

Racism linked with gun ownership and opposition to gun control in white Americans

October 31 2013

A new study has found that higher levels of racism in white Americans is associated with having a gun in the home and greater opposition to gun control policies.

The research, published in *PLoS One*, was led by Dr Kerry O'Brien from The University of Manchester and Monash University and used data from a large representative sample of white US voters.

After accounting for numerous other factors such as income, education and political ideology, the researchers found that for each one point increase (on a scale from one to five) in symbolic [racism](#) there was a 50 percent increase in the odds of having a gun in the home and a 28 percent increase in support for policies allowing people to carry concealed guns.

Each one point increase in symbolic racism (a modern measure of anti-black racism) was also associated with a 27 percent increase in the odds of opposing bans on hand guns in the home. After accounting for those who already had a gun in the home, the odds were reduced to a non-significant 17 percent increase. However, the authors note that this reduction is unsurprising as opposition to bans on guns equates to self interest on behalf of those who already own a gun and do not wish to give it up. And racism was already strongly associated with having a gun in the home.

The research was stimulated by gun control debates in the US after mass

shootings such as the Sandy Hook tragedy, and research showing that with all things being equal black Americans are more likely to be shot than whites. The most recent figures show that there are approximately 38,000 gun related deaths in the US each year. With other research suggesting that having a gun in the home is related to a 2.7 and 4.8 fold increase in the risk of a member of that home dying from homicide or suicide, respectively.

Dr O'Brien said: "Coming from countries with strong gun control policies, and a 30-fold lower rate of gun-related homicides, we found the arguments for opposing gun control counterintuitive and somewhat illogical. For example, US whites oppose gun control to a far greater extent than do blacks, but whites are actually more likely to kill themselves with their guns, than be killed by someone else. Why would you keep them? So we decided to examine what social and psychological factors predict gun ownership and opposition to gun control."

Conservatism, anti-government sentiment, party identification, being from a southern state, were also associated with opposition to gun controls, but the association between racism and the gun-related outcomes remained after accounting for these factors and other participant characteristics (age, education, income, gender).

Symbolic racism supplanted old-fashioned or overt/blatant racism which was associated with open support for race inequality and segregation under 'Jim Crow Laws', but it still captures the anti-black sentiment and traditional values that underpinned blatant racism. Symbolic racism has also been found to be related to stronger opposition to policies that may benefit blacks (e.g. welfare), and greater support for policies that seem to disadvantage blacks (e.g. longer prison sentences).

Study co-author Dr Dermot Lynott, from Lancaster University, said: "We were initially surprised that no one had studied this issue before;

however, the US government cut research funding for gun-related research over decade and a half ago, so research in this area has been somewhat suppressed."

Dr O'Brien said: "According to a Pew Research Center report the majority of white Americans support stricter [gun control](#), but the results of our study suggest that those who oppose [gun](#) reform tend to have a stronger racial bias, tend to be politically and ideologically conservative and from southern states, and have higher anti-government sentiment."

He added: "The study is a first step, but there needs to be more investment in empirical research around how racial bias may influence people's [policy](#) decisions, particularly those policies that impact on the health and wellbeing of US citizens."

Provided by University of Manchester

Citation: Racism linked with gun ownership and opposition to gun control in white Americans (2013, October 31) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-10-racism-linked-gun-ownership-opposition.html>

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