



Support for Gun Reform in the United States: The Interactive Relationship Between Partisanship and Trust in the Federal Government

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Abstract

Studies find that trust in the government is statistically related to support for gun control laws in the United States. Another finding in the literature is that Democratic partisans support gun restrictions at a statistically higher percentage than do Republicans—with the reverse relationship existing for loosening gun laws. While a recent study did find an interactive relationship between trust in government and political ideology (Ryan et al. in *Polit Behav* 44(2):725–748, 10.1007/s11109-020-09633-2, 2022), no study explores whether the impact of trust in government on support for gun reform is, in fact, a function of partisanship. In this study, we test whether there is an interactive relationship between trust in the government and partisan identification in predicting support for gun reform. Using the 2022 Cooperative Election Study (CES), we estimate logistic regression models that find an interactive effect between trust and partisanship. For Republicans, an increase in trust in government leads to a dramatic increase in support for gun control proposals, and a substantial decrease in support for gun rights expansion. For Democrats, trust in the government has almost no impact on support for gun reform. Further, we find that political ideology has only a small substantive relationship with attitudes on gun reform when interacted with both partisanship and trust in the federal government. The practical takeaway is that to increase support for gun control among Republicans, advocates must also recognize the role of governmental distrust in attitude formation among this partisan group.

Keywords Gun control · Gun reform · Partisanship · Trust in government

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Introduction

Studies find that trust in the government is statistically related to support for gun control laws (Cook & Goss, 2014; Ryan et al., 2022). Likewise, distrust in government, and particularly law enforcement, has been found to be pervasive among gun owners (Carlson, 2015; Kelsay et al., 2018) and is related to support for policies that extend gun rights (De Angelis et al., 2017). Another stable finding in the literature is that Democratic partisans support gun restrictions at a statistically higher percentage than do Republicans—with the reverse relationship existing for loosening gun laws (Cook & Goss, 2014; Schaeffer, 2021; Smith, 2002). Yet, no study explores whether the impact of trust in government on support for gun reform varies for Democrats and Republicans.

In this study, we utilize the 2022 Cooperative Election Study (CES) to explore American's support for three gun control and three gun rights expansion proposals. This study asks whether partisan identification and trust in the federal government interact with one another to impact support for gun reform? We hypothesize that trust in the federal government will have a large statistically significant positive effect on Republican partisan's support for gun control, but the reverse impact on support for gun rights extension. The relationship is due to Republicans receiving partisan cues where gun rights are framed as being necessary for citizens to defend themselves against a tyrannical government or to protect themselves because of the government's lack of ability to do so. In comparison, we expect trust in the federal government to have no impact on Democratic partisan's support for either gun control or gun rights expansion since they do not receive similar cues. Therefore, Democratic partisans will have a consistent level of support for gun control and opposition to gun rights expansion regardless of their trust in government.

This study also tests whether the interactive relationship is a product of political ideology rather than partisanship. A recent study by Ryan et al. (2022) found an interactive relationship between political ideology and trust in the federal government on a range of gun reforms. We build upon this innovative work. We argue that partisanship and political ideology are correlated but not synonymous, and that gun reforms are partisan issues that do not map cleanly onto ideological positions. Thus, we indicate that partisanship is a more appropriate variable to interact with trust in the federal government. We expect that when interacting all three variables the role of political ideology in predicting gun reforms will be negligible while partisanship will remain important. In the next section, we survey the literature on trust in the government, partisanship, political ideology, and gun reform.

Trust, Partisanship, Political Ideology, and Support for Gun Reform

The Second Amendment of the Constitution dictates 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.” For most of U.S. history, self-defense by private citizens was not legally considered to be a part of the purview of this

amendment (Spitzer, 2015). However, the interpretation was drastically changed to include the individual right of citizens to keep and bear arms in *District of Columbia v. Heller*, 554 U.S. 570 (2008). The “originalist argument” the Supreme Court propagated was that the Second Amendment was written to protect the right of private citizens to bear arms so that they can form a non-politicized citizen militia that can overthrow a tyrannical government, a right that does not exclude self-protection. Despite the improbability of the assertion that a citizen militia could have the power to overthrow the Armed Forces of the United States, or the fact that paramilitary activity is illegal in all 50 states (Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection, 2020), the argument persists as a core principle. It is defended by the National Rifle Association (NRA) (NRA-ILA, 2023), reiterated by Republican figures such as ex-President Trump, argued for by those who support the expansion of gun rights, and practiced by the hundreds of Americans who are part of citizen militias across the United States (Cooter, 2022).

The opinion in *District of Columbia v. Heller* (2008) asserts that the Second Amendment protects gun possession for “traditionally lawful purposes, such as self-defense within the home.” Protection against crime has reportedly become the most common reason for why individuals own a firearm (Gallup, 2023). One way to understand defensive gun ownership is through the collective security hypothesis where citizens start arming themselves because they have lost faith in the state’s ability to provide security for them (McDowall & Loftin, 1983; Spitzer, 1995). Some studies have found that trust in government and views on the ability of law enforcement to provide security are strong predictors of support for gun rights expansion and defensive gun ownership (Carlson, 2015, 2020; De Angelis et al., 2017; Kelsay et al., 2018). Others theorize that lack of trust in government has particularly led conservatives to think that any gun control legislation is a “slippery slope” towards restricting all guns (Ryan et al., 2022). Mistrust of the state and desire for small government are entangled together with a perception of societal decline, which are integral to the process of some gun owners embracing public security as a personal responsibility (Carlson, 2015). The presumption that the state is incapable of solving the issue of crime is at times shared by local governments and law enforcement themselves, leading to policies that normalize gun owners as collaborators in the enforcement of social order—the so called “good guys with guns” (Carlson, 2020). The narrative of the “good guys with a gun” is intrinsically tied to ideas about masculinity and race and how social roles and crime are imagined by those who carry a gun for self-protection (Stroud, 2015). At its core is the belief that trained law-abiding gun owners, often white men, are the “good guys,” the morally superior, upstanding citizens who have the right and duty to defend themselves and their loved ones because the government is incapable of doing so. Consequently, trust is at the center of the rhetoric and practices that are linked to this Second Amendment interpretation. Studies show that trust in the government is intrinsically linked with support for gun rights among individuals (Cook & Goss, 2014; Ryan et al., 2022). Therefore, our analysis is especially focused on how trust in the government impacts support for gun reform.

Beyond these observations, gun control related dialogue also materializes into predictable partisan patterns. In the wake of any mass shooting, Republican politicians are quick to downplay the role of the weapon in the incident and defend their gun rights with arguments laid out above when confronted with calls for reform. On the other hand, Democratic politicians spotlight the weapon used in the incident and call for legal gun reform. The cleavages between Democrats and Republicans on the issue of guns run particularly deep. According to Pew Research Center (2021), 81% of Democrats think gun laws should be stricter while only 20% of Republicans agree. Furthermore, guns have been dividing partisans for more than half a century. The first time support for gun control appeared in the Democratic party platform and support for gun rights in the Republican platform was in 1968 after the shooting of Robert F. Kennedy (Spitzer, 1995, p. 97). The most recent Republican party platform calls for a strong defense of gun rights and rejection of gun control reforms, as well as a critique of lawsuits targeting gun manufacturers (Republican Party Platform, 2016). The 2020 Democratic Party Platform calls for ending of gun violence through such gun control measures as universal background checks, closing loopholes that allow gun purchases by individuals with a history of abuse or convictions of hate crimes, and incentivizing states to implement licensing requirements (Democratic Party Platform, 2020).

It is the consistent efforts by gun lobbying organizations such as the NRA, which by the 1990s was so radicalized they saw any gun control legislation as a threat to all individual freedoms, that tied gun rights to a conservative ideology and the Republican party (Melzer, 2009). At the same time, partisan sorting and polarization particularly on the party elite level has resulted in elected officials holding more consistent and more extreme positions relative to the general public on issues such as guns (Fiorina et al., 2020). In 1993, members across party lines voted for (and against) the Federal Assault Weapons Ban. The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act passed in 2022, the first piece of federal legislation attempting to incrementally reform gun laws since the Assault Weapons Ban, had all Democrats in Congress voting in favor of it while only 14 Republicans in the House and 15 in the Senate signed on. In addition, the NRA today donates primarily to the Republican party, with only Republican senators making the list of top senatorial beneficiaries of NRA donations (Brady United, 2023).

There has been a considerable amount of debate over just how much partisan polarization is also occurring among the voting population. Miller (2019) finds that on the issue of guns the public begins to polarize only during the Obama Administration and that partisan responses vary greatly depending on the suggested policy. Policy differences are extensively recorded by Pew Research Center (2021) as well—there is over a 40% gap between Democrats and Republicans on support for assault weapons ban, but only a little over a 20% gap on support for background checks. However, what is consistent is that whether it is a question of specific gun control measures or of a general gun control framework Republicans support it significantly less than Democrats (Pew Research Center, 2021; Schaeffer, 2021; Smith, 2002). The difference does not change across time, which indicates the difference is not simply a product of greater ideological sorting into partisan groupings that has occurred over time.

Trust is a fundamental feature of the arguments advocates use when defending the right to bear arms and there seems to be a statistically significant correlation between lack of trust, defensive gun ownership, and support for policies that expand gun rights. Furthermore, the benefits of defensive gun ownership and mistrust of government are frameworks explicitly propagated by the Republican party (see e.g., the 2016 Republican party platform¹). In contrast, the Democratic Party does not explicitly reproduce any meaningful narratives about trust when advocating for gun control. In other words, Democratic partisans are not receiving the same frame on the topic. Therefore, there is the expectation that attitudes towards trust in government would not impact Democrats. Instead, all major gun control organizations and the Democratic party advocate a public health approach that emphasizes the importance of community violence prevention through social programs in place of punitive measures (see e.g., the 2020 Democratic party platform). While a certain amount of trust in government is required for citizens to support policies that incur material or ideological sacrifices (Hetherington, 2015; Rudolph & Evans, 2005), it is less consequential for those who believe that government should act.

Ryan et al. (2022) had previously explored how trust in government might operate differently for people espousing competing ideologies. At times, the authors treat political ideology and partisanship as being synonymous and use the terms interchangeably. We argue, due to the clear partisan signals highlighted above, that partisanship is a more prominent messenger of cues regarding gun reform arguments. In comparison, political ideological groupings do not have such readily identifiable groups of messengers, or grand outlets for messages (such as elected officials with a party label or a published election platform). As Mason (2015, p. 130) states, “partisanship is the most prominent political identity because parties are the groups that directly compete for power in the political realm, and competition between groups increases the salience of the competing group identities.” In comparison, the author argues that ideological identity would impact attitudes and behavior to a much lesser extent due to the absence of a political competition dimension. Further, Castle and Stepp (2021) highlight how most individuals have low levels of political knowledge and lack a coherent set of ideological beliefs. The authors point out how partisanship is a social-psychological identity that has the greatest impact on attitude formation and behavior because party identifiers have access to several cues, such as party platforms, messages from party elites, party activists, affiliated interest groups, and even partisan news sources.

The importance of partisanship should be even more pronounced when investigating attitudes on issues that do not have clear ideological connections. A religious issue, such as abortion restriction, fits quite cleanly on an ideological spectrum. In comparison, the relationship between ideology and gun reforms is not easily discernible. For example, there is nothing inherent within the conservative ideology that would translate into opposition towards a ban on a particular type of firearm. Instead, opposition to certain firearm bans, such as assault rifles, is a partisan issue

¹ The Republican National Convention chose to not adopt a new platform at the 2020 convention due to Covid-19.

position. Therefore, we expect the impact of trust in government on support for gun reforms to have straightforward partisan trends—not ideological trends. We expect that trust in government will have an interactive effect with partisanship when predicting support or opposition to gun reform. Since Republican partisans are the group receiving the frame regarding the relationship between guns and views on the government, we expect that trust in government will only be significant for predicting their views on reform.

Hypotheses

Four overarching hypotheses are posited to test the effect of trust in the government, partisanship, and political ideology on support for gun control policies and policies that expand gun rights as well how the variables interact:

H₁ Democrats are more likely than Republicans to support gun control and less likely than Republicans to support the expansion of gun rights.

H₂ Individuals at higher levels of trust in the federal government are more likely to support gun control and less likely to support the expansion of gun rights.

H₃ There is an interactive relationship between trust in the federal government and partisanship.²

H_{3a} Republican respondents' support for gun control or rights expansion is largely dependent on their level of trust in the federal government.

H_{3b} Democratic respondents' support for gun control or rights expansion is not, or only slightly, dependent on their level of trust in the federal government.

H₄ When interacting trust in the federal government, partisanship, and political ideology, political ideology will only have a negligible impact on support for gun reforms.

Data

The data for the analyses comes from the 2022 Cooperative Election Study (CES), which is a national stratified sample administered by YouGov (Schaffner et al., 2023). The 2022 CES surveyed more than 50,000 respondents carried out in two waves before and after the 2022 U.S. midterm congressional elections. The

² We do not have strong theoretical expectations derived from the literature for independents. Therefore, we do not include a hypothesis for the group. However, we include independents in the analysis as they represent a sizable and important segment of the citizenry.

pre-election survey was administered between September and October of 2022. Respondents were asked two-thirds of the questionnaire during the pre-election survey, which focused on measures such as demographic information, political ideology, partisan identification, as well as voting intentions. The post-election survey was administered in November 2022 where respondents answered questions attending primarily to issues salient to the election. In the empirical analysis, all regression models were estimated utilizing the “common weight” post-stratification survey weight to reduce sampling error and potential non-response bias.³ The multiple regression models in the analysis contain an $N > 44,500$ respondents.

Dependent Variable and Method

The dependent variables explored in this study measure the attitudes people hold towards gun control and gun rights expansion. In the CES pre-election survey, the respondents were asked, “On the issue of gun regulation, do you support or oppose each of the following proposals?” For each proposal, the responses were coded a 0 = opposition and 1 = support. Three proposals assessed support for gun control: (1) Ban assault rifles, (2) Provide federal funding to encourage states to take guns away from people who already own them but might pose a threat to themselves or others, and (3) Improve background checks to give authorities time to check the juvenile and mental health records of any prospective gun buyer under the age of 21. The respondents were also provided three proposals that represented the expansion of gun rights: (1) Prohibit state and local governments from publishing the names and addresses of all gun owners, (2) Make it easier for people to obtain concealed-carry permit, and (3) Allow teachers and school officials to carry guns in public schools.

The reform questions were chosen by the scholars on the CES’s committee for deciding the common content questions to be included in the 2022 expanded “gun reform” section. These measures for gun reform are similar to other longstanding measures represented in large-scale national election studies, such as the CES since 2014 and several American National Election Studies (ANES). The measures were intended to explore a baseline understanding of public sentiment for national-level gun reform. There is recognition that these measures do not account for local variation in current gun laws. It should also be noted that the reforms vary in terms of how well they would reduce gun violence, as well as vary in their prospects for implementation. For our purposes, the intended use of these measures is to understand general support for a range of reforms. Support for these proposals follow the overall trends seen in other surveys that investigate support for gun regulation, which we discuss in the results section. Since the dependent variables are binary, we estimate logistic regression models with survey weights incorporated.

³ Since the six dependent variables of interest were included in the pre-election survey, we do not utilize the post-election survey weights. The only variable in our analysis that derives from the post-election survey is the measure for trust in the federal government. As a robustness check we estimated models using the post-election survey weights. The results were substantively the same.

Independent Variables

Several variables are included in the empirical analysis that have either been found to impact attitudes towards gun regulation or are common in studies on American political behavior and attitudes. First, we include the socio-demographic variables of age, gender, race, education, and income in the regression models. These control variables are not the focus of the study, but their inclusion is necessary as they might be correlated with our main variables of interest. One expectation is that women will be more supportive of the gun control proposals and less supporting of the gun rights explanation proposals (Goss, 2017; Patten et al., 2012; Shapiro & Mahajan, 1986; Smith, 2002). Another expectation is that non-white respondents will be more supportive of gun control (Patten et al., 2012; Smith, 1980). We also expect age to be negatively correlated with support for gun control, i.e., younger people are most supportive compared to older people (Vegter & Middlewood, 2022). We do not have strong expectations for the other control variables, except that a higher level of education is most likely associated with support for gun control. Variable coding and descriptive statistics for the control variables are included in Appendix 1 and 2.

There are also three attitudinal variables included in the multiple regression models. First, since previous studies have found that a respondent's political ideology impacts their views towards gun regulation, we include it as a predictor variable (Patten et al., 2012; Smith, 2002; Thompson et al., 2013). The variable is a 7-point measure from 1 = "very liberal" to 7 = "very conservative". Second, a 3-category partisan identification measure is included as one of our main predictor variables. The partisan identification measure was created from the 7-point variable in the dataset. We combine "strong" partisans, partisans, and "not very strong" partisans into one group. The inclusion of "not very strong Democrat" and "not very strong Republican" partisans into the partisan groupings was done to avoid overestimating the impact of partisan identification on support for gun regulation. Finally, a variable is included that measures the respondent's trust in the federal government. In particular, the question asks, "How much trust do you have in the federal government in Washington when it comes to handling the nation's problems?" The responses are coded: 0 = "not at all", 1 = "not very much", 2 = "a fair amount", and 3 = "a great deal".⁴

⁴ The measure for trust in the federal government is treated like a continuous variable here for ease of presentation and interpretation. As a robustness check, we also estimated models where the measure was treated as an ordinal level measure. The results are substantively the same. In the survey, there was also a measure for trust in the state governments. The two trust measures correlated at 0.458. Since discussion of the Bill of Rights' Second Amendment commonly references the federal government, we utilize the trust in the federal government measure. As a robustness check, we also included trust in the state government as a control and the results were substantively the same.

Table 1 Percentage support for gun policy reform full sample and by partisan identification

	Sample (%)	Dem (%)	Ind (%)	Rep (%)
Gun control				
Ban assault rifles	63.71	88.29	54.47*	33.12*
Provide federal funding to encourage states to take guns away from people who already own them but might pose a threat to themselves or others	61.53	85.48	52.77*	31.59*
Improve background checks to give authorities time to check the juvenile and mental health records of any prospective gun buyer under the age of 21	89.53	96.30	84.79*	82.25*
Gun rights extension				
Prohibit state and local governments from publishing the names and addresses of all gun owners	55.81	38.39	61.35*	78.01*
Make it easier for people to obtain concealed-carry permit	38.19	16.76	44.92*	65.53*
Allow teachers and school officials to carry guns in public schools	45.85	21.29	50.10*	76.94*

*Indicates statistically significant bivariate difference at $p < 0.05$

Results: Descriptive Statistics

In Table 1, the percentages of support among respondents for the six gun regulation proposals, as well as the percentages support by partisan identification, are presented. The first column of percentages displays overall support for the proposals in the sample. The results demonstrate that a majority of respondents (> 60%) support all three gun control proposals. The gun control proposal with the greatest level of support (around 90%) is improved background checks for buyers under the age of 21. Recently, the Texas House Committee on Community Safety witnessed bipartisan support for an age-related policy, which outright bans individuals between 18 and 21 from buying semiautomatic rifles. Although the policy has little chance to become law, this incidence demonstrates some bipartisan support for age-related laws. There is markedly less support for the proposals that extend gun rights. Less than a majority of respondents support making conceal-carry permits easier to obtain or allowing teachers and school officials to carry guns in public school. In comparison, a majority of respondents support prohibiting the publishing of names and addresses of all gun owners.

There are striking differences in the percentages of support for the proposals when aggregated by partisan identification. In fact, across all six gun regulation proposals there are statistically significant bivariate differences between the partisan groupings. A large percentage of Democrats support all three gun control measures, whereas a majority of Republicans only support improved background checks for individuals under the age of 21. Greater than 85% of Democrats support banning assault rifles and providing funding to take away gun from people that pose a risk, while only around a third (33%) of Republicans support the proposals. Even where a majority of both Democrats and Republicans agree on a gun control proposal (improved background checks under 21) the partisan gap is substantial (around 14 percentage points).

The trend is largely reversed when exploring the proposals for gun rights extension. There exists little support for gun rights extension among Democrats, and a sizable percentage of support among Republicans. Less than a quarter of Democrats support making concealed-carry permits easier to obtain or allowing staff to carry guns in public schools, and less than 40% support prohibiting the publishing of gun owners' information. In contrast, two-thirds or more of Republicans support the proposals to extend gun rights. The results provide initial support for H_1 .

In Table 2, the mean level of trust in the federal government is presented for individuals that oppose and support each of the six gun regulation proposals. Across all six proposals there are statistically significant differences in respondents' level of trust when comparing those that oppose and support the proposals. Respondents that support the three gun control proposals have a statistically higher level of trust in the federal government when compared to those individuals that oppose the proposals. Conversely, respondents that support the gun rights extension proposals have a statistically significant lower level of trust in the federal government. The results provide initial support for H_2 . The descriptive statistics point to trends that are expected to exist in the

Table 2 Mean level of trust in federal government based on gun reform views

	Oppose	Support
Gun control		
Ban assault rifles	0.72	1.47*
Provide federal funding to encourage states to take guns away from people who already own them but might pose a threat to themselves or others	0.75	1.49*
Improve background checks to give authorities time to check the juvenile and mental health records of any prospective gun buyer under the age of 21	0.64	1.27*
Gun rights extension		
Prohibit state and local governments from publishing the names and addresses of all gun owners	1.46	1.00*
Make it easier for people to obtain concealed-carry permit	1.42	0.83*
Allow teachers and school officials to carry guns in public schools	1.48	0.87*

*Indicates statistically significant bivariate difference at $p < 0.05$

Table 3 Models predicting attitudes towards gun reform

	Ban Assault Rifles	Take Away Guns	Improve Background Checks	Prohibit Publish Names	Conceal Carry Easier	Carry Guns School
Constant	0.37** (0.07)	1.13** (0.07)	1.80** (0.10)	- 0.19** (0.06)	- 1.00** (0.06)	- 0.88** (0.06)
Age	0.03** (0.00)	0.00** (0.00)	0.02** (0.00)	- 0.00** (0.00)	- 0.01** (0.00)	- 0.01** (0.00)
Woman	0.91** (0.03)	0.42** (0.02)	0.79** (0.03)	- 0.43** (0.02)	- 0.65** (0.02)	- 0.30** (0.02)
Race—Black	0.30** (0.05)	0.38** (0.04)	- 0.23** (0.06)	- 0.15** (0.03)	0.29** (0.04)	- 0.07 (0.04)
Race—Hispanic	0.26** (0.05)	0.35** (0.05)	0.14* (0.07)	- 0.10* (0.04)	0.03 (0.04)	- 0.07 (0.04)
Race—Other	0.14** (0.05)	0.15** (0.04)	- 0.15* (0.06)	- 0.16** (0.04)	0.05 (0.04)	- 0.10* (0.04)
Education	0.03** (0.01)	- 0.01 (0.01)	- 0.001 (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	- 0.03** (0.01)	- 0.12** (0.01)
Income	0.00 (0.00)	0.01** (0.00)	0.01** (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	- 0.02** (0.00)	- 0.00 (0.00)
Political ideology	- 0.36** (0.01)	- 0.31** (0.01)	- 0.23** (0.01)	0.20** (0.01)	0.27** (0.01)	0.35** (0.01)
Party ID—independent	- 0.99** (0.04)	- 0.89** (0.04)	- 0.89** (0.06)	0.52** (0.03)	0.89** (0.04)	0.61** (0.03)
Party ID—republican	- 1.58** (0.04)	- 1.26** (0.04)	- 0.96** (0.06)	0.99** (0.03)	1.43** (0.04)	1.39** (0.03)
Trust—federal gov	0.63** (0.02)	0.70** (0.02)	0.55** (0.02)	- 0.26** (0.01)	- 0.33** (0.02)	- 0.34** (0.02)
N	44,557	44,557	44,558	44,556	44,557	44,559
PRE	0.48	0.46	0.11	0.31	0.38	0.51
ePRE	0.42	0.37	0.24	0.18	0.31	0.35
Log likelihood	- 20,021.0	- 21,501.3	- 12,841.9	- 26,082.4	- 23,184.1	- 22,454.5

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; standard errors in parentheses; survey weights incorporated

multiple regression models. However, they do not indicate how partisanship and trust in the federal government might interact with one another.

Results: Regression Analysis

Table 3 presents output from logistic regression models predicting support for the six gun reform proposals. First, it is worth mentioning trends regarding the impact of the control variables. Age and gender are statistically significant and positively

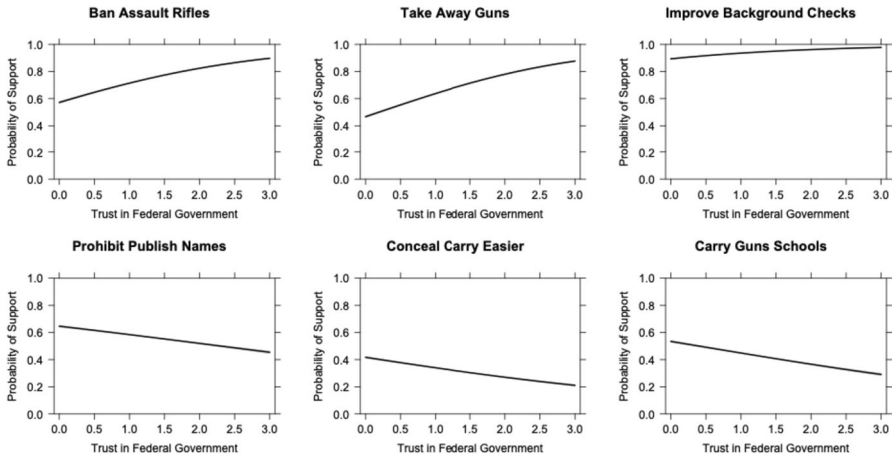


Fig. 1 The effect of trust in federal government on gun reform support. 95% confidence bounds are displayed in shading. The confidence bounds are minuscule given the large number of observations

associated with supporting the gun control proposals and opposing the gun rights extension proposals. There are mixed statistically significant results when assessing the impact of race, education, and income. For political ideology, conservatives are more likely to oppose gun control proposals and support gun rights extension proposals. Second, the results provide support for H_1 . Republicans are statistically less likely to support gun control and more likely to support gun rights extension when compared to Democrats. Third, the results also provide support for H_2 . We should note that the relative size of the coefficients for trust in the federal government are larger than the political ideology coefficients. Trust in the federal government is associated with a statistically higher level of support for the gun control proposals, whereas trust is associated with a lower level of support for gun rights expansion.

In Fig. 1, predicted probabilities are displayed for the effect of trust in the federal government on each of the six proposals. For gun control, trust in the federal government has the largest impact on belief that funding should be provided to take away guns from someone that could pose a threat. An individual with no trust in the federal government is predicted to have a probability of support less than 0.5. In comparison, someone with a great deal of trust is predicted to have a probability of support around 0.9. The difference in predicted support when comparing individuals at the extreme ends of trust is around 0.3 for banning assault rifles and 0.1 for improving background checks, with individuals at the highest level of trust more likely to support the proposals.

The opposite trend exists when exploring how trust in the federal government impacts support for the gun rights extension proposals. There is a decrease of just over 0.2 in the probability of supporting the gun rights extension proposals when comparing an individual with no trust to a respondent with a great deal of trust in the federal government. A respondent with no trust in the federal government is predicted to be more likely to support prohibiting the publishing of names and addresses of gun owners and allowing guns to be carried in schools. On the other

Table 4 Interactive models predicting gun reform

	Ban Assault Rifles	Take Away Guns	Improve Background Checks	Prohibit Publish Names	Conceal Carry Easier	Carry Guns School
Constant	1.01** (0.08)	1.46** (0.07)	2.48** (0.12)	- 0.46** (0.06)	- 1.58** (0.07)	- 1.31** (0.07)
Age	0.03** (0.00)	0.00** (0.00)	0.02** (0.00)	- 0.01** (0.00)	- 0.01** (0.00)	- 0.01** (0.00)
Woman	0.91** (0.03)	0.42** (0.02)	0.78** (0.03)	- 0.42** (0.02)	- 0.65** (0.02)	- 0.29** (0.02)
Race—Black	0.28** (0.05)	0.36** (0.04)	- 0.26** (0.06)	- 0.13** (0.03)	0.31** (0.04)	- 0.06 (0.04)
Race—Hispanic	0.24** (0.05)	0.34** (0.05)	0.13 (0.07)	- 0.08* (0.04)	0.06 (0.04)	- 0.05 (0.04)
Race—other	0.13** (0.05)	0.15** (0.04)	- 0.15** (0.06)	- 0.15** (0.04)	0.06 (0.04)	- 0.10* (0.04)
Education	0.04** (0.01)	- 0.01 (0.01)	0.003 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	- 0.03** (0.01)	- 0.13** (0.01)
Income	0.00 (0.00)	0.01** (0.00)	0.02** (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	- 0.02** (0.00)	- 0.01* (0.00)
Political ideology	- 0.35** (0.01)	- 0.30** (0.01)	- 0.23** (0.01)	0.19** (0.01)	0.26** (0.01)	0.34** (0.01)
Party ID—independent	- 1.98** (0.07)	- 1.38** (0.06)	- 1.89** (0.11)	1.15** (0.06)	1.87** (0.07)	1.41** (0.06)
Party ID—republican	- 2.66** (0.07)	- 1.91** (0.06)	- 1.79** (0.11)	1.66** (0.05)	2.37** (0.06)	2.29** (0.06)
Trust—federal gov	0.08* (0.03)	0.39** (0.03)	0.03 (0.05)	- 0.01 (0.02)	0.13** (0.03)	0.04 (0.02)
Ind*trust fed. gov	0.74** (0.05)	0.35** (0.05)	0.87** (0.08)	- 0.47** (0.04)	- 0.72** (0.04)	- 0.58** (0.04)
Rep*trust fed. Gov	0.78** (0.04)	0.50** (0.04)	0.57** (0.06)	- 0.49** (0.03)	- 0.64** (0.04)	- 0.64** (0.04)
<i>N</i>	44,557	44,557	44,558	44,556	44,557	44,559
PRE	0.48	0.46	0.11	0.31	0.39	0.51
ePRE	0.43	0.37	0.24	0.18	0.31	0.35
Log likelihood	- 19,809.0	- 21,418.8	- 12,779.3	- 25,936.6	- 22,969.6	- 22,262.0

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; standard errors in parentheses; survey weights incorporated

hand, a respondent with a great deal of trust is predicted to be more likely to oppose these two proposals. The results provide convincing support for H_2 .

In Table 4, model output is presented from regression models predicting support for the six gun reform proposals with an interactive effect between partisan identification and trust in the federal government. The models are necessary for testing H_3 and the sub-hypotheses. Overall, the same trends exist when exploring the impact

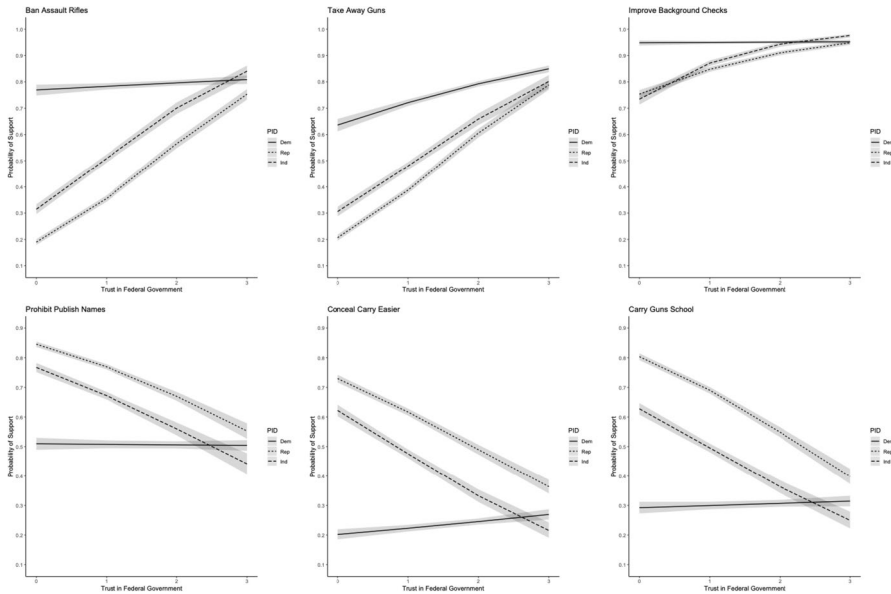


Fig. 2 The interactive effect of partisanship and trust on support for gun control. 95% confidence bounds are displayed in shading

of the control variables. The results also show that partisan identification is statistically related to support for the proposals in the same direction as before. However, the results in Table 4 indicate that when accounting for the interactive relationship between partisan identification and trust in the federal government, trust in the federal government only has a statistically significant relationship with predicting three out of six proposals. For the interaction terms, Table 4 demonstrates a statistically significant interactive effect between partisanship and trust in the federal government across the six models, which provides support for H_3 .

In Fig. 2, predicted probabilities for the interactive effect of partisanship and trust in the federal government on support for the gun reforms are presented. At the top, the three gun control proposals are displayed. First, when exploring support for the ban on assault rifles the figure shows that the predicted level of support is the same for Democrats across all trust in the federal government levels. In other words, trust in the federal government does not impact Democrats’ support for banning assault rifles. In comparison, the impact of trust in the federal government on Republicans’ is substantively large. The predicted level of support for banning assault rifles for a Republican with no trust in the federal government is just under 0.2 whereas a Republican with a great deal of trust is just over 0.7.

A similar relationship is found when exploring taking away guns from people that might pose a threat to others. Here, Democrats are moderately impacted by their trust in the federal government. For Democrats, there is an increase of around 0.2 in the probability of supporting the policy when comparing an individual with no trust to one with a great deal of trust. For Republicans, the difference is three times

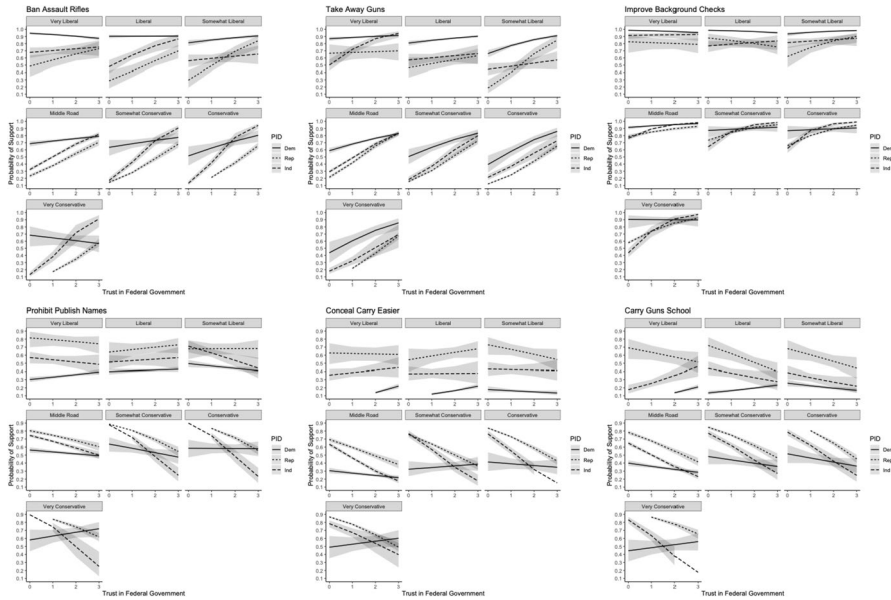


Fig. 3 Three-way interactive effect predicted probabilities. 95% confidence bounds are displayed in shading

that size. A Republican with no trust is expected to have a predicted level of support of around 0.2 compared to a Republican with a great deal of trust, which has a predicted level of support of around 0.75.

The proposal to improve background checks for gun buyers under 21 was a proposal that contained a high percentage of support (89.5%). Around 96% of Democrats and 82% of Republicans supported the proposal, so for both groups the predicted level of support should be high at all levels of trust due to the low percentage that opposed the proposal. However, even for support for this policy a substantive interactive effect exists. Figure 2 shows that trust in the federal government has no impact on Democrats predicted level of support for the improved background checks. For Republicans, there is a change in probability of support for improving background checks of around 0.2 when comparing an individual with no trust to someone with a great deal of trust.

At the bottom of Fig. 2, the predicted probabilities for the interactive effect on support for the three gun rights expansion proposals are displayed. Across all three proposals, the predicted level of support for the Democrats is statistically the same regardless of the respondent’s level of trust. In comparison, a Republican’s predicted level of support for the gun rights expansion policies is considerably less for individuals with a great deal of trust when compared to those with no trust at all. The predicted drop is just over 0.25 for Republicans when exploring support for the prohibition of publishing names and addresses of gun owners on websites. The predicted change in probability is around 0.35 in support for the proposal that would make conceal and carry easier, and around 0.4 for supporting staff carrying guns in

schools. The results provide support for H_{3a} and H_{3b} , which indicated that the impact of trust in the federal government will be large for Republicans when predicting support for gun law reform (and small or nonexistent for Democrats).

To show that partisanship, as opposed to political ideology, explains differences in the effect of trust in government on support for gun reform, we estimated models containing a three-way interactive effect between trust in government, partisanship, and political ideology on support for the six reforms. In Fig. 3, predicted probabilities are displayed for the three-way interaction's effect on support for the gun reforms from the models.⁵ The results provide strong support for H_4 , which hypothesized that gun reforms are mostly partisan, as opposed to ideological, issues. The interactive effect between partisanship and trust in the government remains. Democrat partisans' predicted level of support for the reforms remains constant regardless of their trust in government. For Democrats, levels of support in the gun reforms are also consistent across ideological categories.

In comparison, Republicans partisans' greater trust in the government is associated with an increase in the predicted level of support for the three gun control reforms and a decrease for the three gun rights expansion reforms. The role of political ideology in predicting support for gun reforms among Republicans is negligible. For Republicans, across each of the seven political ideology categories the predicted level of support for the gun reforms is either statistically indistinguishable, or only a small substantive difference, at each at each level of trust in the federal government. For example, Republican partisans have the same predicted level of support for the gun reforms when they have "a great deal of trust" in the government whether they identify as "very liberal" or "very conservative". Conversely, when Republicans indicate they have "no trust at all" in the government their predicted level of support is also similar whether they identify as "very liberal" or "very conservative". The results demonstrate that while partisanship and political ideology might be correlated, there are issues where partisanship is much better predictor of attitudes than is political ideology. This finding also extends to interactive relationships.

Conclusion

This study tested the interactive relationship between partisan identification and trust in the government on support for gun reform. The empirical analyses show straightforward and predictable partisan trends regarding the interactive relationship. Support for gun control and gun rights extension is not a function of trust in the government for Democrats. On the other hand, Republicans' support for gun control and gun rights extension is largely a product of the level of trust these partisans have in the government. Republicans with a great deal of trust in the government are more likely than Republicans with no trust at all to support gun control measures, as well as oppose gun rights extension proposals. The results

⁵ In some instances, the confidence bounds or prediction lines end. This occurrence is due to the bounds or predictions being outside the axes. The axes were chosen to align and be comparable with Fig. 2.

conform with the partisan arguments that are most common in public debates on gun reform. Republican arguments touch on the link between gun rights and views on the government. First, Republican partisans convey an “originalist argument” for the Second Amendment that highlights the right to bears arms as being necessary to overthrow a tyrannical government. Second, Republican partisans emphasize a contemporary gun rights argument that guns are necessary for protection, while frequently mentioning how the government fails to keep people safe.

What insights from the findings should policy practitioners focus on? The results indicate that policy practitioners should be cognizant that the attitude formation process could be different among the partisan groupings. If gun control advocates are attempting to persuade Republican partisans to support gun reform, they need to be conscious of the role that trust in government plays in crafting views on gun reform. On the other hand, the role of government does not impact the attitudes of Democrats. Therefore, appeals or campaigns attempting to increase support for gun reform might need to target groups with different framing.

We should also note how our results differ from previous research. When interacting trust in government, partisanship, and political ideology the results demonstrate that political ideology had only a small substantive, statistically significant relationship with support for the gun reforms. The results confirm our expectations that some gun reforms do not map out well on the ideological spectrum. Instead, gun reforms are partisan issues promoted, or campaigned against, by partisan actors. Since attitudes towards gun reforms are not a function of deeply engrained ideological beliefs, and partisan issue positions do change, the results provide some hope for future gun control policy adoption.

What areas exist for future research? While independents were included in the analysis, the literature did not point to any theoretical expectations for the impact of trust in government on their support for gun reform. The results did show that independents’ support for gun control and gun rights extensions is impacted by their level of trust in the federal government. Independents with a high level of trust are more supportive of gun control and less supportive of gun rights extension proposals than are those with a low level of trust. The results were comparable to Republicans, albeit slightly weaker in magnitude. To better understand why the impact of trust on support for gun reform resembled that of Republicans, more research is needed that investigates the types of arguments for and against gun reform that are most salient among independents.

Appendix 1: Variable Coding

Age Respondent’s age at the time of the survey.

Gender 0 = man; 1 = woman

Race White (reference category); African American; Hispanic; Other races = other. Other race responses, such as Pacific Islander and Native American, were combined due to a low number of observations. We estimated models with the race variable coded in alternative formats and the results were substantively the same.

Education 1 = did not graduate from high school; 2 = high school graduate; 3 = some college, but no degree (yet); 4 = 2-year college degree; 5 = 4-year college degree; 6 = Postgraduate degree

Income 1 = Less than \$10,000; 2 = \$10,000–\$19,999; 3 = \$20,000–\$29,999; 4 = \$30,000–\$39,999; 5 = \$40,000–\$49,999; 6 = \$50,000–\$59,999; 7 = \$60,000–\$69,999; 8 = \$70,000–\$79,999; 9 = \$80,000–\$99,999; 10 = \$100,000–\$119,999; 11 = \$120,000–\$149,999; 12 = \$150,000–\$199,999; 13 = \$200,000–\$249,999; 14 = \$250,000–\$349,999; 15 = \$350,000–\$499,999; 16 = \$500,000 or more.

Political Ideology 1 = very liberal; 2 = liberal; 3 = somewhat liberal; 4 = middle of the road; 5 = somewhat conservative; 6 = conservative; 7 = very conservative.

Partisan Identification Democrat; Independent; Republican; not very strong partisans coded as partisans.

Trust—Federal Gov. 0 = No trust at all; 1 = Not very much; 2 = A fair amount; 3 = A great deal.

Appendix 2: Descriptive Statistics

See Table 5.

Table 5 Descriptive statistics—-independent variables

Variable	Min	Median	Mean	Max	SD
Age	18	52	50.39	97	17.32
Education	1	3	3.56	6	1.51
Income	1	6	6.46	16	3.58
Political ideology	1	4	3.89	7	1.90
Trust—federal gov	0	1	1.21	3	0.85
Variable	White (%)	Black (%)	Hispanic (%)	Other (%)	
Race	69.17	13.42	8.93	8.47	
Variable	Dem (%)	Ind (%)	Rep (%)		
Party ID	48.68	17.47	33.85		
Variable	Men (%)		Women (%)		
Gender	46.46		53.54		

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors report no conflict of interest.

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