

Gun violence prevention groups strike middle ground to meet goals

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A study led by Oregon State University researchers found that American organizations identifying as gun violence prevention groups advocate for the right to bear arms and for some gun purchase and ownership conditions, which they argue will curb gun-related injuries and deaths.

The finding contrasts with some depictions of gun [violence](#) prevention groups as "anti-gun."

"When people talk about the 'gun debate,' it typically revolves around gun rights supporters and anti-gun people with no one in the middle," said Aimee Huff, an assistant professor in OSU's College of Business.

"We found these groups are in the middle. They strike a balance between individual rights and responsibilities to reduce death and injury."

The study is one of the first to look at American gun violence prevention groups (GVPGs), many of which have formed in recent years after events such as the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting and the shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords.

The study is based on two years of analysis of nine gun violence prevention groups, some of which are focused nationally and others regionally or locally. The researchers interviewed leaders of the groups, attended their rallies and training sessions, talked to state legislators about them, monitored their social media pages and analyzed media coverage focused on them.

The consumer culture researchers sought to unpack the messaging of these groups, whom they describe in the paper using pseudonyms to protect their identities. They wanted to understand who the groups focus on, how they reach those people and the outcomes they hope to achieve.

They found that the groups position themselves as supporters of the Second Amendment, direct their messages to the middle-ground majority and communicate the everyday toll of gun violence using non-polarizing language.

The researchers assert that the gun violence prevention groups are having some success. Some examples they cite include:

- Policy changes that have led to an increase in the number of states requiring universal background checks from 12 in 2012 to 18 in 2016.
- Institution of restrictive firearms policies by prominent companies such as Target and Starbucks banning the open carrying of firearms.
- Support of cultural changes championed by gun violence [prevention](#) groups from editorial boards of major newspapers (New York Times and USA Today), celebrities (Beyonce and Jennifer Aniston), and professional sports and entertainment associations (NBA).

Further, the researchers cite a Gallup poll that found the percentage of respondents who want the nation's laws or policies on guns to be more strict has risen from 25 percent in 2012 to 38 percent in 2016.

The researchers conclude: "It is neither possible nor necessary to precisely identify the impact of GVPGs in these changes, but we assert it is reasonable to assume that they play an important role."

The paper, "Addressing the Wicked Problem of American Gun Violence: Consumer Interest Groups as Macro-social Marketers," was published in the *Journal of Macromarketing*.

More information: *Journal of Macromarketing*,
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