

POLICY ANALYSIS – PART ONE  
FIREARMS POLICY IN AMERICA AND THE NEED FOR EMERGENT DATA

Presented To:

Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives  
Steny Hoyer, Majority Leader of the U.S. House of Representatives  
Kevin McCarthy, Minority Leader of the U.S. House of Representatives  
Mitch McConnell, Majority Leader of the U.S. Senate  
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The debate over firearms policy in the United States is exemplary of the polarized divide characterizing the nation's attitude towards much of contemporary policy issues. There would likely be little disagreement in asserting firearms policy is of noteworthy concern to both the citizenry and all tiers of government (Reinhart, 2017). However, while we could surmise that virtually everyone might agree that a reduction of violence, of which gun-related violence factors heavily in America (Gramlich, 2017), would be broadly beneficial to society, attitudes towards gun control policies in the US exhibit anything but consensus and have evolved into a highly polarized and increasingly confrontational debate that has roots in many factors including geography, political alignment, and numerous interrelated and standalone socio-cultural components (Van Dam, 2018). Of deeper concern are entrenched divisions specific to political partisanship. This is not to place blame on a particular party or individual but to acknowledge that many policy issues, including that of gun control, have as of late experienced added polarization and extreme stand-off dynamics to the point that little sustainable legislation – favorable to any voice along the spectrum of attitudes towards firearms policy – has been created where longevity and objectively assessed efficacy characterize such actions (Kleck, 2016).

Nevertheless, a more foundational pathology can be seen when considering the inability to find workable compromises towards bridging the divide: *A lack of emergent data that might transcend the political divide and the hermeneutical elements that render existing data to be interpreted as unreliable or explicitly aligned to theses of respective, entrenched positions.*

After the Dickey Amendment went into effect in 2017, and after a 16 year period of avoidance from further studies into gun-related violence, the Centers for Disease Control conducted a limited study on Firearm-Related Violence in 2013 which was enabled by joint funding from the CDC/CDC Foundation, and non-governmental grants (NAP, 2013). The study produced data that both confirmed and confronted long-standing perceptions held by the whole

of the firearms policy spectrum including the framing of gun-related violence as a public health issue (Cruz, 2013) (Hsieh, 2018) (NAP, pg.3). And yet, as witnessed by the diversity of analysis, this data did not result in any sustainable spirit of compromise towards the deepening stalemate. Also present, and generally from the perspective of the politically conservative voices along the spectrum of debate, was a lack of trust and perceptions of reliability attributed to the study due to a perception that the study was reflected of a specific pro-gun control agenda (Beckett, 2014) (Cox, 2015) (Hsieh, 2016) – an expression of partisanship that is situationally rooted and not reflective of broader dynamics assigned solely to political conservatism.

This need for expanded research and emergent data has increased in gravity today because the time is ripe for action. As it stands and representing two decades of nonexistent public funding at the Federal level, we are now recipient to a recent 2018 Omnibus Spending Bill that includes \$25 million allocated towards gun-violence research by the CDC. That the bill was approved by both houses of Congress and signed into law by President Donald Trump is noteworthy and indicative of broadly shifting attitudes since the implementation of the Dickey Amendment. Nevertheless, the foundational problem at hand remains – *how to proceed in a manner that will produce data considered reliable and valid by all actors in the ongoing debate and struggle to better address firearms policy in America.*

There is much at stake and potentially lost should any renewed research by the CDC find itself unable to be considered broadly reliable and insightful – a concern held by some researchers despite the relative bipartisan support for the approved funding (Greenfieldboyce, 2018). Firstly, it would be the citizens of the United States that would have the most to lose on multiple fronts. The debate over firearms policy represents a divide that is as potently expressed in the citizenry as it is in the government. While the idea of reducing harm and increasing safety in the polis might represent a consensus goal, in constant tension are the concerns over broader

public safety and the need to defend one's own self and immediate community – this in a period of renewed tension and confrontations over race, socioeconomics, immigration, and equality issues. Also lying in tension are valid confrontations between the broad expressions of Constitutional rights and the situational limits placed on the exercise of such rights in the public arena. To add, other valid concerns over past policy actions spotlight their effects upon equal access to the rights and subsequent provisions afforded by the Second Amendment, and equity in the framing of the problem of gun violence (Melling, 2018) (Jaffe, 2018).

Additionally, the distilled, philosophical focus of the firearms policy debate distracts from the experiential aspects of gun-related violence, that such violence exists in several modalities – each with unique causal factors and potentially unique prescriptions for addressing and mitigating harm, and negatively impacts both the broader social psyche and the ability of individuals to better process and more wholly recover from violent events. These modalities include mass shootings, criminal homicide, and suicide by gun (Beckett, 2015).

Finally, the constant pendulum swing of policy and legislative actions that contribute to the seeming unbridgeable divide results in a loss of sustainable judicial clarity regarding its role in guiding social, political, and market behaviors. While plurality is important as a positive element of American culture, the current fragmentation results in narrowly pocketed strategies designed to create behavioral workarounds against such legal haziness and transience (Elinson, 2019).

As such the near standstill type of inertial effects that characterize the state of firearms policy in America will serve to deepen disillusionment, raise the volume of signal-drowning partisan noise, and continually erode the trust of the people in its government if the even-increasing fragmentation remains unabated. Therefore, an essential need for producing, emergent, broadly trusted data remains as a paramount task of Congress and executive agencies.

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