Prevention of School and Mass Shootings

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Introduction

School and mass shootings have become a tragically casual aspect of American society (Kowalski et al., 2021). Gun violence is a preventable problem whose solution is long sought–after throughout varying political parties, age groups, and geographical locations. The present study observes the American public's perceptions of gun violence prevention and preparedness in the face of a shooting threat, in hopes of patching the current gaps in communication to produce targeted messages which prepare the public for, and prevent, future catastrophes.

Method

- 256 Mechanical Turk respondents participated (80.7% white; 54.8% male).
- Participants completed a Qualtrics survey analyzing aspects of school/mass shootings. Questions targeted respondents' perceptions about warning signs related to school/mass shootings (e.g., did they believe that school/mass shooters displayed warning signs before the shootings), actions related to preparedness (e.g., did they receive any training on how to respond to or report warning signs), and political opinions regarding school shootings (e.g., what political party do you think most school/mass shooters belong to).
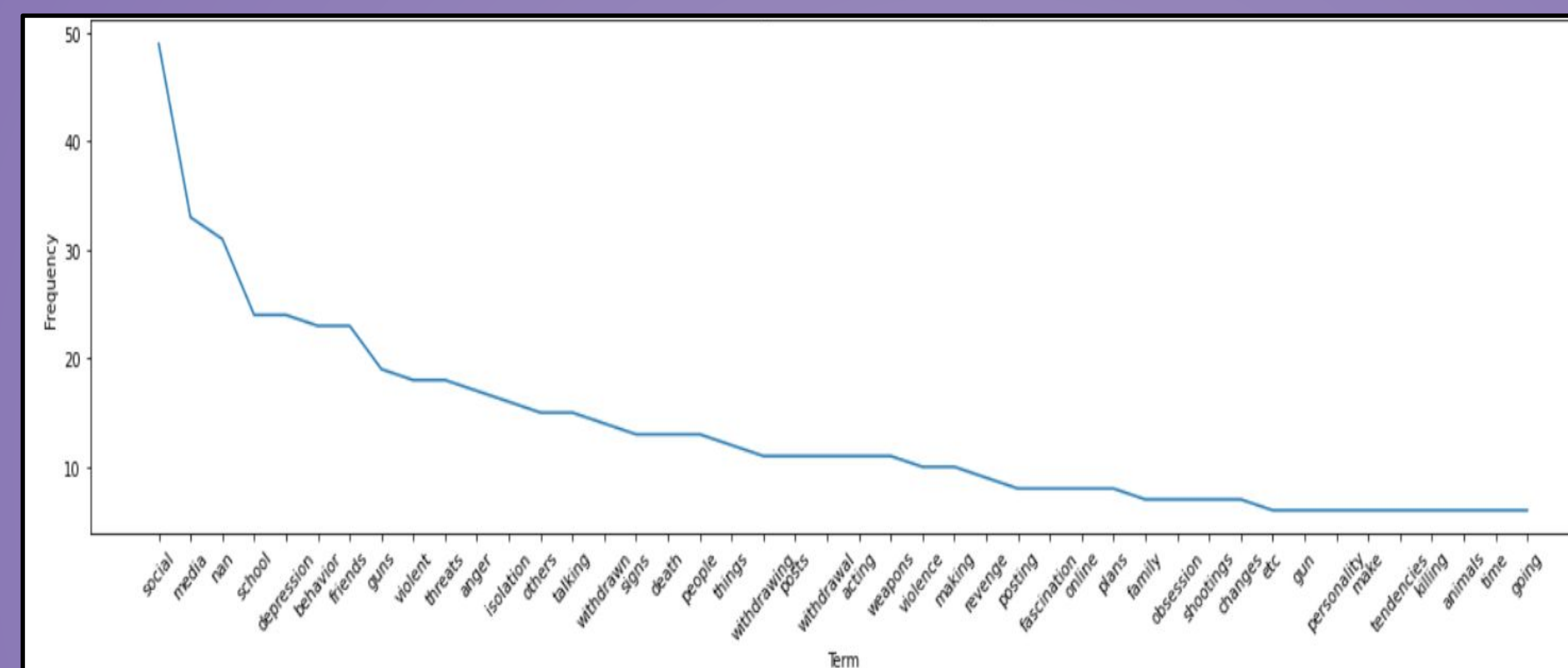
Table 1: Perceptions of Warning Signs

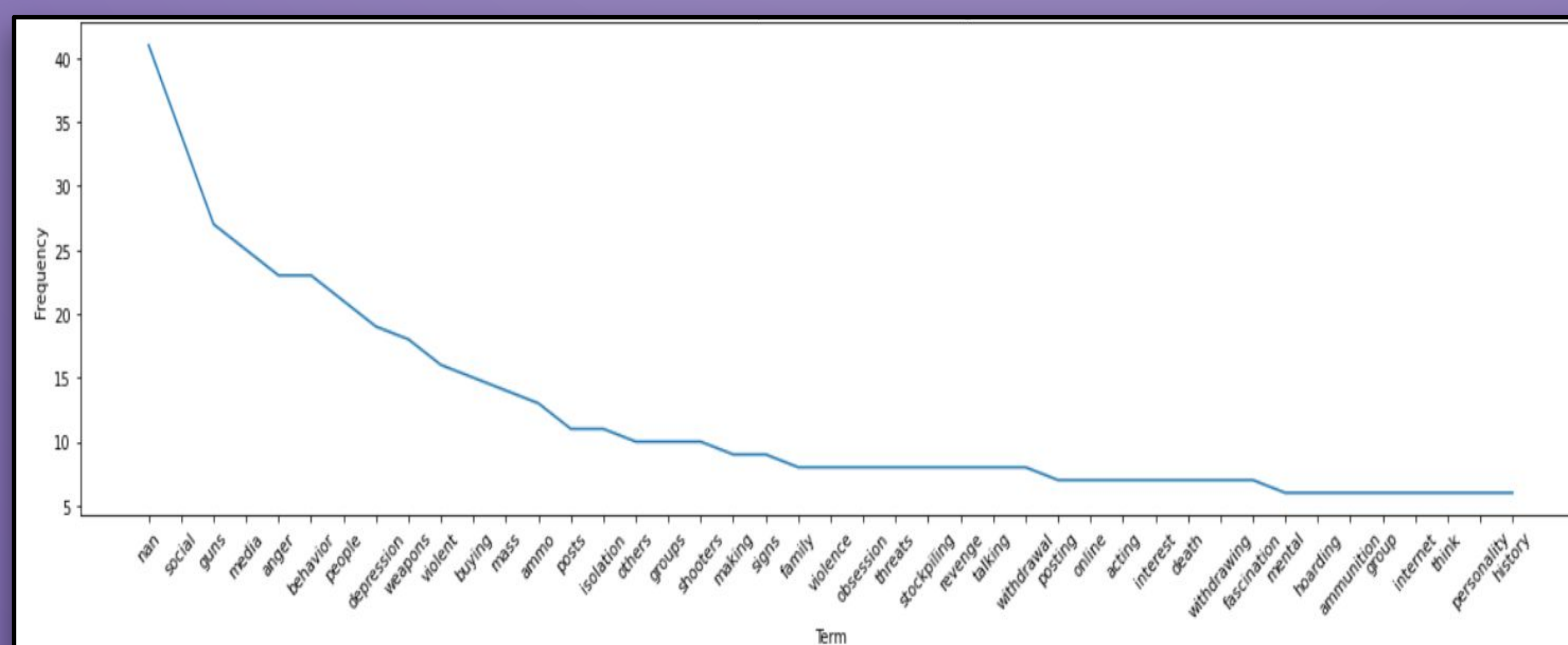| Question	No	Yes
Shooters display warning signs before **school** shooting?	18.5	81.5
Shooters display warning signs before **mass** shooting?	27.3	72.7
Would there be **school** shootings if people acted on warning signs/unusual behavior of their classmates?	33.9	66.1
Would there be **mass** shootings if people acted on warning signs/unusual behavior of others?	30.1	69.9
Would you know what action to take if you saw warning signs of a **school** shooting?	51.6	48.4
Would you know what action to take if you saw warning signs of a **mass** shooting?	58.6	41.4
Have you received training on how to respond/report warning signs of a **school** shooting?	92.8	7.2
Have you received training on how to respond/report warning signs of a **mass** shooting?	94.0	6.0
Have you ever witnessed suspicious behavior that could be a warning sign of a **school** shooter?	93.2	6.8
Have you ever witnessed suspicious behavior that could be a warning sign of a **mass** shooter?	95.6	4.4
If yes, did you report those warning signs of a **school** shooting?	95.2	4.8
If yes, did you report those warning signs of a **mass** shooting?	97.9	2.1

Note. Numbers reported reflect percentages.

Figure 1: School Shooting Term Frequencies

"Social" "Media" "School" "Depression" "Behavior"
"Friends" "Guns" "Violent" "Threats" "Anger"

Figure 2: Mass Shooting Term Frequencies

"Social" "Guns" "Media" "Anger" "Behavior",
"People" "Depression" "Weapons" "Violent" "Buying"

Results

- Participants believed both school (**81.5%**) and mass (**72.7%**) shooters displayed warning signs.
- **48.4%** of participants said they would know what action to take if they saw warning signs of a school shooting, whereas **41.4%** indicated the same for mass shootings.
- Almost **70%** thought the shootings would occur even if people acted on the warning signs.
- Only **7.2%** and **6.0%** of participants had received training on how to respond/report warning signs of shootings respectively.
- **61%** of participants thought stricter gun laws would reduce the frequency of school shootings, and **57.5%** of participants said the same with mass shootings.
- Only **17%** of participants believe that arming citizens is an effective way to save lives in the event of an active shooter.
- When asked which political party is to blame for the issue of gun violence in America, **73.4%** indicated the Republican party.
- Physical safety tools ($M = 3.60$), such as metal detectors and cameras, as well as a positive school climate ($M = 3.89$), were seen as the most effective measures in preventing school shootings. Police officers ($M = 3.67$) and positive workplace environments ($M = 3.67$) were viewed as the most effective measures in preventing mass shootings.
- Of the participants who had participated in an active shooter drill, most did not feel the drill made them feel any more or less safe than before ($M = 3.07$). In fact, many indicated that the drill increased anxiety ($M = 3.72$).

Discussion

Despite the increasing prevalence of school/mass shootings in the U.S., the American public largely feels underprepared in the face of a shooting threat. Many existing preventative measures, such as active shooter drills or zero–tolerance policies, are viewed as not only ineffective in preventing such casualties, but also as responsible for increasing psychological issues such as anxiety. These results indicate a necessary shift in societal implementation of various ineffective shooting preventative measures, towards more effective measures – such as gun control legislation and the creation of positive working and school environments.