How the Gun Control Debate Stalls Policy Progress: An Experimental Investigation

Benjamin R. Kantack and Collin E. Paschall

March 19, 2017

Abstract

Gun control policy has been an intractable issue in American politics for decades. This is so even as public polling is generally favorable for gun control measures, and even though the frequency of mass shootings and other forms of gun violence ensures that the issue retains a high profile. In this study, we investigate one potential reason for this paradox – the interplay between abstract and concrete arguments used in the rhetoric of gun control politics. We claim that the same conditions that increase the salience of gun violence also put those supporting tighter regulation in an unfavorable position of presenting concrete policy proposals in response to specific real-world events, when in fact an abstract debate about the merits of gun control is actually more advantageous for gun control advocates. To test these claims, we present the results of an experiment designed to test the persuasive power of these different forms of argument. Our findings suggest that the abstract debate of safety versus freedom has better prospects for increasing support for stricter gun control than does the concrete debate that dominates post-shooting discussions of gun control.

Since the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, on December 14, 2012, dozens of mass shootings have been perpetrated in the United States (Stanford MSA, 2017). The Sandy Hook shooting and others have intensified news coverage and policy discussion related to the accessibility of firearms (Towers et al. 2015). Public support for stricter gun control, having declined gradually over the previous two decades, spiked to 58% after the Sandy Hook shooting and has remained relatively near that level thereafter (Gallup 2017).

Based on these factors, one might conclude that the United States is primed to adopt stricter gun control policies in order to reduce the likelihood of future mass shootings. However, despite what seems like an opportune moment for policy advancement, gun control

legislation at the federal level has stalled repeatedly and seems unlikely to gain traction in the near future. Two responses to the Sandy Hook shooting – the Assault Weapons Ban of 2013 and the bipartisan Toomey-Manchin amendment – died in the Senate. When the Toomey-Manchin amendment resurfaced in 2014 after the shooting in San Bernardino, California, it earned even fewer votes than it did initially. Proponents of gun control have thus far failed to sufficiently mobilize public support behind major policy interventions aimed at preventing or mitigating gun violence.

It is likely that a variety of institutional factors impede gun control advocates' policy goals. We submit that one overlooked obstacle contributing to this stalling of policy progress is the fact that the gun control debate, as argued between proponents and opponents and presented to the public in the media, is structured in a way that disadvantages the pro-gun control argument. Specifically, by framing their arguments as responses to specific mass shootings, gun control proponents adopt weaker arguments (and invite stronger arguments from their opponents) than if the debate were couched as an abstract clash of values. Under these circumstances, supporters of increased gun control find themselves defending the applicability of a new policy to the most recent mass shooting(s) rather than the policy's intrinsic merits. Paradoxically, the immediate aftermath of a mass shooting (when the gun control debate crops up most often in American politics) may be the hardest time to advance major gun control legislation if it invites this concrete, shooting-specific variety of the debate.

The Two Gun Control Debates

Gun control can be argued either as an *abstract* or *concrete* matter. In the abstract, the gun control debate is a clash of values between security and freedom. Proponents of increased restrictions on the purchase and possession of firearms contend that stricter gun control will reduce the chances that guns will fall into dangerous hands with accidentally or deliberately deadly results. Opponents of these restrictions make appeals based on the utility of firearms

for personal protection or leisure and reference the Second Amendment's extolling of the virtues of a "well regulated militia" as a check against tyranny. We perceive this abstract argument as holding several advantages for proponents of gun control: gun violence that occurs provides more powerful imagery than violent acts prevented by the possession of firearms, and an eighteenth-century injunction against tyrannical government may strain the imagination of an American public which has had little cause to truly fear totalitarianism in the United States.

Despite these advantages, this abstract debate is rarely litigated in the American court of public opinion. Instead, when the gun control debate arises in the United States, usually in the immediate aftermath of a nationally-salient incident of gun violence, it arises in the form of what we call the *concrete* debate. Gun control proponents advance a specific policy recommendation, such as expanded background checks or preventing individuals on the FBI's No Fly List from being able to purchase firearms. Rather than grounding their opposition in individual freedom and constitutional protections, opponents respond with a practical tack, claiming that whatever new policy is being proposed would not have stopped whatever shooting prompted the debate had it been enacted beforehand. For example, the National Rifle Association statement released in the wake of the Sandy Hook shooting asserted that "Expanding background checks at gun shows will not prevent the next shooting, will not solve violent crime and will not keep our kids safe in schools...The sad truth is that no background check would have prevented the tragedies in Newtown, Aurora or Tucson." (National Rifle Association 2013). Similarly, Florida Republican Senator Marco Rubio explained his decision to vote against new gun control amendments after the 2015 Orlando nightclub shooting by arguing that "None of these crimes that have been committed...would have been prevented by the expanded background checks" (CBS This Morning 2015).

In contrast to the abstract argument, this concrete debate over specific policies and shootings is tilted considerably more in favor of those who oppose new gun control measures. The policies proposed after some of the most prominent recent mass shootings in the United

States would not in fact have prevented the events which prompted their proposals. None of the shooters involved in the Sandy Hook, San Bernardino, or Orlando shootings was on an FBI watch list at the time of their respective shootings (Schwartz et al. 2015; Winter and Connor 2016), the Sandy Hook and San Bernardino shooters did not purchase their own weapons (Balsamo 2017; Hermann and Rosenwald 2012), and the Orlando shooter passed a background check to purchase his (Winter and Connor 2016). Focusing on the counterfactual of whether X have stopped shooting Y effectively "moves the goalposts" in the gun control debate, turning what could be an argument over the intrinsic merits and drawbacks of the policy in question into haggling over a policy's applicability to a specific case. This places a higher burden of proof on the pro-gun control side of the argument, which must either defend that the policy would have "worked" in this specific instance or make the difficult concession that the event which motivated the current policy push would not have been stopped by the new proposal.

In addition to this shift in scope, the concrete version of the gun control debate changes gun control from an "easy" issue of gut feelings and value judgments to a "hard" issue of policy details and complexities (Carmines and Stimson 1980). Centering the discussion on a recent mass shooting may be a strategic decision to attempt to capitalize on the emotional impact of a salient atrocity to build enthusiasm (Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000), but this impact may be attenuated by the shift in focus from gun control in the abstract to concrete counterfactuals that are stacked against proponents of gun control. If reigniting the gun control debate in the wake of high-profile gun violence gives opponents of gun control access to more effective arguments related to whether said mass shooting would have been preventable under a proposed policy, the immediate aftermath of a mass shooting may paradoxically be one of the worst times to attempt to mobilize the public behind policy interventions designed to reduce gun violence.

Hypotheses

We suspect that the arguments presented in these two forms of the gun control debate impact voters' gun control attitudes differently. Specifically, we anticipate that abstract arguments (those focusing on the value debate between security and freedom) will favor proponents of gun control more than concrete arguments (those focusing on specific policies and specific mass shootings). Abstract arguments debate the issue of gun control in its "easiest" form and impose a relatively low burden of proof on supporters of stricter policies. Concrete arguments, on the other hand, "harden" the issue and draw voters' attention to the nitty gritty of the policy details, while also increasing the burden of proof for gun control proponents (who must defend the new policy's applicability to the shooting which prompted the discussion, rather than merely defend it on its intrinsic merits.) This theory underlies our first two hypotheses:

> *H1: Abstract pro-gun control arguments will be more effective than concrete pro-gun control arguments at increasing support for expanded background checks.*

> *H2: Abstract anti-gun control arguments will be less effective than concrete anti-gun control arguments at decreasing support for expanded background checks.*

One of the reasons we see abstract arguments as being more tilted toward the pro-gun control side is that they do not grapple with the specific counterfactual of whether the policy in question would have stopped the most recent incident of mass gun violence. If abstract arguments in fact yield greater support for expanded background checks than concrete ones, we suspect that the concrete case for stricter gun control is being undermined by the fact that individuals perceive the new policy as less effective due to its hypothetical failure to prevent the latest atrocity. As a result, we formulate two hypotheses related to the anticipated effectiveness of expanded background checks:

H3: Abstract pro-gun control arguments will be more effective than concrete pro-gun control arguments at increasing the anticipated effectiveness of expanded background checks.

H4: Abstract anti-gun control arguments will be less effective than concrete anti-gun control arguments at decreasing the anticipated effectiveness of expanded background checks.

Research Design

We conducted an experiment designed to test how the different arguments often heard in the course of the gun control debate affect two attitudes. First, we tested for the differing effects of abstract and concrete, pro- and anti-gun control arguments on participants' *support* for expanded background checks for gun purchases. Second, we tested for the effects of these arguments on participants' *anticipated effectiveness* of an expanded system of background checks on at reducing mass shootings in the United States.

We recruited our participants through the Amazon Mechanical Turk service (MTurk) and conducted the experiment in Spring 2017. MTurk is an online platform that presents users with "human intelligence tasks" and compensates users for their work. This tool has become increasingly popular in social science research over the last five years (Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012). The platform allows researchers to recruit a large number of subjects for simple behavioral experiments and surveys at low cost, and the resulting sample is often more representative and attentive than undergraduate subject pools (Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012; Hauser and Schwarz 2016). We offered participants five cents in exchange for answering a brief series of questions about gun control policy, and, after eliminating some subjects that failed attention checks or were from outside the United States, the result was a sample of 660 participants.

The experiment consisted of a 3 × 3 research design. Each participant received an

abstract pro-gun control argument, a concrete pro-gun control argument, or no pro-gun control argument, followed by abstract anti-gun control argument, a concrete anti-gun control argument, or no anti-gun control argument. Crucially, we varied the content of pro- and anti-gun control arguments so that participants would be randomly exposed to different combinations of abstract and concrete claims about gun control. Following the experimental manipulation, participants answered a battery of demographic questions, including on their partisanship and ideological identification.

The pro-gun control statement was a three-sentence argument. The first sentence read, "We must take measures to reduce mass shootings like Orlando and San Bernardino." The second sentence was randomly assigned to be either an abstract policy proposal for expanded gun control or a more specific, concrete policy recommendation; we used either 1) "We should implement common sense gun reform to keep guns out of dangerous hands," or 2) "The existing system of background checks should be expanded to keep guns out of dangerous hands." The final sentence read, "Americans demand we take action to address the problem of mass shootings, and this will help make us safer."

The anti-gun control statement was designed to be approximately equivalent in terms of length and sentence construction to the pro-gun control statement. The randomization in this statement came in the first two sentences, designed to make either effectiveness-based (concrete) or rights-based (abstract) arguments against gun control measures. The rights-based argument read, "Further gun regulations represent an attack on our Second Amendment rights. Americans have a constitutional right to bear arms to protect their homes and their families." By contrast, the effectiveness-based argument read, "Further gun control regulations would do nothing to reduce mass shootings. Determined individuals, like the shooters in Orlando and San Bernardino, will still be able to obtain guns even with stricter laws." After the randomized sentences, the final sentence of the anti-gun control statement read, "These policies will only restrict gun rights without making Americans any safer from mass shootings."

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After seeing zero, one, or two of the aforementioned arguments (depending on treatment group), participants answered a series of questions designed to measure argument strength. First, participants indicated whether they favored, opposed, or neither favored nor opposed expanding background checks. For participants who indicated a preference, a follow-up question measured the intensity of that preference, asking participants whether they favored or opposed such a policy a great deal, moderately, or a little. The next question asked participants how effective expanding background checks would be at reducing mass shootings in the United States, with five response options ranging from not effective at all to extremely effective. For analytic purposes, we converted these responses to seven- and five-point interval scales of support for and anticipated effectiveness of expanded background checks, respectively.

The strength of this research design lies in how it allows us to estimate the independent effects of abstract and concrete arguments and counterarguments in the gun control debate. With this design, we obtained post-treatment measures of participants' attitudes towards gun control after seeing abstract and concrete arguments posed against each other and separately. This allows us to estimate the direct effect of each argument, controlling for whether it was alone or presented as part of the sort of back and forth that is common in the presentations of the gun control debate in the media.

Results

To estimate the effects of our different arguments on participants' support for gun control measures and their anticipated effectiveness of said measures, we modeled participants' support for and anticipated effectiveness of background checks using OLS regression. Each model includes indicator variables for whether participants read abstract or concrete proposals for gun control (either "common sense" gun reform or specifically expanded background checks) and whether respondents also read an abstract or concrete rebuttal (the Second

Amendment argument or the claim that backgrounds checks would not have prevented the particular incident).

Table 1 displays the estimates for our first model, with support for background checks as the outcome variable. The table shows the results when we estimate the model using four different subsets of our data. Column 1 uses all of our observations, while columns 2, 3, and 4 estimate the model for liberal, moderate, and conservative participants.[1] The coefficients for the arguments in this model should be interpreted as showing the effect of that argument on the outcome variable compared to the absence of an argument from that side. For example, the coefficients labeled "Pro (common sense)" indicate how much that argument increased support compared to a condition where no pro-gun control argument was present.

Turning to the results of Table 1 and Figure 1, when looking at the entire sample, none of the arguments have a statistically significant effect. Similarly, none of the coefficients of interest reach significance among moderate participants. Among more ideological participants, however, there are significant results. For liberals, there is a positively and statistically significant effect for the anti-gun control argument based on an appeal to Second Amendment rights. This suggests that liberals recoil and become *more* supportive of expanded background checks when exposed to abstract, values-based arguments in favor of gun rights.

The other statistically significant result for an argument variable in Table 1 also suggests that ideology plays an important role in how citizens respond to rhetoric around gun control. Among liberals, independents, and in the sample as a whole, a proposal for common sense gun reform had no effect on support for background checks.[2] However, among conservative respondents, this argument actually increases support for background checks. In other words, even controlling for the presence of anti-gun control arguments about the effectiveness of background checks or appeals to Second Amendment rights, proposals for common sense gun control still appear to have a positive effect on conservatives' support for expanded

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[1] "Liberal" are those who self-identified as very liberal, liberal, or slightly liberal. "Conservatives" are those who self-identified as very conservative, conservative, or slightly conservative. Moderates are those who identified as "moderate; middle of the road."

[2] This may be due to a ceiling effect, as our respondents were generally in favor of gun control measures.

Table 1: Determinants of Support for Expanded Background Checks

Variable	All	Lib.	Mod.	Con.
Pro (common sense)	0.208	0.174	−0.493	0.717*
	(0.169)	(0.175)	(0.380)	(0.340)
Pro (background checks)	0.108	0.106	−0.300	0.148
	(0.170)	(0.175)	(0.375)	(0.346)
Con (2nd Amendment)	0.201	0.497**	0.185	−0.247
	(0.172)	(0.181)	(0.382)	(0.342)
Con (effectiveness)	−0.092	0.052	−0.073	−0.417
	(0.169)	(0.175)	(0.375)	(0.348)
Male	−0.458**	−0.070	−0.170	−0.752*
	(0.152)	(0.161)	(0.336)	(0.306)
Age	0.001	0.015	−0.020	0.0160
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.014)	(0.011)
College degree	0.507***	0.302**	0.393	0.267
	(0.145)	(0.154)	(0.328)	(0.295)
Income (percentile)	−0.398	0.320	−0.464	−0.303
	(0.221)	(0.240)	(0.501)	(0.433)
Constant	5.482***	5.188***	6.599***	4.295***
	(0.285)	(0.285)	(0.652)	(0.622)
R^2	0.04	0.08	0.06	0.07
Number of observations	659	313	122	224

Dependent variable: Support for expanded background checks

Standard errors in parentheses
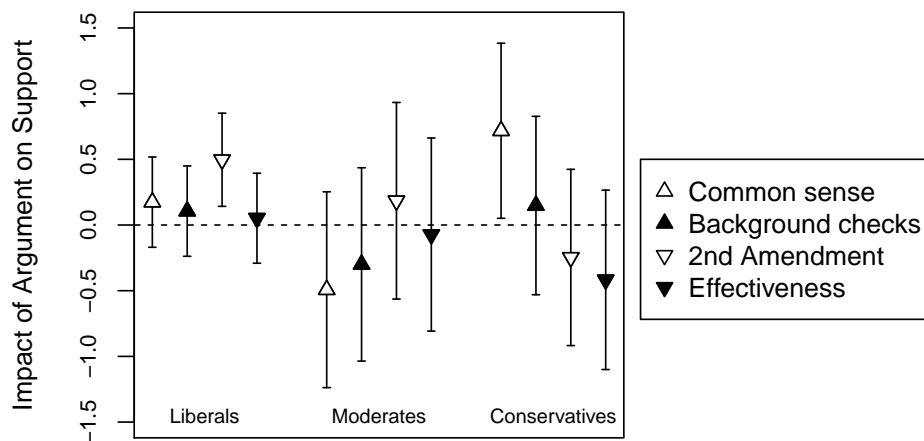
* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Figure 1: Impact of Arguments on Support for Expanded Background Checks (by Ideology)

background checks.

Table 2 and Figure 2 display the results of the same analyses as Table 1 and Figure 1, with the exception that the outcome variable is perceived effectiveness of background checks as a gun control measure. The results of these estimates similarly suggest intriguing dynamics about the gun control debate. Among liberal participants, the negative and statistically significant coefficient for common sense gun control suggests that, other things equal, liberals are less confident about the effectiveness of expanded background checks when seeing an abstract proposal for a gun control measure. The other statistically significant effect for a variable of interest in these models is the negative coefficient among conservatives for seeing the appeal to the Second Amendment as an argument against background checks: conservatives become less optimistic about the potential for expanded background checks to reduce mass shootings when exposed to the abstract anti-gun control argument.

Table 2: Determinants of Perceived Effectiveness of Expanded Background Checks

Variable	All	Lib.	Mod.	Con.
Pro (common sense)	−0.190	−0.337*	−0.524	0.208
	(0.112)	(0.143)	(0.276)	(0.190)
Pro (background checks)	−0.128	−0.137	−0.371	−0.089
	(0.112)	(0.143)	(0.273)	(0.194)
Con (2nd Amendment)	−0.040	0.087	0.352	−0.471*
	(0.113)	(0.147)	(0.277)	(0.191)
Con (effectiveness)	−0.079	−0.063	0.192	−0.350
	(0.111)	(0.143)	(0.272)	(0.195)
Male	−0.323**	−0.161	−0.262	−0.405*
	(0.100)	(0.132)	(0.244)	(0.171)
Age	−0.005	0.002	−0.008	0.001
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.010)	(0.006)
College degree	0.149	−0.029	0.180	−0.013
	(0.096)	(0.126)	(0.238)	(0.165)
Income (percentile)	−0.357*	−0.195	−0.130	−0.171
	(0.145)	(0.196)	(0.364)	(0.242)
Constant	3.295***	3.365***	3.220***	2.705***
	(0.187)	(0.232)	(0.474)	(0.348)
R^2	0.03	0.03	0.07	0.07
Number of observations	659	313	122	224

Dependent variable: Perceived effectiveness of expanded background checks
Standard errors in parentheses
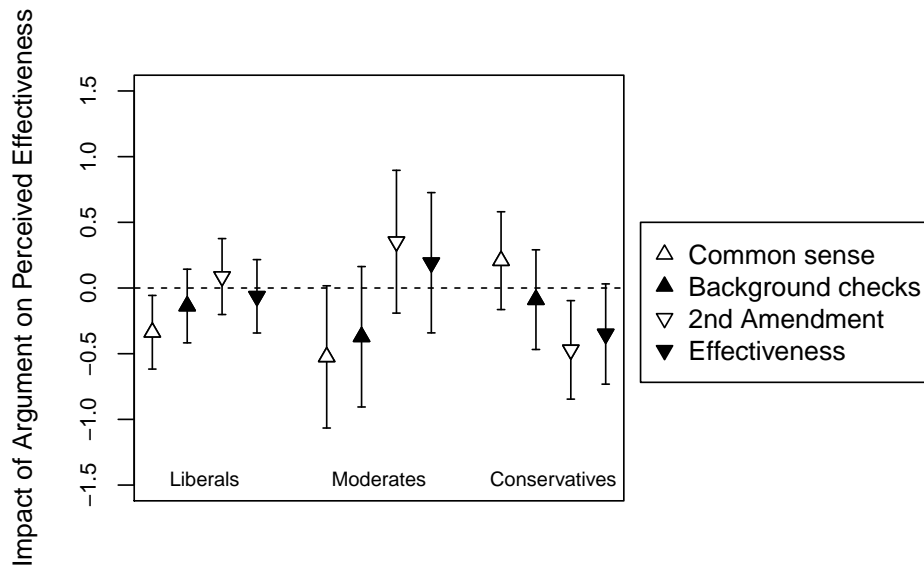* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Figure 2: Impact of Arguments on Perceived Effectiveness of Expanded Background Checks (by Ideology)

In terms of our hypotheses, these results provide partial support, but also present new questions. Among conservatives, abstract pro-gun control arguments increased support for expanded background checks, while abstract anti-gun control arguments increased support among liberals. However, with respect to the anticipated effectiveness of gun control, our results were against expectations. The only effects we found suggest that abstract pro-gun control arguments actually reduce the anticipated effectiveness of background checks among liberals, and abstract anti-gun control arguments decrease the anticipated effectiveness of background checks among conservatives.

Conclusion

At the outset of this project, we theorized that one of the reasons for the intractability of the gun control debate was related to the timing and content of gun control rhetoric. At the times when gun control arguments are most salient, we claimed, the arguments

that are most frequently used are actually disadvantageous to gun control advocates: the specific proposals that are presented during these high-salience periods would actually be less effective that more abstract appeals at increasing support for stricter gun control, and the concrete responses available to anti-gun control advocates would be more powerful than general appeals to values at *reducing* support.

The experimental design we used in this study allowed us to identify the effect of different gun control arguments on attitudes towards gun control. The results partially supported our expectations, in that we did find that abstract pro-gun control proposals can be more effective than concrete pro-gun control arguments at increasing support for background checks, at least among conservatives. However, our expectations did not hold with respect to the anticipated effectiveness of expanded background checks. Proposals for common sense gun reform actually reduced anticipated effectiveness among liberals, and the only effect we found for anti-gun control arguments was a negative effect for abstract arguments about Second Amendment rights among conservatives.

In light of these results, we regard the rhetorical decisions made by gun control advocates as in some ways undermining their policy goals. The abstract gun control debate – pitting safety against freedom in a clash of values – would seem to have the most promise for persuading individuals to be more supportive of increased restrictions on the purchase and possession of firearms. However, this abstract debate is almost never litigated as such: instead, mass shootings prompt concrete debates over gun control policies that trap proponents of gun control by forcing them to either defend a policy's applicability to the most recent mass shooting(s) or acknowledge that said shooting(s) would not have been stopped by the new policy in question. Insofar as the immediate aftermath of a mass shooting baits gun control proponents into making concrete arguments and gives gun control opponents access to concrete rebuttals, these times may paradoxically be the least opportune for advancing gun control policy proposals.

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Political Attitudes Survey

You are invited to participate in a research study on how citizens think about issues related to guns, such as gun control and mass shootings. It may refer to recent events in the news.

This study is conducted by Ben Kantack, Collin Paschall, and Aleks Ksiazkiewicz, members of the Department of Political Science at the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign.

This study is limited to residents of the United States. HITs submitted with duplicate IP addresses or IP addresses outside the US will not be accepted.

This study is designed to take approximately 10 minutes of your time. Your decision to participate or decline participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to terminate your participation at any time without penalty (although only subjects who successfully complete the survey will be eligible for payment). If you want do not wish to complete this study, just close your browser.

Your participation in this research will be completely confidential and data will be averaged and reported in aggregate. Possible outlets of dissemination may be journal articles, dissertation work, books, and conference presentation. There are some instances where UIUC bodies and university or state auditors responsible for research oversight will need to view study information to ensure that proper research procedures are taking place. Although your participation in this research may not benefit you personally, it will help us understand political decision-making in the United States.

There are no risks to individuals participating in this survey beyond those that exist in daily life.

If you have questions about this project, you may contact Ben Kantack (email: kantack2@illinois.edu; telephone: 605-690-3134), Collin Paschall (email: paschal2@illinois.edu; telephone: 402-651-1733), or Aleks Ksiazkiewicz (email: aleksks@illinois.edu; telephone: 281-974-7638). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670.

○ I have read and understand the above consent form. I am 18 years of age or older and, by clicking this button to continue , I indicate that I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. (4)

Please enter your MTurk Worker ID. _____

Condition 1: Abstract pro, concrete pro

AR Please read these two arguments. When you are finished, go to the next question.

> We must take measures to reduce mass shootings like Orlando and San Bernardino. We should implement common sense gun reform to keep guns out of dangerous hands. Americans demand we take action to address the problem of mass shootings, and this will help make us safer.

> Further gun regulations represent an attack on our Second Amendment rights. Americans have a constitutional right to bear arms to protect their homes and their families. These policies will only restrict gun rights without making Americans any safer from mass shootings.

Condition 2: Abstract pro, concrete con

Please read these two arguments. When you are finished, go to the next question.

> We must take measures to reduce mass shootings like Orlando and San Bernardino. We should implement common sense gun reform to keep guns out of dangerous hands. Americans demand we take action to address the problem of mass shootings, and this will help make us safer.

> Further gun control regulations would do nothing to reduce mass shootings. Determined individuals, like the shooters in Orlando and San Bernardino, will still be able to obtain guns even with stricter laws. These policies will only restrict gun rights without making Americans any safer from mass shootings.

Condition 3: Abstract pro

Please read this argument. When you are finished, go to the next question.

> We must take measures to reduce mass shootings like Orlando and San Bernardino. We should implement common sense gun reform to keep guns out of dangerous hands. Americans demand we take action to address the problem of mass shootings, and this will help make us safer.

Condition 4: Concrete pro, abstract con

Please read these two arguments. When you are finished, go to the next question.

> We must take measures to reduce mass shootings like Orlando and San Bernardino. The existing system of background checks should be expanded to keep guns out of dangerous hands. Americans demand we take action to address the problem of mass shootings, and this will help make us safer.

> Further gun regulations represent an attack on our Second Amendment rights. Americans have a constitutional right to bear arms to protect their homes and their families. These policies will only restrict gun rights without making Americans any safer from mass shootings.

Condition 5: Concrete pro, concrete con

Please read these two arguments. When you are finished, go to the next question.

> We must take measures to reduce mass shootings like Orlando and San Bernardino. The existing system of background checks should be expanded to keep guns out of dangerous hands. Americans demand we take action to address the problem of mass shootings, and this will help make us safer.

> Further gun control regulations would do nothing to reduce mass shootings. Determined individuals, like the shooters in Orlando and San Bernardino, will still be able to obtain guns even with stricter laws. These policies will only restrict gun rights without making Americans any safer from mass shootings.

Condition 6: Concrete pro

Please read this argument. When you are finished, go to the next question.

> We must take measures to reduce mass shootings like Orlando and San Bernardino. The existing system of background checks should be expanded to keep guns out of dangerous hands. Americans demand we take action to address the problem of mass shootings, and this will help make us safer.

Condition 7: Concrete con

Please read this argument. When you are finished, go to the next question.

> Further gun regulations represent an attack on our Second Amendment rights. Americans have a constitutional right to bear arms to protect their homes and their families. These policies will only restrict gun rights without making Americans any safer from mass shootings.

Condition 8: Abstract con

Please read this argument. When you are finished, go to the next question.

> Further gun control regulations would do nothing to reduce mass shootings. Determined individuals, like the shooters in Orlando and San Bernardino, will still be able to obtain guns even with stricter laws. These policies will only restrict gun rights without making Americans any safer from mass shootings.

Condition 9: No arguments

Click to go to the next question.

Support for expanding background checks

Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose expanding background checks?
- ○ Favor
- ○ Oppose
- ○ Neither favor nor oppose

[*If favor*] Do you favor that a great deal, moderately, or a little?
- ○ A great deal
- ○ Moderately
- ○ A little

[*If oppose*] Do you oppose that a great deal, moderately, or a little?
- ○ A great deal
- ○ Moderately
- ○ A little

Anticipated effectiveness of expanding background checks

How effective do you think expanding background checks would be at reducing mass shootings in the United States?
❍ Extremely effective
❍ Very effective
❍ Moderately effective
❍ Slightly effective
❍ Not effective at all

Demographics

We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from very liberal to very conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale?
❍ Very Liberal
❍ Liberal
❍ Somewhat left of center
❍ Centrist, middle of the road
❍ Somewhat right of center
❍ Conservative
❍ Very Conservative

Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a...
❍ Strong Democrat
❍ Democrat
❍ Independent Leaning Democrat
❍ Independent
❍ Independent Leaning Republican
❍ Republican
❍ Strong Republican

What is your gender identity?
❍ Male
❍ Female
❍ Other (please specify): _____

How old were you on your last birthday?

What racial or ethnic group(s) best describes you?
- ❑ African American/Black
- ❑ Asian
- ❑ Native American
- ❑ Hispanic/Latino
- ❑ Caucasian/White
- ❑ Other
- ❑ Don't Know

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?
- ○ 8th grade or lower
- ○ Some high school, no diploma
- ○ High school diploma or equivalent (GED)
- ○ Some college, no degree
- ○ Associate degree
- ○ Bachelor's degree
- ○ Master's degree
- ○ Professional or doctorate degree

INC Which of the following best indicates how much money your family's total income was this past year?
- ○ $0-$24,999
- ○ $25,000-$49,999
- ○ $50,000-$74,999
- ○ $75,000-$99,999
- ○ $100,000 - $124,999
- ○ $125,000-$149,999
- ○ $150,000-$174,999
- ○ $175,000-$199,999
- ○ Over $200,000
- ○ Don't Know