years ago. This issue has been around for a long time, and the solution is known. So why has nothing changed? Why is the question still, "Do we need more laws" when the obvious answer is no? Dr. Kates was unquestionably right in his assertion that the laws are under enforced because law enforcement is under resourced. However, there is another reason for why the pattern of gun crime never seems to have a definitive change.

In his book, *Bowling Alone* Robert Putnam examines rather rapid decline in our societies' civil engagement in the last quarter century. Putnam emphasizes the importance of a strong and active society for growth and development in a democracy. The reoccurring theme that he harps on is the term "social capital". "Social capital' is to some extent merely new language for a very old debate in American intellectual circles (Putnam 2000: 24)." He argues that life in American communities has become very different at the beginning of the twenty first century than it was in the mid twentieth century. He supports his argument with countless examples from surveys that tell the tale of the "breakdown of community (Putnam 2000: 25)." The issue of community breakdown is of the utmost importance. Without further social development Americans could deteriorate our once strong, socially engaged society down to an individualistic democracy which

would ultimately not work.

Putnam uses both a qualitative and a quantitative approach to his argument. He provides a plethora of examples by asking a series of questions. "Are club meetings really less crowded today than yesterday, or does it just seem so? Do we really know our neighbors less well than our parents did, or is our childhood recollection of neighborhood barbecues suffused with a golden glow of wishful reminiscence? League bowling may be passé, but how about softball and soccer? Are strangers less trustworthy now? (Putnam 2000: 26)." He has great points, and raises some valid arguments. But what is the point of having the sense of togetherness that he is referring to. A great example he uses are neighborhood watch groups. Neighborhood watch groups serve many purposes. They can be a deterrent to crime obviously, but they can serve a greater purpose. They give people a chance to feel involved on a personal level where their voice actually matters. People like to feel like they matter and are part of something that is important. Putnam tells us that there has been an increase in the number of neighborhood watch groups in recent years and that they "often have an immediate impact in reducing crime (Putnam 2000: 107)." Crime watch groups are everywhere. Many neighborhoods have signs at their entrances boasting of a neighborhood watch group. The sign gives some people a sense of security and belonging. For others however it is not enough. "A 1998 Department of Justice survey of twelve cities nationwide found that 11 percent of all residents had ever attended a neighborhood watch meeting to help protect themselves from a crime (6 percent in the last year), as compared to 14 percent who kept a weapon at home, 15 percent who owned a guard dog, and 41 percent who installed extra locks. In short, we invest more in guns, dogs, and locks than in social capital for crime defense (Putnam 2000: 107)." This is probably one of the main reasons that a neighborhood watch loses backing after the initial onslaught of support.

Why is a neighborhood watch even necessary? People are supposed to be trustworthy and kind to their neighbors. Property crime is not something that should be committed in the safety of a neighborhood. One of Putnam's theories about the lack of social capital is that it has led to less trustworthy people. He thinks that a potential measurement for how trustworthy people is the national crime rate. He also acknowledges the fact that the crime rate has other factors as well, but offers it as a point of measurement nonetheless. "Murder rates are generally accepted as the most reliable index of the incidence of crime, the least susceptible to distortion from one jurisdiction to another (Putnam 2000: 308)." He shows a correlation between the number of murders and the level of social capital. He acknowledges that there are many reasons why certain states have a low homicide rate. These reasons include the economic wealth of the state, education levels, number of urban areas versus rural and the median level of income across the state. "But further analysis, which takes account of these and other factors, finds that the relationship between social capital and safe streets is

real. In fact, social capital is about as important as poverty, urbanism, and racial composition as a determinant of homicide prevalence. Surprisingly, social capital is more important than a state's education level, rate of single-parent households, and income inequality in predicting the number of murders per capita during the 1980-95 period. Intriguingly, this correlation remains strong when we control for statewide levels of fear about crime; that unexpected fact implies that the casual arrow runs, at least in part from social capital to crime (Putnam 2000: 308-309).” This relates back to the neighborhood watch idea. If the level of social capital was higher, the fear of crime would be lowered and the actual crime rate (in theory) would be lower.

This can be connected with Kates' theory as well. He claims that there is a lack of enforcement of the laws. Putnam says that social capital is too low. Therefore if people participated more in their communities, like in a neighborhood watch committee, the social capital level would be raised along with the chances of crime being stopped. Granted, the neighborhood watch committees do not have the authority to arrest anyone, but their presence would deter crime from that area because they have direct contact with the local police department. We do not need more legislation concerning gun control laws. We need people to be involved in their community. Another way that the Putnam's ideas can be connected is related to the suicide numbers. Higher social capital could help in keeping suicide rates down. Most people are dealing with severe depression problems at the point of suicide. If they were more involved in the community people would be able to help their depression. Also if social capital was higher, people with mental health issues would be noticed more. This way, instead of relying on congress to simply enact more laws to control these people, a higher social capital rate would get the mentally ill noticed and helped more which would keep them from getting their hands on weapons. The responsibility of a safe society cannot solely be placed on legislation congress and the president pass. Citizens must help also.

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