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What are the differences between gun laws in Republican  
voting states such as Florida, versus Democratic voting states  
such as New York?

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
MA in Comparative Criminology and Criminal Justice

Maynooth University

School of Law and Criminology

## **Abstract**

Gun laws in America are often a topic of conversation, especially in times where guns have either proven helpful or dangerous in different circumstances. This research project aims to identify why certain Republican states, such as Florida and certain Democratic states such as New York have such different views on gun laws. Additionally, this project will examine the impact different gun laws have on school shootings. The data for this project was collected through numerous secondary sources. Reasons why people may be for and why people may be against owning a gun are outlined in this paper. Other aspects that will be explored within this paper will examine the NRA, young people and gun violence, race and gun violence, media and gun ownership as well as public opinion from gun ownership. All of these findings display that gun violence is a major issue in the US and there is a need to change the second Amendment of the US Constitution. However it is also important to recognise that gun culture in America is not a part of the US that will be removed., as it plays such a major role in many people's lives.

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#### **New York**

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## Chapter 1 - Introduction

“Yes, people pull the trigger - but guns are the instrument of death. Gun control is necessary, and delay means more death and horror.”

(Spitzer, n.d.)

“Disarm the people – that is the best and most effective way to enslave them.”

(Madison, n.d)

Gun violence in the US is a topic of debate for people all over the world, not just within America. The first quote demonstrates one person’s opinion on these matters, an opinion that many other people also have. There is a display of desire to save people from guns. However, the second quote displays the other side of the debate: by removing peoples right to arm and protect themselves, they will fall victim to those who still seek to harm them. This paper has chosen to look specifically at New York and Florida because both have recently undergone or are about to undergo new policy changes in relation to gun control legislation which are both very different. Florida is a Republican state so the recent change in gun laws can display this by having had their gun laws loosened whereas New York is a Democratic states who’s gun laws have recently tightened. Republican voters tend to prefer being able to enforce their right to bear arms, while Democratic voters tend to prefer having laws in place to protect people. This is widely explored in chapter 4 where it is also discussed how these preferences impact instances of school gun violence.

Gun violence in America is constantly increasing. In 2021, the most recent year where complete data is available, 48,830 people died from gun-related injuries in the U.S., according to the CDC (Gramlich, 2023). Many studies that have been carried out to explore the impact of gun violence have shown that there is a desperate need for stricter gun laws throughout America (Ghiani, Hawkins and Baum, 2019:1254) and these also claim that this should be done since approximately 38% of violence caused by using a gun was committed by people who were legally entitled to own one (Swanson, et al., 2016: 1073). People are legally able to obtain guns and then use them to commit illegal crimes. As with any society there are going to be organisations which will try to influence people in to supporting the organisations groups. One such group in the US is the NRA. The National Rifle Association (NRA) are an organisation

in the US who support the idea of being able to carry guns. The NRA have been able to convince people that a part of their identity involves their right to bear arms as this will help to reduce crime (Finger, 2022). Florida has the nineteenth highest rate of gun violence in the US (EveryStat.org FL, n.d.). New York has the fourth lowest rate of gun death in the United States (EveryStat.org New York, 2023). This will be discussed in more detail in chapters 2 and 5. This research aims to understand more clearly what differences both states face as a result of their vastly different gun laws. Upon comparing both states, many differences can be spotted. Both states have different requirements for what is needed when trying to purchase a firearm. Furthermore Florida has laws which allows people to use guns more freely than New York does, such as with the shoot first laws. All of this will again be examined in more depth in chapter 2.

In order to get a clearer idea of just how these differences affect these states, one must start by comparing different studies and research that has been carried out in this area. Upon doing this it becomes obvious that there are similar trends in these pieces of research. For example, data claims that in the 50 states between 2005 to 2015 there were 416,391 suicides and of these deaths 211,766 were firearm related (Ghiani, Hawkins and Baum, 2019: 1256). Furthermore, another study found that mandatory waiting periods before somebody is able to purchase a gun will result in a decrease of gun related homicides by approximately 17% anywhere in the US (Ludwig, 2017: 12097). This is an important fact because it demonstrates that at least some instances of gun violence are perpetrated due to the offender not fully thinking through what they are about to do. Again these two examples refer back to the opening statement by Spitzer. Without guns people may still wish to cause harm, but the level of harm could be significantly reduced.

There are different headings which can explain everything there is to know about guns in the US. This can range from how to obtain a firearm to how the general public feels about them. Firearm accessibility, motive, gun control measures, risk factors, consequences, public opinion, gun violence prevention programmes and media representation are the eight different topics which the paper examines closely in chapter 4 as well. These headings can explain the differences and similarities found in the current literature in relation to this topic of gun violence. Overall the findings in this paper show that the differences between Democratic voters and Republican voters can explain the differences between opinions in relation to gun violence. This can also account for the opinions of those in Florida versus those in New York, Republican and Democratic states, respectively.

The right to bear arms originated in the US in 1791 and today is disputed as laws and weaponry have developed and moved on. Until 1939 in the case of ‘United States vs Miller’ (1939) the Supreme Court had very little to do with this amendment. This case will be discussed further in chapter 5 but since then, the Supreme Court has been able to intervene on matters relating to this amendment. However, there is only a limited amount that the courts can do as each state is entitled to write their own laws. As a result of this though, in New York there is a specific emphasis placed on protecting the people from gun violence, whereas in Florida the emphasis is placed on protecting the right to bear arms. In New York it is estimated that 19.9% of adults own a gun and in Florida there are approximately 35.3% of adults who own a gun (CBS News, 2022). In recent times the Supreme Court has been able to have an opinion in relation to the second amendment. The most recent example of this happened just in June of 2023 when the court ruled that gun regulations must be "consistent with this nation’s historical tradition of firearm regulation" to survive court challenges (Fritze, n.d.).

The following chapter will examine existing literature on gun violence in the US, specifically in Florida and New York, and will explore research that has been carried out in relation to statistics as well as the NRA. Additionally, it will explore small case studies in relation to this organisation. In Chapter 3, the methodology of this research will be explained. This will be done by outlining the different ways in which the research for this paper was carried out as well as why these specific methods were used. This will be done by examining the research design, data collection, documentary evidence, desktop research, the ethical issues associated with this type of research as well as the limitations. Chapter 4 will present the findings of the this research, which includes data analysis and descriptive statistics as well as qualitative findings. Chapter 5 will discuss these findings by also examining the origin of the right to bear arms, media and gun ownership, firearm ownership in Florida and New York as well as the differences in laws within these two states, impact on public safety, case studies of school shootings within these two jurisdictions, attitudes and perceptions towards firearm laws in Florida and New York, data analysis again of this research, limitations with this research and recommendations for future research. Chapter 6 will present the conclusions of all of this research.

## **Chapter 2 – Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

This literature review will discuss the differences in crime rates between American states whose gun laws have a high and low rank for gun law strength. A particular emphasis will be placed on New York and Florida. These two states will have a specific focus placed on them because they are often associated with being holiday destinations for tourists and are currently about to - or have just - instated new gun laws. New York State is ranked number two for gun law strength in the US, according to a study carried out by EveryTown (Everytown Research & Policy, 2023), but Florida is ranked as number nineteen, according to them. This literature review will expand more on this point before concentrating on the impact of such gun laws surrounding young people and youth justice. It will do this by examining school shootings because that is an issue which is only growing in the US as time goes on. It is constantly becoming a more pervasive issue. Then this literature review will examine the statistics between states with differing ranks for gun law strength. Lastly, this literature review will discuss the already existing literature and research that surrounds other types of violent crimes that don't involve guns, in these states. This will be able to provide insight as to whether weak or strong gun laws have any impact on other types of violent crimes.

### **An Overview**

#### ***Gun Violence***

Gun violence refers to homicide, violent crime, suicide or unintentional killings as a result of somebody's use of a firearm. In the United States every year, many people are injured or killed as a result of gun violence. "48,830 people died from gun-related injuries in the U.S. [in 2021]" (Gramlich, 2023) and "eight-in-ten U.S. murders in 2021 – 20,958 out of 26,031, or 81% – involved a firearm." (Gramlich, 2023). As well as this, the United States has a significantly higher rate of gun deaths than any other developed country in the world (Ludwig, 2017: 12097). Approximately 60% of these deaths are suicides and death by firearm is by far the most popular format of suicide in the United States. This number has been constantly increasing every year since 1999 (Ghiani, Hawkins and Baum, 2019: 1254). Studies have shown that there is a connection between being able to own a gun versus not being able to own one when it comes to crime rates (Villaveces, et. al., 2000). This connection can be attributed to having easy access to weapons at any given time, which means that the offender can commit these crimes on a whim. There is a belief that if somebody wants to harm another person, they will be able to

with or without a gun, by using other weapons, however this is not the case. Killing somebody with a gun is a very impersonal way of killing and therefore if someone chose to kill another way, such as by knife crime, they may decide against it. By having to get close enough to the potential victim to kill, an assailant may choose to not carry out the crime so they don't have to witness their own crime so up-close. For example, one study showed that a mandatory waiting period before somebody is able to purchase a gun will result in a decrease of gun related homicides by approximately 17% (Ludwig, 2017: 12097). This means that if laws are put into place which will prevent people being able to impulsively buy a gun, there will be a significantly reduced amount of gun violence.

There is a further issue surrounding gun violence in the United States and this is the level of school shootings which take place all over the country. The Columbine High School shooting is perhaps one of the most well-known mass shooting that has ever been perpetrated. This was a school shooting in the late 1990s which resulted in the deaths of twelve students, one teacher and the two people who were responsible for the 46 minute long attack (Schildkraut and Hernandez, 2014: 363). Children and teenagers having access to guns that have been carelessly left about the house or illegally sold to them still accounts for a number of accidents caused by guns and for this reason it is fair to say that gun laws in the United States don't only affect adults and tax payers, but also those seen to be some of the most vulnerable people in society (Webster and Starnes, 2000). Since the Columbine High School Shooting there have been another 386 school shootings, exposing over 356,000 students to gun violence at school, as of July 11, 2023 (Cox, et. al., 2023). While the American people's desire to ban handguns is decreasing every year, after the Columbine tragedy the support for the ban slightly increased. However, currently, American people are now more in favour than ever of keeping their gun laws instead of developing new laws (Carlson, 2023).

### ***Gun Laws***

In the United States, guns are controlled under different federal laws in order to regulate them. These laws differ according to the state. The different ways in which guns in the US are controlled are by foundational laws such as background checks, the gun industry and product safety such as microstamping, public regulations and policing and civil rights. In New York, gun laws regulate the sale, possession, and use of firearms and ammunition in the U.S. state of New York, excluding New York City which has different licensing regulations. These laws are much stricter than elsewhere in the US, such as in Florida where the regulations are almost the

same just not as strict until July, 2023 when they will change to permitless carry. This will be examined in more detail in chapter 5. Furthermore, the NRA poses a large threat to the creation of new gun laws. There is a common belief that those involved in the NRA will never agree to a change to their current gun laws (Ludwig, 2017: 12097). The NRA is the National Rifle Association in America. There is a lot of evidence which shows that the NRA's political influence is very strong, which is where issues regarding changing gun legislation may stem from. Members of this Association engages deeply in politics and a big number of them are the Americans who oppose strict gun control laws (Lacombe, 2019: 1342).

As well as implementing stricter gun laws in order to prevent gun crimes, there needs to be stricter laws surrounding the trafficking of guns which would allow family and police the powers to remove a firearm legally from someone who they perceive to be unfit to own one (Swanson, et al., 2016: 1074). A study which took place in Maryland (Koper, 2014) has shown that guns were more likely to be seized if they were "semiautomatic, medium to large caliber, easily concealable, and cheap" (Koper, 2014: 285). Referring back to the previously mentioned suicide rates, in the 50 states between 2005 to 2015 there were 416,391 suicides and of these deaths 211,766 were firearm related (Ghiani, Hawkins and Baum, 2019: 1256).

Many studies have shown that there is a desperate need for stricter gun laws throughout America (Ghiani, Hawkins and Baum, 2019:1254) and claim that this should be done because approximately 38% of violence caused by using a gun was committed by people who were legally entitled to own one (Swanson, et al., 2016: 1073). This will be expanded on later. However, for this reason it is believed by researchers that it is important to enforce stricter gun laws by properly screening people before allowing them to legally own a gun. "More background checks are associated with fewer homicide (IRR:0.93, 95% CI:0.91–0.96) and suicide (IRR:0.98, 95% CI:0.96–1.00) deaths." (Sen, and Panjamapirom, 2012; 346). So far there are only 8 states classified as national leaders in relation to gun laws, 9 that are making progress, 9 that are missing key laws, 9 with weak systems and 13 that are considered to be national failures. States that have strict gun laws in place have a significantly lower gun violence rate (Ludwig, 2017: 12097) . The reason for this can be attributed to the "collective action problem" (Ludwig, 2017: 12097) which means that only a small but powerful portion of people have enough power to influence the legislative process and prevent any change from happening that they don't agree with (Ludwig, 2017: 12097).

## **The NRA**

### ***Who are the NRA?***

The NRA stands for the National Rifle Association and were created in 1871 in an attempt to protect the second amendment. This is an important part of this paper because “the National Rifle Association (NRA) is one of the most powerful and well-financed interest groups in Washington, or in any state capital. It works consistently and effectively to define the framing of the gun control debate, and to ensure that federal and state policies reflect its preferences.” (Jackson, 2013). This is the most influential gun organisation in the US. They are a non-profit gun rights advocacy and lobbying group in America (Nugroho, 2022; 122). It has been described by scholars, that the reason the NRA have become so powerful is because “the NRA has crafted a specific gun-owner identity among its members and cultivated a coherent ideology whereby gun rights are tightly connected to other issues, like crime or the role of government” (Finger, 2022). Simply put, the NRA have been able to convince people that a part of their identity involves their right to bear arms and that by owning and using such weapons they will help reduce the level of crime and have their say in government. On their website, the NRA state that they are “America's longest-standing civil rights organization. Together with our more than five million members, we're proud defenders of history's patriots and diligent protectors of the Second Amendment.” (NRA, 2019). As well as this the NRA also have their own magazine where members, editors and writers are able to voice their beliefs. They “describe policies in terms of the gun-owner lifestyle and values, emphasizing threats to the gun-owner identity, rather than dry policy details.” (Finger, 2022) Members of the NRA are then able to go and further spread these beliefs by communicating with others and sharing these ideas. There is a lack of people coming up with their own original ideas.

### ***What do they do?***

The NRA play a very large role in politics and the members of this organisation are far more likely to vote in elections than gun control advocates (Schutten et al., 2022). The NRA has been known to find politicians who they believe will support their cause and benefit them if they become elected. “In the 2014 cycle, the NRA spent \$998,850 on 19 U.S. House committees” (Musa, 2016; 2). As well as playing a large role in politics, this organisation continues to implement fears into the American people in order to be able to maintain its influence (Marcotte, 2017; Reston, 2017). Sugarman, 1992 argues that “while the news media, politicians, and the American public may characterize the NRA through stereotypes of drunken

rednecks” (Sugarmann, 1992), the actual truth is that “in reality, the organization views itself as possessing a loftier niche in society, that of virtually defending the Second Amendment of the constitution, which guarantees citizens' rights to keep and bear arms.” (Sugarmann, 1992). This means that the members of the NRA see themselves as good people who are trying to do what’s right for their country whilst those opposed to the NRA see this as an organisation who are hindering the progression of laws which would make the country safer for everyone (Sugarmann, 1992).

This organisation describes the work they do as being “designed to promote firearms and hunting safety, to enhance marksmanship skills of those participating in the shooting sports, and to educate the general public about firearms in their historic, technological and artistic context” (NRA Mission Statement, 2023).

### **New York vs. Florida**

This paper has chosen to look at New York versus Florida because of their differences in relation to gun laws. As well as this they are both major holiday destinations for people both inside and outside the US. However the main reason these two states were chosen is because of the new laws that have either just come into place surrounding gun laws (New York) and the ones that are about to come into law (Florida). This will be expanded on more throughout the paper.

### ***New York***

New York has the fourth lowest rate of gun death in the United States (EveryStat.org New York, 2023). However this doesn’t mean that the crime rates relating to guns are non-existent. Almost 50% of all gun deaths in New York are as a result of gun homicide and between 2012 and 2021 the rate of gun deaths has increased by 12% (EveryStat.org New York, 2023). New York City and New York State differ in relation to gun laws regardless of the fact that New York City is a part of New York State. In New York City, rifles, shotguns and handguns will require a permit to purchase and the owners of these guns must be licensed and have a permit to carry. In New York state, only handguns have these requirements. So far, as a result of researchers only having access to state identifiers, it becomes more difficult for these researchers to be able to include the laws of local areas within the state. These laws can be even stricter than the laws that are imposed by the state (Ghiani, Hawkins and Baum, 2019: 1259). This applies to New York Legislation where “unlike New York State, New York City requires



gun owners to render their firearm inoperable with a safety lock.” (Ghiani, Hawkins and Baum, 2019: 1259).

According to the New York Police Department (NYPD), “for the month of October 2022, the number of overall shooting incidents decreased in New York City compared with October 2021. Citywide shooting incidents decreased by 33.6%.” (The official website of the City of New York, 2022). The gun arrests in the city had risen by 4.3% compared to a year previous (The official website of the City of New York, 2022). The NYPD takes help and advice from citizens in order to identify those who have information regarding future gun crime such as who has an illegally obtained firearm. They are able to entice people to help by convincing citizens to share information on illegal guns by offering them monetary rewards. They are then able to trace these guns back to whoever is illegally selling or trafficking these weapons (Golden and Almo, 2004: 2). This allows citizens and police work together to help get guns off the streets. In 2001 a new project was launched. It was called Operation Gun Stop. This was a program which enticed people to come forward with any information they may have regarding illegal guns. A \$500 reward was offered to those who were able to assist in the arrest of someone who illegally owned a gun. In 2002 this reward was increased to \$1,000 and currently it is at \$1,500. (Golden and Almo, 2004: 2). Today, over 7,800 arrests have been made with thanks to this program and 5,000 illegal weapons have been seized (New York City Police Foundation, n.d.).

As well as the gun stop program that New York had, there was another, similar group which also had similar desires in relation to preventing gun crime. The Firearms Investigation Unit (FIU) aims to reduce the amount of guns that are in New York City by identifying and pursuing gun traffickers. It has a lot of similar traits to the gun stop program except that it differs in the sense that the FIU’s sole intention is to get guns off the street and therefore are less focused on the persecution of offenders than the gun stop program is.

In 2022 New York State overturned a century old restriction regarding carrying a concealed gun into public and this was seen to be the most notable gun related decision made in a very long time (Tanne, 2022: 1). It was ruled that the second amendment in the United States Constitution protects such a right. Jack Resneck Jr who is president of the American Medical Association (AMA), said, “The AMA is deeply disappointed with the US Supreme Court’s harmful and disturbing decision to strike down a New York state measure regulating

concealed carry licences for handguns... Firearm violence is a public health crisis. Overturning decades of reasonable firearm regulations will cost more lives.” (Tanne, 2022: 1).

One of the main questions when looking at different levels of crime in countries, states or cities is about whether race contributes at all to different crime rates. In the case of New York City and State, there has been an applaudable amount of research done in this area. In New York there is a disproportionate number of black and Hispanic people in areas considered to be ‘hot spots’ for being a victim of a gun related crime. (MacDonald, Mohler, and Brantingham, 2022: 5). This remains true even when there is an equal amount of white people in the same ‘hot spot’ area. It is believed that this is related to the ever present racial divide within America (MacDonald, Mohler, and Brantingham, 2022: 5). By overturning the restriction regarding carrying a concealed gun into public, the issue of race was again emphasised. For many people of colour in America, there is a feeling of being unsafe when approached by a police officer on suspicion of carrying an illegal gun. By legalising carrying a gun in public, this is made less likely (Blocher and Siegel, 2022: 455). Regardless of this amendment, there will still be aimed violence towards people of colour as a result of this racism. Not only in New York but all over America this is a growing problem. In 2020, Black Americans made up only 12.5 percent of the U.S. population and yet 12,179 Black Americans were killed as a result of gun violence, whereas only 7,286 white Americans died that year due to gun violence. This means that black Americans made up 61% of all gun homicide victims in 2020 (Edmund, 2022). With regard to the Hispanic and Latino community, the cause of death for 60% of those living in America in 2020 was as a result of a gun related homicide (Edmund, 2022). This large gap between Americans of colour and white Americans visibly displays the racial concerns as described by MacDonald, Mohler, and Brantingham, 2022. The over policed and under protected ‘hot spots’ cause far more harm than good to these Americans.

In New York State alone there were approximately 35 mass shootings recorded in 2022. School shootings continue to take over a very large section in American news. 2022 marked the highest number of school shootings ever in one year in the United States. Even though New York has some of the strictest gun laws in the country, since 1971 until May 2022 there were 76 recorded school shootings. Just this year, 2023, there has already been a shooting outside a high school in New York City. While nobody was killed, two students and a school security guard were injured (NBC News, 2023.).

In New York in 2022 a case was brought to the courts where attorney Letitia “Tish” James, the 67th Attorney General for the state of New York, filed a lawsuit because she claimed that some of the highest people in the NRA were not spending money the way they should have been. For this reason she wanted the group to be legally dissolved. Part of the role of the attorney general is to look into non-profit organisations (The Associated Press, 2022). The judge determined that there would be no reason to dissolve the NRA but allowed to trial to proceed with the understanding that if the NRA were found guilty they would have to pay fines or other types of remedies.

The NRA tried to dismiss Attorney General James’ complaint but in March 2022, the New York County State Supreme Court denied a second round of motions brought forward by the NRA when they tried to dismiss the lawsuit. In an attempt to completely avoid accountability, the NRA filed for bankruptcy despite the organization’s claims to have healthy financial reserves. The NRA had previously filed for bankruptcy in Texas when it came out “that the NRA did not file the bankruptcy petition in good faith.” In June 2022, the State Supreme Court rejected the NRA’s accusation that the investigation against it was politically motivated, and found that Attorney General James’ claims against the organization’s wrongdoing are serious and viable, and are well within her office’s jurisdiction to investigate (James, 2022). This case study is relevant to this overall paper because it demonstrates clearly the positioning of NRA in such a Democratic State such as New York. This contrasts deeply with how the NRA are perceived in Florida.

### ***Florida***

Florida has the nineteenth highest rate of gun violence in the US (EveryStat.org FL, n.d.). This could be as a result of Florida’s gun laws being significantly less strict as those in New York State. This is because there are very few requirements one must meet before being able to purchase a firearm. The age requirement is 21 years of age unless the person works for law enforcement in which case this age is reduced to 18 (Florida Department of Law Enforcement Priorities, n.d.). When looking to buy a handgun the person must be a resident of Florida unless they want to buy a long gun which can be purchased regardless of what state the person lives in as long as it complies with that states laws. There is no permit to purchase a fire arm but there is a waiting period before one can obtain the weapon of three days after the purchase of all firearms. Perhaps the most concerning part of Florida’s gun laws is that there is absolutely

no maximum number of firearms any one person can purchase in one transaction (Florida Department of Law Enforcement Priorities, n.d.).

In Florida between the years 2011 and 2020 the rate of gun suicides decreased by 1% but gun homicides increased by around 40%. Despite this horrifying statistic, Florida's law makers are set in their beliefs to not change their gun laws. This is largely as a result of their strong beliefs to their constitutional rights and religious beliefs (Whitehead, Schnabel and Perry, 2018). Many gun advocates in Florida, as is the case with gun advocates anywhere in the US believe that guns are a God given right and that when guns are misused it is because the person has lost their Christian values, not because guns are so easy to access (Whitehead, A.L., Schnabel, L. and Perry, S.L., 2018).

The Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida, on February 14, 2018 led to the deaths of 17 students and the injuries of 14 others. The shooter was a former student who was no longer allowed on school grounds as he had previously been found to have bullets in his bag. As well as this it was well known he owned many guns and had made violent threats in the past. He posted images of himself killing small animals on social media and had described himself as a "professional school shooter" (Johnson, S.A., 2018: 601). Many organisations and people failed the victims of the shootings by choosing to not step in and attempt to prevent this tragedy. These included the Broward County Sherriff's Office, the FBI, the Mental Health Fields and the shooters family and friends. Many people had reported the shooter and expressed their concerns about him but nothing was ever done about it by these people until it was too late (Johnson, S.A., 2018: 602).

After this violent shooting, Florida's law makers passed a law which stated that in every school across the state, the motto "In God we trust" had to be placed in a "conspicuous place" (Whitehead, Schnabel and Perry, 2018: 2). "Kim Daniels, a Democrat who sponsored the bill, said that "the real thing that needs to be addressed are issues of the heart" (Whitehead, Schnabel and Perry, 2018: 2) and that "he [God] is the light, and our schools need light in them like never before.'" (Whitehead, Schnabel and Perry, 2018: 2). Daniels claimed that videogames are the real problem and that "children are being trained to become virtual assassins" (Solochek, 2018). Students that survived this attack demand more than "thoughts and prayers" and turned their anguish and anger into activism when approximately 100 of these students travelled to the state Capitol to voice their calls for better gun control. The debate of whether having access to guns or having access to witnessing violence has stemmed from this tragedy. At no point did these

law makers consider making any changes to their current gun laws to prevent such a tragedy happening again. Their belief was that if someone could understand that God was watching them, they would no longer feel the need to harm others.

Similar to in New York, race again plays a major role in relation to gun violence. In Florida, while white people are 3 times more likely to die as a result of gun suicide, black people are 1.7 times more likely than white people to die as a result of a fire arm and are 7 times more likely to be killed as a result of gun homicide. (EveryStat.org FL, n.d.). This does not just include adults. Unfortunately black children and teenagers in Florida are approximately 3 times more likely than white children and teenagers to die as a result of a firearm.

Mass shootings are also very common in Florida with one of the most recent ones having taken place in January of 2023. 11 people were left injured after a car with four people in it drove by with some of them shooting out of the car windows. (Grant and Mansell, 2023). Approximately 23 days later there was another mass shooting in Florida but this time there were 3 fatalities. A gunman shot and killed a woman in Orlando and then returned to the neighbourhood hours later and shot four more people. He killed a journalist who was covering the shooting of the woman and a 9-year-old child (Fischer and Frisaro, 2023).

In Florida in January of 2023 the NRA made a new request to Florida law makers that people who own and carry guns shouldn't be expected to carry permits as well. If this is passed then this would make Florida the 25<sup>th</sup> American state to have passed this law. This is referred to as a 'constitutional carry' and the motion was described by the Governor of Florida as a motion which he has 'always supported'. A Democratic spokesperson who was the Mayor of Parkland during the 2018 school shooting as described above explained how this is a very dangerous law to pass. She claimed that the bill would be unconstitutional and added that "We have to be very clear and specific as to what the legislation actually does, and that is to remove the training requirement, and you will no longer have the check if you have something disqualifying you in your criminal record," (Dailey, 2023). The NRA in Florida are hugely influential and it is believed that this bill will be passed. This state starkly contrasts New York in that Florida are far more influenced by the NRA and so are their laws and policies, regardless of the danger they may cause.

### ***New York vs. Florida***

As previously discussed there are many differences between the state of New York and the state of Florida in relation to gun laws. However, that's not to say that strict gun laws will

completely eradicate the harm caused as a result of legal gun ownership. New York is one of the states with the strictest gun laws in the country and yet there is still a very present threat of gun violence. However Florida would be good proof that while strict gun laws may not be the answer to gun violence in the United States, it will definitely help bring down the number of victims.

Foundational laws in Florida and New York differ only slightly. A background check and/ or a purchase permit are only required in New York, not Florida (Everytown Research & Policy, 2023). As well as this there is no shoot first law in New York but there is one in Florida (Everytown Research & Policy, 2023). A shoot first law is a self-defence law which states that someone is able to shoot and kill someone in public if they feel threatened even if this person would be able to safely remove themselves from the situation without this measure. These laws have unnecessarily increased the level of deadly violence in states where this is still allowed (Degli Esposti, Wiebe, Gasparri, and Humphreys, 2022). However there are also some similar foundational laws between these two states. Both states require someone with a concealed firearm to carry a permit, store the firearm securely and away from children and both states have implemented the extreme risk law. This is a law which states that if a person is at risk of harming themselves or others with a firearm, a court order can be granted to remove the guns from this person and prevent them from buying more (Everytown Research & Policy, 2023).

Florida fails hugely in regard to the gun industry and product safety laws while New York is almost perfect in all aspects of it. New York has banned the use of assault weapons and high capacity magazines (Everytown Research & Policy, 2023). Florida does not ban these (Everytown Research & Policy, 2023). Ghost guns are homemade guns which until recently were not properly identified as real firearms. Since then some states have changed laws to state that ghost guns must be treated as real firearms and be sold with serial numbers. These guns are regulated in New York but not in Florida (Everytown Research & Policy, 2023). As well as this Microstamping for new handguns is a requirement in New York but not in Florida. In fact only two states, California and New York have adopted this law. Microstamping is when “microscopic striations and impressions are left on bullets and cartridge cases when a gun is fired. These markings are unique, reproducible, and therefore, like “ballistic fingerprints,” can be used to identify a gun.” (Akello, et. al., 2023; 7:2).

Guns that are carried in public have their own laws and regulations. In this area New York and Florida are fairly well matched excluding some factors. Both states prohibit carrying a gun in public after being charged with a violent offence, neither state allows a gun to be carried on college campuses, state Capitols, demonstrations or bars (Everytown Research & Policy, 2023). However Florida has not banned carrying a weapon in K-12 schools. These are schools that include kindergarten and middle school, so children age approximately 4 years old until 13 or 14 years old. New York has banned carrying weapons into these schools (Everytown Research & Policy, 2023). Florida also fails to use crime gun tracing, which involves being able to identify who owns a firearm that has been found at the scene of a crime.

### **Young People and guns**

It is important to understand at which point in a person's life they become interested in owning a firearm. As discussed above, young people and firearms is an issue which needs to be understood too since young people and guns are another issue which must be faced by the American people. School shootings in the US are often carried out by young people, not always just adults. While in America the minimum age at which someone can purchase a gun is 18 or 21, some American youth still have access to firearms regardless. One of the main questions is why young people in the US would want to carry a firearm. A study carried out by Shapiro, et al., (1997) discussed how "The Excitement factor seems to have a straight forward meaning. High scores indicate the respondent intrinsically likes guns and thinks they are fun. These items depict no instrumental function of guns. High scores on the Excitement factor indicate the respondent feels that owning, carrying, or holding a gun would be a source of stimulation and pleasure in and of itself. In interviews with juvenile offenders, Ash et al. (1996) found that excitement was a frequently mentioned motive for gun carrying." (Shapiro, et al., 1997; 319). Some young people get a rush from carrying a weapon that can cause such devastating harm.

### **Race and Gun Violence**

Another important area in relation to studying the impact of gun violence in the US, also discussed above, is how gun violence and race relate to each other. Unfortunately race not only plays a role in shootings but also in court judgements. "White-on-black homicides are more likely to be ruled justifiable in states with Stand Your Ground policies" (Armstrong, and Carlson, 2019). Furthermore, gun violence is also deemed almost acceptable towards black people by police and other citizens as "it is a routinized harm against a marginalized group of which the public at large is aware and which is frequently discussed by media outlets, but which is also tacitly or explicitly sanctioned by the government and legal forces" (Armstrong, and

Carlson, 2019; 4). Gun violence definitely affects everybody in the US but it is undeniable that some people have to suffer more. Laws such as the Florida Stand your Ground laws are racist as they don't protect black citizens the same way they do white ones. These laws will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

## **Conclusion**

There have been many studies carried out that have examined the impact of strong and weak gun laws in different States in the United States. These studies have shown that in states such as New York, where there is a higher level of importance placed on regulating gun use, there is a significantly lower fire arm crime rate, compared to states such as Florida where the importance is placed on protecting their constitution. As mentioned above, these studies which have been able to demonstrate the importance of very strict gun laws have been able to explain how waiting periods when purchasing firearms or only allowing people purchase a firearm when they have a permit will dramatically decrease injuries and deaths caused by firearms. However, the findings of these papers are not standardised across all of the American States, as there are naturally going to be differences depending on each State. Additionally, factors such as differences in political beliefs, race and culture can also create differences between these public attitudes.

There is a significant amount of research in this area but there are definitely still gaps regarding what it would take for some states to implement much stricter gun laws, regardless of the fact that there is a significant amount of proof that guns are indeed the problem. The mindset that 'guns don't kill people, people do' has been disproven throughout this research as often times people react to problems with emotions, and therefore with guns. In states such as New York where people have to wait for three days after purchasing a firearm before they are able to claim it proves this. Understanding the American public's attitudes towards their 'right' to own and operate firearms is important because it can explore areas where compromises can be made and allow the American people keep their Constitutional right to bear arms while also allowing other people their human right to life. This can be done by determining the public's perception of the rising crime and homicide rates in States where gun laws have been determined to be not as strict, such as Florida and gathering their reaction when shown the results of states such as New York after making it more difficult yet still possible to own a firearm. The next chapter will explain the methods used for this study.



## **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The objective of this study is to examine the impact that gun laws have on different states by examining and comparing two different American States with very different gun laws. This research includes the collection of statistical data which is a quantitative method of conducting research. This research is interpretivist because it “rel[ies] on questioning and observation in order to discover or generate a rich and deep understanding of the phenomenon being investigated.” (www.nottingham.ac.uk., n.d.). For this reason, this type of research is often associated with qualitative methods of data collection, meaning that there is a mixed approach within this paper. The reason that interpretivist research will be used is because this research was completely desk based meaning that it was journals, articles, government websites and news stations which is where the information for this chapter will come from. All of the information within this paper is from secondary sources. This chapter is going to firstly examine the research design that was used. Then this chapter will examine the data collection and analysis process before finally looking at any possible ethical concerns.

### **Research Design**

In this paper, it was determined that document analysis would be the most appropriate method of research. This was used when conducting research for this paper and includes documents that are both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material. This type of data collection “requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge” (Bowen, 2009). This paper will use a comparative case study approach in order to effectively compare the differences in gun violence and laws within Florida and New York. These two states have been chosen to represent a Democratic voting state (New York) and a Republican voting state (Florida). Furthermore, as was mentioned previously, both states are often associated with being holiday destinations for tourists and are currently about to - or have just - instated new gun laws. The documents that have been used for this research contain texts which contains both opinion and statistics about this topic. Through the approach of looking at multiple sources of data, and comparing to what other resources claim, such as the fact that in the 50 states between 2005 to 2015 there were 416,391 suicides and of these deaths 211,766 were firearm related (Ghiani, Hawkins and Baum, 2019: 1256), the comparative aspect of this paper can really be seen. While this information is useful and relevant it is slightly outdated which is one of the limitations of using this method for research.

## **Data Collection**

In the case of this paper data collection was done by examining different papers and articles. This included academic peer reviewed articles and government websites. There was no specific timeline of publication that was looked at, however the most valuable information was information that was within the last couple of years. More detail of this process is split into the two states below. This was an important part of this research because it helps to understand the problem more clearly. For this paper, only secondary data was used and the specific form of data that was required was gun crime statistics.

The data collection that was done for New York was started by reading different papers and articles and comparing them to each other. From this the most important and relevant information was taken and used in this paper. There is an issue in New York, as with everywhere in journalism, where journalists will pick and choose how much of a certain topic they want to discuss. “Only a restricted class of crime themes—those dealing with street crime—ever become crime waves. Once a crime wave begins to emerge in the media, officials use their news making powers to control its growth.” (Fishman, 1978; 531). Thankfully, this area of crime is one that has gripped these reporters so it was heavily reported on. However, this may not always be the best method to use when researching for other types of topics. While journalistic sources are not the only form of research this paper will be looking at, this is still an important aspect to consider.

The data collection that was done for Florida was also started in a similar way to New York which was also carried out by reading articles and journals from other scholars. A good majority of this data was collected through Google Scholar. Google Scholar is a search engine which allows for certain types of search terms to be looked up and have relevant papers appear. Google Scholar specializes in scholarly literature and academic research. It offers a large database of intellectual works that have undergone peer review or that have been published in respected academic journals, including books, theses, essays, and conference papers. “Google Scholar goes beyond information discovery by leading qualifying users at subscribing libraries to the primary digital documents, and any users to the millions of open access (free) primary documents offered through mega-databases of preprint and reprint servers, as well as to the full text digital collections of several government agencies and research organizations.” (Jacsó, 2005). I found this tool to be particularly beneficial for this paper for these reasons. Some of the terms used within this paper included “NRA influence”, “Florida gun control”, “New York gun control” and “gun trafficking” as well as other phrases too. There are limitations similar

to New York where journalists will only report on what they think will draw the most attention from the public. After the Parkland shooting in Florida, coverage of shootings became better. “[One] of the most common frames found in previous coverage of mass shootings (gun control, popular culture, school safety), only gun control was prominent following the shootings in Parkland. Newer frames (partisan divide, activism, mental health) instead followed gun control in popularity, likely because these were utilized by the activist Parkland survivors themselves. With a few important exceptions (e.g., community newspapers used community change, law responsibility, and family responsibility more; national used gun control, activism, and partisan divide more), local and community newspapers were similar in their use of frames. Perhaps most importantly, the findings indicate the survivors’ activism seemed to disrupt the “settling” of news coverage into well-established frames for mass shootings.” (Holody and Shaughnessy, 2022). As a result of this newer type of coverage in Florida’s journalism, there has been a new way of reporting. In turn this made the data collection for this section slightly easier than for New York.

### **Documentary Evidence**

The evidence for this paper has come from published government documents and journal articles from both Florida and New York, as well as news reports surrounding gun violence in both of these States. The official statistics that are being used have come from official government organisations and the researchers who are using them have referenced these statistics instead of gathering their own information which is why this information is defined as being documentary.

It is very important that the documents used come from a reputable source and that they have been credited. This is important because, as Newburn said “information... is hard to obtain and the few available data are not often very reliable” (Jones and Newburn, eds. 2006). However, because so many of the documents used were gathered by governmental bodies they can be considered to be very reliable. Governmental resources are considered reliable because they generally contain primary sources of law, for example cases, statutes, and regulations. This paper will analyse the different themes that are identified throughout these different governmental websites, articles and journals. There is also a significant amount of news articles that are referenced in this paper so it was important to be sure that these also all came from reputable sources such as news stations that avoid bias, unlike FOX News who often voice their opinions. This can be done by making sure that the papers, news sources and other sources

are scholarly sources or are published by governmental bodies. The easiest way to do this is to refine the search to only display scholarly and credible articles.

Jacobsson (2016) states how important it is that research for a paper such as this comes from a reliable source because it is the only way to know that the source is trustworthy (Jacobsson, 2016). It is important to notice that through doing work in this way there were a number of similarities between the Florida aspect and the New York aspect of this paper. This can be identified in the ways that although New York have significantly more gun laws than Florida has, there is still a level of gun crime. This means that regardless of how strict the gun laws are there is still always going to be gun violence as long as there are guns.

After this, it was important to see how influential the government statistics would be. It was decided that while a certain level of importance should be placed on them, it was just as important to include work carried out by other before this paper and to utilize that information too. There is a lot of information regarding gun violence in America, but since there are realistically only two parties involved, those who are very much for and those who are very much against the right to own a gun, it must be considered that some of this information could be inaccurate.

### **Desktop Research**

Desktop research is a method used for data collection which uses the existence of other data for its main basis. The steps involved in conducting the desk research that was required for this paper includes outlining relevant research attributes in relation to gun control, selecting the best resources, looking for pre-existing data, compiling it, comparing it to other data, and finally analysing it. This was described in more detail above.

### **Ethical Issues**

All of the information which this paper accessed had already been gathered and published because the primary form of research for this piece was secondary desk based research. Due to the fact that all of this information was already in the public domain this will not be an ethical issue that will need to be considered. However, with that being said one of ethical issues that will have to be dealt with is the ethical collection of data from the sources you are analysing. Also that you will be honest about what the data say and be objective in your analysis

### **Limitations**

There have always been disadvantages to using secondary data instead of primary data. However, when a “systematic procedure” (Johnston, 2014) is followed, then it can be a “viable

method to utilize in the process of inquiry” (Johnston, 2014). It is when this systematic procedure is not followed though, that the problems surrounding this type of data occur. The main benefit to using primary data is that the questions posed to the research group “can be tailored to the research question, which ensures that the study is coherent and that the information collected indeed help to resolve the problem” (Hox and Boeije, 2005; 594). This is not as easy to do when using only secondary sources, as was the case in relation to this paper where secondary sources were the only possible way.

Secondary sources can cause problems if they are unreliable, biased, or out-of-date. A biased source could, for instance, ignore evidence or perspectives that contradict a certain perspective or agenda while only presenting material that supports it. This means completely ignoring the actual purpose of the article in order to make it say what the author may want it to say. While writing this paper one of the biggest problems faced was data that was out of date or conflicting with other data. It was important while writing this paper to be sure to include all information, not just the information that would fit this narrative. In a similar way, a source which is out of date may contain information that has since been updated or changed, resulting in a misinterpretation of the state of knowledge at the time it was written. In addition, secondary sources may be hampered by a lack of context or comprehension of the main sources on which they are based. The person using the information may not fully understand what it is the article is trying to say and interpret it in their own way, changing what the article is actually trying to discuss. It was important to make sure I fully understood what the sources were claiming before using them as a reference. Secondary sources occasionally misread or misrepresent original sources, which can result in incorrect conclusions or false information.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research was done by including the collection of statistical data, such as research papers, journal articles, governmental sources and other scholarly peer reviewed articles, which allowed a quantitative method of conducting research. The research design discovered that document analysis would be the most appropriate method of research. The data collection consisted at looking at both New York and Florida separately for methods of data collection in each respective jurisdiction. Through the use of these methods the aim of the research is to research the question of; “is there a connection between crime rates in American States with less strict gun laws such as Florida, versus those with stricter laws such as New York?” Due to the large amount of documents and data in relation to the research question, the

limited time frame and the distance between Ireland and America, secondary research was deemed most appropriate. The next chapter will present the findings.

## **Chapter 4 – Findings**

### **Introduction**

The research question was ‘what are the differences between gun laws in Republican voting states such as Florida, versus Democratic voting states such as New York?’ Within this a specific emphasis was placed on states that tend to vote more Republican, such as Florida, and a state that votes more Democratic, such as New York. The objective for carrying out this research was to explore whether gun laws relate much if at all to the level of gun crimes within certain states. As well as this, this research aimed to understand the importance of said strict gun laws in states where these laws have already been implemented. This is an important topic of study because the Gun Violence Archive, a non-profit organization that tracks gun violence incidents in the United States, has stated that there is an average of over 100 individuals shot per day, including both fatal and non-fatal shootings (Wamser-Nanney, 2021). This chapter will present the findings from different studies and explore how opinions between Republicans and Democrats differ. This chapter will begin by exploring the existing literature that has already been published in relation to gun violence in the US. It will do this by exploring states where the majority of voters are either Republican or Democratic before looking more specifically at New York versus Florida. It will then explore the quantitative findings, the comparative analysis, discussion of findings and finally the limitations. The findings of this research will be explored more within this chapter by presenting the findings of the research that were gathered using the research methods previously outlined in chapter 3 and the thematic analysis coding from chapter 2. As previously stated, there are two different strands to this research. The first is the case study approach in which data from both New York and Florida will be examined and compared. Some of these data that has been gathered will be presented in tables in order to show the differences pertaining to each state.

### **Data Analysis and Descriptive Statistics**

#### *Data Analysis*

Gun violence in the United States is an issue which is finding itself more and more in the news. Between mass shootings such as the Sandy Hook school shooting and accidentally setting of a firearm in a grocery store, as was the case with a woman who was going through her purse at a Walmart in Massachusetts, when she accidentally fired her handgun, gun control is a topic which deserved close attention and rigorous analysis performed to it. The research performed for this specific paper was carried out in large by the use of Google Scholar through literature based research. This allowed for a wide variety of papers and studies to be accessed. For

example, one of these papers as discussed in chapter 2 and will be again covered in chapter 5, carried out a study which found that a mandatory waiting period before somebody is able to purchase a gun will result in a decrease of gun related homicides by approximately 17% (Ludwig, 2017: 12097). This type of information is invaluable when trying to identify the different ways in which the harm caused by guns can be decreased while also allowing the gun trade continue in the US. However, as with anything there are also limitations to that study. This paper later discovered that approximately 38% of violence caused by using a gun was committed by people who were legally entitled to own one (Swanson, et al., 2016: 1073). This is a limitation because it means that even after people go through the legal process of owning a gun there will still be instances where the law cannot fully protect individuals. This implies that the other 62% were not legally entitled to own a gun. Below, there is a more in depth examination of the different opinions between Republicans and Democrats, and then a chart on the opinions of people from New York State versus those from Florida in relation to gun control.

*Republican vs Democratic States*

Below is a table which outlines the differences between Republican Voters in the US and Democratic voters in the US. This research was carried out by Rogers, Radcliffe and Kaleigh in 2022. The sample size was different per question, as this was research gathered from different studies and compiled together for this paper. However, everyone in the study was a registered US voter. These voters were asked different questions and the answers are compiled into this table. In relation to this table K-12 teachers are teachers who teach kindergarten to 12th grade (ages 5-18). Furthermore red flag laws are laws that state when somebody is at risk of doing something with a firearm, but they can't be arrested because no crime has been committed and they don't appear to need a mental health hold or qualify for one, they will still be prevented from being able to obtain a firearm.

	<b>Republican Voter</b>	<b>Democratic Voter</b>
<b>Yes I believe stricter gun laws would reduce mass shootings</b>	34%	87%
<b>Yes I support universal background checks</b>	77%	91%



<b>Yes I favour preventing people with mental illnesses from buying guns</b>	85%	90%
<b>Yes I support red-flag laws</b>	70%	85%
<b>Yes I support banning assault weapons</b>	37%	83%
<b>Yes I favour arming K-12 teachers</b>	66%	24%
<b>Yes I have a gun in my house</b>	48%	28%
<b>Yes I believe that protecting the right to own a gun is more important than protecting people from gun violence</b>	39%	9%

Table 1.0 - Differences between Republican Voters in the US and Democratic voters in the US.

Table 1.0 clearly indicates the large difference in opinions between the Republican voters and Democratic voters in America. This study was carried out by Rogers, Radcliffe and Kaleigh (2022). Democratic voters seem to have stronger beliefs than Republican Voters that more regulations in relation to gun control would result in less injuries and casualties. While 87% of Democratic voters believe that stronger gun laws would reduce mass shootings, only 34% of Republican voters believe this to be true. As well as this 83% of Democratic voters believe that there should be a ban placed on assault weapons while only 37% of Republican voters believe this should be the case. 66% of Republican voters believe that K-12 teachers, teachers who teach kindergarten to 12th grade (ages 5-18), should be armed while only 24% of Democratic voters believe this to be true. Perhaps the most shocking statistic of all however, is the fact that 39% of Republican voters believe that protecting their right to own a gun is more important than protecting people from gun violence, while just 9% of Democratic voters believe this to be true. However, there are some instances where the beliefs have been relatively similar. 91% of Democratic voters believe that there should be universal background checks while 77% of Republican voters believe the same. 90% of Democratic voters believe that people with mental illnesses should not be allowed to buy guns while 85% of Republican voters believe the same.

85% of Democratic voters and 70% of Republican voters support red flag laws. These findings are important because they demonstrate that there are still some areas where Democrats and Republicans are able to find common ground. This is relevant as it demonstrates that overtime perhaps, these people will begin to see even more clearly the other sides opinions and overtime there won't be such a large divide. Finally, this study also showed that 48% of Republican voters and 28% of Democratic voters have a gun in their house.

*New York vs. Florida*

Below is a table which outlines the differences and similarities regarding gun laws and gun crime rates in both New York and Florida carried out by Gilligan and Lurye (2023) and the CDC (2021).

	<b>New York</b>	<b>Florida</b>
<b>Gun Law Strength Ranking</b>	6 <sup>th</sup> in US	24 <sup>th</sup> in US
<b>Gun Deaths Per 100k people</b>	5.3	13.7
<b>School Shootings since 1970</b>	64	79

Table 1.1 - Differences and similarities regarding gun laws and gun crime rates in both New York and Florida.

Table 1.1 is from two separate studies that were carried out by Gilligan and Lurye (2023) and the CDC (2021) which this paper compiled together and clearly indicates that there is a lower number of gun and crime rates in New York than in Florida, however this is not by much in regard to school shootings. 5.3 people die per 100,000 people in New York per year compared to the 13.7 people that die per 100,000 people in Florida per year (CDC, 2021). This is over twice as many people. However the same type of difference is not reflected in school shootings between the two states. Since 1970 there have been 64 school shootings in New York compared to Florida's 79 school shootings (Gilligan and Lurye, 2023). That means 0.00000323 per capita in New York and 0.00000363 per capita in Florida. Although Florida is higher, the numbers are almost identical. There are 18 states worse than New York but better than Florida; yet the school shooting rates are almost identical. This is slightly confusing considering the laws in both states are so different. In a study carried out by Lin, Fei, Barzman and Hossain it was claimed that "little is known regarding the time trend of mass shootings and associated risk factors." (Lin, Fei, Barzman and Hossain, 2018). This means that it is almost impossible to identify a trend between these different shootings, because of how unpredictable they are. This paper then went on to carry out a study which aimed to understand a time trend and the risk factors associated

with this. The results indicated that overtime there have been more instances of mass shootings yet there was no way to predict the mass shooting rate (Lin, Fei, Barzman and Hossain, 2018). This study then went on to claim that this could be because of “correlations between the interval between consecutive shootings and the frequency of on-line related reports as well as on-line search interests, respectively ( $p < 0.001$ ).” (Lin, Fei, Barzman and Hossain, 2018; 1). This means that these findings might mean that online media might correlate with the increasing incidence rate of mass shootings. Naturally, this is just one of many theories which might explain why the level of school shootings in a state with significantly stricter gun laws has very similar statistics to a state with weaker ones but suggests the idea that the desire to cause a school shooting stems from the internet; something that is accessible in every state.

### **Qualitative Findings**

The main reason for carrying out a research paper such as this one was to assess whether or not there is a connection between crime rates in American States with non-strict gun laws such as Florida, versus those with stricter laws such as New York. Ultimately it was discovered that there is in fact a difference between these states in terms of general gun violence, but in the case of these two states not so much in the terms of school shootings where the statistics are shockingly similar. This section of the paper will look at the qualitative findings from these previous statistics and papers that have been published.

#### *Overview of the research*

The most important demographic in relation to this paper were the voters of the two major political parties in the United States, Democrats and Republicans. Through examining these parties it was found that without a doubt Republicans value their right to guns significantly more than Democrats do. This information would explain why people from Florida tend to get into more trouble with guns than those from New York, because Florida is a largely Republican state whereas New York is a largely Democratic state. Florida has changed across the years from a fairly evenly divided state to one which is Republican dominated. As a result of this there has also been a change in the law such as the law which will come into place on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2023, the permitless gun carry law as mentioned above and will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5. In a paper carried out by Wozniak (2017) a study was performed which aimed to examine the “empirical accuracy of the Democrats’ and Republican’s seemingly-contradictory beliefs about public opinion by analysing data from a national public opinion poll conducted 4 months after the school shooting during the height of the post–Sandy Hook debate

about gun control.” (Wozniak, 2017; 256). Ultimately it was determined in this paper that both concerns and cultural beliefs are related to people’s opinions about gun control yet the most important predictors of peoples preferences come from their political beliefs (Wozniak, 2017). This means that people will tend to make up their minds about gun control as well as other such issues, based on the opinions of the political party they support. It implies that these people rely on these political parties to come to a decision for them, instead of trusting their own instincts to come to such a conclusion.

Overall the research carried out for this paper has determined that there is a connection between crime rates in American States with weak gun laws such as Florida, versus those with stricter laws such as New York. It all comes down to political support when determining whether a state is going to have a high or low rate of gun violence; states that tend to vote Republican will have weaker gun laws and a higher rate of gun violence. States that tend to vote Democratic will often have stronger gun laws and less instances of gun violence.

#### *Data collection methods*

The data for this paper was gathered solely from secondary sources. This method was used because it wouldn’t have been possible for this paper to have carried out its own research. Google scholar was used instead to provide many different sources of trustworthy information that had already been peer reviewed. Through doing this it was found that there was plenty of research that had already been carried out for this topic. Gun violence in the US is a topic that is studied a lot. Secondary data analysis is useful for this because it allows for comparisons of different studies, that have been carried out over different years to be compared and similarities and differences to be identified. However, school shootings are not covered as much. This is due to the sensitivity of the crimes and the fact covering such a topic may lead to distressing content people don’t want to have to learn about.

#### *Data analysis approach*

In order to analyse the information gathered above it was important that thematic analysis was used in order to identify themes and consistencies within said papers. The data could then be coded as part of a thematic analysis, categorized, and organized for analysis. Upon doing this it was found that there are many codes which relate to the topic of gun violence. The following are codes from a thematic analysis that came from the papers that were discussed in the literature review.

Firearm accessibility is the first code that will be discussed and looks at how easy it is to acquire a firearm as well as the importance of background checks and waiting periods. A paper by Carlson, 2023 identified that American people are now more in favour than ever of keeping their gun laws instead of developing new laws (Carlson, 2023). This ideology of the American people was then again reiterated in Koper, 2014. In this paper a study was carried out which determined that guns were more likely to be seized if they were “semiautomatic, medium to large calibre, easily concealable, and cheap” (Koper, 2014; 285). Firearm accessibility refers to how simple it is for people in America to obtain such weapons.

The next code that will be examined is the reasons why, or the motives for gun ownership. There are many reasons why someone may want to own a gun, such as self-defence, hunting, status symbol or personal beliefs, just to name a few. In a paper by Degli Esposti, Wiebe, Gasparri, and Humphreys (2022), an analysis of the “stand your ground” self-defence laws as well as the state-wide rates of homicides and firearm homicides were investigated. This paper looked at why people feel the need to own a gun in order to feel safe. As well as this it also examined the shoot first laws that some states have which is a self-defence law which states that someone is able to shoot and kill someone in public if they feel threatened. The paper goes on to claim that some of these self-defence reasons for owning a gun can lead to paranoia and irrational thinking which have unnecessarily increased the level of deadly violence in states where this is allowed. (Degli Esposti, Wiebe, Gasparri, and Humphreys, 2022).

The next code is gun control measures which relates to the policies and legislation which aims to prevent gun violence, for example background checks, assault weapons bans, waiting periods, or red flag laws. One study found that a mandatory waiting period before somebody is able to purchase a gun will result in a decrease of gun related homicides by approximately 17% (Ludwig, 2017). Another paper discussed explained how microstamping guns so that they can be traced may be another effective method of identifying a gun and the owner of the weapon after it has been fired off (Akello, et. al., 2023.).

Gun violence risk factors refers to what type of people are more at risk of being victims of gun violence or are more at risk of committing a crime with a gun. This can include socioeconomic factors, mental health issues, domestic violence, gang involvement, substance abuse, access to firearms, or exposure to violence in the media. This theme is evident in papers such as those by Edmund (2022) where it is stated that gun violence affects people of colour in the US more than any other type of group. While focused primarily on the year 2020, it was

discovered that black Americans made up 61% of all gun homicide victims in that year (Edmund, 2022). In the US the matter of race seems to always be an issue. In New York there is a disproportionate number of black and Hispanic people in areas considered to be ‘hot spots’ for being a victim of a gun related crime. (MacDonald, Mohler, and Brantingham, 2022). For this reason there is a feeling in these areas that a gun is needed for self-defence. For many people of colour in America, there is a feeling of being unsafe when approached by a police officer on suspicion of carrying an illegal gun. By legalising carrying a gun in public it is going to be less likely that these people will feel as unsafe or be put into an unsafe situation, as what they are doing is no longer illegal (Blocher and Siegel, 2022: 455).

The next code which was discovered was the consequences of gun violence. This refers to the impact that gun violence has had on people in the US such as injuries, fatalities, trauma, and fear as well as many others. In a paper by Fischer and Frisaro (2023), the topic of fatalities was explored. A Florida gunman killed 3 people in Orlando, which included the reporter who was covering the original shooting. In a paper by Grant and Mansell (2023) fatalities were again the main topic after 10 people had been hurt in a mass shooting in Florida. Perhaps the more difficult and saddening victims of gun violence to find are those who are victims of school shootings. The Columbine High School shooting is perhaps one of the most well-known mass shootings that has ever been published. This was a school shooting in the late 1990’s which resulted in the deaths of twelve students, one teacher and the two people who were responsible for the 46 minute long attack (Schildkraut and Hernandez, 2014: 363). The Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida, on February 14, 2018 led to the deaths of 17 students and the injuries of 14 others. 2022 marked the highest number of school shootings ever in one year in the United States with 35 school shootings.

The next code identified was the public opinion and attitudes. This refers to the societal views, beliefs, and attitudes toward gun violence, gun ownership, gun control, or related policies and interventions by members of the public. As discussed earlier, political beliefs seems to play the largest part in public opinion in terms of whether people support gun control or not. A paper by Johnson, 2018 led a discussion of change needed following the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. It was determined that even if someone believes that another person may be at risk, often times nothing will be done about it. When describing this school shooter, Johnson stated that the victims were not protected by a number of organisations such as the Broward County Sherriff’s Office, the FBI, the Mental

Health Fields and the shooters family and friends. Just because people are aware that someone may be a danger, they will not always act.

The next code is gun violence prevention programs. This refers to the different ways in which gun control can be effectively carried out such as by community-based initiatives, educational campaigns, firearm safety training, mental health support services, or conflict resolution programs. Perhaps if these had been available to the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooter, the victims would still be alive today. A paper by Golden and Almo (2004) explained how the New York Police Department (NYPD) was able to reduce gun violence in New York. The NYPD takes help and advice from citizens in order to identify those who have information regarding future gun crime such as who has an illegally obtained firearm. They are able to entice people to help by convincing citizens to share information on illegal guns. They are then able to trace these guns back to whoever is illegally selling or trafficking these weapons (Golden and Almo, 2004).

The final code that this paper will look at is the way that the media represents gun violence. This includes the ways in which gun violence is covered in the news, in movies, video games, or music, as well as the way it may influence public perception, attitudes, or behaviour. The media has the power to make or break different organisations. In a paper by Sugarmann, 1992, an argument surrounding the NRA claimed that “the news media, politicians, and the American public may characterize the NRA through stereotypes of drunken rednecks” (Sugarmann, 1992) and it is for this reason that this is now how the outside world sees this group. Furthermore different methods of media can allow people to identify victims, possible locations for violence or even post instances of themselves carrying out evil acts. The Marjory Stoneman Douglas high school shooter had posted images of himself killing small animals on social media and had described himself as a “professional school shooter” (Johnson, 2018). These were the types of things that should have alerted others to this persons state of mind.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of a paper such as this was to discover whether or not there is a connection between crime rates in American States with weak gun laws such as Florida, versus those with stricter laws such as New York. A particular emphasis in this section was also placed on school shootings in these two states. The current data that has been published can lead to a number of conclusions. The findings here show that the differences between Democratic voters and Republican voters can explain the differences between opinion in relation to gun violence. This

can also account for the opinions of those in Florida versus those in New York, Republican and Democratic states, respectively. The thematic analysis codes helped explain even more the differences and similarities found in the current literature in relation to this topic of gun violence. The following chapter will consider these results in further detail, delve into the impacts of these findings and consider them in the context of even more published literature.



## **Chapter 5 – Discussion**

### **Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the findings presented in the previous chapter in respect to the current literature on gun control and violence in the US. It will examine gun violence through the examination of the research question, “what are the differences between gun laws in Republican voting states such as Florida, versus Democratic voting states such as New York?” by analysing the impact of the political influence of Republican versus Democratic voters. This chapter will also analyse the second research question, regarding how this can all affect young people in terms of school shootings. Currently, the research has been suggesting that by providing more information on the effects of gun violence both intentional and accidental, there may be more support for the idea of introducing stricter gun laws into states where gun crimes are very high. The previous chapter presented the findings of this research. This chapter will discuss the findings of this research in even more detail but it is important to remember that the data has been gathered solely from secondary sources and so it is difficult to draw conclusions for this specific research question for this reason.

### **Where did the right to own a gun originate from?**

In 1791, the United States Bill of Rights was created, which included the Second Amendment to the United States Constitution. This stated that "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." (Volokh, 2006; 195). The Bill of Rights was a “document setting forth the liberties of the people.” (Black, 1960; 865). However, before this was implemented in the US, the English were first to implement this in the 1689 English Bill of Rights. This also dealt with personal defence by Protestant English people. While this is still technically law in England today, it is not held to the same standard as its counterpart in America.

During the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), militias played a major part in the fight for independence. During the war, armed citizen-soldiers were used and this influenced the Founding Fathers when they were drafting the Second Amendment. The right to bear and keep arms was proposed by James Madison when the most dangerous firearm a person could own were muskets and flintlock pistols. It has been argued that “a modern pistol provides so much destructive potential-that the Framers, were they present today, would recognize the absurdity of allowing ordinary law-abiding persons to possess or carry such a weapon.” (Cramer and Olson, 2007; 716). Furthermore, the phrasing of the Second Amendment has been a subject of interpretation. The phrase "well-regulated Militia" is also

debated as it seems unclear whether it was intended that this should mean just a militia service or also an individual's right. In another paper by Cramer and Olson (2008), it was concluded that if this were the case, then this would mean that "if "bear arms" referred only to the military carrying or use of arms, then the right protected by the Second Amendment might not be an individual right to possess or carry personal arms for personal self-defence. The right would be to a government-organized militia, or at best, to exercise what the Tennessee Supreme Court in *Aymette v. State* acknowledged was a right to revolution." (Cramer and Olson, 2008). In this instance there would be no reason for any regular civilian to own a firearm.

Until the turn of the 20th century, the Supreme Court had very little involvement in regards to the second amendment. This was until 1939 in the case of *United States vs Miller* (1939). This case was about two defendants, Jack Miller and Frank Layton, who were indicted on charges of unlawfully and feloniously transporting in interstate commerce an unregistered double barrel 12-gauge shotgun having a barrel less than 18 inches in length, from Oklahoma to Arkansas, which violated the National Firearms Act, 26 U.S.C.S. § 1132c et seq. The Court ruled that the Second Amendment protected the possession of weapons that had a reasonable relationship to the preservation or efficiency of a well-regulated militia but did not guarantee the right to keep and bear such an instrument as this one.

Recently, the interpretation of the Second Amendment has been legally changed again. In the landmark Supreme Court case of *District of Columbia v. Heller* (2008) it was ruled that the Second Amendment does in fact protect an individual's right to possess a firearm for traditionally lawful purposes, such as self-defence in the home and not just in relation to militia services. This was a monumental case which emphasised an individual's rights over militia membership. Then, in 2010, *McDonald v. City of Chicago* (2010) held that the Second Amendment applies to state and local governments as well.

### **Media and Gun Ownership**

Gun control and gun ownership is a topic which is highly debated and discussed in America. The issue of gun control versus gun rights remains highly contentious, with varying opinions on the balance between individual liberties and public safety. For this reason it is no wonder that the media plays a large role in the discussion of both gun violence and ownership. The media however, also manages to push the blame of gun violence away from actual guns. An article by [americanprogress.org](http://americanprogress.org) found that "the word "gun" or another synonymous variation was only included in 3.5 percent of headlines and summaries of online news posts that included

the words “murders” or “homicides,” even though 80 percent of homicides are committed with a firearm, and gun homicides increased by 35 percent.” (Ragland, 2022). This means that when people see these headlines it is not immediately clear that guns are the reason for these murders and homicides. This article goes on to state that even though the media often examines the roles that guns play, rarely do they prioritise or emphasise this when reporting on gun violence. “To curb this, the public needs to understand the primary reason behind the spike, and policymakers need to strengthen gun laws, which, as evidence shows, reduces violent crime. The media obviously plays an important role in this regard yet, unfortunately—and overall—it has failed to adequately focus on the true driver of rising violent crime—guns—in its coverage.” (Ragland, 2022).

The media has had an impact on gun control for decades. For example in a paper written in 2002 it was discovered that “logistic regression results indicate that regular viewers of crime shows are more likely to oppose gun control and believe that firearms prevent crime. Respondents who receive their primary crime news from the print media are more likely to disagree with making it easier to conceal firearms.” (Dowler, 2002; 235). This indicates that it is possible that depending on where one receives their news from and the type of media they surround themselves with may have an impact on a person’s beliefs around gun control. Most of what people know about gun violence is what has been fed to them through the media and one study that was examining this found that “gun control and gun rights frames are salient, and television, social media and newspapers are the most popular sources of gun violence information.” (McKeever, Choi, Walker and McKeever, 2022).

### **Firearm Ownership Rates in Florida and New York**

By focusing specifically on New York and Florida one is able to discover a sample of the opinions of highly Democratic versus Republican states. Democratic states tend to have stronger or stricter gun laws which means that there is a wide range of restrictions put in place to prevent violence or accidents caused by people owning a gun. Weak gun laws refers to a lack or less of these restrictions. In New York, the voters are mostly Democratic making this a Democratic state. As well as this there are far more gun laws in place here than there would be in Florida, which happens to be a Republican state.

In New York there is a specific emphasis placed on protecting the people from gun violence, whereas in Florida the emphasis is placed on protecting the right to bear arms. In New York it is estimated that 19.9% of adults own a gun and in Florida there are approximately

35.3% of adults who own a gun (CBS News, 2022). The drastic difference in these numbers can be attributed to a number of different reasons, which will be outlined below.

### **The Differences in Gun Laws and Regulations in Florida and New York**

New York has some of the strictest gun laws in the country and has banned certain types of weapons in order to make its citizens safer. Florida's gun laws are not as strict as those in New York and also hasn't banned certain types of weapons which could be considered unnecessary for any citizen to acquire. In a study carried out by Tasci and Sönmez it was found that this lack of gun control in Florida impacts more than just the people who may own guns. "Results reveal a significant and negative impact of gun violence on perceived safety, desirability, visitor satisfaction, and the likelihood of visiting Florida; however, the impact of gun violence is less important to visitors than Florida's image attributes are." (Tasci and Sönmez, 2019; 24). The easy access to guns in Florida is actually a deterrent for people who may want to visit or move to this state.

New York State laws states that a person is not required to have a license to own or possess shotguns or manually operated action rifles, but does require a permit to legally possess or own a pistol. A permit is also needed to purchase all semi-automatic rifles, but not to possess them (Smith, 2007). In Florida the law surrounding gun laws has only recently changed. "On Monday April 3, 2023, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed House Bill 543 into law. This bill, strengthening the second amendment, eliminates the requirement that an individual obtain a permit to carry a concealed firearm in Florida. Beginning July 1, 2023 permitless concealed carry for lawfully owned weapons will become legal." (Gassman, 2023).

When this paper began both states did require background checks before somebody is able to purchase a fire arm and both states require concealed carry permits, though the process for getting one of these is different. Originally in Florida a person must be at least 21 years of age, have no criminal record, have completed a firearms training course, have the required documents such as a drivers licence and proof of having completed said training course. Finally one must submit an application which will lead to a background check as well as being photographed and having their fingerprints taken. The fingerprints will be used in a background check. In New York the requirements are similar but there are slight differences. Again, one must be at least 21 years old, but then they must complete an application where they are asked questions surrounding, for example, employment and your own personal character. Then, like Florida, this person must be fingerprinted and submit the application. Again, this will lead to a

background investigation. After this the person may be interviewed and assessed depending on which part of New York they are in and depending on the results they will then have to attend a firearms safety course. Then they can get their license.

### **Impact on Public Safety**

Public safety also differs significantly between these two states. This section will focus specifically on Florida's public safety, due to the high number of gun related casualties in this specific State. In a paper written by Lowy and Sampson (2016) a specific interest is placed on public safety throughout the United States. The paper explores laws that all states must adhere to, obviously including Florida and New York. It states that "Courts consistently recognize that every right is constrained by the bedrock interest in public safety. Although these cases do not expressly rely on the right to live, these public safety interests necessarily derive from the right to live and, hence, the need to protect lives" (Lowy and Sampson, 2016; 198). This explains that although the American people are entitled to their rights as laid out in the constitution, if these rights are a risk to public safety, they should not always be the main priority. "The Supreme Court has recognized that the public safety risks posed by even a single unsecured gun can outweigh Fifth Amendment rights." (Lowy and Sampson, 2016; 198).

In an article dedicated to discussing the public safety issues in New York City, many topics such as homelessness and substance abuse are discussed, however, gun violence is one of the most obvious topics in this paper. The writer states that there has been a recent rise in shootings in many of these neighbourhoods (Stringer, 2021). The same paper states that one of its main needs is to improve ways which will to reduce the flow of guns into the five boroughs (Stringer, 2021). The five boroughs being Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, The Bronx and Staten Island. This paper then goes on to explain statistics regarding guns and public safety stating that "In 2020, for instance ... There were 85 blocks with three or more shooting incidents over the past year and 10 blocks with five or more incidents. And approximately 100 people were connected to three or more incidents involving gunfire as offenders, witnesses, or victims." (Stringer, 2021). The writer states that this type of gun crime can be prevented by reducing peoples accessibility to guns. Since New York has such strict gun laws, as previously discussed, it can be more difficult for people to get access to a gun, however this does not mean that people still aren't able to get them elsewhere. "Gun trafficking rings have managed to purchase firearms in states with weaker gun laws and transport them into the five boroughs. In fact, nearly 90 percent of guns recovered in the city were purchased out-of-state." (Stringer, 2021).

This means that gun laws are not able to protect people from guns as those who want them will be able to access them.

In Florida, public safety in regard to gun violence is also an important topic. The most obvious and important part of this is the statistics regarding deaths. In Florida there have been rising rates of gun violence. The table below demonstrates the increase of instances of gun violence in Florida from 2015 to 2021 as discovered by the Florida Department of Health (2023).

Data Year	Number of People	Rate
2021	3,117	13.8
2020	2,987	13.5
2019	2,842	12.7
2018	2,875	12.9
2017	2,690	12.4
2016	2,682	12.7
2015	2,375	12.1

Table 2.0 - Deaths From Firearms Discharge, Rate Per 100,000 Population, Single Year

It must be noted how in the five years between 2016 and 2021 there was a 1.1% increase in deaths in Florida. This is a statistic that is both shocking and unbelievable. The public safety in Florida as a result of being able to own guns is shocking. The argument that guns are used for protection can be completely disregarded when faced with statistics such as this. The ‘stand your ground’ laws in Florida as discussed above are a controversial law which is meant to provide a sense of security to people in Florida by legally allowing a person to use lethal force in self-defence. However, these laws can lead to people killing others as a result of a misunderstanding of the situation or for purely being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Other issues surrounding public safety in regard to gun violence include domestic violence and guns, gun trafficking, stand your ground gun laws, mass shootings and school shootings. In a paper written in 2014 it was discovered that women are far more likely to be a victim of a fatal domestic abuse attack and that “guns play a big role in that violence. According to the Florida Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board, 56 percent of domestic violence homicides in the state from 2006 to 2012 were committed with a gun [and] firearms accounted for the murders of 1,331 women in Florida from 2001 to 2010.” (To, 2014). The same paper

notes that Florida has very weak laws regarding preventing people with a history of domestic abuse from being able to buy a gun. Similar to New York, gun trafficking is also a problem here. However, unlike New York, the majority of gun trafficking in Florida is as a result of Florida exporting instead of importing. “American-made guns trafficked through Florida ports are destabilizing the Caribbean and Central America and fueling domestic crime.” (Freeman, 2023). In April of this year, 2023, a young 16 year old black boy was shot and killed in Kansas City, Missouri by a white man after the young boy rang the wrong doorbell. While this was not in Florida, this instance of horrific violence has led to renewed scrutiny of “stand your ground” laws all over the US because deeply rooted racism is not a reason to shoot a child on your doorstep.

Mass shootings in Florida are the final public safety issue which this section of the chapter will discuss. “As of Feb. 23, there have been seven mass shootings in Florida in 2023.” (Bridges, 2023). Before the end of the second month of the year there were already seven mass shootings. A mass shooting means that there are multiple individuals that have been injured or killed with a gun. “Mass shootings in Florida increased to 34 in 2020 from 15 the year before, while nationally mass shootings jumped nearly 50% during a pandemic with crippling unemployment, violent protests and idle youth... In 2020 Florida reported 34 mass shootings that killed 26 and injured 133. A year earlier, the state had 15 mass shootings that killed 20 and injured 54.” (Della Cava and Stucka, n.d.). Naturally, where there are mass shooting there will also be school shootings. The next section will cover that.

New York was not as necessary to cover in this section due to the rarirt of mass shootings in this state, compared to Florida. For example this year. In Florida as of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 2023 there have been 21 mass shootings (Gunviolencearchive.org., 2023). In New York as of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 2023 there have been approximately 11 mass shootings (Gunviolencearchive.org., 2023). While this number is not good, it is almost 50% less than Florida’s.

### **Case Studies: School Shootings**

Naturally, Florida is not the only state that experiences school shootings because where there are a lot of guns, there will be violence toward children with said guns. This section is going to examine two of the most infamous school shootings in each of the two states discussed in this paper; one in Florida and one in New York. One of the most infamous school shootings in Florida was the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida which

now ranks among the most deadly mass shootings in American history. In New York State there is no very infamous school shootings because it is such a rarity. One of the most well-known ones is the Columbia High School shooting in 2004.

In 2004 in New York, a 16 year old boy named Jon Romano went into Columbia High School and loaded his pump action shotgun in the school bathroom. While he was in there another student came into the bathroom who Romano forced out at gun point. Then Romano shot at two students in the hallway but missed. It was at this point the school went into a panic and was put in a lockdown. Romano continued this reign of terror by walking down the hallway and pointing his gun at other students before the Assistant Principal was able to grab him from behind. However, just before Romano could be disarmed he was able to fire off a final shot which wounded a teacher. Romano received 20 years at Clinton Correctional Facility in Dannemora, New York. After 15 years he got out. In 2020 Romano spoke at a School Safety Conference in Saratoga County. “It’s important for me to be a part of the solution,” (Conlin, 2022) he said to the other people at the conference. As a child, Romano was abandoned by his father then sexually abused and this pain stuck with him for a long time. “I wanted others to know of my pain, of my suffering and, unfortunately, I wanted to spread that pain and suffering to them,” (Conlin, 2022) he said to them. “Way too many times, we let that one kid fall through the crack and we don’t know how to reach out to them,” (Conlin, 2022) said Saratoga County Sheriff’s Deputy Kenneth Cooper, who oversees several school resource officers across the county.

Obviously, not all school shootings have such a happy ending. On a completely different side of the same spectrum we have the most infamous school shooting in Florida which also happens to be one of the most deadly school shootings in American history; the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida. On Valentine’s Day in 2018 a former student that had been expelled from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, Nikolas Cruz shot and killed 17 people while leaving 14 more injured. Cruz arrived at the school supplied with a rifle, ammunition cartridges and smoke grenades. Cruz was carrying an AR-15 rifle which he was able to legally buy as well as the ammunition for it. Once inside the school Cruz started going into classrooms and shooting before moving on to shoot in other classrooms. Cruz then set off the fire alarm so people would panic and spill out into the hallway. “He fired multiple times at students and teachers, and killed three people outside the school before entering one of the teaching buildings, where he killed 12 more, Broward County Sheriff Scott Israel said. Two others died of their injuries in local hospitals.” (BBC News, 2022). When the



police arrived they started clearing people out of the school and escorting them off campus. One of the people they escorted was Cruz who had disguised himself as one of the students. Once he had left he went to Subway and McDonalds for lunch. About an hour later police captured Cruz and brought him to the hospital before he was released into police custody. At the time this was the most deadly school shooting since the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, Connecticut where 26 people were shot and killed including 20 children. Connecticut is a mostly Democratic state. However, today the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting has been surpassed by another shooting which happened in Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas on 24 May 2022, when 18-year-old Salvador Rolando Ramos shot and killed 21 people, including 19 students and two teachers, and injured 18 others. Texas is a Republican state.

School shootings are a tragedy that happen all over the United States because there is such easy access to guns. It doesn't seem to matter if a state is Democratic or Republican, school shootings will happen where people are able to get guns either legally or illegally. However, the strength of gun laws in Democratic states versus the weaker laws in Republican states could be linked to the types of shootings. In New York, a Democratic state that has some of the strictest gun laws in the country, finding the most infamous school shooting was difficult. This is because there were no fatalities and the perpetrator decided to advocate against gun violence upon his release from prison. However when someone even hears the term 'school shooting' their mind might go to the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting because of the number of victims and destroyed families. The next couple of sections will express how people's opinions in these two states have been swayed as a result of such acts of violence, not only from school shootings, but also other types of firearm related violence.

### **Attitudes and Perceptions towards Firearm Laws in Florida and New York**

In Florida and New York today, regardless of the fact that Florida is a red state (Republican) and New York is blue (Democratic), there is still a split between the populations in regard to gun ownership and what else can be done in order to promote gun safety. As discussed previously, Florida is going to be loosening their gun laws even further as of July 1<sup>st</sup> when Florida will introduce a permitless gun carry law which will allow people to purchase guns without any training or background checks. Florida will be the 26<sup>th</sup> US state to pass such a law. This is a bill that was signed off by Governor and Republican Ron DeSantis . In the Florida house, this bill was approved in a vote of 76 to 32, and then was passed by the senate in a vote of 27 to 13. However the people of Florida do not agree with this. "Polls show that a majority

of Floridians oppose the policy, and previous surveys have indicated that Florida voters overwhelmingly support other gun safety measures like universal background checks and mandatory waiting periods.” (Greve, 2023). Not only do the people of Florida not want their gun laws loosened, they actually want them made significantly stronger. This demonstrates that the people of Florida do not have much of a say in what their politicians do once they have been voted in. DeSantis said that “you don’t need a permission slip from the government to be able to exercise your constitutional rights,” (Fineout, 2023) about this decision. However there are still some people from Florida who actually want the gun laws loosened even more. Some people want to be able to carry guns openly. This would mean that people would be able to carry a firearm in public where the firearm is fully or partially visible to other people. DeSantis has said that while he supports open carry, many Republicans in the state Senate don’t for reasons such as protecting Florida’s sheriffs. This has been seen as a weak move on behalf of DeSantis and some believe it will hurt his chances in the next election. This is leading to further concern that he will loosen other gun laws in an attempt to prevent this (Fineout, 2023).

In New York very different opinions regarding gun laws are in place. In fact one of the most recent laws regarding firearm safety was introduced in 2022 which stated that there would be gun free zones all across the state of New York. This means that no gun will be allowed on the premises of government owned buildings such as courts, anywhere that provides health care or services, places of worship or religious observation, libraries, public playgrounds, public parks, zoos, anywhere that is licenced to provide services to children, youth, or young adults, nursery schools, preschools, and summer camps, anywhere that is to provide services or assistance to people with developmental disabilities, the office of addiction services and supports, the office of mental health, or the office of temporary and disability assistance, homeless shelters and other similar places, schools, public transport, anywhere that has a licence to allow people to consume alcohol or cannabis, any place used for the performance, art entertainment, gaming, or sporting events any location that is being used as a polling place, any gathering of people who wish to collectively express their constitutional rights to protest or assemble and finally Times Square in New York City (Giffords, 2023). There are some people who this won’t apply to such as police and military as well as some other groups. The public opinion on these new laws are still being discovered as it is too soon to be able to fully know if they have made any major difference or not. However, from other states that have implemented these laws it was found that even after many years of this gun free zone policy, it is still difficult to determine whether there has been any benefit to the state from these laws. In

a paper carried out in 2018 written by Grier it was found that “A problem exists relating to current gun control policies, specifically the evidence surrounding using gun-free zones, as well as the public perception of their use. If one could show that gun-free zones do not reduce gun violence, or these actually increase the likelihood of an active shooter incident, then gun-free zones should be comprehensively analysed.” (Grier, 2018).

There is a major difference between Florida and New York in relation to the newest gun laws to come out. In Florida a law that will allow more guns on the streets with no need for a permit is about to be legalised whereas in New York a law that prohibits guns in certain places has already been put through. While it isn't clear yet how much damage or help these laws will create one thing is clear. The Democratic State of New York values the safety of its people as a number one priority, whereas the Republican state of Florida values its constitutional rights as a number one priority.

### **Data Analysis**

This paper looked at the different ways in which legislation in both New York and Florida impacts the number of mass shootings every year. A specific emphasis was placed on how the legislation differs between these two states and how these laws work when put to the test. Changes made in Florida, such as no change made to gun laws but bringing religion into the picture by placing the ten commandments in schools has made no difference compared to actual changes in law in New York where, for example it was demanded after a mass shooting that the age which a person must be in order to purchase semi-automatic rifles increased from 18 to 21. The comparisons of New York and Florida were important because it proved vital in understanding why there are so many advocates for restrictions on gun purchasing as well as why so many people want to protect their right to bear arms.

### **Limitations while writing this paper**

As with any type of research, there were bound to be limitations. In the case of this paper, one of these limitations included that all of this research was second hand. This is by no means just a negative as it meant that more studies and papers were available to me rather than if the only type of work in this paper was primary research. There was no way that it would have been possible to carry out field research and so this paper relied heavily on information from other people. Due to this it was more difficult to find an answer for very specific questions such as whether or not there is a connection between crime rates in American States with weak gun laws such as Florida, versus those with stricter gun laws such as New York. Further limitations

that were discovered while going through this research included legal and policy constraints, specifically in regard to school shootings where victims may be minors and have their files sealed. However, this type of information was not crucial for this paper so this was only a minor inconvenience rather than a major issue. Political sensitivity is another limitation which arises as a result of what a delicate, controversial and emotional topic gun violence can be. This sensitivity can lead to bias in the work. Biases can also be found in the media in relation to the topic of gun violence and school shootings causing issues such as underreporting and data gaps.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

There were naturally a number of limitations that this paper came across while being written such as those that were outlined above, however future research should investigate how the American public feel about different gun laws in a more direct manner. There are very few statistics which monitor public opinion in this sense. Furthermore, as was mentioned above, it will be important to discover whether the new Florida permitless gun carry law that comes into effect in July 2023, will increase gun violence including injury and death. It will also be important to monitor the New York gun free zones to see if they provide any significant amount of safety to the public or not. If so they could be implemented elsewhere and if not there would be no need to continue with them.

### **Conclusion**

As expected, there is some form of connection between Republican states having higher levels of gun violence due to their already loose and still loosening laws, specifically in the case of Florida v. New York. America's gun laws have been around for hundreds of years and it is very unlikely that the American people will be giving up their right to bear arms any time soon. However this right has also led to undeniable tragedies in the form of mass shooting, school shooting and domestic shootings as well as many other types. The topic of gun violence is often discussed in the media where often the guns themselves are never blamed. When discussing homicide rates news outlets will often give statistics on how many people died but rarely what the cause of death was, as outlined above. Florida is a Republican state with very loose laws. As well as this their laws are going to become even more lax with permitless gun carry laws. However, New York is a Democratic state and has some of the strictest gun laws in the country. After introducing gun free zones in 2022 this was cemented even further. However, only time will tell if there is going to be any benefit to these laws. Hopefully, future research will be able to discover the effects of New York and Florida's newest gun laws and be able to fill in the gaps where this paper lacks, as this is definitely an important topic of discussion.

## Chapter 6 - Conclusion

“It takes a monster to kill children. But to watch monsters kill children again and again and do nothing isn’t just insanity — it’s inhumanity.”

(Gorman, 2021)

This research examined data pertaining the differences between Republican and Democratic states in relation to gun laws. This paper wanted to specifically focus on Florida and New York, as both are states with high tourism rates and have recently changed their laws relating to firearms. As well as this both states are very different politically, with Florida being a predominantly Republican voting state and New York being a predominantly Democratic voting state. It is well established within the literature that states with looser gun laws have a higher rate of gun violence. This is demonstrated by New York having the fourth lowest rate of gun death in the United States (EveryStat.org New York, 2023) and Florida having the nineteenth highest rate of gun violence in the US (EveryStat.org FL, n.d.). However this isn’t necessarily reflected in the statistics of school shootings. As discussed in chapter 4, since 1970 there have been 64 school shootings in New York compared to Florida’s 79 school shootings (Gilligan and Lurye, 2023). That means 0.00000323 per capita in New York and 0.00000363 per capita in Florida. These statistics are remarkably similar considering that their laws are so different. It is not clear as to why this is so and for this reason further research will be needed to examine this phenomena. Overall it is apparent from my research that while there are plenty of resources in relation to gun violence in America, there is not enough research in relation to school shootings.

Throughout the course of my research I critically assessed the many differences between gun laws in a Democratic state such as New York and the gun laws in a Republican state such as Florida. The legislation in both of these states has changed since this paper began being written; Florida’s laws loosened and New Yorks laws tightened. Since both of these laws are so new it is not possible to conclude which law is more successful and beneficial towards the general public yet. For this reason future research will have to examine these results.

Gun violence in America is getting worse and more violent with the development of new age weapons. The argument that this is a right which is protected by the second amendment of

the US constitution ignores this weaponry advancement in the almost 236 years since it was written. This paper has discovered that the stricter the gun laws in a state are, the safer the people in that state are from suffering the consequences of gun violence. If firearms keep being developed at a rate significantly faster than laws are able to be put through then these crime rates and death rates will also keep rising. Pressure needs to be specifically placed on Republican states to keep their citizens safe from gun violence. A paper written by Luca, Malhotra, and Poliquin, 2020 identified three main findings as a result of mass shootings in relation to gun policy. “Mass shootings evoke large policy responses. A single mass shooting leads to a 15% increase in the number of firearm bills introduced within a state in the year after a mass shooting. This effect increases with the extent of media coverage.” (Luca, Malhotra, and Poliquin, 2020; 1). This statistic demonstrates that gun laws tend to be altered and improved only after a tragedy has occurred and only when there is a demand from the public. It is clear that in order to save lives, these firearm bills need to be introduced before more tragedies like the Columbine shooting happen again, as discussed in this paper. It is vital that the US can come and work together to combat gun violence, creating a path towards a safer and more compassionate society for generations to come.

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