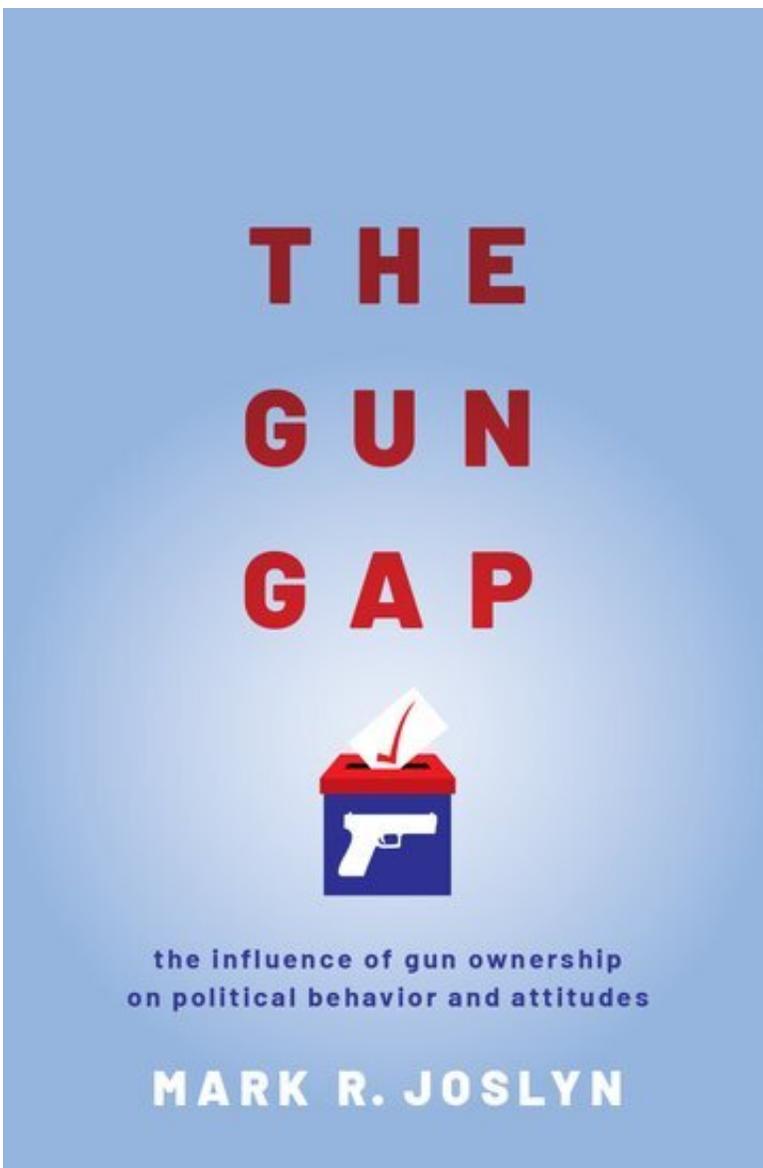


Gap between gun owners and non-owners explains disparities in political attitudes, voting patterns

October 13 2020, by Jon Niccum



Whether one views gun ownership as positive or negative is a matter of perspective. But according to new research, it's the total number of guns a person owns that may define them politically.

"The difference between owning a gun and not owning one and your likelihood of voting Republican is a fairly small probability. There's a much larger probability between a person who owns one gun and another who owns 10 of voting for a Republican," said Mark Joslyn, a professor of political science at the University of Kansas.

That's one of many revelations in his new book titled "[The Gun Gap](#)" (Oxford University Press, 2020). This gap explains a wide range of political behaviors and attitudes, including voter choice and turnout, preferences for gun control policies and support for the death penalty.

Joslyn's research finds those who are "deeper into gun culture," as witnessed by the quantity of firearms they possess, display more qualities that match up with Republican voting preferences. However, this has been surprisingly downplayed during the current election cycle.

"If you look at the swing states today, Michigan is a significant gun state. Wisconsin is another. Arizona and Pennsylvania, as well. These states are on a knife's edge right now, yet [gun owners](#) are rarely discussed as a group of importance. But you notice they truly are important when you examine the vote distributions. Even down the ballot, they stay with Republicans," he said.

Another aspect covered in "The Gun Gap" is that owners are more likely to vote in general than non-owners. Such weapons are often threatened

with new regulations, so owners become more aware of election dynamics for that reason. Gun owners also tend to stay in communities longer than non-gun owners, so they're easier to locate and politically mobilize. They also belong to gun-owner groups, which again makes them accessible to mobilization.

"All those things put together make gun owners a formidable group that frankly has never been discussed in terms of its political implications," he said.

Currently, nearly 40% of households contain some type of firearm, according to the Pew Research Center. And that number has risen significantly this year.

"Since the pandemic started, there's been a historical run on guns, a buying frenzy like none other. It's not even close to prior election years. It's almost a 70% increase from last year," Joslyn said.

He explains this is primarily because of the uncertainty associated with the pandemic and the protests. Many of these represent first-time owners.

"Obviously, if someone is a Democrat who bought a gun in March, they're not going to run out and immediately vote for Trump or any other Republican. But my book does suggest future elections might be affected by this national increase in gun owners," he said.

Under former President Barack Obama, weapons were bought because the gun community feared new regulations would make purchases more difficult. Then another surge happened again in 2016 when it was assumed Hillary Clinton would win the presidency.

"Now those same people are realizing there's a strong possibility Trump

loses, Biden comes in and gun laws are changed. You might see a secondary purchasing spree because of that anticipation of Biden winning," Joslyn said.

With all these factors in play, the author is surprised this hasn't become a bigger issue during the election.

"You saw at the last presidential debate (Sept. 29) that guns were not even discussed, and I don't anticipate it being a major issue. It could have been one because Biden has an interesting history on guns laws and his current support for a ban on assault weapons," Joslyn said.

"I think what you'll see is very much the same or maybe a larger split between gun owners and non-owners in terms of their propensity to vote Republican at all levels of government. But we're not going to see the kind of salience and rhetoric we saw in 2016 about guns."

Joslyn has taught at KU since 1996, where he specializes in public opinion and political behavior. He's published dozens of articles that explore this topic, including those intersecting with mass shootings and counterterrorism efforts.

Although he doesn't personally possess a gun, he was astonished by the amount of friends, neighbors and colleagues who took note of this latest project, often whispering to him that they were owners themselves.

"Many of these people didn't fit any of the stereotypes at all," Joslyn said.

"Actually, this spree of gun buying is substantial among females since the pandemic hit, which saw a huge increase in women buying guns and attending training sessions," he said. "So once you start digging into the actual numbers and getting past the stereotypes, you find the ownership

question is broad enough to create a tremendously powerful political group if mobilized. For some elections, that happens. But most of the time it's ignored."

Provided by University of Kansas

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