THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGY AND MASS SHOOTINGS ON FIREARM ACQUISITION IN THE UNITED STATES

Stephen F. Austin State University

Abstract

This research explores the determinants of firearm acquisition in the United States in two parallel areas: (1) the impact of political ideology, and economic well-being and (2) the impact of mass shootings.

Impact of Political Ideology

In an attempt to identify the influence of political ideology on firearm acquisition, proper data sets were selected to quantify these variables. Economist Jurgen Brauer created a data set by adjusting the FBI’s National Instant Criminal Background Check records to more realistically represent firearm acquisitions. Political Ideology is typified using two separate indices: citizen and state. Citizen Ideology measures the average location of the active electorate in each state and State Ideology measures the average location of the elected officials in each state on a liberal conservative continuum.

Impact of Mass Shootings

In an attempt to identify the affect of mass shooting events on firearm acquisition, the appropriate Autoregressive Integrated Moving Average (ARIMA) model was determined. This model transformed the raw firearm sales data into a stationary form, meaning it no longer contains a trend or seasonality, more appropriate for forecasting. This model was used to create forecasts of firearm sales for the months surrounding seven selected mass shootings.

Summary

Throughout modern history, firearm acquisitions have been increasing dramatically and the contributing variables to this shift have been poorly understood. This research indicates that though there is a slight correlation between variables such as political ideology and unemployment levels and firearm acquisition – there is no evidence for causality. The data does suggest increased firearm acquisition following mass shooting events, with the largest spikes following earlier events and decreasing influence in later years.