

2017

Crime and Partisanship : How Party ID Muddles Reality, Perception and Policy Attitudes on Crime and Guns

Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz
University of Rhode Island, shanna_pearson@uri.edu

Joshua J. Dyck

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/psc_facpubs

**The University of Rhode Island Faculty have made this article openly available.
Please let us know how Open Access to this research benefits you.**

This is a pre-publication author manuscript of the final, published article.

Terms of Use

This article is made available under the terms and conditions applicable towards Open Access Policy Articles, as set forth in our [Terms of Use](#).

Citation/Publisher Attribution

Pearson-Merkowitz, S. and Dyck, J. J. (2017), Crime and Partisanship: How Party ID Muddles Reality, Perception, and Policy Attitudes on Crime and Guns*. *Social Science Quarterly*, 98: 443–454. doi:10.1111/ssqu.12417
Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12417>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Political Science at DigitalCommons@URI. It has been accepted for inclusion in Political Science Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@etal.uri.edu.

Crime and Partisanship¹

How Party ID Muddles Reality, Perception and Policy Attitudes on Crime and Guns

Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz
University of Rhode Island
shannapearsonuri@gmail.com

Joshua J. Dyck
University of Massachusetts Lowell
joshua_dyck@uml.edu

Abstract: Objective: In this paper we theorize that partisanship is such a strong filter of information that it can affect how individuals make sense of their lived environment and how the geographic experience informs policy attitudes. As a result, although “independents” tend to be less politically knowledgeable and have less developed policy opinions, their policy attitudes on gun control are more informed by their lived experience than partisans. Methods: We use data from an original survey of American adults about crime and gun control linked to crime statistics from the FBI. Results: We find that stronger partisanship leads to resistance to information from the lived environment in the development of policy attitudes about gun control. Conclusion: Democrats and Republicans have very different views about guns and, generally, these priorities are relatively unaffected by contextual experience; however, gun policy attitudes of independents, are highly correlated with the level of gun crime in their geographic context.

¹ Authors names are listed in random order; contributions are equal. This paper was previously presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, CA, September 3-6, 2015. We greatly appreciate the feedback provided by the discussant, Heather Ondercin and several audience and panel members. We also would like to thank Makayle Washington for her research assistance on an earlier version of this project and Alexandra Filindra for helpful feedback.

The context-cue interaction approach examines how partisanship interacts with social context to influence policy beliefs (Dyck and Pearson-Merkowitz, 2013; Pearson-Merkowitz, Filindra and Dyck, 2015). Partisanship, the theory argues, can interrupt the connection between the geographic, cultural, and social environment and the development of public policy attitudes. The theory attempts to explain why the connection between the information that people gather via their lived environment and social interactions does not always translate into policy opinions that political scientists and social psychologists would expect. While the psychological literature suggests that intimate experience with minorities should increase tolerance and acceptance of that minority group via intergroup contact, the context-cue interaction builds on the original premise of this argument and its limitations (e.g. Allport 1979) and suggests that, at least in relation to policies that benefit minorities, this connection is limited. Partisanship creates a perceptual screen that mitigates the social experience from affecting policy opinions.

In this paper, we build on this basic approach to examine how partisanship affects the link between policy beliefs and other kinds of social context. We examine how the actual context of where one lives affects policy attitudes in the area of gun control. We propose that one's immediate social environment will not affect policy attitudes and policy prioritization if the individual is strongly attached to a political party. Specifically, we argue that geographic context will be less consequential to attitudes and perceptions of partisans because party identification provides such strong cues about how to think about policies such that the immediate lived environment becomes a secondary, instead of a primary, influence. Our findings suggest that independents are the only group whose policy concerns track their lived experience in regard to crime and guns. Partisans, on the other hand, hold largely stable policy views on gun control and gun violence whether they live in a high crime or low crime area.

Putting Context in Context

In the tradition of Key (1949) and Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee (1954), scholars have long posited that social placement and where someone lives is the primary influence on political beliefs and opinion formation. Social placement includes a person's social surroundings, including their network of friends, family, co-workers, and fellow church goers as well as the context of their environment including who else lives in their immediate surroundings and the economic and political position of their context. In the geography literature, this is often referred to as Tobler's first law of geography – that “everything is related to everything, but near things are more related than distant things.” (Tobler, 1970).

The psychological mechanism of contextual theories is well established: Environmental cues change how people perceive the importance of issues or how to solve problems (e.g. Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995). The term “contextual effects” is meant to describe the process through which interpersonal interactions, observations, and experiences affect the political beliefs and voting choices of the people living within a geographic space. The contextual effects literature is often focused on the connection between exposure to or interaction with minority groups and attitudes toward minorities (e.g. see Riek et al, 2006 for a recent review of this literature). However, context is also known to affect other areas of political life such as views on the environment (e.g. Blake, 2001; Egan and Mullin 2012) and the death penalty (e.g. Soss et al., 2003). And some explicitly geographic examinations have demonstrated that proximity to rail lines (Petersen et al. 2008), the US/Mexico border (Branton and Dunaway, 2009), or polling places (Dyck and Gimpel, 2005) affects both policy attitudes and political behavior. Neighborhood context has also been shown to act as a mobilizing or demobilizing effect in studies of political participation (e.g. McClurg, 2003; Pearson-Merkowitz, 2012; Enos 2016).

While some contextual effects theories have come under fire due to the causal inference problem (e.g. Oakes 2004), recent research has found that assumptions from the context-cue interaction approach about the “treatment” people receive in their contextual environment is indeed well-grounded in reality (Newman et al. 2015).

Context, Crime, and Partisanship

The effect of context on attitudes and views on crime *should* be rather straightforward. For example, Soss et al. (2003) use the murder rate in the county in which a respondent resides to predict support for the death penalty. Their logic is fairly straight forward: “A higher murder rate implies a greater chance that an individual will know someone (or know someone who knows someone) who has been murdered. It also may produce a greater stream of interpersonal and mediated communication regarding crime and punishment” (Soss et al., 2003, 406). As the likelihood of being a victim increases and concern that one might be a victim increases, so too should “perceptions that there is a real need for the death penalty” (Soss et al., 2003, 406). In this way the context in which one lives should influence how individuals perceive the need for different policies.

The contextual effects literature would suggest that those who experience high rates of crime in their neighborhood would think crime was an important political issue (e.g. Graber, 1980). However, the partisanship literature suggests that people’s political priorities and policy views are not shaped by their lived experience as much as their political preferences and the views that they are exposed via trusted political elites (e.g. Zaller 1992).

Mutz (1994) for example, posits that *impersonal influences* can affect public opinion. The media is perhaps the most pervasive of these “impersonal influences” as most Americans are bombarded by a steady stream of media information. Mutz and Soss (1997; 452) argue that the

media can serve as a “surrogate for more direct expressions or solicitations of public opinion.” Attention to the media, then, is a shortcut that people may use to stay aware of the political environment outside of their own lived experience. Specifically on issues of crime, the media is known to influence public attitudes about how to deal with perpetrators, as well as influencing people’s perceptions of the stereotypical criminal (e.g. Gilliam and Iyengar, 2000).

In a similar vein, the elite-cue giving perspective (Lupia 1994; Popkin 1991; Zaller 1992) argues that elites offer important “information shortcuts” for those who identify with them, helping these adherents make sense of the numerous political issues of the day. As a result, with just small pieces of information, relatively inattentive partisan voters appear to make seemingly informed decisions and hold consistent policy opinions because they are able to make use of cues in the information environment (Popkin 1991; Lupia 1994). Since most voters have some degree of ambivalence regarding public policies, they respond to the considerations offered by elites with whom they share a political identity (Zaller 1992). Democrats and Republicans do not use or trust the same media sources and are increasingly suspicious of the fairness of news coverage on the “other” side (Mitchell et al. 2014). As a result, issues can become a priority to individuals and simple evaluations of the extant environment can be shaped more by *which* elites (including which media channels) one listens to, than the actual environment in which one lives.

Groups that lack cues (i.e. political independents) may therefore be less likely to make “informed” decisions. In addition, pure independents are often marked by their lack of attention to politics and general political knowledge. Independents are less likely to be able to identify which policy positions “go with” which political party and hold less stable or coherent ideologies (Zaller 1992). But political knowledge is not entirely necessary to gain perception of basic experiential realities, particularly about issues like crime and safety which are highly related to

one's neighborhood context (Beckett 1994).² Partisans might have knowledge about a policy issue, but their information environment acts to dissuade them from contextualizing new information in a way that challenges their political predispositions due to agenda-setting by political elites (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Reinerman and Levine, 1989; Christiansen, 2013).

However, in regard to policies that are “localized,” we argue independents are better able to prioritize policy concerns based on ground-level information and make instrumental connections *because of, not despite*, their lack of partisan identification and general political awareness. Thus, we argue that the connection between cues in the contextual environment and policy positions is not as “clean” as it might be. Instead, all information, including that from the lived environment is filtered through a partisan lens. Specifically, we posit that, the environmental context in which we live should affect our perceptions of policy attitudes *and* what is important and politically relevant. However, partisanship will decrease the relevance of apolitical cues, lived experience and objective reality. Interestingly, the logic of our theory is that it is those with weaker partisan attachments or no attachments at all (independents) who should respond most to their environment and therefore, logically prioritize policy arenas that will directly benefit them.

Republican and Democratic elites have taken different stands on the importance of guns and violent crime in recent history (Gimpel 1998). Democrats have embraced gun control and crime reduction, and particularly stopping gun crime, as a “major issue.” In his campaign and

² In regards to our hypothesis in specific, Beckett (1994) tracks concern about crime between 1964 and 1992 and finds that concern over crime tracked elite attention to crime more than any actual incidence in crime.

subsequent presidency, Barack Obama focused extensively on the need for more police, gun control, and more attention and money focused at decreasing gun violence (Koren 2016). He pushed for Congress to take up gun control and talked extensively about the impact of gun crime in specific on the nation's families. In his 2013 State of the Union address, over four dozen victimized families of gun violence were in attendance and the President used the opportunity to make a plea to congress to pass greater restrictions on guns.³ Republicans tend to emphasize gun rights and even to argue that a greater presence of guns empowers ordinary citizens and will lead to a decrease crime. The "tea party" movement within the Republican Party has made gun rights one of its primary agenda items and has used an empowerment argument to attract women to the party by noting that gun rights are a feminist principal (Deckman 2016).

Both parties discuss gun control extensively in the national party platforms. For Democrats the party platform has called for a new assault weapons ban and other gun regulations to decrease gun violence for decades. The Republican platform has focused on gun ownership of all types being a fundamental right that cannot be infringed upon by the federal government. These positions are visible in debates and votes on gun control in Congress as well. A day after the San Bernardino shootings in which a couple engaged in a mass shooting, the U.S Senate took up the Manchin-Toomey Amendment which would have expanded background checks on for purchasers of firearms. The measure failed on a vote of 48-50 with only two Republicans (Senators Pat Toomey-PA and Susan Collins-ME) voting in favor of the Amendment and one Democrat (Senator Heidi Heitkamp-ND) voting against. Other recent gun control votes in

³ http://abcnews.go.com/ABC_Univision/Politics/obama-makes-plea-gun-control-state-union/story?id=18481837

Congress and public statements about gun control mirror this divide—Republicans favor of expanding gun ownership for the sake of “protection” and Democrats favor of gun control for the sake of “protection.” For those who are politically knowledgeable and follow politics even remotely, gun control has become an “easy issue” (Carmines and Stimson 1980; Lindaman and Haider-Markel 2002).

Given the clear priorities and positions of the two parties, we believe strong Republicans are likely to think that a) crime is a major issue but b) that gun control is not the answer to lowering violent crime. Strong Democrats, on the other hand, are likely to think that a) crime is a major issue and b) gun control is an answer to lowering violent crime. For these strong partisans, we believe that we will find that these two beliefs are unaffected by the context in which the respondent lives because their priorities and subsequent policy beliefs are likely to have been set by the partisan information environment and not their local lived context.

True independents, on the other hand, are free from partisan elite cues. Not only are they less likely to pay attention to political messaging, they also are less likely to process their environment in terms of the current political agenda or policy solutions offered by party elites. Importantly, however, unlike many other policies, in the case of violent crime, independents need not pay attention to partisan politics or read a national newspaper to get a feel for how much crime exists in their neighborhood. This is information gained through local media, discussions with neighbors and other experiences that happen just being in one’s environment (police sirens, gun shots, local news, etc. (Weitzer and Kubrin 2004). Thus, we expect that pure independents’ attitudes about gun control, and views about crime/policy priorities will be most closely associated with objective measures of crime in the extant environment. Stated more formally, we develop the following hypotheses:

H1: Concern about crime and attitudes toward gun control will be influenced by the actual amount of crime in the lived environment.

H2: Concern about crime and attitudes toward gun control will be influenced by partisan identification. Strong Democrats will be the most likely to view crime as a major problem and to support gun control measures. Strong Republicans will be the least likely to view crime as a major problem and to oppose gun control measures.

And H3: The effect of the local environment on concerns about crime and attitudes toward gun control should be strongest for independents and weakest for strong Democrats and strong Republicans.

Research Design

We test our hypotheses using data from an original 2014 survey conducted by YouGov in April of that year. To achieve a representative sample, 1,172 respondents were surveyed using a non-probability online sample; the data were trimmed to 1,000 using a propensity score matching algorithm to a frame constructed from benchmarks on age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education, and ideology from the 2010 American Community Survey. All analyses were then conducted using a post-matching weight variable. This method of achieving representative samples has been used in numerous previous studies and has been tested extensively for external validity in elections (Vavreck and Rivers, 2008; Ansolabere and Rivers, 2013).

To test the hypotheses we have outlined requires (1) a contextual level measure of actual crime and (2) variables asking for perceptions of crime as well as attitudes about firearm policy. Our measure of context is a county level measure of violent crime, with a per capita adjustment for the size of the population. The data come from the FBI's 2013 uniform crime reporting database. There are some issues with this measure of context, to be sure. First, we would prefer

to have a smaller contextual unit of analysis, as counties can be large, diverse and may contain different neighborhoods with varying degrees of crime and correlates of crime.⁴ Additionally, the uniform database relies on police agencies to self-report crimes; it would seem that in some areas there may be an incentive to creatively report crime to downplay its severity. However, crime reports are considered valid indicators of crime (Gove et al. 1985), the database is used frequently in academic studies regarding crime, and, it is the geographically smallest and best indicator available of violent crime in the United States. Also, we see no strong a priori reason to believe that an imperfect measure of context introduces anything other than random error into our models.

Our models of concerns about crime come from the following question: *How concerned are you about the level of gun violence and gun-related crimes in the United States in the past few years?* (very concerned, somewhat concerned, not very concerned, not at all concerned).

Our models of gun control attitudes come from the following question on banning assault weapons: *Do you [strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose] banning the sale of assault weapons?* To test our central hypothesis, we ran ordered logit models on each of the two outcomes, interacting our county-level measure of neighborhood crime with a five-point scale of party ID.⁵ Control variables are included for gender, race (white

⁴ There is some research that suggests that crime should be considered at a more diffuse level of aggregation (Hipp 2007). Because of this, county might be an acceptable, if not ideal, level of aggregation.

⁵ In a five-point scale, leaning independents and weak partisans are collapsed into a single category because they are generally behaviorally indistinct. We considered using the full seven-

and non-white), age (and its square), education, political awareness (a 6 point scale constructed from 5 questions), ideology (5 point likert scale), urbanicity (NCHS subrural categories from the CDC) and a question regarding gun ownership which asks whether there are guns in the home that the individual lives in. Full coding specifics are detailed in the supplemental appendix.

Results

The results of our complete analysis are presented in Table 1 and include both a baseline model and a model that includes the party ID interaction with the contextual variable. Since interactive effects and non-linear coefficients are both difficult to interpret without the use of visual aids, we present the effects graphically in Figures 1-2 (baseline effect) and Figures 3-4 (interactions).

[Table 1 about here]

We begin by demonstrating evidence in support of Hypothesis 1. For both perceptions of crime and the ban on assault weapons, there is strong evidence that living in an area with higher levels of violent crime per capita leads to an increased probability of being “very concerned” about the level of gun violence and gun crime in the United States, which we present in Figure 1. The effect is both statistically significant and substantively large – from a low crime to a high crime environment increases the probability of being very concerned about gun violence and gun-related crimes by 29 percentage points, while the likelihood of only being not very or not at all concerned decreases. A similar result is found shifting to the policy variable that asks if

point scale, but we are not assuming a linear effect and therefore measurement precision puts greater pressure on the model. We have run the models with both a 3 point and 7-point scale and found similar substantive results.

survey respondents are in favor of a ban on assault weapons in Figure 2; a respondent is 20 percentage points more likely to “strongly support” a ban on assault weapons if they live in a high crime environment than in a low crime environment while the likelihood of a respondent being somewhat or very opposed decreases as the crime rate increases. This effect is also statistically significant at $p < .001$. Therefore, we find consistent evidence that the lived environment impacts the manner in which people prioritize crime and that more crime increases support for gun control policy.

[Figures 1 and 2 about here]

However, our theory posits that partisanship will act as a filter which will impede respondents from using their lived context to think about both policy attitudes and perceptions of crime. We test this by modeling crime perceptions and support/opposition to a ban on assault weapons as a function of party identification, county-level violent crime per capita, and their interaction.

The effects by party are presented in figures 3a and 3b for the dependent variable: perceptions of gun violence and crime. On general concern about gun violence (figures 3a and 3b), strong Republicans are not affected by the social environment. Strong Democrats, to be sure, are, with a probability difference of .16 between the least violent and most violent context; in a county with no violence, the probability of being “very concerned” about gun violence is .64, while in the highest crime environment, that probability is .80. The difference for Republicans is 11 points (.44 to .33), but that difference is not statistically significant. However, the effect is substantially larger for independents. Pure independents in the least violent context have a predicted probability of being “very concerned” about gun violence of .25, compared to

those in the most violent context who have a probability of .98, a 73 percentage point difference. The interaction effects for both Weak/Leaning Republicans and Democrats are not significant.

[Figure 3 about here]

The effects of local gun violence on support for a ban on assault weapons are presented by party in figures 3c and 3d. Notably, Democrats are more supportive of a ban on assault weapons than Republicans by large margins (Figure 3c). However, for Strong Democrats, Strong Republicans and Weak/Leaning Republicans, opinions do not vary with crime context. The respondent in the county with the highest crime is not more likely to be in favor of a ban on all assault style weapons than if they live in an area with virtually no reported violent crime. But this finding does not apply to pure independents or weak/leaning Democrats (Figure 3d). For both groups, as violent crime in the county increases, so too does the probability of support the assault weapon ban. These differences are substantively quite large. A pure independent, for instance, who lives in a very low crime county has a predicted probability of strongly supporting the assault weapon ban of only .25; that probability increases to .69 in counties with the highest rates of crime-- an increase of 44 percentage points.

Taken together, the findings provide strong support for our hypotheses. While crime context affects opinions about whether or not gun crime is a serious problem and support or opposition towards gun control, there is tremendous variation in this effect by party, regardless of context. Independents are the most consistently responsive group to the objective social environment on attitudes about crime. They are more likely to connect violent crime in their neighborhood to perceptions about crime as well as attitudes towards banning assault weapons. Strong partisans have such crystalized attitudes that they do not appear to use or be moved by information from their social context in crafting attitudes about crime and gun control.

Discussion and Conclusion

There are large partisan differences in attitudes towards *both* crime and gun control, consistent with previous research linking issue frames to partisan attitudes on the topic (Haider-Markel and Joslyn 2001). Our analysis shows that Democrats are very concerned about gun violence and strongly in favor of banning assault weapons.⁶ Likewise, strong Republicans are less concerned about violence and less supportive of banning assault weapons. While these findings should be expected given current debates over gun control, our findings demonstrate that strong partisans (as well as weak/leaning Democrats and Republicans) are not sensitive to *actual* violence in the lived environment. Strong partisans, and even relatively weak partisans, rarely alter their concern about crime or their support for gun control that would limit the availability of large ammunition guns, even in the face of violence in the lived environment. For the case of partisans, crime is either an issue (as it is for the majority of strong Democrats) or it is not (as is the case for a majority of strong Republicans).

However, the story is different for independents. We theorized that given the lack of partisan cues on the topic, independents would be the most likely to actually use their lived experience to develop their attitudes toward gun violence and gun control. Our models suggest that it is indeed independents that are the most responsive to their lived environment in the development of their political concerns and policy attitudes.

Our results extend conflict-cue interaction theory to the case of crime policy. Partisanship not only interrupts the connection between policy preferences and interpersonal contacts but also interrupts the connection between social placement and policy concerns and beliefs.

⁶ We note that an assault weapon ban is really only one part of the gun control debate and more research is needed before generalizing about overall policy effects.

In conclusion, there appears to be an important contextual influence of the lived or local experience on individuals when it comes to crime, but this influence is conditioned by party identification. Political independents are oft maligned in political science literature as being distinguished by their lack of attention to news and coverage of politics and public affairs. But on issues like crime and safety that cut so close to home, it is very interesting that independents appear to be the most affected by their lived context. In this sense, media messaging and elite dissemination of cues appears to stop, filter and sort potentially relevant information from the environment. If we put this into context with recent research on facts in politics, we find some evidence that the lens of party identification conditions the lived environment in such a way that even the nature of the facts are up for debate.

References

- Allport, Gordon W. (1979). *The Nature of Prejudice*. Basic books.
- Berelson, Bernard, Lazarsfeld, Paul F. (Paul Felix), 1901-1976 and McPhee, William N *Voting: a study of opinion formation in a presidential campaign*. University of Chicago Press, 1954.
- Beckett, Katherine. "Setting The Public Agenda:" Street Crime" And Drug Use In American Politics." *Social Problems* 41 (1994): 425-425.
- Blake, Donald E. "Contextual effects on environmental attitudes and behavior." *Environment and Behavior* 33, no. 5 (2001): 708-725.
- Branton, Regina P., and Johanna Dunaway. "Spatial Proximity to the US—Mexico Border and Newspaper Coverage of Immigration Issues." *Political Research Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (2009): 289-302.
- Carmines, Edward G., and James A. Stimson. "The two faces of issue voting." *American Political Science Review* 74, no. 01 (1980): 78-91.
- Carsey, Thomas M., and Geoffrey C. Layman. "Changing sides or changing minds? Party identification and policy preferences in the American electorate." *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 2 (2006): 464-477.

- Christiansen, Martin B. "Partisan Motivated Reasoning During the Great Recession: Does an Unambiguous Economy Eliminate Partisan Motivated Biases." *Journal of Politics* (2013).
- Deckman, Melissa. 2016. *Tea Party Women*. New York. New York University Press.
- Dyck, Joshua J., and James G. Gimpel. "Distance, Turnout, and the Convenience of Voting." *Social Science Quarterly* 86, no. 3 (2005): 531-548.
- Dyck, Joshua J., and Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz. "To know you is not necessarily to love you: The Partisan mediators of intergroup contact." *Political Behavior* 36, no. 3 (2014): 553-580.
- Enos, Ryan D. "What the demolition of public housing teaches us about the impact of racial threat on political behavior." *American Journal of Political Science* 60, no. 1 (2016): 123-142.
- Egan, Patrick J., and Megan Mullin. "Turning personal experience into political attitudes: the effect of local weather on Americans' perceptions about global warming." *The Journal of Politics* 74, no. 03 (2012): 796-809.
- Fenno, Richard F. *Congressmen in committees*. Little, Brown, 1973.
- Gimpel, James G. 1998. "Packing Heat at the Polls: Gun Ownership, Interest Group Endorsements and Voting Behavior in Gubernatorial Elections." *Social Science Quarterly* 79(3): 634-648.
- Gilliam Jr, Franklin D., and Shanto Iyengar. "Prime suspects: The influence of local television news on the viewing public." *American Journal of Political Science* (2000): 560-573.
- Graber, Doris Appel. *Crime, News and the Public*. New York: Praeger, 1980.

Gove, Walter R., Michael Hughes, and Michael Geerken. "Are Uniform Crime Reports A Valid Indicator Of The Index Crimes? An Affirmative Answer With Minor Qualifications*." *Criminology* 23, no. 3 (1985): 451-502.

Hipp, John R. "Block, tract, and levels of aggregation: neighborhood structure and crime and disorder as a case in point." *American Sociological Review* 72, no. 5 (2007): 659-680.

Hochschild, Jennifer, and Katherine Levine Einstein. *Do Facts Matter?: Information and Misinformation in American Politics*. University of Oklahoma Press, 2015.

Huckfeldt, R. Robert, and John Sprague. *Citizens, Politics and Social Communication: Information and Influence in an Election Campaign*. Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Iyengar, Shanto. "Television news and citizens' explanations of national affairs." *American Political Science Review* 81, no. 03 (1987): 815-831.

Key Jr, V. O. *Southern Politics: In State and Nation*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. (1949).

Koren, Marina. "The President's Emotional Speech on Gun Control" *The Atlantic*. January 5, 2016. Available at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/01/obama-executive-action-gun-control/422661/>

Lindaman, Kara, and Donald P. Haider-Markel. 2002. "Issue Evolution, Political Parties, and the Culture Wars." *Political Research Quarterly* 55(1):91-110.

Lott Jr, John R. "More guns, less crime." University of Chicago Press Economics Books (2010).

Lupia, Arthur. "Shortcuts Versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections." *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 01 (1994): 63-76.

McClurg, Scott D. "Social networks and political participation: The role of social interaction in explaining political participation." *Political research quarterly* 56, no. 4 (2003): 449-464.

Mitchell, Amy, Jeffrey Gottfried, Jocelyn Kiley and Katerina Eva Matsa. "Political Polarization & Media Habits." *Pew Research Center*, 2014.

Mutz, Diana C. "Contextualizing Personal Experience: The Role of Mass Media." *The Journal of Politics* 56, no. 03 (1994): 689-714.

Mutz, Diana C., and Joe Soss. "Reading Public Opinion: The Influence of News Coverage on Perceptions of Public Sentiment." *Public Opinion Quarterly* (1997): 431-451.

Newman, B. J., Velez, Y., Hartman, T. K. and Bankert, A. "Are Citizens "Receiving the Treatment"? Assessing a Key Link in Contextual Theories of Public Opinion and Political Behavior." *Political Psychology*, 36 (2015): 123–131.

Oakes, J. Michael. "The (Mis) Estimation of Neighborhood Effects: Causal Inference for a Practicable Social Epidemiology." *Social Science & Medicine* 58, no. 10 (2004): 1929-1952.

Pearson-Merkowitz, Shanna. "The limits of the homogeneity model segregation and civic engagement in Latino communities." *American Politics Research* 40, no. 4 (2012): 701-736.

Pearson-Merkowitz, Shanna, Alexandra Filindra, and Joshua J. Dyck. "When Partisans and Minorities Interact: Interpersonal Contact, Partisanship, and Public Opinion Preferences on Immigration Policy." *Social Science Quarterly* (2015).

Popkin, Samuel L. "The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Elections." *Chicago: University of Chicago* (1991): 49-71.

Reinarman, Craig, and Harry G. Levine. "Crack in context: Politics and media in the making of a drug scare." *Contemp. Drug Probs.* 16 (1989): 535.

- Riek, Blake M., Eric W. Mania, and Samuel L. Gaertner. "Intergroup threat and outgroup attitudes: A meta-analytic review." *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 10, no. 4 (2006): 336-353.
- Romer, Daniel, Kathleen H. Jamieson, and Nicole J. De Coteau. "The Treatment of Persons of Color in Local Television News Ethnic Blame Discourse or Realistic Group Conflict?" *Communication Research* 25, no. 3 (1998): 286-305.
- Soss, Joe, Laura Langbein, and Alan R. Metelko. "Why Do White Americans Support the Death Penalty?." *Journal of Politics* 65, no. 2 (2003): 397-421.
- Tobler, Waldo R. "A Computer Movie Simulating Urban Growth in The Detroit Region." *Economic Geography* (1970): 234-240.
- Vavreck, Lynn, and Douglas Rivers. "The 2006 Cooperative Congressional Election Study." *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 18, no. 4 (2008): 355-366.
- Weitzer, Ronald, and Charis E. Kubrin. "Breaking news: How local TV news and real-world conditions affect fear of crime." *Justice Quarterly* 21.3 (2004): 497-520.
- Zaller, John. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Figure 1 – Marginal Effect of Local Violent Crime Per Capita on Concern about Violent Crime

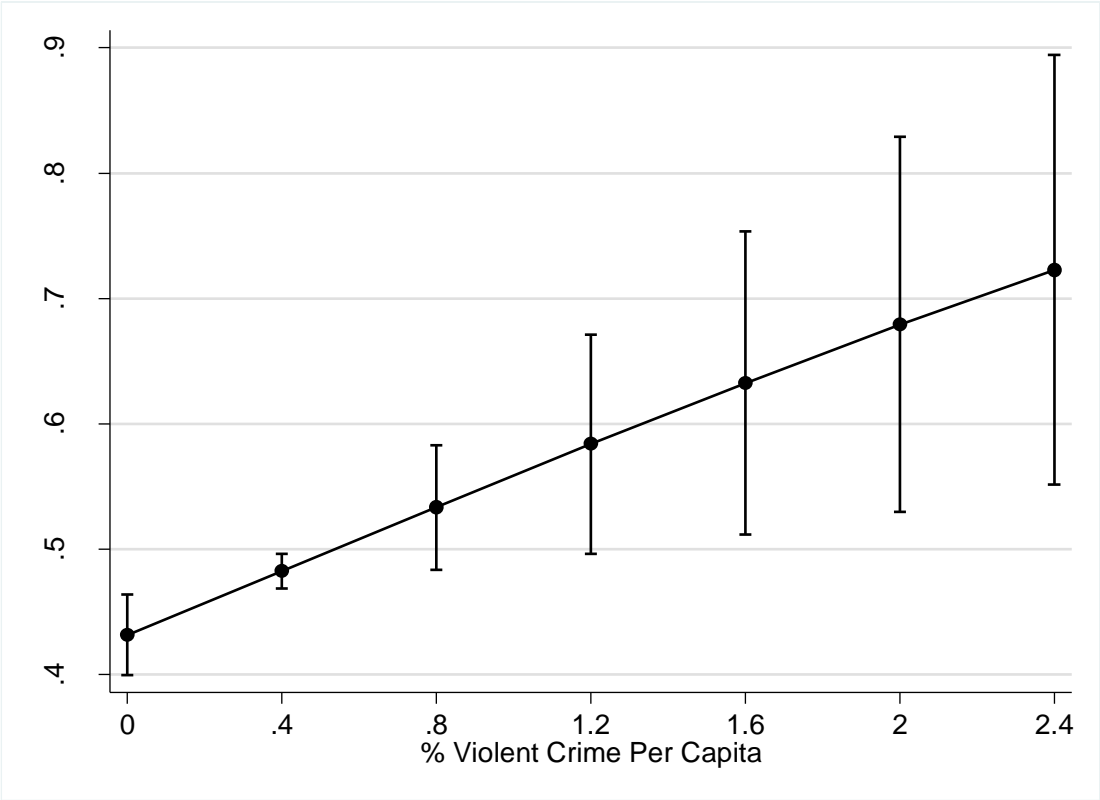


Figure 2 – Marginal Effect of Local Violent Crime Per Capita on Attitudes on Assault Weapon Ban

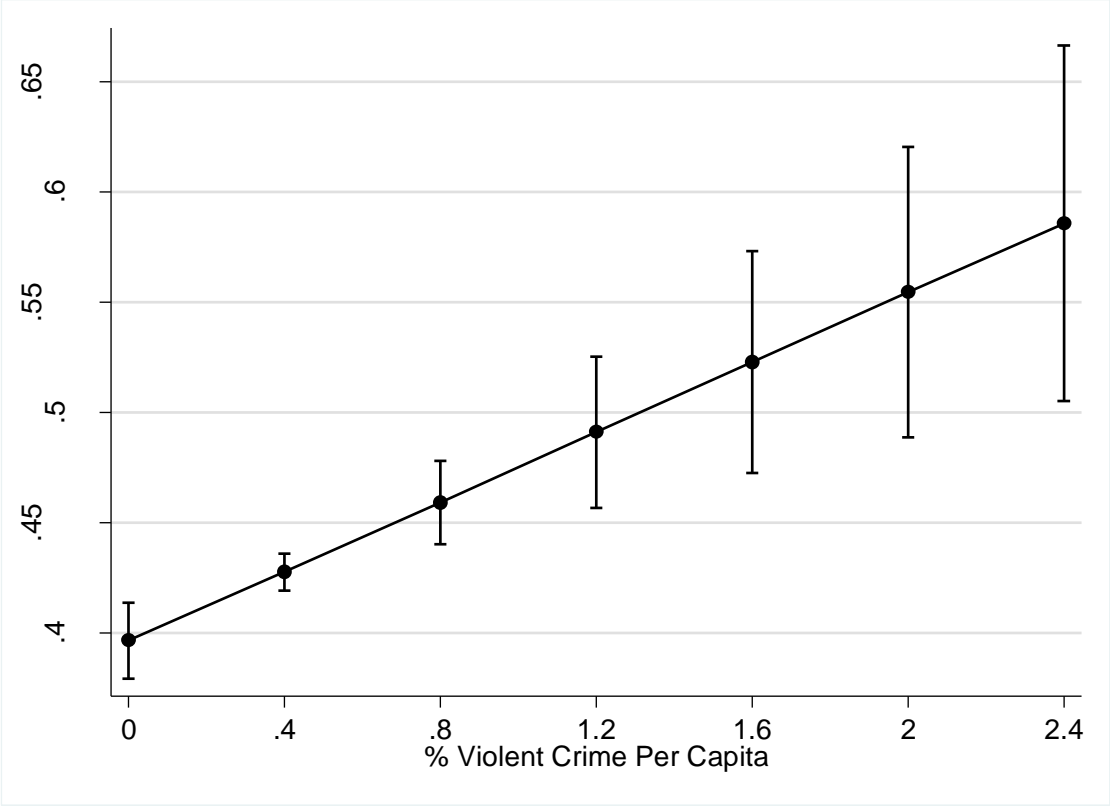


Figure 3. Marginal Effects for Gun Violence Concern and Assault Weapons Ban Models

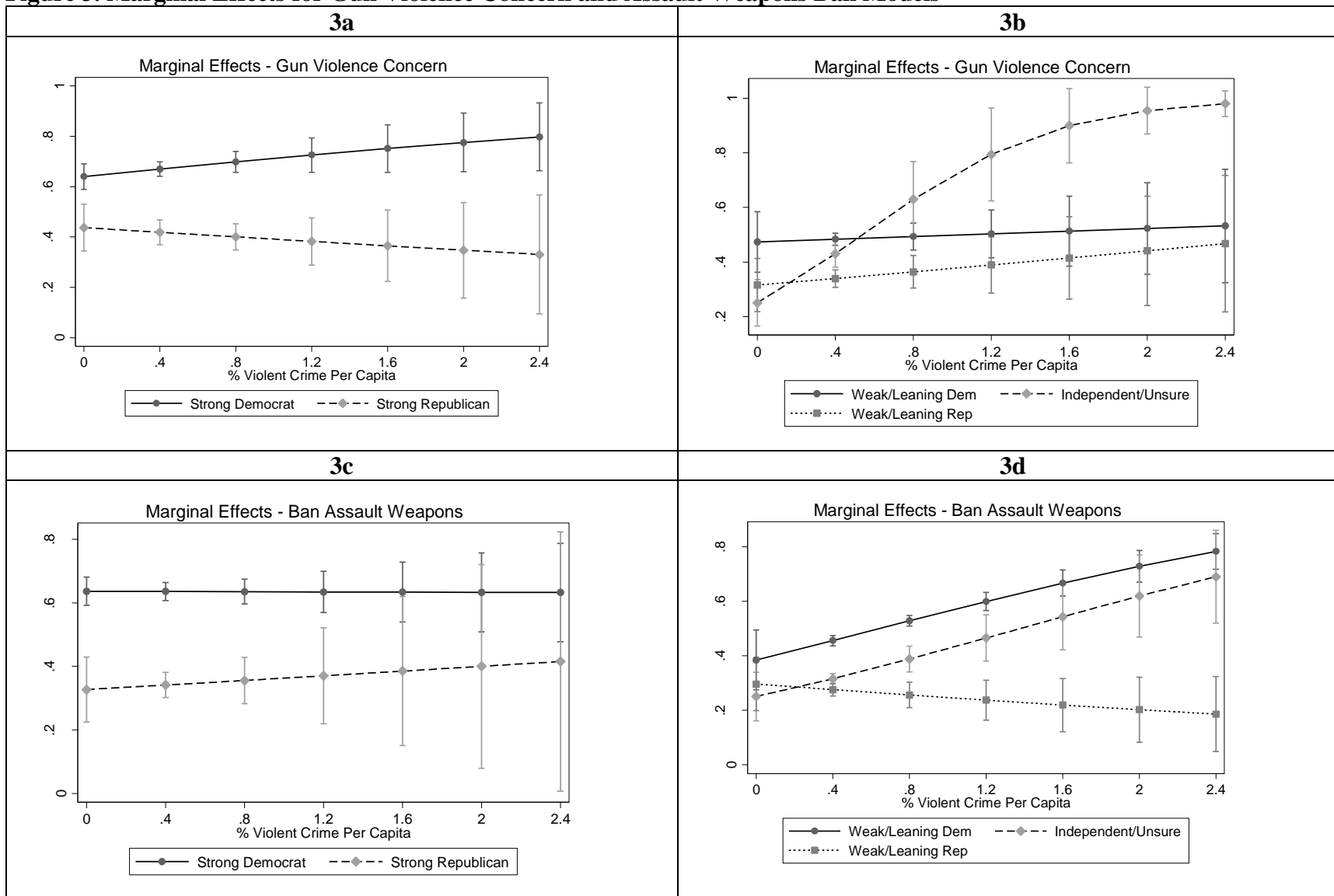


Table 1 – Predicting Attitudes about Gun Violence Concern & A Proposed Policy on Ban Assault Weapons

Variable	Gun Violence Concern						Assault Weapon Ban					
	Model 1-1 – Base Model			Model 1-2 – Interactions			Model 2-1 – Base Model			Model 2-2 – Interactions		
	Coef	SE	p<	Coef	SE	p<	Coef	SE	p<	Coef	SE	p<
Crime Per Capita (PC)	0.598	0.224	0.008	0.355	0.225	0.115	0.435	0.110	0.000	-0.009	0.212	0.966
Weak/Leaning Dem	-0.670	0.077	0.000	-0.574	0.120	0.000	-0.607	0.064	0.000	-0.978	0.108	0.000
Independent/Unsure	-0.943	0.127	0.000	-1.639	0.166	0.000	-1.321	0.089	0.000	-1.706	0.132	0.000
Weak/Leaning Rep	-1.301	0.118	0.000	-1.293	0.146	0.000	-1.501	0.108	0.000	-1.440	0.156	0.000
Strong Republican	-1.066	0.189	0.000	-0.895	0.297	0.003	-1.450	0.174	0.000	-1.566	0.379	0.000
CrimePC X Weak Dem	---	---	---	-0.249	0.243	0.306	---	---	---	0.872	0.213	0.000
CrimePC X Independent	---	---	---	1.837	0.508	0.000	---	---	---	0.941	0.275	0.001
Crime PC X Weak Rep	---	---	---	-0.067	0.272	0.806	---	---	---	-0.282	0.314	0.369
Crime PC X Strong Rep	---	---	---	-0.558	0.443	0.208	---	---	---	0.199	0.638	0.755
Gender (0,1)	0.410	0.060	0.000	0.395	0.061	0.000	0.505	0.051	0.000	0.495	0.052	0.000
Non-white (0,1)	0.384	0.050	0.000	0.372	0.055	0.000	-0.001	0.053	0.982	-0.016	0.059	0.790
Age	-0.029	0.009	0.002	-0.026	0.009	0.003	-0.057	0.012	0.000	-0.055	0.011	0.000
Age ²	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000
Education	-0.009	0.028	0.752	-0.002	0.027	0.949	0.048	0.027	0.079	0.051	0.029	0.080
Political Awareness	0.018	0.031	0.558	0.019	0.033	0.570	-0.059	0.038	0.122	-0.061	0.038	0.106
Liberal (0,1)	0.006	0.130	0.965	0.047	0.138	0.735	-0.041	0.112	0.717	-0.048	0.110	0.660
Moderate/Unsure (0,1)	-0.056	0.133	0.673	-0.012	0.147	0.936	-0.578	0.136	0.000	-0.567	0.136	0.000
Conservative (0,1)	-0.425	0.183	0.020	-0.411	0.190	0.031	-1.383	0.164	0.000	-1.379	0.156	0.000
Very Conservative (0,1)	-0.269	0.218	0.216	-0.261	0.217	0.229	-1.934	0.154	0.000	-1.942	0.149	0.000
Urbanicity	-0.027	0.065	0.679	-0.018	0.066	0.784	-0.070	0.025	0.005	-0.071	0.023	0.002
Gun in HH, not owner (0,1)	0.109	0.191	0.569	0.159	0.180	0.377	0.912	0.131	0.000	0.929	0.113	0.000
No Guns in HH (0,1)	0.844	0.157	0.000	0.805	0.160	0.000	1.263	0.099	0.000	1.253	0.097	0.000
Cut 1	-3.590	0.279		-3.600	0.305		-2.849	0.304		-3.010	0.287	
Cut 2	-2.024	0.237		-2.032	0.268		-1.575	0.292		-1.734	0.273	
Cut 3	0.109	0.214		0.116	0.246		-0.505	0.299		-0.661	0.278	
N	897			897			895			895		
Pseudo R ²	.089			.093			.152			.153		

Note: Model coefficients are from ordered logit regression; variable coding in Appendix Table A1; data are from a 2014 UMass Lowell Center for Public Opinion Poll of 1000 American Adults; conducted by YouGov for the authors.

Supplemental Appendix Table A1 – Variable Coding

Independent Variables	Coding
Crime Per Capita	(instances of violent crime/population) * 100
Party ID	Dummy variables for Weak/Leaning Dem, Independent/Unsure, Weak/Leaning Rep, Strong Republican (Strong Democrat is excluded category)
Gender (0,1)	Dummy variable for respondent gender
Non-white (0,1)	Dummy variable for if respondent is non-white
Age	Age, in years
Age ²	The square of age
Education	6 point Likert scale ranges from No HS degree to Post-grad degree
Political Awareness	Index of 5 knowledge items: id of John Boehner, John Roberts and David Cameron; which party controls the House and Senate?
Ideology	Dummy variables for Liberal, Moderate/Unsure, Conservative, Very Conservative (Very Liberal is the excluded category)
Urbanicity	4-point scale ranges from large metro, suburb, small metro, non-metro
Gun Ownership	Dummy variables for “gun in household, not the owner,” and “no gun in household”; “gun owner” is the excluded category
Dependent Variables	
Table 1 – Concern about Gun Violence and Crime	How concerned are you about the level of gun violence and gun-related crimes in the United States in the past few years? Choose the option that best suits your view. 47% Very concerned (4) 37% Somewhat concerned (3) 13% Not very concerned (2) 4% Not at all concerned (1)
Table 2 – Support for Assault Weapon Ban	Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly banning the sale of assault weapons? 40% Strongly support (4) 20% Somewhat support (3) 20% Somewhat oppose (2) 20% Strongly oppose (1)