

Packing heat to compete: How GOP women brand toughness with guns

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POLITICS | ELECTION 2020

GOP Women Embrace Guns in House Races

Record number of female Republican candidates aim to recover ground in Congress and close the gender gap with Democrats after losing majority in 2018 elections

By [Natalie Andrews](#) [Follow](#)

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GOP women politicians and the double bind

- ▶ Women face the double bind (e.g. Teele, Kalla, and Rosenbluth 2018; Jamieson, 1995; Schneider and Bos, 2013; Miller et al. 2010)



Backlash for gender counterstereotypic performance

- ▶ Women politicians face backlash for gender counter-stereotypic performance (e.g. Bauer and Carpinella 2018; Krupnikov and Bauer 2014; Ono and Yamada 2020; Miller et al. 2010)



Guns are a symbol of masculinity

- ▶ Firearms are a symbol of masculinity (e.g. Connell, 1995; Gibson, 1997; Stroud, 2012; Melzer, 2009; Stange and Oyster, 2000; Carlson 2014; Carlson and Goss 2017; Hayes et al. 2021; Germanaz 2024)

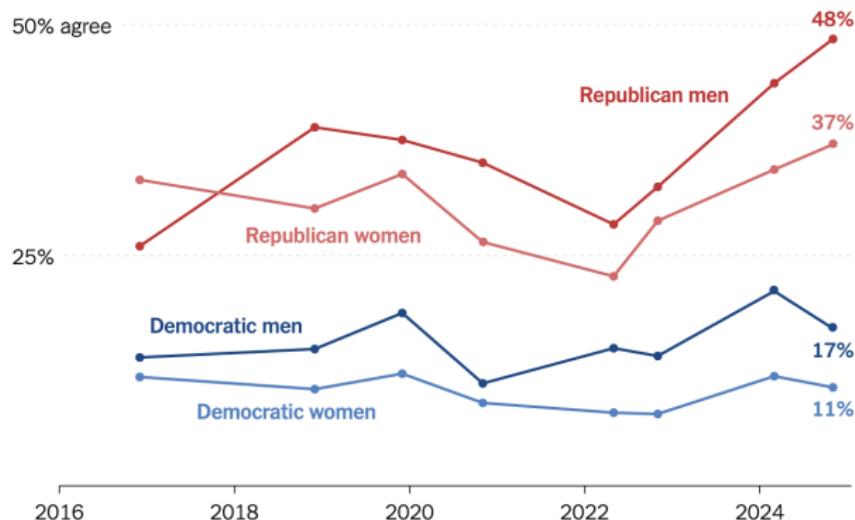


The GOP and its voters prefer traditional values

- ▶ GOP voters prefer traditional values and thus femininity in women (e.g. Wolbrecht 2000; Layman 2001)

More Republicans now believe that women should return to their traditional roles in society

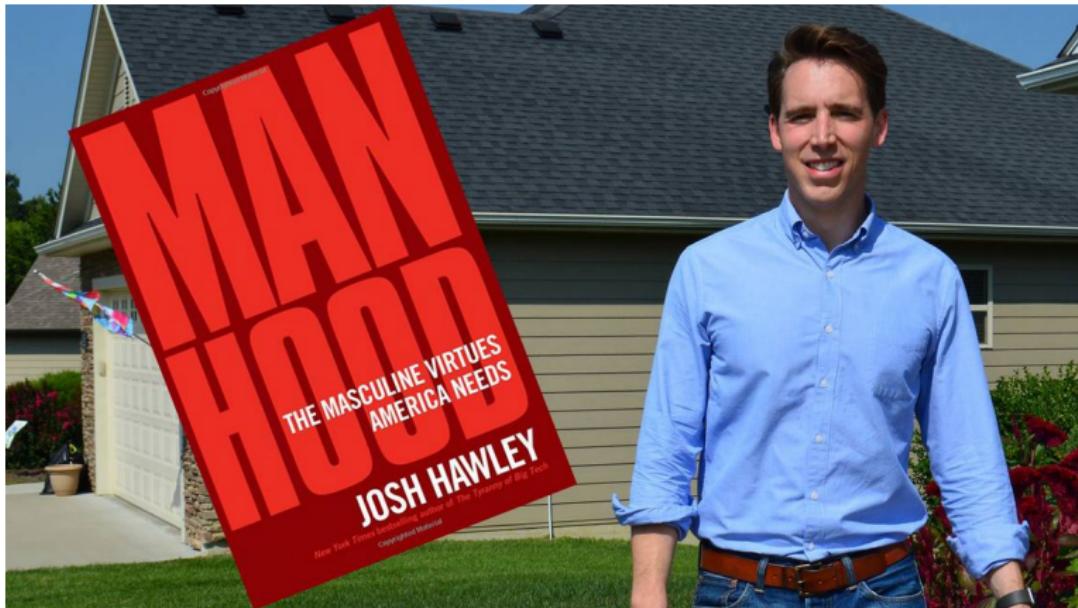
As of November 2024, almost half of Republican men agree, up from 28 percent in 2022.



Source: Views of the Electorate Research Survey

Republicans and masculinity

- ▶ For instance, GOP voters:
 - ▶ Have masculine personalities (McDermott 2016)
 - ▶ Prefer masculine candidates (Karpowitz et al. 2024)



Guns are for women too

- ▶ There are positive associations between women and firearms

(Carlson, 2014; Hayes et al. 2021)



Guns are a symbol of conservatism

- ▶ Guns also carry strong associations with conservatism (Hansen and Dolan 2025; Joslyn 2017; Lacombe 2019)
- ▶ Women are stereotyped as being more liberal than men (e.g. King and Matland 2003; Schneider and Bos 2016)



I am going to convince you that...

1. GOP women indeed employ more firearm imagery than men
(it is not just fanfare in the media)
2. This is a strategy employed by women in election periods (when the double bind is most salient)
3. GOP HRs communicate masculinity and conservatism when they post images of firearms
 - ▶ And this is especially pronounced for GOP women
4. Voters are responsive to this messaging on conservatism and masculinity
5. Voters do not penalize GOP women for gender counter-stereotypic performance

Data

- ▶ I compile an original corpus of images from the public Instagram accounts of Republican US House Reps

Table 1: Instagram corpus summary

feature	count
total images	344,618
total posts	235,898
distinct accounts	318
total R. women	35
total R. men	189
total R. reps	224

Measuring guns

1. Zero-shot object detection with `yolo-world` (Cheng et al., 2024)
 - ▶ **Validation accuracy is 0.9** ($N = 500$)
2. DSL to ensure no classification bias (Egami et al, 2023, 2024)
3. > 30,000 expert labels are used as part of the DSL correction
 - ▶ **Validation accuracy becomes 1.0** (same $N = 500$)
4. Manually remove posts without GOP rep.

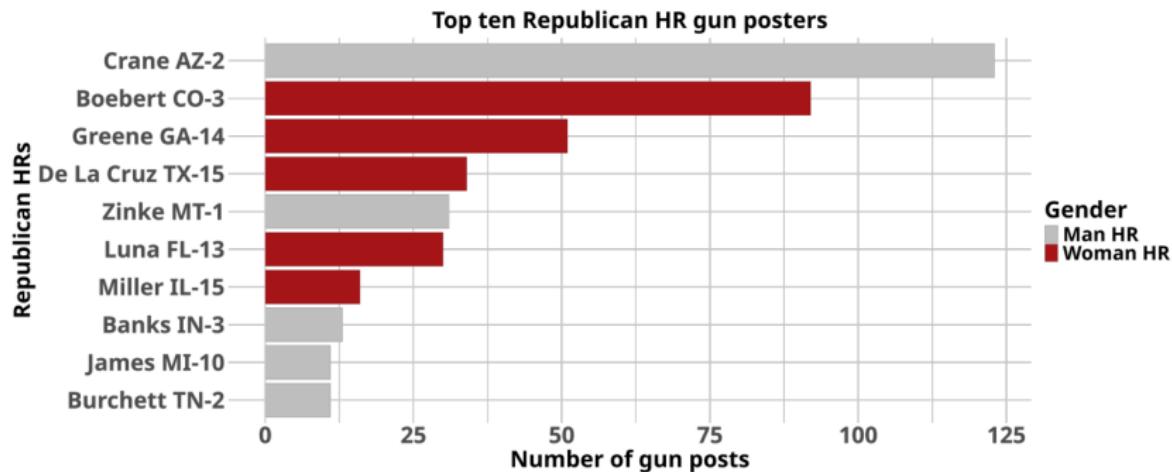
Examples of gun detection

- ▶ Rep. Anna Paulina Luna (FL-13)



Do women post more firearms than men? Initial evidence

- ▶ The average GOP woman posts ≈ 7 images containing firearms. The average GOP man posts ≈ 2

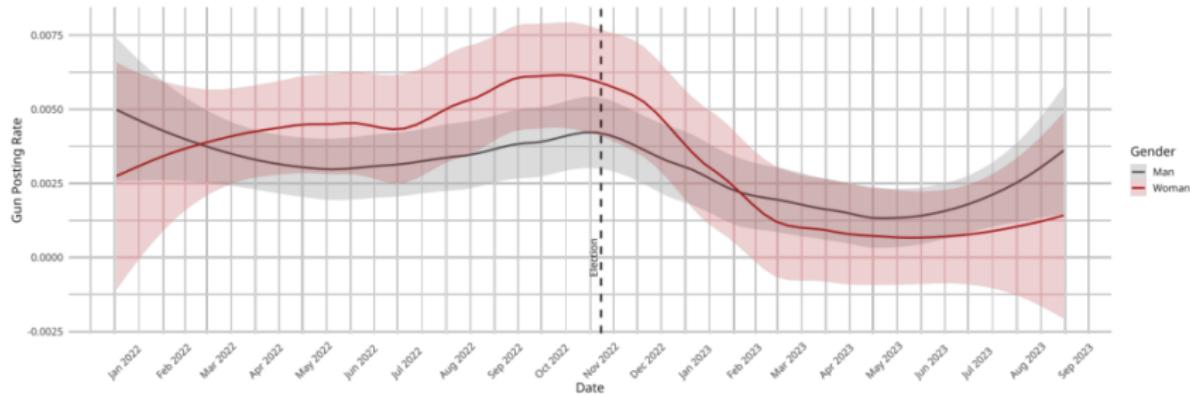


Is this strategic or individualistic?

Is this strategic or individualistic? Initial evidence points to strategic

- ▶ LOESS curves for men and women HRs with shaded confidence bands

Figure 3: Percentage of gun posting in the election for and during the 118th congress



Model specification

- ▶ I use the following OLS specification:

$$\log \left(\frac{\# GunPosts_i}{\# TotalPosts_i} \right) = \alpha + \nu Woman_i + \mathbf{x}_i^T \boldsymbol{\rho} + \varepsilon_i$$

- ▶ $Woman_i$ is coded 1=yes and 0=no. The quantity of interest is ν . \mathbf{x}_i is a vector of controls including demographics, military service, partisan alignment, and NRA donations.
- ▶ The unit of analysis i is the GOP representative

Women post more firearms and this is more pronounced in the election period

Table 2: GOP women posted more guns in the election for and during the 118th congress

	Election period			Full period		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Woman (1=yes, 0=no)	0.774*** (0.278)	0.801*** (0.283)	0.674** (0.282)	0.623** (0.310)	0.651** (0.314)	0.549* (0.316)
NOMINATE (Left→Right)		1.230* (0.656)	1.043 (0.649)		2.101*** (0.729)	1.949*** (0.728)
NRA Donations		0.00004 (0.0001)	0.00005 (0.0001)		0.0001 (0.0001)	0.0001 (0.0001)
Age		-0.028*** (0.009)	-0.025*** (0.009)		-0.024** (0.010)	-0.021** (0.010)
Rural District (LO→HI)		0.151 (0.099)	0.126 (0.098)		0.150 (0.110)	0.130 (0.109)
Military (1=yes, 0=no)		0.074 (0.229)	0.083 (0.225)		-0.159 (0.254)	-0.152 (0.252)
Constant	-8.850*** (0.110)	-8.640*** (0.736)	-8.615*** (0.724)	-8.609*** (0.123)	-9.047*** (0.818)	-9.026*** (0.812)
Observations	224	223	222	224	223	222
Adjusted R ²	0.029	0.075	0.050	0.013	0.068	0.049

Note:

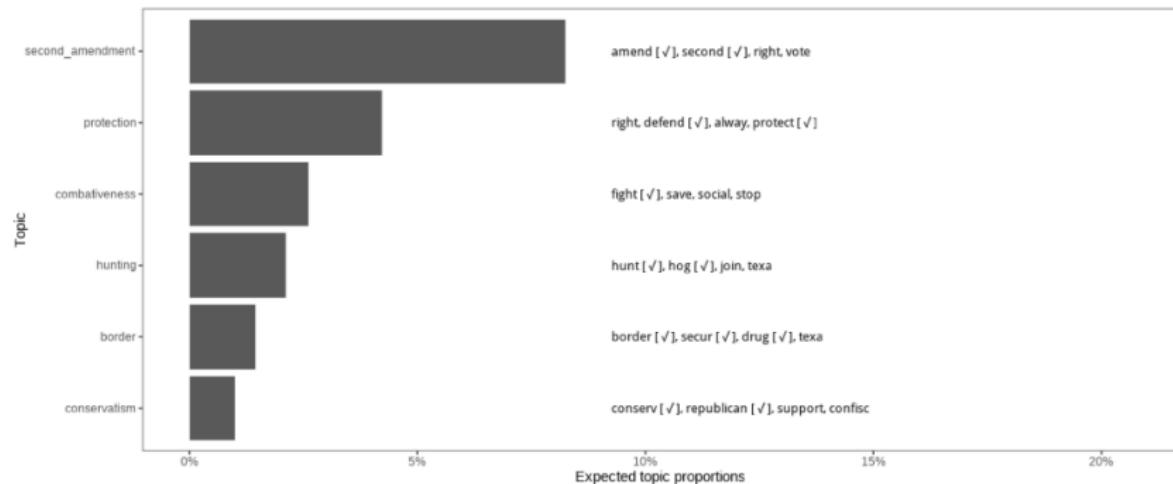
*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

But do GOP HRs truly communicate masculinity and/or conservatism in gun posts?

- ▶ To probe at what HRs are trying to communicate, I subset my data (using computer vision labels) to posts containing guns and examine accompanying captions (text)
- ▶ I use a Keyword Assisted Topic Model (Eshima et al. 2024)
- ▶ I seed four topics:
 - ▶ **Combativeness (masculinity)**
 - ▶ c("fight", "defeat")
 - ▶ **Protection (masculinity)**
 - ▶ c("protect", "defend", "famili", "law-abid")
 - ▶ **Second Amendment (conservativism)**
 - ▶ c("second", "amend", "2nd")
 - ▶ **Conservatism (conservativism)**
 - ▶ c("conserv", "republican")
- ▶ Model diagnostics indicate strong fit

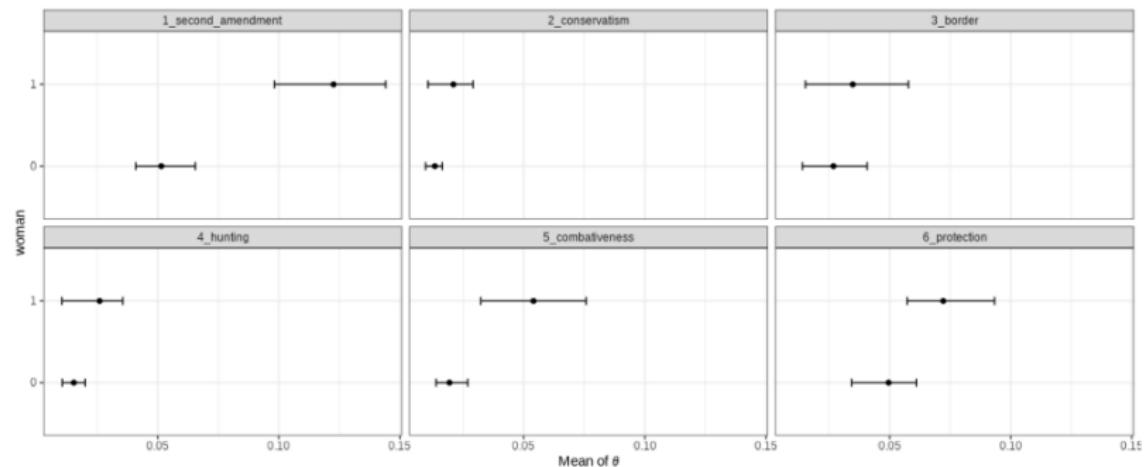
GOP HRs appear to communicate masculinity *and* conservatism concurrently in gun posts

Figure 4: Expected Topic Proportions from Gun Posts Captions



Masculinity and conservatism are more pronounced in women HRs captions than mens

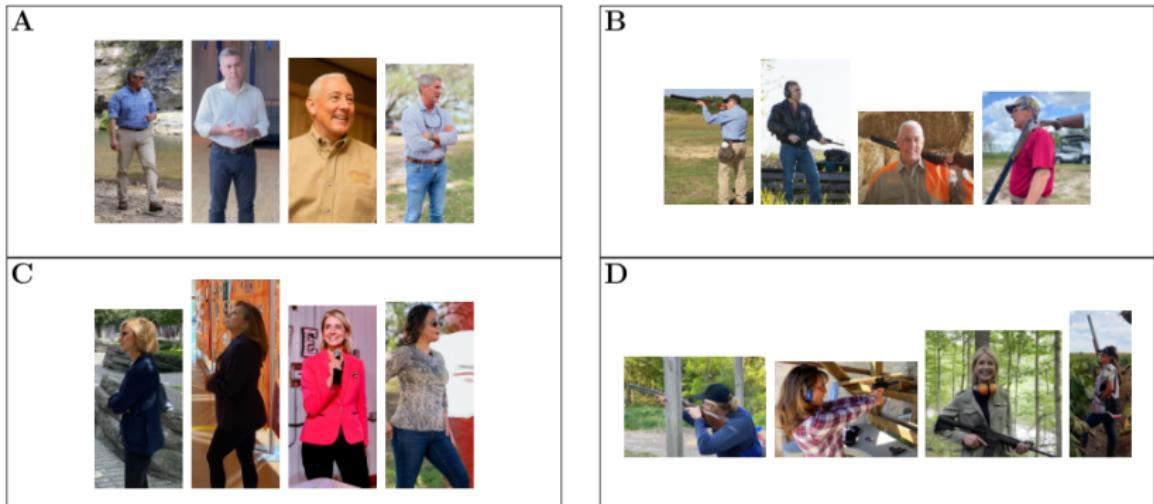
Figure 5: Marginal posterior means of document-topic distributions for men and women HRs



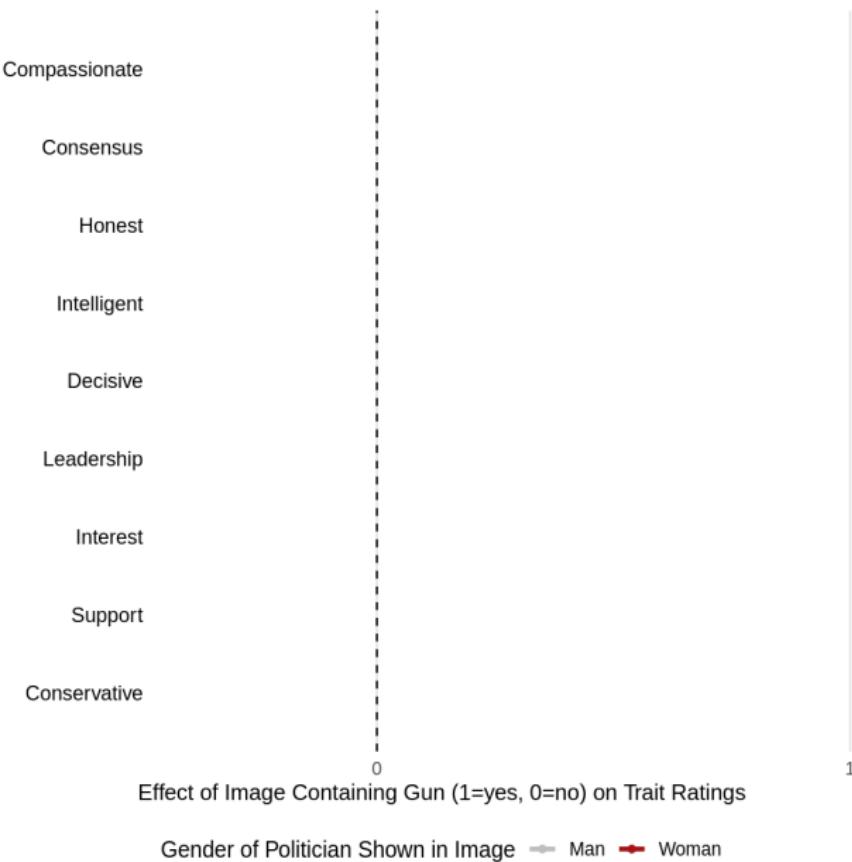
But how responsive are voters? And are there penalties for counter-stereotypic performance?

- ▶ I conduct a survey of Republican primary voters ($N \approx 700$) who are shown an HR in **A**, **B**, **C**, or **D** below
- ▶ Voters are then asked to evaluate the HR

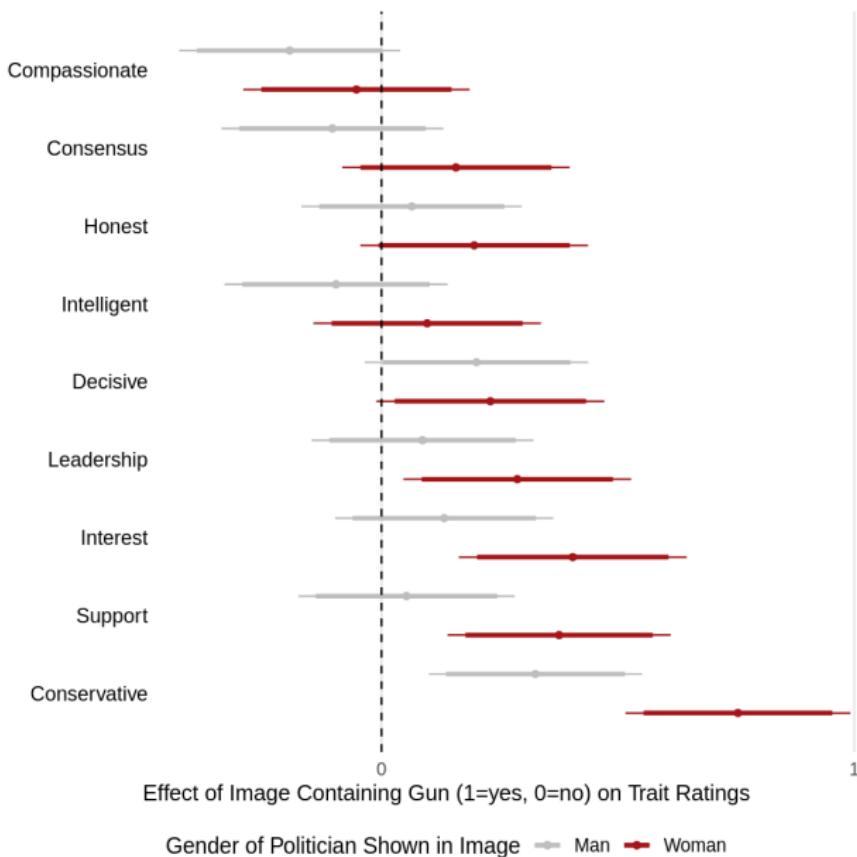
Figure 6: Experimental manipulation



GOP women get (disproportionate) boosts in evaluations



GOP women get (disproportionate) boosts in evaluations



Key takeaways

1. GOP women indeed employ more firearm imagery than men (it is not just fanfare in the media)
2. This is a strategy employed by women in election periods (when the double bind is most salient)
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That is all so far! Thank you!

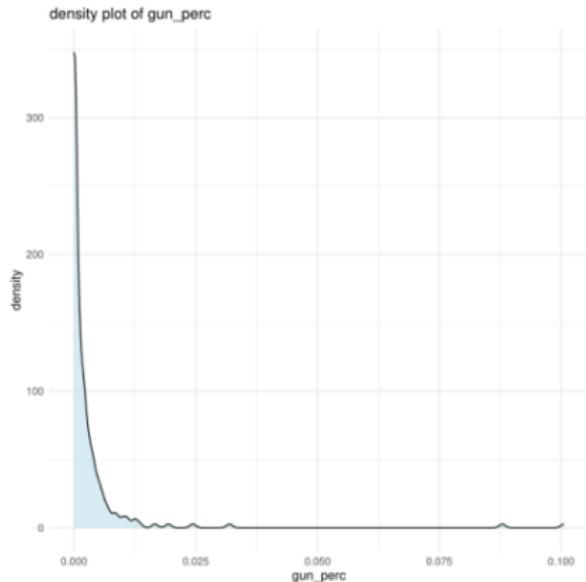
- ▶ Email: enathan@wustl.edu
- ▶ Web: nathanenglehart.github.io

Slide Appendix

- ▶ A.I (Distribution of outcome variable)
- ▶ A.II (keyATM diagnostics)

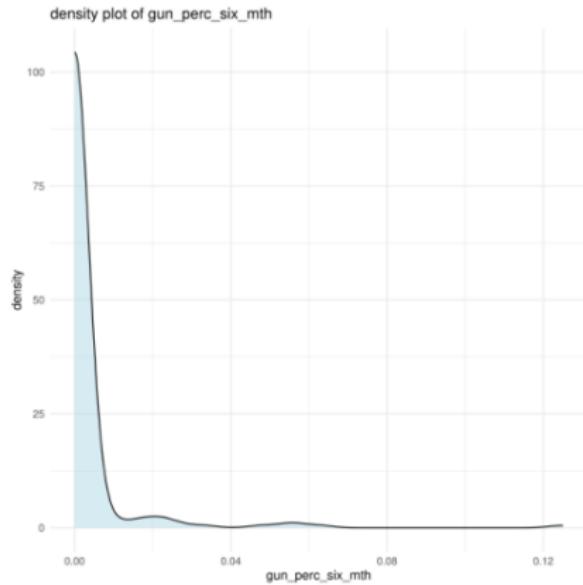
Slide Appendix A.I (1/2)

Figure A.2: Gun post density in the full period



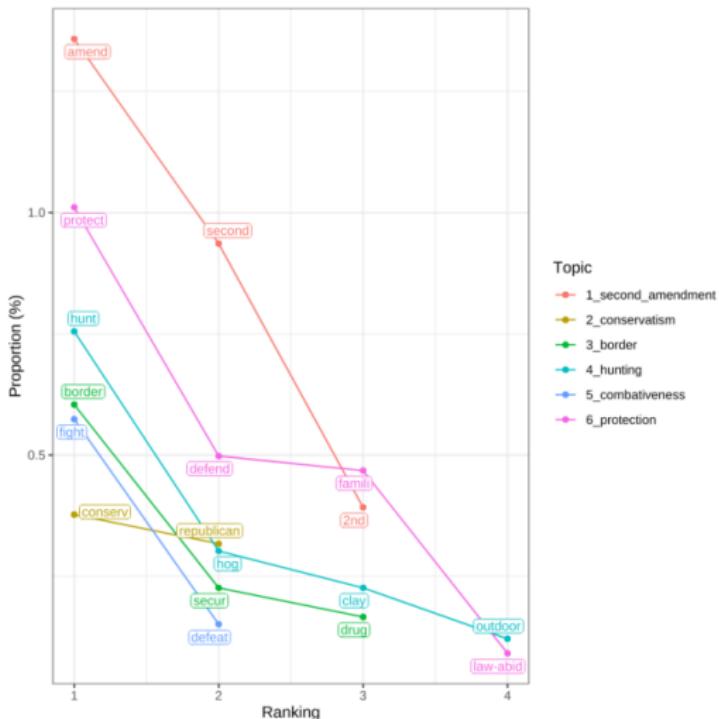
Slide Appendix A.I (2/2)

Figure A.3: Gun post density in the election period



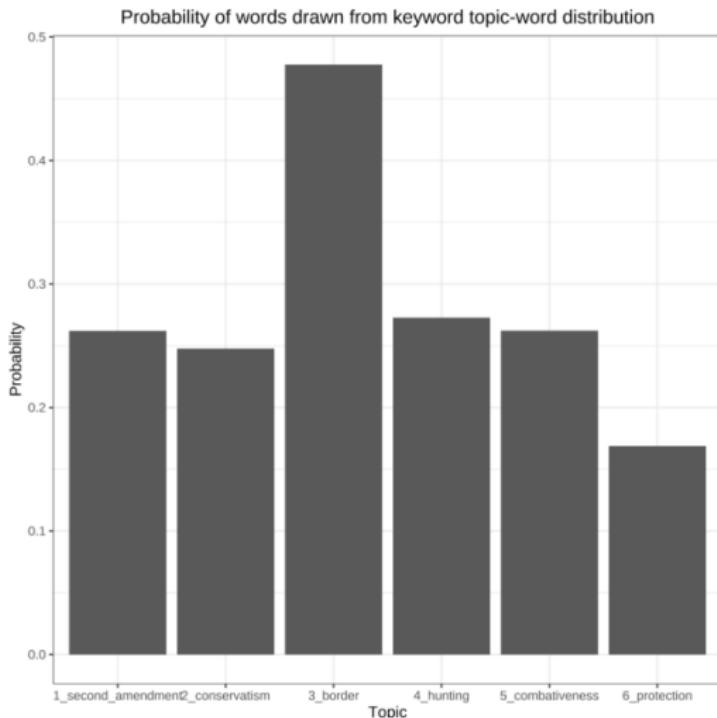
Slide Appendix A.II (1/3)

Figure A.14: Keyword visualization



Slide Appendix A.II (2/3)

Figure A.15: π plot



Slide Appendix A.II (3/3)

Figure A.16: Model fit plot

