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Short Paper #1

In 1989, Deborah Stone proposed the "causal stories" framework of examining public policy, grouping arguments into four types: intentional, inadvertent, mechanical, and accidental. The gun control and gun rights lobbies (hereafter GCL and GRL) both employ several causal stories, especially of intentional cause, to sway public sentiment toward their sides. The GRL applies the technique more effectively due to its ability to deflect the GCL's strongest intentional story.

Intentional stories are the strongest under Stone's framework, representing a situation "where an action was willfully taken by human beings in order to bring about the consequences that actually happened," (Stone 1989, 285). The GCL frames the National Rifle Association's (hereafter NRA) intentions to be supporting the business interests of gun manufacturers instead of protecting everyday Americans. The Violence Policy Center, an organization advocating for gun control, claims that the NRA is "nothing more than a gun industry trade organization that only masquerades as a shooting sports foundation," (Violence Policy Center 2024). This frame fits with Stone's concept of "calculated risk," where someone's knowledge of negative consequences is trumped by their monetary desires, making an inadvertent cause an intentional one. In the GCL's view of the NRA, the organization's leaders know that their opposition to reform is preventing legislation that would save lives; therefore, they are intentionally prolonging

the gun violence crisis. Stone notes that "calculated risk" was "the crux of the plaintiffs' argument in the asbestos and Agent Orange litigation" (Stone 1989, 291), so it's clear that its method of framing has worked historically.

The GRL does not deny gun violence but instead portrays efforts to fix the crisis with gun control as misguided and, at worst, an intentional purge of a popular way of life. A 2013 article by Kyle Wintersteen in pro-gun magazine *Guns and Ammo* cites the failure of handgun bans in Chicago and Washington, D.C. as evidence that gun control policy is useless. Wintersteen reshapes the gun violence argument as accidental by claiming that the problem, which the GCL blames on the GRL, cannot be fixed by human intervention, therefore deflecting blame. This is the most powerful of the methods Stone mentions for deflecting a causal story, as it rejects the idea that *anyone* is to blame. This rebuttal is overwhelmingly strong because it undermines the basis of every story put forward by the GCL - that gun control works. With this in mind, the GRL broaches its own intentional story: that the GCL wants to take away the second-amendment rights of gun-owners. In a 2024 rally at a Pennsylvania NRA chapter, Donald Trump claimed that "your second amendment will always be safe with me as your president" (NRA 2024). Trump implies that without him as president, gun rights are under imminent attack from the GCL. To a gun owner, this story foments a sense of unity. Among Stone's descriptions of a successful causal theory is its ability to "create new political alliances among people who are shown to stand in the same victim relationship to the causal agent" (Stone 1989, 295). That the primary causal theory of the GRL does this so well makes it more powerful than the GCL's causal story. Additionally, since the GCL's policy goals are based on restrictions on guns, they cannot reframe the story as accidental, having to settle for a less powerful form of rebuttal.

Ultimately, because the GRL can deflect the blame for the problem of gun violence from itself by proposing an "accidental" interpretation by the crisis, its arguments are stronger.

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