

The modern problem of the historical context of a right to bear arms research pap...

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



For many in the United States, the words “ Gun Control” is a four-letter word that immediately causes their preconceived notions to surface and prevents them from logically looking at the issue. The polarization of gun-control in this country has evolved to a point where neither party, even the one with the most control in Washington is able to put fourth any legislation regarding this issue. This essay analyzes this phenomenon with a view to the historical context behind gun control and laws that regulate gun ownership in the United States.

Everyone who has engaged in conversation or argument on the issue of gun control has heard the second amendment quoted as the justification for the right of private citizens to own arms. David C. Williams in his book “ The Mythic Meanings of The Second Amendment” discusses the context of where the second amendment comes from, how it is understood, and what the original intentions behind it were. As he has it, the Second Amendment as it is understood today, is based upon a myth, of the framer’s belief in American unity and modern interpretations in “ American distrust and disunity” (Williams, 18). He goes back to the amendment’s precedent of British common law’s right to bear arms, which was seen as an auxiliary right, supporting self-defense and resistance to oppression.

One of the biggest problems with the second amendment is that it is ambiguous in it’s wording regarding what it exactly proposes to do. It is written as, “ 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.” (US Constitution). This has been stretched to simply being called a “ right to bear arms” but as it is here in plain English, this is not what it is saying. It

also does not list limits on arms. Certainly a private citizen could not own a tank, or a nuclear warhead, so the government must be unhindered in deciding the nature and degree of weapons that people can own.

This seems simply enough, but as a survey of media surrounding the issue shows, it is anything but simply. It is an issue that each side is polarized on and also one that has a powerful gun lobby preventing logical legislation from being passed on it.

Since the tragic events of Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012, the issue of gun control has resurfaced as a hot issue needing to be addressed by a government able to make changes that could mitigate the chance of a repeat tragedy. The casualties were drastic, twenty children, all first-graders, just 6 or 7 years old, felled by semi-automatic rifle fire within five minutes. Six women, teachers, aides and the principal gunned down. The shooter also took his own life and, before heading to Sandy Hook Elementary School, killed his mother. (Bismarck Tribune).

Because of the powerful gun lobby, in the news coverage of the current state of the issue, with the latest action in the senate being gun measures failing the by a margin of six votes, different media outlets while reporting on the same issue, do so in different ways. This essay analyzes the coverage of the issue and debate and compares Fox News', which has a reputation for a strong right wing slant, with other major media publication's coverage of the same issue. The issue now has been tabled.

After a massacre occurred in Sandy Hook, a political issue that had been largely put on the back burner re-emerged in the forefront of political discussion. The issue was mostly divided along party lines, as the vote on

the issue indicated.

The New York Times called out Fox News for what they considered to be biased coverage of the issue. They said that “ The Decision not to show the president’s angry rejouring to the Senate vote – or to cover the vote in any detail an hour earlier – was the latest example of Fox’s evident lack of interesting in the gun violence debate that has captivated many other media outlets. (NY Times).

In analyzing the April 7th, 2013 article, “ Background check plan defeated in Senate, Obama rips gun bill opponents” one begins to see some grounding in the reputation that Fox News denies about it being slanted one direction to the other. This comes through in the article in discussion. By looking at syntax choices in the headline and comparing it with Fox’s competitors, there is, in the very least a different between their coverage and other media houses.

One article by Jonathan Weisman titled, “ Senate Blocks Drive for Control” discusses how the senate failed to meet the vote for the 60 votes necessary. Faced with a decision either to remove substantial new gun restrictions from the bill or to allow it to fall to a filibuster next week, Senate leaders plan to put it on hold after a scattering of votes Thursday. More than 50 senators — including a few Republicans, but lacking a handful of Democrats from more conservative states — had signaled their support for the gun bill, not enough to reach the 60-vote threshold to overcome a filibuster.

Another article, “ America’s Gun Divide” by Lexington and featured in the Economist says the gun control is going nowhere. The reason the author says the gun control issue is going nowhere is because “ the millions of

Americans in favor of gun control do not live in the right places” (Lexington). Support for gun control is geographically and racially concentrated in ways that sap the movement of political power. And that disparity of opinion is linked to another

Their word choice in the headline “defeated” imparts a level of finality, which the debate is over. This is the same choice of words that CNN chose in their coverage, issuing a headline “Senate defeats gun background check proposal.” ABC News, used drastically different choices of words in framing the gun-debate, running one story whose headline read, “Background Check In Peril” in senate. Consistent with that is the headline they ran to cover Background Check’s bills defeat in the senate, “Gun Control Loses: No Expanded Background Check.”

This framing seems more in support of the measure than Fox’s coverage where a close reading of the story in analysis is consistent with Fox’s reputation for conservative coverage. Fox, however, does not acknowledge any bias in their reporting and operates under the slogan “Fair and Balanced.”

Also noteworthy is the choice of including Obama’s response in the headline saying that he “Rips” those who were opposed to the bill.

When reading the story, Fox’s coverage seems more similar to reading a sports story where there is a clear winner and loser, and where perhaps the writer, who remains anonymous in Fox’s coverage but not the other major network’s, seems to be philosophical in favor of the bill’s defeat. While the other major networks ran pictures of The Senate or lawmakers involved with the bill, Fox’s choice of pictures included a featured photo of a handgun in

front of a random sampling of driver's licenses.

The framing of the story and photo create a consensus before even the first word of the story is read that favors opponents of the gun bill and cast Obama and supporters of the bill as adversaries before even the first word is read.

The first paragraph is wrought with language biases saying the Senate defeated a "vital background check amendment" and that this was a linchpin to Democrat's gun control bill. ABC news took a dramatically different approach to framing the story, writing that a "Sense of pessimism was settling" among supporters of the bill, and that despite an aggressive push from Obama and families of Newtown shooting victims, the bill fell short of its necessary votes.

Though the whole issue of gun control is currently a topic of relevant debate because of the December, 2012 shooting in Newtown, Fox News first mentions the tragedy by attaching a strong bias to it, saying that the opponents, which they make mention of the fact that a few were democrats, claimed that this type of legislation would "not have prevented" incidents like Newtown.

The Fox New article fleshes out by quoting Obama's response, but instead of using neutral constructions like "Obama said in a speech," their verb choice is "accuse" a strong verb that it could be said casts Obama as antagonist in the context of the story.

" ' All in all, this was a pretty shameful day for Washington," Obama said, accusing the gun lobby of lying about the bill.'" Whether or not the gun lobby did lie about the bill, was not elaborated upon in the article, despite it

certainly being newsworthy and relevant, not least because the president of the United States is accusing a lobby of lying to the American people to advance its self-interests.

While other news articles point that this is one piece of legislation and others are on their way, citing Obama's appeal to the American people not to forget about their passion for the issue, Fox News implies that the defeat will silence the issue. "It's unclear where supporters will go from here," they article goes on to say. Following is a very telling sentence of the whole article:

He said the claims "upset" some gun owners who in turn "intimidated" senators.

The use of quotations in this manner causes the speaker, in this case Obama, to seem insincere or dishonest. People put words in quotations in this manner when there is an overriding doubt as to the veracity of their statements. Whether or not claims (from the gun lobby) did upset people or intimidate lawmakers, the use of quotations marks makes the claim seem less credible than if they had been omitted.

The article contains four specific instances of stating claims for why the bill would not have functioned or been effective gleaned from opponent's criticism of the bill, while the argument for contain no specific rational for why it was being proposed and what it hoped to do. While in ABC and CNN's coverage there is some development of the bill in question, Fox's coverage does not give readers much of an understanding of what the bill contains.

The Fox coverage contains another addition not listed in the major networks—an alternate narrative that explains the defeat outside of Obama's

pronouncement that it was the gun lobby lying and intimidating. They cite an AP-GfK poll that showed forty-nine percent of Americans support stricter gun laws, which they say is down fifty-eight percent from January, implying that the American people, who Obama said in his speech, were 90% in favor of the bill, are no longer behind the actions being proposed in the Senate.

The Los Angeles Times saw the events in Washington as a defeat of any gun control for the time being. Their headline read, "Tougher gun laws seen as unlikely."

In a piece they ran shortly after the attack one reporter said, "But although the tender age of the victims brought tears to President Obama's eyes and an assertion from him that We're going to have to come together and take meaningful action to prevent more tragedies like this, regardless of the politics."

Fox News, in this analysis, was consistent with its stereotype of being biased towards right-wing agenda. While there is nothing wrong with right wing values, the conflict enters when one considers who they claim to be and how they claim they do their news coverage. In the article analyzed here, Fox news took a defensive tone, citing and justifying why the bill was defeated and seemingly agreeing through rhetorical devices and framing with the opponents of it.

Gun violence in the United States is currently at over 30,000 fatalities annually (Science Insider). This is a much higher rate than similar countries such as Canada. No one denies that we have a problem, but the government is currently unable to propose a solution. As has been shown here in the media coverage on the issue, it is one that is so starkly divided that

politicians on either side seem unable to find a compromise. The underlying problem is the interpretation of what the second amendment means. To a clear thinking adult, the wording of the second amendment is obviously not a free pass to own any sort of firearm. However, it has been so sold this way by the gun lobby and conservative media that people are now able to get past the four words, "The right to bear arms."

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