Media and Gun Control: Polarizing the Public

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Abstract
Gun control is a major issue in today’s society. The media depicts an outlook on each issue from pro-gun control to anti-gun control. Every gun debate has its issues whether it is mass shootings or murders by using handguns and automatic weapons. Gun control is a very sensitive subject and has been a debate on whether or not we should have stricter gun restrictions or ban all guns all together. Gun restrictions for the mentally challenged have also been a major issue when it comes to mass shooters who suffer from a mental illness. During this study, we will present on how media representation of the gun control debate has sensationalized either sides opinion, polarizing the public away from accurate facts and a common solution.
Sorry Wrong Number

In the article “Sorry, Wrong Number,” written by Gary A. Mauser and David B. Kopel the issue of how the media their information about gun control and whether gun control is a good public policy or if the news and government are on their polls. Many news stations today use what they call their “findings” or media polls that debate whether guns kill people or people kill people that always because an issue in these discussions. The main issue with these incidents is race. According to Kopel and Mauser “Interviewer bias is a potential problem whenever there are significant social or cultural differences between the interviewer and the respondent. (Mauser,Kopel,1992)

The media usually exaggerates their “findings” in many different aspects. According to Kopel and Mauser, Time magazine established a poll to view how many American’s owned fully automatic weapons. Time magazine’s results came to the conclusion that 4 million Americans possess a fully automatic weapon, which is 20 times the number higher than registered guns; also it is 10 times higher than any criminologist has estimated.

News Media Framing of Serious Mental Illness and Gun Violence

in the United States, 1997-2012

In the article “News Media Framing of Serious Mental Illness and Gun Violence in the United States, 1997-2012” The author examines the statistics on how and why the media covers news about gun violence. The author states that despite mass shooting as only being a fraction of the deaths caused by gun violence it receives the majority of
news coverage and seemingly always sparks a national debate (McGinty, Webster, Jarlenks, Barry, 2014, p.406). Then addresses the subject of mental illness in the media in relation to gun violence, specifically with SMI classifications of mental disorders such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia, stating that the correlation between the two is weak and overplayed by the media (McGinty, Webster, Jarlenks, Barry, 2014). The article states that this conclusion could be problematic because it makes the public have a false belief that SMI’s cause gun violence, which in turn could affect the privacy and freedom of citizens suffering from SMI’s (McGinty, Webster, Jarlenks, Barry, 2014).

**Effects of News Media Messages About Shootings on Attitudes Toward Persons with Serious Mental Illness and Public Support for Gun Control Policies**

In this article “Effects of News Media Messages About Mass Shootings on Attitudes Toward Persons With Serious Mental Illness and Public Support for Gun Control Policies” how the news media covers mass shootings and how the media gets the public support for gun control. The aftermath of mass shootings results in gun control advocates rising up to persuade the public for their support. During the mass shooting, the media will relay how the shootings happen and gun control advocates feel these stories help rally support for stricter gun laws. During the shootings, sometimes the gunman however will have a mental illness, which is seen as a negative thing and it’s even more negative when people ask questions like “How did he/she get her hands on this weapon?” Thus raising the support for gun control. Media outlets create the debate over whether people who suffer with mental illness should have a stricter gun restriction and ban on
large-capacity magazines. Gun control and mental illness is portrayed in a negative aspect is a major issue in today’s society.

**Shooting rampages, mental health, and the sensationalization of violence**

In the article “Shooting rampages, mental health, and the sensationalization of violence” Faria argues that the media misrepresents facts and bring fame and attention to the criminals involved in mass shootings, which encourages other disturbed people to seek the same reward (Faria, 2013). The article has undertones that support a conservative viewpoint with less gun control, however it makes interesting points on the manipulation of facts in order to support specific views on both sides of the political aisle.

The article presents statistics that support citizens carrying guns stopping armed and preventing massacres. Faria goes on to say that this statistic is not represented in the media, because it opposes the agenda of politicians for stricter gun control legislation (Faria, 2013). Faria finally states that the media “should not use emotionally charged, atrocious crimes to incite even more passion to sell newspapers or television time, or to effect a desired public policy” (Faria, 2013).

In conclusion, the four aforementioned articles all show that media representation of the gun control debate has sensationalized either side’s opinion, polarizing the public away from discovering a common solution. In order for the public to get an accurate view of the facts surrounding gun control, the media must not sensationalize crime or throw all the blame on the mentally ill or faulty gun legislation. Logically, a common solution
exists if society can focus on the facts about gun control and not how the media is presenting them to support a specific agenda.

References:


