



Traditional Gender Role Ideologies and Firearms

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ABSTRACT

Although several studies have examined gender differences in gun-related attitudes, little is known about how traditional gender role attitudes might contribute to the gun policy preferences of Americans or their decision to own a gun. Our analysis of national data from the Baylor Religion Survey indicates that Americans who report more traditional gender role beliefs are more likely to support policies that would increase the number of armed people in schools and allow more people to carry concealed firearms and less likely to support policies that would limit the possession of handguns, semi-automatic weapons, and high capacity magazines. Interestingly, individuals who report more traditional gender role attitudes are also less likely to support policies that would expand gun safety programs and background checks that include mental health screenings. These associations persisted with adjustments for age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, household income, marital status, the presence of children, religious identity, religiosity, political orientation, region of residence, and urban residence. We conclude that traditional attitudes about gender are consistently associated with less restrictive and more precarious gun policy preferences among Americans. These patterns are noteworthy because they support the same general conclusion: Americans who report more traditional views about gender tend to want more guns in society with fewer legal restrictions related to access and safety. We also find that there are significant differences between men and women who hold these views. Men with more traditional views of gender are more likely to own a gun and support more liberal gun policies.

BACKGROUND

Today, men make up the majority of gun owners in the United States. With this, they also commit the most firearm crimes as well as gun homicides. With over four hundred million guns in America, that leaves roughly one hundred and eighty million in the hands of men. For many, it is a large part of their livelihood, the hunting, the bonding, the purchasing, everything that comes with owning a gun. It can make them feel more masculine and often firearm companies will promote their weapons as such, the men who buy their guns are the most masculine. But with this rigor of advertisement and push for more “masculine men”, brings the feasible possibilities of harm by said men with their guns. Men commit the most gun crime, including homicides. We have gun policies to make sure that felons do not have access to guns as well as the special permits that come with owning a gun. There is legislation all over the United States about gun ownership. Men will feel and have been pushed to understand that their manhood comes with owning a gun, so we must ask the question, why might gun policy be associated with manhood?

Firearms are symbols of masculinity. For men, they resemble dominance and power. A gun shoots shrapnel at high speeds that can cause injury or even death. The ability to use and own a firearm is seen as a way to maintain power and dominance. There is so much power within such a small device, with it, men use it to justify their masculinity. There is an advertisement from Bushmaster Firearms, an international semi-automatic, and rifle distributor, in a magazine that depicts a “man card revoked” card, for not owning a rifle. Companies like Bushmaster Firearms have pushed hypermasculine ideals that men who refuse to own a gun revoke their man card. The NRA uses gendered languages to promote stereotypical masculine values such as self-reliance and independence of the government (Bergman 2021). These major firearm companies are pushing these ideals only for profits, not for the good of the man. But limiting this access to their firearms would be emasculating them. These men depend so highly on their guns and creating a policy that outright removes them could give a detrimental hit to their manhood. If any laws are put into effect that would restrict their access and deny men as their role of protector, they will continue to fight against it.

METHODS

Our dependent variables measure attitudes toward gun policy. Respondents were asked whether they favored or opposed the following items: (a) putting armed security or police officers in more schools; (b) arming more teachers and school officials; (c) laws that allow individuals to carry concealed firearms; (d) banning the possession of handguns by everyone except law enforcement; (e) banning semi-automatic weapons; (f) banning high capacity magazines that hold more than ten bullets; (g) expanding gun safety programs; and (h) expanding background checks to include better mental health screenings.

Gender role ideology is a composite measure of two commonly used items that capture beliefs about the role of men and women in society. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following statements –“It is much better for everyone if the man earns the main living and the woman takes care of the home and family” and “Preschool children suffer if their mother is employed at a full-time job.” Response categories to these questions ranged from (1) Strongly Disagree to (4) Strongly Agree.

Multivariate analyses also adjust for background variables that are known correlates of gun ownership and policy preference (Morin 2014; Yamane 2017), including: gender (1 = male, 0 = female), age, level of education (1 = less than high school, 0 = high school, 1 = some college, 1 = college graduate, 1 = post graduate education), household income (in dollars, categorical with 1 = \$10,000 or less; 2 = \$10,001–\$20,000; 3 = \$20,001–\$35,000; 4 = \$35,001–\$50,000; 5 = \$50,001–\$100,000; 6 = \$100,001–\$150,000; 7 = \$150,001 or more) marital status (1 = married, 0 = other marital status), number of children (capped at four or more), rural resident (1 = rural, 0 = urban or suburban), southern resident (census definition of the south = 1, 0 = non-southern resident), employment status (1 = employed, 0 = not currently working outside the home), and political views (1 = extremely conservative to 7 = extremely liberal) We also include two measures for religion in this analysis, which are known to be associated with gun ownership and attitudes (Froese and Bader 2010; Yamane 2016; Stroope and Tom 2017). We estimate our results using logistic regression.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

In this research, we build on previous work by testing the relationship between gender role ideologies and gun policy preferences. We hypothesized that individuals who support more traditional gender role ideologies would tend to support gun policies that arm more people in public and private spaces given the traditional male protector role. We also expected that individuals who support more traditional gender role ideologies would tend to oppose gun policies that expand safety measures or reduce access for individuals and the broader society. Our results consistently supported both of our first two hypotheses. Our last hypothesis stated that there would be no differences between men and women who held higher levels of traditional gender role ideologies. This hypothesis was not supported as there were only two policies in which there were no gender differences: requiring safety programs before ownership and increasing the number of law enforcement officers on school campuses. The associations between gender role ideologies and gun policy attitudes were consistent. Most striking among these was opposition to policies that could potentially reduce gun injuries or gun violence by increasing the stringency of background checks or requiring gun safety as a prerequisite for ownership. Any policies that create barriers to gun ownership could potentially prevent men from fulfilling their duty as a protector. We have found that to women, gender roles matter less, as men find that gender roles matter more to them. Due to our results, when creating any policies or legislation regarding firearms, it needs to be aimed towards women to have any success in support by the people. For example, closing the boyfriend loophole, where domestic abusers cannot buy or own weapons but does not apply to partners who are just dating, would have women more likely to support a policy like this to pass in legislation. Men who hold more traditional views about gender were more likely to want more guns in society than women. In almost every model, men were significantly different from women, and this difference became more pronounced as the levels of traditional gender role ideology increased. Of the nine models, only two had no gender differences. The differences, and lack thereof, suggest that men and women internalize different aspects of their gender role identity related to enacting their roles.

CONCLUSION

We conclude that gender role ideologies are consistently associated with less restrictive and more precarious gun policy preferences among Americans. These patterns are noteworthy because they support the same general conclusion: Individuals who report more traditional gender role beliefs tend to want more guns in society with fewer legal restrictions related to access and safety. It is also particularly noteworthy that believing in traditional gender roles is more important for men when it comes to considering whether to support or oppose specific gun policies. In addition to longitudinal trend studies, research is needed to explore potential subgroup variations in the association between gender role ideologies and gun policy preferences.

References

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