

Do stricter gun
control laws reduce
crime rate
criminology essay



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As mentioned earlier, the state of Illinois is well-known for its attitudes towards gun ownership. Chicago, IL, has one of the strictest state gun control laws. “ The law makes no ifs ands or butts about it. Due to the unfortunate rate of violent crime in Chicago and surrounding suburbs, weapons charges are prosecuted the fullest extent of the law” (Law Offices of M. Fakhoury, 2012). Skokie is a village located in Cook County, one of the biggest and most populous suburban areas of Chicago, whose residents are also required to have a Firearm Owners Identification, in case they possess a firearm at home or carry it (Law Offices of M. Fakhoury, 2012). Yet, one of the biggest controversies surrounding Chicago is that, despite the presence of strict gun control laws, the state remains one of the biggest suppliers of firearms that are later recovered in crimes. Between 2008 and 2012, the police detected 1, 375 guns used in Chicago crimes within a year after they had been purchased (Main, 2012). 58% of all guns recovered in Chicago crimes were found to have been bought somewhere in Illinois (Main, 2012). The last time the police organized stings on the gun stores in Chicago suburbs at the end of the 1990s: more often than not, police professionals admit that persecuting gun store owners is extremely problematic (Main, 2012).

This project will involve the analysis of individual attitudes towards gun control laws and their effectiveness in two suburban villages: Skokie of Cook County and Carbon Hill, Grundy County. Both territories are included in the Chicago metropolitan area and both are bound to comply with the requirements of the state gun control laws. However, Skokie remains one of the central players in the state’s pursuit of illegal gun owners and suppliers, against Carbon Hill that is rightly considered as one of the smallest and least

populous suburban areas in Chicago. This project will compare the attitudes and perceptions of the gun shop owners in the two suburban areas in terms of the effectiveness of gun control laws in reducing crime rates.

Literature Review

The current state of literature does not provide too much information regarding the relationship between gun control laws and the rates of crime. However, the existing theoretical and empirical gaps confirm the relevance of the proposed study. Numerous studies of gun control laws have been conducted in the Chicago area, mainly because the state has one of the best systems of gun ownership control and imposes severe limitations on the ownership and use of firearms on its territory. To a large extent, the question of gun control and its potential impacts on crime rates is extremely relevant, given that gun ownership in the United States is increasingly concentrated (Cook, Ludwig & Samaha, 2009). Cook et al. (2009) offer the results of a detailed statistical analysis, which shows that, in 2009, between 200 and 250 million firearms were held in private calculation in the U. S. Simply stated, there were enough firearms for every adult to possess (Cook et al., 2009). Simultaneously, three fourths of American adults did not possess firearms at that time, meaning that most adults who have one gun also own many (Cook et al., 2009). In 1994, 75% of all firearms were owned by citizens with four or more officially registered guns (Cook et al., 2009). Clearly, these patterns of gun ownership continue to persist over time. These gun ownership patterns vary by region and geographical area: for instance, village and small town residents are much more likely to own a gun than the residents of large cities and communities (Cook et al., 2009). This in part justifies the choice of

the two suburban areas for the proposed study. Cook et al. (2009) also suggest that gun owners are more likely to have a criminal record than their neighbors who do not have any gun. Whether gun ownership results in higher crime rates or vice versa is still one of the most controversial problems facing law enforcement in the U. S.

Cook et al. (2009) claim that the prevailing majority of gun owners in America gets their firearms from licensed dealers, but the rates of illegal gun acquisitions remain surprisingly high. Almost one half of all gun transactions involving unauthorized dealers accounts for the guns that are later used in crime (Cook et al., 2009). Meanwhile, the rates of gun-related mortality steadily decline, although their rates are still higher than they used to be in the 1950s (Cook et al., 2009).

As of today, the United States has a well-developed system of gun control laws, although the federal “ gun regulation is almost entirely a product of legislation rather than rulemaking processes in administrative agencies” (Cook et al., 2009, p. 9). The principal types of gun control law in America include: (1) interstate access restrictions; (2) gun design restrictions and laws; (3) gun possession and use control; (4) gun regulations that assist in solving particular gun-related crime and regulate record keeping; and (5) mass tort litigation (Cook et al., 2009). Chicago and the entire state of Illinois have focused on the gun possession and use laws, which specify whether or not (and how) guns are to be carried in public. At present, only Alaska and Vermont do not place any restrictions on gun access and use (Cook et al., 2009). Certain states also try to regulate the principles of gun storage: since

2005, all handguns obtained from licensed dealers have come equipped with a device for secure storage (Cook et al., 2009).

In this context, Rosengart, Cummings, Heagerty, Maier and Rivara (2005) offer a different typology of gun control laws: (1) shall issue laws that permit individuals to carry a concealed weapon; (2) laws and regulations that limit the minimum age for purchasing handguns; (3) laws that limit the minimum age for handgun possession; (4) laws that limit the frequency of handgun purchase (for example, no more than one gun per month); and (5) junk gun laws that place a ban on selling cheaply constructed handguns.

Regardless of the typology used, evidently, different types of gun control laws will have different impacts on crime rates. Rosengart et al. (2005) explore firearm mortality in all 50 states, as well as the District of Columbia, and discovered that the presence of the so-called “shall issue” laws increased the rates of firearm homicides and deaths, whereas no particular type of law was associated with a statistically significant decrease in firearm and total homicides. No law was found to reduce the rates of firearm suicides (Rosengart et al., 2005). These results suggest that the relationship between gun control laws and crime rates is non-linear and involves numerous factors that mediate and moderate this relationship.

These results were also echoed in the study conducted by Kovandzic, Schaffer and Kleck (2005), who found that the correlation between gun prevalence and crime rates did not reflect a causal relationship. Kovandzic et al. (2005) claim that mis-measurement of gun levels, reverse causality, and confounding variables make it difficult to accurately estimate the exact impacts of gun control laws on crime rates. These factors also reduce and

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even reverse the direction of the relationship between gun control legislation and the rates of firearm homicides/ deaths (Kovandzic et al., 2005). Actually, and Hahn et al. (2005) confirm this fact, the current body of research and evidence is insufficient to confirm that gun control laws positively affect and help reduce the rates of crime. Studies that are available to readers display considerable methodological and empirical limitations. Among the major problems of the current research is consistent underreporting of homicide victims to law enforcement agencies and the FBI (Hahn et al., 2005). Studies that focused on the analysis of firearm bans and their effectiveness in crime deterrence reached inconsistent results (Hahn et al., 2005). Nonetheless, certain researchers confirm the validity of gun control laws and their potential contribution to reducing the rates of firearm crimes.

Mokan and Tekin (2006) analyzed the effects of gun availability on juvenile crime, including theft, robbery, burglary, and property damage. After controlling for the most essential individual and family characteristics, the researchers found that the presence of a gun at home was directly related to the tendency to commit crimes by juveniles (Mokan & Tekin, 2006).

Simultaneously, Mokan and Tekin (2006) found no evidence that gun possession and use reduced the rates and risks of citizen victimization. The fact that the researchers used a nationally representative sample of young people suggests that the results of their study can be easily generalized to the entire U. S. population, but these results alone cannot confirm the relevance and effectiveness of gun control laws. Even if carrying firearms is the core factor of gun crimes in home and public locations (Koper & Mayo-Wilson, 2006), the central question is whether gun control laws are strong

enough to keep citizens from owning firearms. Another question is whether not owning a gun is a more effective measure of crime deterrence than owning one. All these questions require accurate evidence-based answers, and the proposed study does have the potential to shed light on the controversial relationship between gun control and gun crime.

Several researchers highlight the problems and controversies that follow the implementation of gun control laws and regulations. Ludwig (2005) mentions the difficulty balancing the crime control needs with the need to protect citizens' civil liberties. The crime control-civil liberties tradeoff is an inseparable component of all gun control laws (Ludwig, 2005). Ludwig (2005) also writes that widespread gun ownership can be both beneficial and detrimental to public safety, and it is more likely that the latter effect will dominate. Another problem surrounding gun control laws is that of underground gun markets: Cook, Ludwig, Venkatesh, and Braga (2006) explored this problem in detail. Although illegal markets for gun dealers and customers are rather scarce, illegal gun trading opportunities are enough to satisfy the growing demand for firearms at the state level.

Unfortunately, measuring the effectiveness of gun control is an extremely complicated task. Moorhouse and Wanner (2006) mention two major problems encountered by researchers measuring the degree of gun control and crime rates. First, there is no single instrument for measuring gun control, since gun control is a broad term encompassing numerous meanings and concepts, from laws that prohibit gun ownership to the mandatory provision of gun safety locks (Moorhouse & Wanner, 2006). Actually, the diversity of legal gun control forms and requirements were also mentioned <https://assignbuster.com/do-stricter-gun-control-laws-reduce-crime-rate-criminology-essay/>

by Cook et al. (2009) and Hahn et al. (2005). In this situation, researchers cannot know whether all these forms of gun control need to be measured together or separately and how their effects on crime rates have to be distinguished. Second, the effectiveness of gun control laws and their impacts on crime rates depend on numerous factors: the presence of gun control laws alone cannot be considered a sufficient measure of crime rates in a given state (Moorhouse & Wanner, 2006). The impact of gun control laws on crime rates also depends upon the degree to which these laws are enforced (Moorhouse & Wanner, 2006). This is why two different jurisdictions with similar gun control laws may experience dramatically different effects, simply because one of these jurisdictions does not do anything to enforce the law (Moorhouse & Wanner, 2006). All these problems and controversies justify further analysis of the gun control-crime rate relationship.

Background Theories and Implications

The current state of law and research has far-reaching theoretical implications for the analysis of gun control laws and their impacts on crime rates. To begin with, today's theory of gun control rests on the powerful commitment to a strong and legitimate federal regulatory state (Cornell, 2006). Most state laws concerning gun control lie within the limits of this gun control ideology (Cornell, 2006). Gun control laws in modern America are also closely related to the Second Amendment theory, which suggests that the federal power does not have any constitutional right to disarm citizens (Cornell, 2006). In light of the recent court cases mentioned earlier, the Second Amendment theory of gun control also applies to individual states.

However, the most essential is the supply-side aspect of modern gun control laws and regulations. These aspects were described by Ludwig (2005) and Johnson (2008). The former suggests that, historically, the federal power and individual states have been focused on regulating the supply side of the gun market, thus trying to restrict the access of high-risk individuals to firearms (Ludwig, 2005). The supply side ideals have served the foundation for the most radical gun control proposals (Johnson, 2008). The supply-side logic is quite straightforward: most people genuinely believe that the most horrible crimes could have been prevented by not letting the perpetrator get a firearm (Johnson, 2008). Yet, one of the biggest problems with the supply-side formula is that it touches only a tiny share of the entire firearms inventory currently owned by American citizens; moreover, porous borders and market freedom facilitate manufacturing and delivering legal and illegal firearms against the supply-side law (Johnson, 2008). Ludwig (2009) supports these claims and says that police professionals should prioritize demand-side gun control activities to enhance the effectiveness of the existing gun control laws.

Research Questions, Hypotheses, and Theories

The central research question to be answered in the proposed research is: “Do gun control laws enforced in the state of Illinois help to reduce crime rates in Skokie and Carbon Hill. The research hypotheses include:

Hypothesis 1: Residents of Skokie and Carbon Hill believe that the existing state gun control laws do not help to reduce crime rates.

Hypothesis 2: Residents of Skokie and Carbon Hill believe that the current state of gun control law does not allow reducing the rates of crime in the Chicago metropolitan area.

Hypothesis 3: Residents of Skokie and Carbon Hill believe that the Chicago metropolitan area should not be covered by the state gun control laws, due to the high rates of crime in this area.

The goal of the research and its hypotheses is to create a complete picture of the gun control-crime rate relationship in the Chicago metropolitan area. The theoretical framework underlying the proposed research is the traditional supply-side concept which, despite its limitations, remains the chief element of all gun control laws in the United States (Johnson, 2008).

Research Data and Methods

The primary data for the proposed research is to be obtained directly from the residents of the two target areas, who provide informed consent to participate in the study. The sample will not be limited to gun shop owners but will also include legal experts residing in the two target areas and individuals, who have faced the risks of homicide or firearm violence at least once in a lifetime. The estimated sample will include 60 respondents from each suburban area to enable relevant comparisons across the two groups of research participants.

The study will involve two variables: one independent variable and one dependent variable. The independent variable is represented by the gun control laws in the state of Illinois, whereas the dependent variable is

represented by the suburban residents' perceptions in terms of the efficacy
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of these laws and their potential/real impacts on crime rates in the area. Other confounding variables to be controlled during the study include: the age and social class position of the respondents, and their professional belonging (gun shop owners, legal professionals, or residents with experience of victimization in gun homicides) at the time of the study. The data collection process will be anonymous and managed via electronic media (the Internet and e-mail). The study will incorporate the features of the quantitative research design, with statistical analysis used to analyze the research results. Logistic regression will be used to analyze and interpret the findings.

The choice of logistic regression for the proposed study is justified by the fact that it allows for analyzing and interpreting changes in the dependent variables that are categorical and dichotomous (Myers, Well & Lorch, 2010). The logistic regression philosophy fits ideally in the logic and assumptions of the proposed research. First, the proposed research does not assume the presence of a linear relationship between the two variables (Myers et al., 2010). Second, the dependent variable is actually a dichotomy, i. e. has 2 opposite categories (Myers et al., 2010). In their answers, all research respondents will have to state either “ yes” or no”, which also means that the two categories of the dependent variable are mutually exclusive. In this situation, logistic regression is one of the most appropriate methodological approaches (Myers et al., 2010). With a minimum of 50 cases recommended for the use of logistic regression, the proposed sample size will also enable effective use of this method of data analysis (Myers et al., 2010).

Research Instrument

Questionnaires will be used to collect primary data from the research participants. Questionnaires represent one of the most convenient and effective approaches to quantitative research and enable the researchers to collect subjective and objective information from the large pools of participants (Vogt, Gardner & Haeffele, 2012). In the proposed study, questionnaires will work most effectively, since all questions asked will be structured, categorical, and dichotomous (Vogt et al., 2012). The questionnaire will include questions related to the respondents' demographic and socioeconomic features, as well as questions that relate to the perceived effectiveness of the gun control laws for reducing the crime rate.

One of the chief limitations of questionnaire research is the difficulty obtaining reliable and honest information from the research participants (Vogt et al., 2012). However, the proposed study is initially oriented towards analyzing the subjective perceptions of the research participants in terms of the efficacy of the gun control laws, based on their individual experiences and beliefs. All questionnaires will be distributed to the research participants via email, once they provide a written informed consent to participate in the study. Each respondent will have 48 hours to respond to the questionnaire and send it back via email. Those respondents who fail to turn their questionnaires in within the requested time period will not be included in the final analysis of the study results.

Feasibility; Plans B and C

The feasibility of the proposed study is difficult to estimate, but it is clear that the use of the quantitative research design and questionnaire

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instruments will help to optimize the costs and benefits of the proposed project. The study is feasible and useful for two main reasons. First, numerous earlier studies reviewed in this project evaluated the relationship between gun control laws and crime rates from an economic or econometric perspective (Cook et al., 2006; Cook et al., 2009; Hahn et al., 2005; Kovandzic et al., 2005; Johnson, 2008). The proposed study, by contrast, is focused on the legal and social sides of the problem. Second, the study is feasible since it does not involve any unusual resources or expensive research instruments. Because the current state of evidence is insufficient to conclude that the gun control laws can effectively reduce crime rates (Hahn et al., 2005), the findings of proposed project will help to fill the existing empirical and theoretical gaps in literature.

Plan B

In case the results of the study are inconclusive, comparing Chicago suburbs with those, which do not fall under any strict gun control laws, will help to solve these dilemmas. If that is the case, the same approach and methodology will be used to analyze the information provided by the respondents residing in a different (beyond Illinois) area.

Plan C

In case the study results appear to be subjective and biased, changes in the crime rates under the influence of the gun control laws will have to be analyzed. This information will add to the picture of the gun law perceptions reported by the respondents from the very beginning.

Timeline

The proposed study will take 2 months (60 days). The hypotheses and sampling stages will last 15 days. 7 days will be devoted to administering and receiving questionnaire responses from the study participants. 30 days will be devoted to the analysis and interpretation of the study findings, with the remaining time spent to craft the final report.

Ethics

The main ethical principles to be pursued during the proposed study will include: (a) confidentiality; and (b) informed consent. Fully informed voluntary consent is the fundamental factor of ethics in any research involving human beings (Gregory, 2003). To meet the basic criteria of ethical research, all participants will receive the fullest information about the nature, goal, and expected results of the proposed study. All research participants will be free to answer any questions related to the study. Concerning confidentiality, the participants will not have to provide any personal information, such as name and job/occupation. Only general demographic information will be required to meet the goals of the proposed study. All research participants will be free to refuse from participation at any stage of the research process. Preliminary results will be provided to all research participants, to avoid confusions and conflicts at the data analysis and discussion stages. I believe that there are no vulnerable groups involved in my research therefore; I would have De Paul's Institutional Review Board Exemption.

Conclusion

This proposal provides the basis for designing and implementing a study into the effects of gun control laws on crime rates in Chicago suburbs. The proposal includes a brief review of literature and an overview of the proposed data collection instruments, methods, and data analysis models. The proposed study has numerous benefits but also considerable limitations. Therefore, the proposed research will become only one of the many steps towards a better understanding of the nature and implications of gun control laws for crime and deviance in America.