

# Gun Control Debate

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## 1 The Set Up

Recently — for the last decade or more — there has been considerable, um, discussion about individuals' Second Amendment rights.<sup>1</sup> Here is what everyone can agree on: The verbiage of the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is a little vague.<sup>2</sup>

### **Second Amendment to the US Constitution:**

*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.*

## 2 What We're Interested In

There are a lot of arguments that are out there. Some are normative, some historical, some preferential. As a human and a citizen, I have preferences over outcomes, but as a *scientist* I have a responsibility to pose and answer a question in a valid, data-driven way.

I think that actually, the entire debate boils down to what sounds to me an awful lot like a causal question. *Would enacting tougher gun-control legislation actually reduce the number of violent acts that occur?*

## 3 What We're Doing

Let's discuss this. No. Let's debate this.

### 3.1 For Both Groups

You are going to think about the evidence that might exist that would enable us to adjudicate whether we should enact some form of legislation that would make it harder to own guns. We are not concerned in the policy, what it does, or how it does it. This means: don't get bogged down in the minutia of building a *particular* policy.

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<sup>1</sup>Hold aside the statements made by the Republican Presidential nominee about the "Second Amendment People" doing something to the Democratic Presidential nominee...

<sup>2</sup>Why are there two clauses? Why are they formed in such a way? Were the Framers of the Constitution actively *trying* to confuse us? Is there a treasure map on the back of the Declaration of Independence? What is the relationship between original intent and interpretative law? And so on and so on...

### 3.1.1 *Consider the following points:*

- What is the causal quantity ( $\tau$ ) that we are interested in?
- Although there have, to date, been no studies that have been intentionally designed to identify the causal effects of some policy, there have been attempts in the past to reduce gun use in some areas.
- Although the details of particular instances are not important, Chicago is one area that has restricted some forms of hand-gun ownership. At other points, some states have enacted reductions. Or, alternatively, some countries have enacted large-scale buy back (Australia) or prohibitions in the first place (Japan).
  - What is the most that we learn from these forms of policy interventions?
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- What are the outcomes that we are interested in?
- What types of studies might have been rolled out in the past?
  - What does the design of such a study look like?
  - What are the concerns with a design of that particular form?
  - AKA: What are the strengths of the types of past designs? What are the limitations?
- How would you structure a pro-restriction argument (again, not focusing on the particular details of a specific plan) to try and convince the group that does not want reductions?

## 3.2 **Pro Gun Control: We Should Enact Some Policy That Makes It Harder To Have Guns**

With the common understanding of Section 3.1.1 as the back drop:

- Craft the strongest argument that you can for *why* we should, given the present observational evidence, enact some law that makes it harder to people to own guns.
- I don't particularly care for sentimental arguments or arguments based on a morality that appeals to (a) fairness; (b) God; or (c) sportsmen – that is, make this an argument grounded in causal language, research designs, and data.
- Consider the responses that the "con" group will bring forward, and try to spike these arguments.

## 3.3 **Con (We Should Not Enact Some Policy That Makes It Harder To Have Guns)**

With this as the back drop:

- Craft the strongest argument that you can for *why* we should NOT, given the present observational evidence, enact some law that makes it harder for people to own guns.

- I don't particularly care for sentimental arguments or arguments based on a morality that appeals to (a) fairness; (b) God; or (c) sportsmen – that is, make this an argument grounded in causal language, research designs, and data.
- Consider the types of arguments that the "pro" group is going to make, and your responses.

## 4 Now Design a Federal Intervention

- Imagine that your group is Executive, Legislature, and Courts for a day.
- With this ultimate power, how would you design a Federal policy to generate the kind of causal evidence that would allow us to come down on one side or another of this debate?
  - What would your policy do (spend the least amount of time on this, but put something at least a little bit concrete together)
  - What are the units that you would randomize? How would you randomize them?
  - What are the primary and secondary outcomes that are the focus of your study?
  - What is the time scale of your study?
  - Do you have concerns about: attrition, non-compliance, spillover, displacement, failed randomization, selection? How can you mitigate those, or how can you build a test for their presence?
  - Draw out the grammar of your intervention with: M, N, R, O, X.
  - What are the strengths and weaknesses of your:
    - \* Design
    - \* Intervention