



# **US Gun Controls: A Change for the Decades**

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# Policy Report: Uvalde Texas Gun Shootings 2022

## *Executive Summary*

The United States, based on its founding ideology of 'freedom', has always advocated regulations on possessing firearms by its citizens. Since the introduction of the *Second Amendment*<sup>1</sup> In 1791, which protected the right of a US citizen to bear firearms, the United States made constant revisions to its gun laws amid the political and socio/economic challenges the country faces. A similar change was brought about recently in 2022 as Joe Biden, following a tragic incident in Uvalde, Texas, revised certain aspects of their gun control law in response to public and political pressure. Though this event happened in Texas, its impact was felt throughout the US triggering a strong reform in gun control laws, as it increased the limitations on carrying firearms whilst employing stricter measures to reduce its possession from potential threats.

This report will look at the ideas, interests, and institutions that influenced the 2022 Gun Control Law change, seeking to explain the possible reasons why this certain event had such a huge impact on changing legislation. Our analysis builds on statistical data, qualitative reasoning, and analytical models and diagnoses how the change brought is a combination of ideas, interests, and institutions that come together in defining change. I conclude that though ideas and institutions contributed to the build-up and implementation of policy change, true success in reforming gun control laws comes from the cumulative actions of interested parties at a local and national level that seek change to protect themselves from such recurring events.

<sup>1</sup> Constitution of the US, *Second Amendment (1791)* <https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-2>

## *The Facts*

The event that we focus on is from May 24th, 2022, where an “18-year-old ex-student ‘Salvador Ramos’, **shot nineteen students, and two teachers, while wounding seventeen**” (Burrows, Texas House of Representatives 2022) others at the Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. The incident that occurred only 10 days after the “mass shooting in Buffalo, New York which **killed 10 people**” (Morales & Eric 2022), all of whom were black, resulted in mass outrage by the media and public. Combined, both incidents caused immense protests throughout the United States seeking stricter gun control regulations for the safety of US citizens that forced the government to take prompt actions in tackling this issue.

Not surprisingly, the Democrats, the governing party, called upon a change in regulations as their party manifesto has always supported stronger policies on gun control. However, interestingly, we also saw many prominent republican leaders such as Mitch McConnell, that broke ranks to side with democrats in support of these reforms. The fact that a small number of republicans joined democrats broke through their parties' “long-standing blockade of gun safety measures and shattered three decades of congressional paralysis” (Cochrane and Annie 2022) on tightening the nation's gun laws. The Senate passed a bill on gun control laws with almost a **two-thirds majority (65-33)** including 15 republicans that aimed at stricter laws to reduce the number of mass shootings in the United States. Some key elements of the bill were:

- **Enhanced background checks for younger gun buyers**
  - The bill brought on inspection of juvenile and mental records within criminal background checks for potential gun buyers under the age of 21. These checks

were sought to be thorough taking up to 10 days compared to the 3-day check as before.

- **Incentives for states to implement red flags**

- The bill provided \$750 million in federal money to states for creating red flags on people that are ruled dangerous by a judge. This funding incentivized the states to carry out practices that may reduce dangerous people carrying firearms.

- **Closing the boyfriend loophole**

- The bill also toughened laws around domestic abusers carrying firearms. The new law barred convicted people or domestic abusers from buying or possessing a gun which was a gap in legislation before.

- **Funding Mental Health Schools**

- The bill allocated billions of dollars to schools and communities to expand their mental health programs. It also provided funding to improve security and train adults on how to talk about mental health with minors.

- **Tougher penalties on illegal purchases**

- Lastly, the bill strengthened regulations on illegal purchases of guns. Targeting mainly “straw purchases” who buy guns on behalf of those that do not qualify. Though it is still hard to control such illegal gun trafficking, if a connection is found, the penalty ranges from 15-25 years in prison.

The bill brought about groundbreaking changes that experts say were long awaited.

What was even more surprising is that democrats in response to the massive public response strewn away from their manifesto. Even after the supreme court ruled against them, which rejected their law on applicants to have a license or proper cause to carry a firearm, they still collaborated with republicans to achieve common grounds that would benefit the general

public. Such cooperation between the left and right-wing is something that the US has not seen in some time. Figure 1<sup>2</sup> gives us a slight understanding of differently the right and left



**Figure 1**

wings have historically approached gun control laws and how they collaborated in 2022.

The reforms brought in, as a result, were a great step to not only reduce possible gun violations but also in cooperation among policymakers and political representatives.

## **Analysis**

With some of the key facts laid out, we now go back to our initial question of what triggered the change, and what key factors played a role in determining reforms. In particular, we will shift our focus to the **3 I's (ideas, interests, and institutes)** and discuss their relevance in this case, where we particularly focus on interests as the most important determinant to change. We will use models and streams relevant to this policy case to determine the process and resulting change.

The unfortunate incident that occurred in Uvalde is one of the many similar shootings that have happened in the US in the last few decades. Some other popular incidents that got televised and discussed nationally were the **Columbine (1999)**, **Sandy Hook (2012)**, and **Parkland (2018)** Shootings, all of which had current or former student's that open fired and murdered students and staff at the schools. A complete timeline of these incidents can be

<sup>2</sup> Figure 1 shows us a difference in right-left wing approached in gun control laws



seen in Figure 2<sup>3</sup>. The recurrence of such incidents makes it important for us to diagnose why reforms were brought in due to the Uvalde shootings and not in prior instances.



**Figure 2**

## **Ideas**

To examine this further, we need to break down this policy case and look at it from a broader perspective. In particular, we discuss the role of idea's when we look at why the change occurred and how idea's in the form of belief systems, discourses and institutions played a role in guiding us toward reforms. In our case, this idea fits in a very different perspective, as we examine how political parties go against their historic beliefs in pursuit of changing gun laws. Democrats, who were the party in power during this incident, and who were pursuing and got denied their contestation against the carrying of firearms without licensing or due cause, collaborated with some republicans in getting to common grounds.

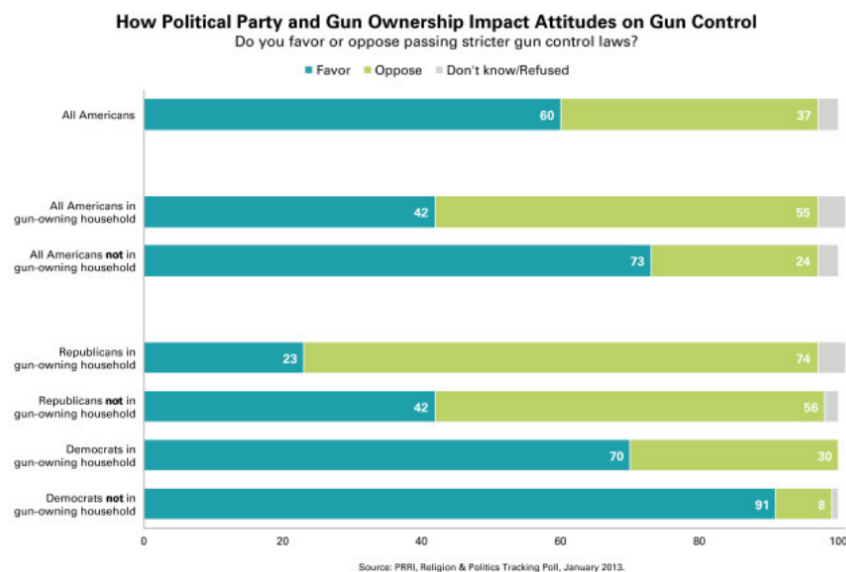
<sup>3</sup> Figure 2 shows us the timeline of school shootings. <https://whhscbox.com/830/news-features/school-shootings-show-a-sinister-side-of-history/>

Similarly, “Republican senators and MPs also relaxed their demands and worked to pass a bill that encouraged some controls” (Cochrane 2022) that would limit dangerous people from carrying firearms.

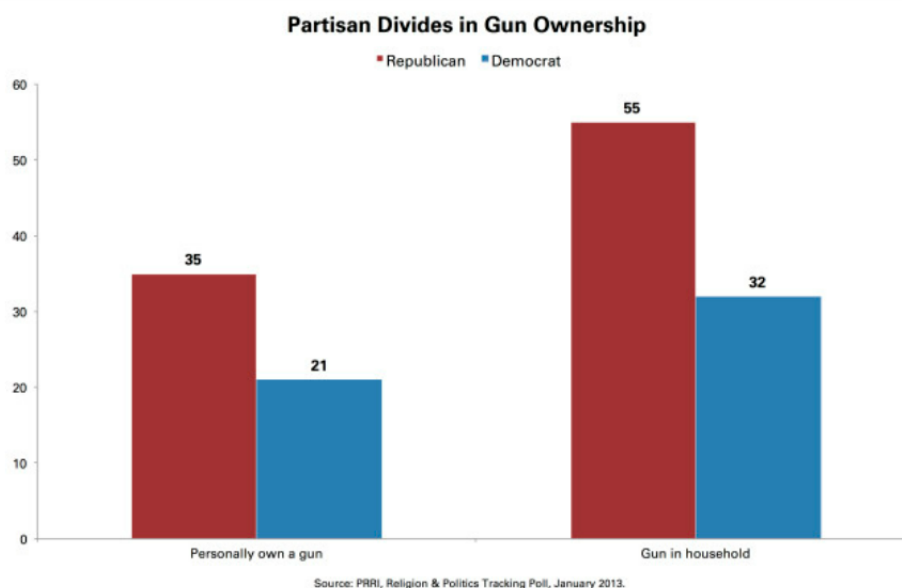
Historically we see that even US citizens sided with their party’s political beliefs on gun regulations as seen in Figure 3<sup>4</sup> where we notice that before these major school shootings, only about “**23% or 1 in 4**

**republicans** in a gun-owning household supported stricter measures for gun control. In contrast, **73% or 3 in 4 democrats** supported stricter regulations” (Oliphant 2020). Similar

differences can also be seen in gun ownership where close to **90% of republicans** own a firearm in their household compared to **53% of democrats** as shown in figure 4<sup>5</sup>. This stark



**Figure 3**



**Figure 4**

<sup>4</sup> PRPI, Religious and Tracking poll survey from 2013: <https://www.prii.org/spotlight/how-political-party-and-gun-ownership-impact-attitudes-on-gun-control/>

<sup>5</sup> Graph constructed by statistical data by PEW Research Centre: [https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/07/11/broad-public-approval-of-new-gun-law-but-few-say-it-will-do-a-lot-to-stem-gun-violence/pp\\_2022-07-08\\_gun-policy-2022\\_00-01/](https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/07/11/broad-public-approval-of-new-gun-law-but-few-say-it-will-do-a-lot-to-stem-gun-violence/pp_2022-07-08_gun-policy-2022_00-01/)

contrast depicts how different both sides believed and understood gun laws.

These ideas and historic beliefs were largely affected by these shootings, as recent survey data post-Uvalde (2022) shows us the change in the beliefs of republicans. Figure 5<sup>6</sup> does a great job of showing us this. We notice that previously **23%** of “republicans supported stricter gun control laws which have increased to **47% (double)** in last few decades” (Durkee 2022) which indicates

the impact of such

events and how a larger

portion of the general

public now demands

stricter gun controls.

This change in opinion

may be due to improved

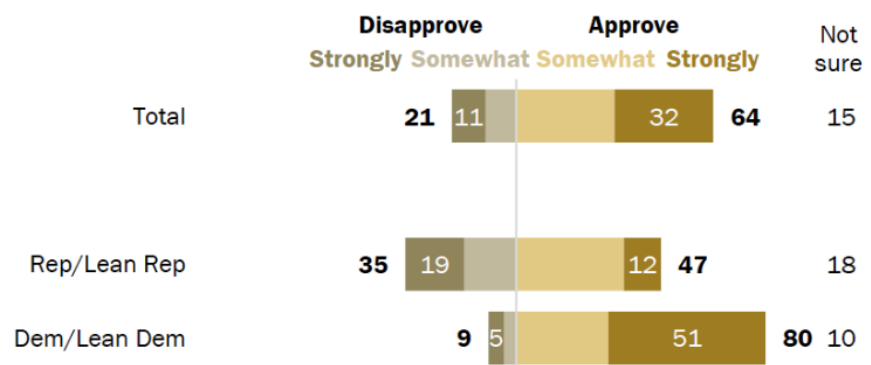
and better media coverage

compared to incidents such as Columbine in 1999, where people did not have such easy access to information as today. Moreover, also maybe because this incident happened 10 days after a racial shooting in Buffalo that combined caused an immense uproar. Especially since the US has recently faced massive protests on racial issues.

As we further think about ideas in this policy case perspective, we also see it from a perspective of discourse. In the last few decades, there has been an increase in homicides by young offenders, mainly due to the increase in the availability of guns for them (Blumstein and Danial 1996). The increase in public awareness of the link between youth homicides and

### Americans largely supportive of new gun law, but most would like Congress to do more

*% who \_\_\_\_ of the new law to address gun violence passed by Congress and signed into law by Joe Biden*



**Figure 5**

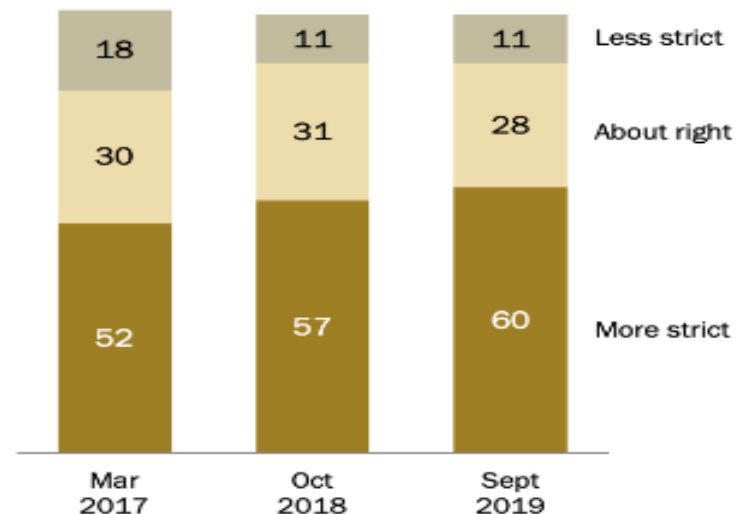
<sup>6</sup> Figure 5 used research data from the PEW Research Centre to get respondents to answer certain questions on Gun reforms. [https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/07/11/broad-public-approval-of-new-gun-law-but-few-say-it-will-do-a-lot-to-stem-gun-violence/pp\\_2022-07-08\\_gun-policy-2022\\_00-01/](https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/07/11/broad-public-approval-of-new-gun-law-but-few-say-it-will-do-a-lot-to-stem-gun-violence/pp_2022-07-08_gun-policy-2022_00-01/)



the availability of guns is a “major contributor to why almost **64%** of US citizens now approve the 2022 Bill on stricter reforms” (Nadeem 2022). Figure 6<sup>7</sup> gives shows gives more information on our hypothesis, as it supports our claim of how the US has experienced a gradual change for those who support gun controls. It also indicates a drop in those in support of lenient gun control.

### **A majority of Americans say gun laws should be more strict**

*% who say gun laws should be \_\_\_\_ than they are today*



Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown.  
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 3-15, 2019.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

**Figure 6**

This fundamental difference in how people now see and understand gun control is a reason why they have shifted their beliefs on having lenient gun control. Moreover, the change in public belief may also have influenced political parties, especially republicans to change their belief on gun control as that was a more popular public demand, which may have caused a bipartisan coalition to be formed. Hence, the change in the historic beliefs of public and political leaders plays a key part in starting the process and change in the case of the Uvalde Gun Control Bill 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Figure 6 take information from the PEW Research Centre on US adults supporting gun controls  
<https://www.npr.org/2019/10/20/771278167/poll-number-of-americans-who-favor-stricter-gun-laws-continues-to-grow>

## *Institutes*

We further move our analysis towards institutes as a key determinant for these reforms. The US legislature is the main branch that we focus on as they are responsible for laws and reforms. The 2022 bill is considered a major milestone” mainly because it is the first gun control bill in decades by congress” (Murphy and George 2022) and it is the first time in decades that a reform has received immense support from Republicans and Democrats. It is particularly important since the change in ideas, beliefs and, perspectives discussed is of no use until the legislature takes action and implements it in formal writing.

Here, it is important to note and analyze however why this certain incident made the legislature and senate to look into reforms and not prior incidents such as the Parkland shootings. Hence, a relevant political analogy to describe this could be the Garbage Can Model<sup>8</sup> which mainly states that the process of decision-making is an organized anarchy. Since the start of such homicides, we see how policymakers and governments, especially republicans, have tried to address this issue in a way that is focused more towards increasing security and improving literacy on this issue rather than addressing the elephant in the room i.e. easy accessibility of arms. Even in 2018, Donald Trump, the President of the US, did not “consider the availability of guns as an issue, but focused on mental instability as the cause of senseless shootings” (Young 2020) which resulted in solutions that were not useful in the long run.

<sup>8</sup> Garbage Can Model, further information on this topic [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garbage\\_can\\_model](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garbage_can_model)

The few pieces of legislation that were passed were mainly “increasing wait times to 3 days, banning the possession and sale of bump stocks (attachments that increase fire rates) on weapons, and increasing purchasing age to 21” (Sitzmann 2019). Moreover, “extensive funds were spent on mental health programs and training for school teachers across the country” (Wheeler 2022). All these were useful regulations, however, there were still easy ways to get around them as increasing waiting time and banning stocks still gives access to weaponry to youths. These laws were brought in and some were revoked a few months later since the solutions were not sustainable. Figure 7<sup>9</sup>, shows how the parkland shootings initiated reforms but were brought forward in a way that could not sufficiently decrease such incidents. This is why we see how quickly many laws were revoked and the effect of these temporary

solutions was

brought down.

Hence we saw

solutions to be

thrown to deal with

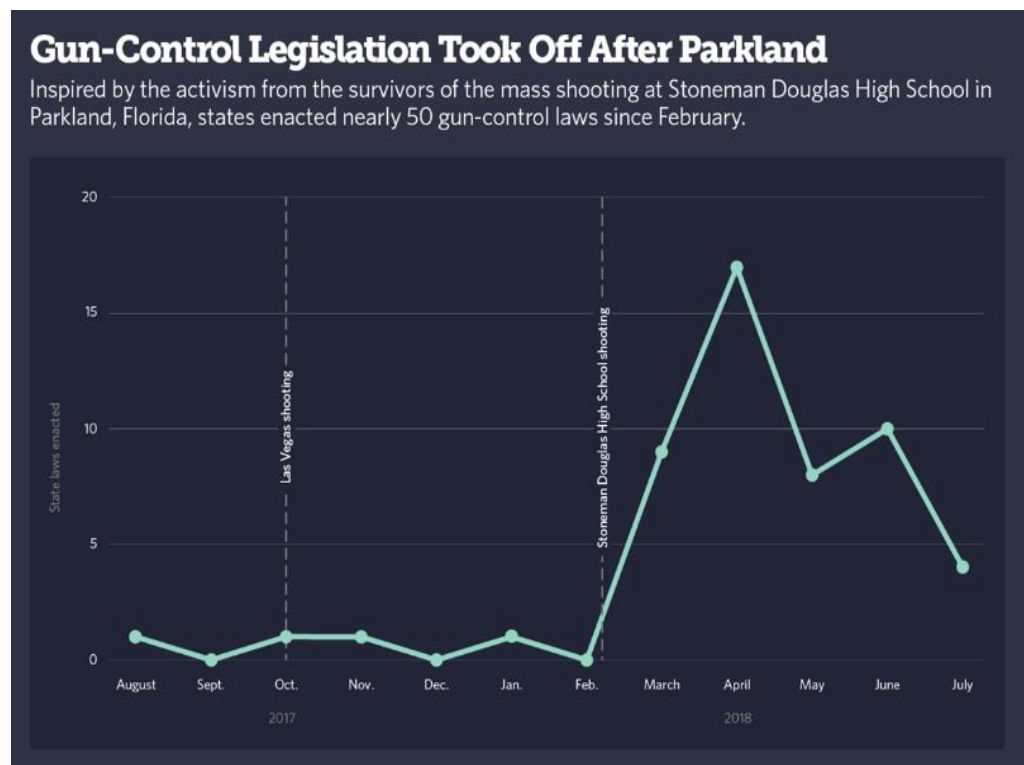
public outrage but

effective law-

making was not

made for these

problems.



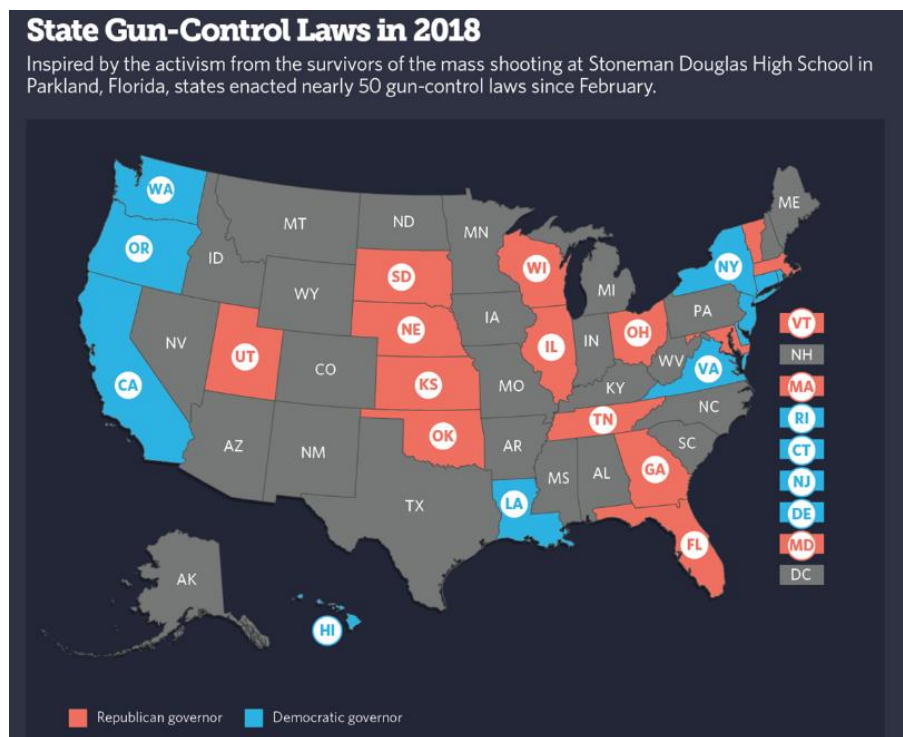
**Figure 7**

<sup>9</sup> Figure 7 is extracted from statistical data collected by the PEW research centre.

<https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2018/08/02/after-parkland-states-pass-50-new-gun-control-laws>

The other problem, when we talk about the Garbage can model and the institutes involved in prior incidents is their lack of effective policymaking throughout the US. In 2018 when Trump did try to bring some reforms, they were brought in certain states that were mainly Republican (as they were the party in power) but we could not see a national change. Moreover, what's surprising is that not all Republican states even took up these laws and Texas is one of them where Uvalde happened 4 years later. Figure 8<sup>10</sup> shows us exactly that, and it also indicates how limiting the reform was to certain states only.

These are some of the changes that we see after Uvalde in terms of political cooperation and national acceptance and implementation. The bill produced in 2022, was for the “first time put in writing that addressed the issue of violence” (Wheeler 2022)



**Figure 8**

and made an attempt that would not

violate an individual's right to bear arms

but also produce safety for its citizens. Both parties collaborated and **over 30% of**

**republicans in the Senate voted in favor of this act.** This bipartisan coalition was formed

due to the recurrence of an incident, especially since Uvalde happened in a republican state

<sup>10</sup> Figure 8 is extracted from statistical data collected by the PEW research centre.  
<https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2018/08/02/after-parkland-states-pass-50-new-gun-control-laws>

that allowed both parties to collaborate, formulate and issue a bill that would aim to lower the chances of such events in the future.

While we do put out our discussion on institutes as possible players for this policy change, we also need to consider how they might eventually cause problems in this case in particular. The supreme court, in late June of 2022, “issued a decision that cast the future of more strict limits on gun ownership in doubt” Zurcher (2022). Such statements do put question marks on the future of gun control and even slight doubts as to whether the bill may be overturned. Mainly because the SC does not want anything that violates the Second Amendment. With such doubts looming, it is still important to mention that to date, the 2022 Bill is still one of the biggest reforms in Gun control for decades.

## ***Interests***

We lastly discuss the third and last ‘I’ (interests) that may have contributed to this policy change. The Uvalde incident caught a lot of public and media attention as thousands of protestors marched in different cities demanding stricter gun control laws (Wines 2022). The incident that naturally got paired with the millions of black men and women protesting against the shootings in Buffalo had national coverage. Advocacy coalitions were formed, where protesters against the Uvalde and Buffalo shootings joined together seeking a stop to gun violence came out in numbers which created a lot of pressure.

Looking over the events in the past decades, we see that protests did happen, however, the increased use of social media and access to information enabled people to get their message across much better. We have seen how even in the George Floyd case, the ‘Black Lives Matter’ campaign that ran online and on streets created so much pressure that the government had to act. Similar scenes were witnessed this time around as protestors came to the streets for 7-8 days fighting against the old, obsolete gun controls. These groups

led by activists **Amber Goodwin** (Founder of Community Justice), **Delaney Tarr** (Founder of March for Our Lives Movement that advocated against gun violence), and **Mark Barden** (Who was the founder of Sandy Hook Promise Fund) brought their past experiences from gun shootings campaigns to organize peaceful yet effective campaigns in various states which made mayors and senators sit down with them and discuss reforms.

The protests of these interested groups coupled with republican leaders siding towards gun control reforms enabled a large percentage of people to now favor stricter gun measures as they understood the effects of existing policymaking. This improved provision of information led to a **12-percentage point** increase in support of gun control as shown previously in figure 4.

What is interesting is that for years, the constant shootings had slowly but steadily increased public rage on gun control laws, and the two back-to-back shootings in May gave the whole movement a spark. The concept of Punctuated Equilibrium fits in pretty well in this policy case. The phenomenon states that “political processes are characterized by stability and incrementalism, but occasionally they produce large-scale departures from the past” (Baumgartner 2018), and such departures that lead to policy change often come through a shock that enables change. These combined shootings could be considered as the ‘shock’ needed in our case. The process and build-up towards policy change had been consistently looked at with mild changes however the uproar caused by Uvalde sparked energy in interest groups and policy entrepreneurs that came forward for change.

Furthermore, what encouraged policymakers and institutes to act for change was the way these interested actors and groups put out their demands. Rather than just focusing on school shootings as potential ways of gun violence, the protests included campaigns on closing the boyfriend loophole and decreasing domestic violence. This is something that resulted in additional fuel for the protests. Statistical Data from the National Coalition of



Domestic Violence reveals on average, nearly **20 people per minute** face violence from their partner, and **every 1 in 4 women in the US goes through domestic violence**. These extreme numbers “paired with youth homicides and assaults tabulate the total affected by violence into thousands” (WHO 2021). As a result, the pressure created by these individuals on such a high level not only created awareness of gun control but also encouraged oppressed and affected people to come out and raise their voices against their assaulters.

With our analysis of the 3I's complete, we summarize our key findings in figure 8 below that gives a brief overview:

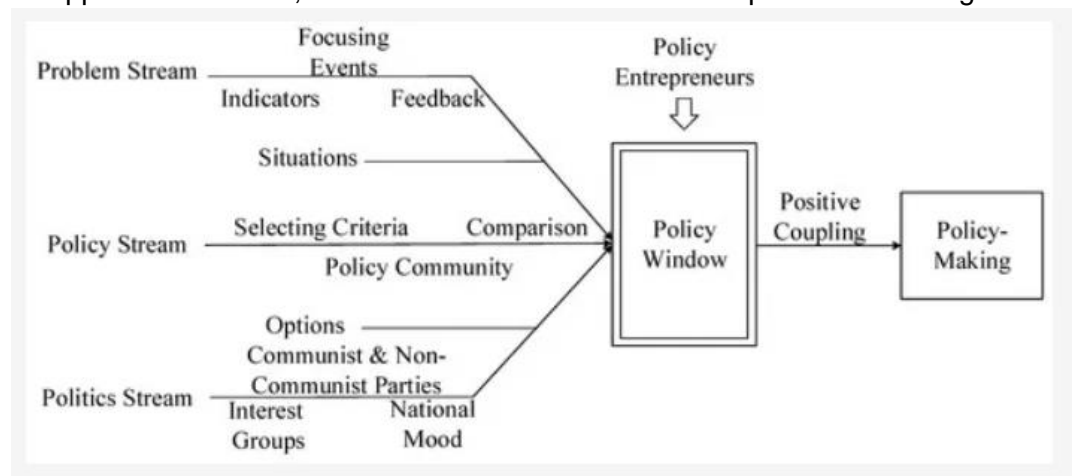
The 3I's Framework		
Ideas	Institutes	Interests
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political Parties changed their historic beliefs to devise a policy that may benefit public</li> <li>• From a perspective of discourse we see the government to understand the link between availability of gun with homicides</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The change in written laws in the form of a bill that aimed to resolve prior gaps.</li> <li>• The takeaway from past laws and how the legislative addressed them while also discussing the role of the supreme court</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We see the role of interested parties such as social movements and protests and their impact on policy change</li> <li>• We see the formation of an advocacy coalition between gun protesters and those affected by domestic and racial violence</li> </ul>

*Figure 9*

## Discussion

With our analysis of the determinant of *policy change* laid out. It is important that we step back and look at our policy case from a broader perspective to see how it may be connected with themes discussed in our literature. The Multiple Stream Framework is a model that fits in well in our case. Figure 10 does a great job of giving us a broad understanding of the multiple-stream model.

We notice that 3 different streams individually build up over time and join at some point to work towards policy change. In our case, we see that the Problem Stream could be categorized as the focused event which happened in Uvalde, Texas. The event that built itself up from constant gun violations in the past indicated to policymakers the need to work towards reforms. We also see consistent



**Figure 10**

feedback regarding minor amendments made to gun controls prior, where the public demanded stricter measures and rejected the ones being implemented

The Politics Stream involved the players or actors that played a key role in developing the case and encouraging institutes to act on it. The massive protests under social activists, the involvement of people affected by violence, and the existence of a bipartisan coalition all played an important role in understanding the problem and working toward reforms. The national perspective on gun laws also changed as we saw the support towards stricter regulations double in republican supporters and close to 90% in democrats. The combination of these actors and change in National Mood on this policy acted as an important stream toward change.

Lastly, the Policy Stream can also be seen in our case. We saw attempts to make a policy change through these events such as Trump's 2018 reforms, however, the lack of effectiveness and acceptance of these laws at a national level and in communities was a big reason for their failure. Coming to 2022, we saw how Biden's government took the feedback from the public and its opposition to carve out reforms that could answer the demands made by protestors and those affected.

Combined we see that these different streams were brought together by the government to act as policy entrepreneurs and use the events and public outrage to pass a bill that they have been striving for, for years. With the large support of Republicans that did not want to see such events in their states again, they formalized a bill that could put forward the historic belief of democrats, while not compromising on a citizens' beliefs to bear arms.

The model put together resulted in policy makings on certain aspects of the gun controls that previously were exploited by people and caused many violence. Similar to literature we have seen in, it is interesting yet not surprising that the key influence to policy change has consistently been national outrage. Even in our MSF, though the roles of other streams are important in the build up and implementation of policies, the public pressure contributed in the acceleration of process and effective policy making.

## ***Conclusion***

With our analysis and discussion laid out, it is important to discuss our learnings from what transpired. Since our client is interested in the process that led to policy change after Uvalde Shootings, hence we keep that in our mind whilst concluding our analysis. There are many practical takeaways from our report, but our key findings are the determinant of change and how they apply in our context. As we look back at our literature, and we see our policy case, it is evident that in the current era certain things influence policy change. The first, and probably most unfortunate reason is the occurrence of an incident that triggers a response by

the government and the public. Second, the public response. The response of the public can be through social media or in-person protests that aim to persuade the government to make change. Finally, the cooperation of political parties toward a sustainable, and efficient policy. While we have seen policy changes throughout time, what is important is the implementation of effective policy that is less about gaining votes or following beliefs and more about benefiting the public. All these elements can be seen in our case, where Uvalde was the trigger, mass public response to strikes was their response, and the formation of a bipartisan coalition was the root of policy change.

Here it is important to understand that the current approach to policy change may be effective, however, the consistent occurrence of an event that follows change is not the most sustainable one. The public and economy can not go over an incident every few years, and only after it happens 5-6 times combined with public pressure is a reform introduced. There should be a committee of policymakers that sits down after the first major incident to deal with current policies as a country should not be losing lives before Congress learns of the problem.

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