



# Examining the Associations Between Political Ideology, Cognitive Biases, and Gun Behaviors

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## Abstract

In the contemporary American political landscape, an escalating party divide is reshaping political ideologies and policies, with gun control being a particularly contentious issue. The oversimplified view of this division fails to capture the intricate interplay between political ideology, gun-related attitudes control, and underlying cognitive biases. The current study examines individual differences in beliefs including beliefs in a dangerous world (BDW), suspicion, and resentment as well as gun-related attitudes across the spectrum of political ideology. The study further examines how these factors predict gun behaviors in a simulated environment, assessing average latency to touch, point, and shoot. This study utilized a sample of 110 adult participants with self-report and behavioral data. Findings indicate significant differences across the political spectrum, with more conservative individuals endorsing significantly more favorable gun attitudes and attitudes in favor of gun accessibility. Additionally, gun attitudes were significantly less favorable in individuals higher in resentment and suspicion. BDW was associated with pointing and shooting the gun sooner, while suspicion was associated with waiting longer to touch the gun. Additionally, more favorable gun attitudes were associated with touching and firing the gun sooner. Results from moderation analyses suggest that suspicion has an effect for individuals with less favorable gun attitudes, such that increasing suspicion leads to shooting sooner. While this study must be considered in light of its limitations, these findings have implications for public safety and emphasize the need for further exploration into the intricate dynamics between beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors within political ideology.

## Introduction

- Gun control issues are often discussed as a binary divide between Republicans and Democrats.
- Party affiliation alone does not capture the full spectrum of political beliefs
- Gun attitudes and attitudes toward gun control are examined in the literature as facets of gun policy beliefs
- Various individual and group biases may influence these beliefs
- Research has demonstrated an influence of negativity bias and threat bias, individuals with higher threat bias are more likely politically conservative
- Suspicion and resentment, cognitive components of aggression, may also influence the internal motivation of group members
- Research has not yet addressed how selected beliefs and attitudes influence gun behavior, and how these elements differ across the political spectrum

## The Current Study

- Aim 1: Investigate individual differences in beliefs and attitudes across political affiliation and ideology (Replication)
  - 1a. Republicans vs. Democrats
  - 1b. Political spectrum very conservative to very liberal
- Aim 2: Examine relationships between beliefs and attitudes
- Aim 3: Understand impact of beliefs and attitudes on gun behaviors
- Aim 4: Explore potential interactive effects

## Method

### Participants

- 111 from SONA + Tallahassee area
- Average age = 19
- 77% white participants
- COVID-19 vaccination

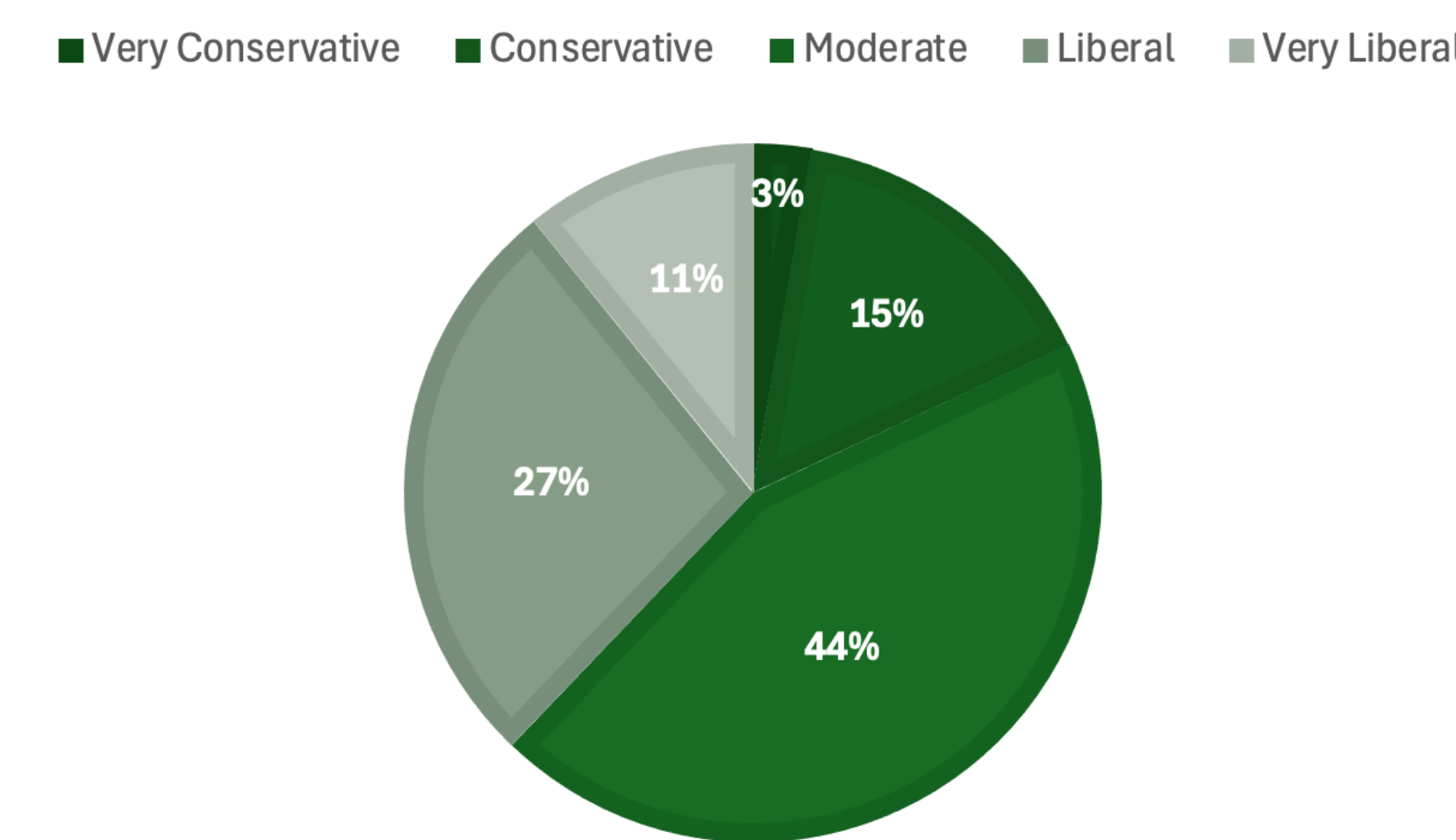
### Procedure

- Informed Consent
- Self-report Questionnaire
- Shooting Simulator Scenarios
- Debrief and Compensation

### Measures

- Belief in a Dangerous World (BDW)
- Hostility-Guilt Index (HGI) Suspicion and Resentment Subscales
- Gun Attitudes Scale (GAS)
- Attitudes Towards Gun Control Scale (ATGCS)
- Latency - Avg. % scenario completed when gun was touched, pointed, fired

### POLITICAL IDEOLOGY BREAKDOWN



### Data Analytical Approach

- Descriptive Statistics
- Independent Sample T-tests (1a)
- Bivariate Pearson's r Correlation (1b, 2)
- Linear Regression Analyses (3)
- SPSS Process Moderation for interactive effects (4)

## Results

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations among continuous study variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Political Ideology	-	-	-	-	-	-
2 Resentment	.13	-	-	-	-	-
3 Suspicion	.20*	.61*	-	-	-	-
4 BDW	-.03	.00	-.30**	-	-	-
5 ATGC	-.66**	-.09	-.18	-.15	-	-
6 GAS	.60**	-.30**	.35**	-.05	.66**	-
7 Touch	.06	.09	.25**	-.16	-.16	-.25**
8 Point	.13	-.04	.07	-.19*	-.06	-.16
9 Fire	.14	-.05	.05	-.23*	-.12	-.34**
<i>M</i>	3.28	27.54	32.24	39.85	21.06	21.96
<i>SD</i>	.946	5.94	7.67	7.75	7.30	6.59

Figure 1. Beliefs and Attitudes among Republicans vs. Democrats

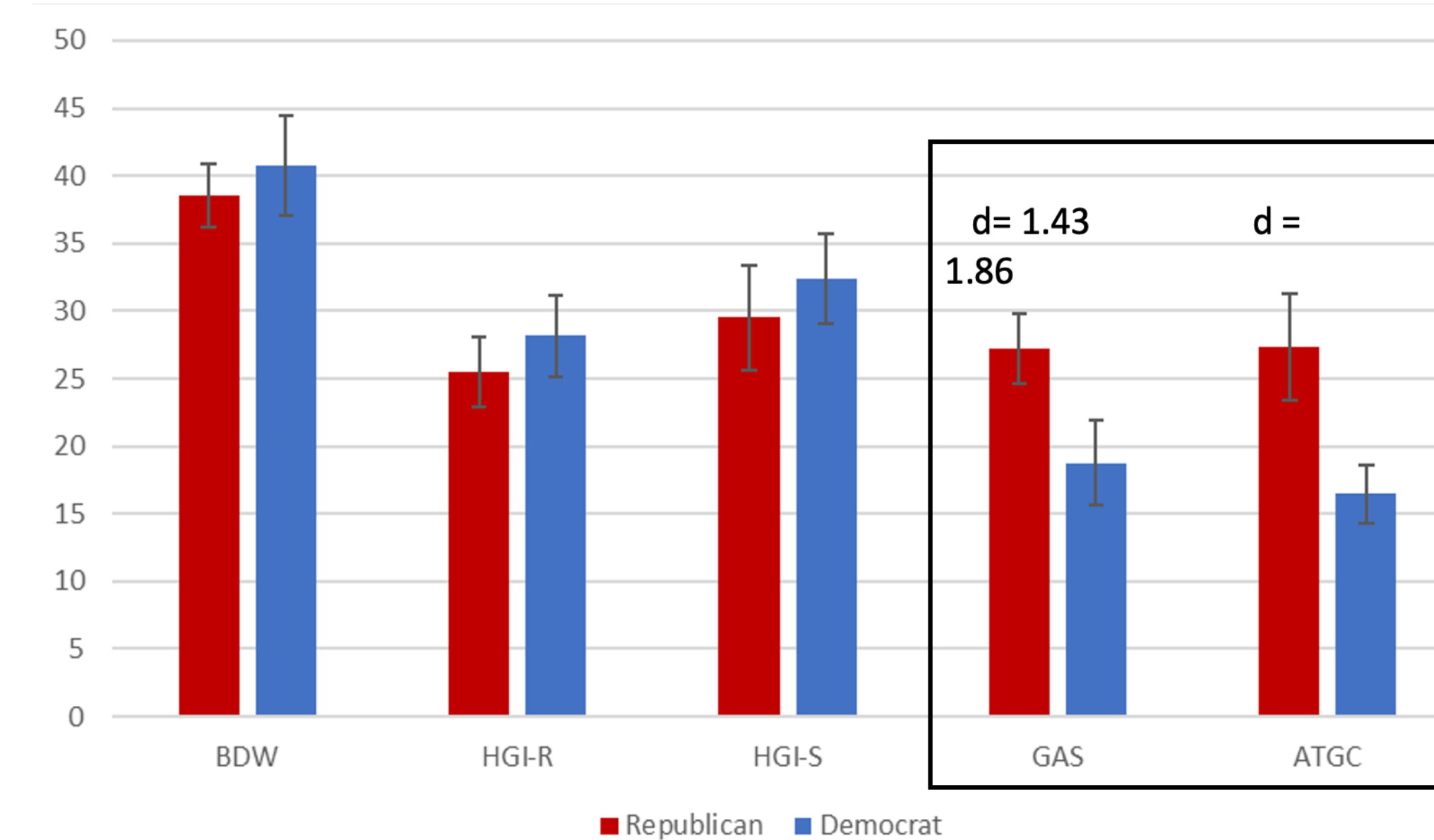
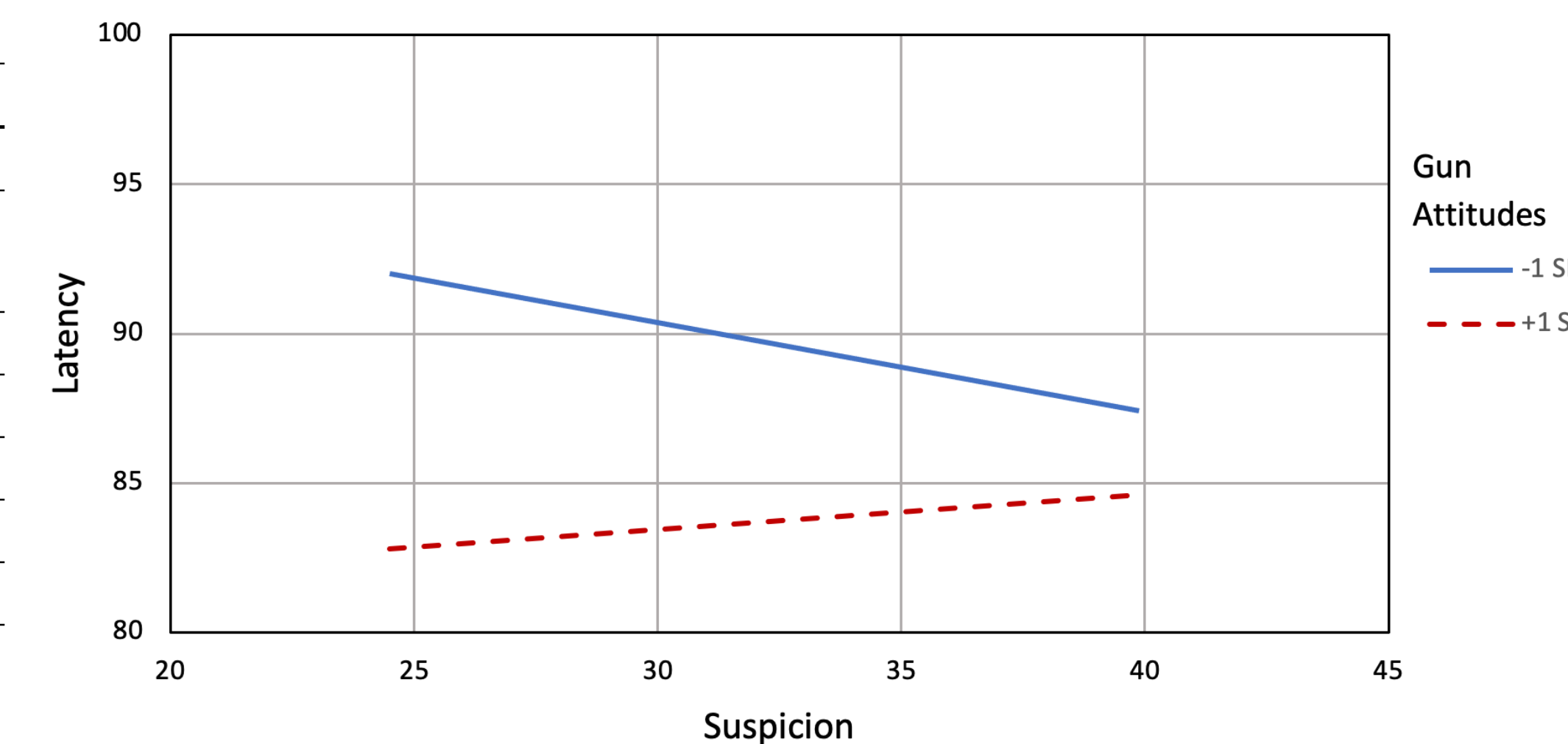


Table 2. Linear Regression Model for Latency to Fire

Predictor	<i>t</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	-	-	-	.21	4.64	.000
Political Ideology	-0.65	-.08	.515	-	-	-
BDW	-2.65	-.26	.009	-	-	-
Resentment	-1.07	-.12	.286	-	-	-
Suspicion	-0.86	-.11	.390	-	-	-
ATGC	0.87	.12	.387	-	-	-
GAS	-4.18	-.54	<.001	-	-	-

Figure 2. Latency to fire by suspicion and gun attitudes.



## Discussion

### Summary of Findings

- Aim 1 found significantly more favorable gun attitudes and attitudes in favor of gun accessibility among Republicans and individuals identifying as more conservative
- Aim 2 found positive associations amongst variables except BDW and GAS, negatively associated with Suspicion and Resentment respectively
- Aim 3 found
  - Individuals with more favorable GA and ATGC on average touched, pointed, fired gun sooner
  - Higher suspicion caused individuals to wait longer to touch the gun, & resentment had no associations
  - Higher BDW associated with pointing & firing sooner.
- Aim 4 found significant interaction of Suspicion on latency to fire, but no others

### Conclusions

- Confirmation of current political landscape
- Suspicion and liberal ideology
- BDW and GAS as relevant predictors
- Higher BDW, threat perception and defensive gun ownership
- Suspicion and firing latency, less favorable gun attitudes & threat-assessment process

### Limitations

- Correlational Study
- Not a representative sample
- Immediate post-pandemic & vaccination requirement

### Future Directions

- Exploring suspicion, gun behaviors, and threat-related beliefs
- Extending findings to diverse population/geographic areas
- Implicit Bias Measures
- Media coverage, Cognitive Bias Modification

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